

About JACK VANCE

Testimonies – Anecdotes - Visits

Texts collected by

Jean Luc Esteban

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Cover illustration: the Castle Portal by Ferdinand Knab



Jack Vance by Jullian Bernard (France)

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Most of the texts are published with the agreement of their respective authors.

Some of them could not be reached or did not answer, if one or more articles contain information about you and you do not want them to be published, please contact me and we will find a solution:

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*Thanks to John Vance for his kind agreement
and all the other contributors...*

Notice on the content

The texts in this collection are presented "as is", they reflect the feelings and opinions of each author at a given time without seeking objectivity and may be contradictory to each other.

I strongly advise the reader to complete these testimonies by reading the autobiography *"This is me, Jack Vance, or more properly, this is I"* (Spatterlight Press)

ABBREVIATION- REFERENCES

JVMB :

Jack Vance Message Board - Discussion forum about Jack Vance

Hosted by TAPATALK :

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/>

VIE :

Vance Integral Edition project started in 1999 by a group of over 300 international volunteers that led to the complete edition of Vance's works in 44 volumes, completed in 2006

COSMOPOLIS:

A web-based journal published by the VIE group to inform volunteers of progress and methods and producing articles, essays, and photos about Jack Vance and his work -63 issues released.

VIE RESOURCES SITE / FOREVERNESS

<https://vanderveeke.net/foreverness/>

1952 Colton News

COLTON NEWS 18 Saturday, August 2, 1952

"COLTON SOCIETY" IONE L. OLIVER

Society Editor

Ingolds Hosts to Couple Home From Stay in Europe

COLTON — Visiting in Colton after spending nine months in Europe are Mr and Mrs. Jack Vance (Norma Ingold) who are guests of her parents Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Ingold of Grand Terrace.

The Vances plan to remain here until he has completed a novel which he is writing, and some television script.

The couple spent two weeks in England travelling by bicycle, from Southhampton to London, visited Winchester and Salisbury cathedrals; Stonehenge, Oxford, Windsor Castle, Westminster Abbey, and the British museum. They also attended a performance of "Rakes Progress" presented by the Sadlers Wells ballet troupe at Covent Gardens.

From England, Mr. and Mrs. Vance went to Austria through Switzerland, spent three weeks near Innsbruck and one week at Schloss Fuschl, a former castle, now used as a hotel.

During their 6-week stay in Vienna; the couple went through Schonbrun Palace, the summer residence of Emporer Franz Josef. They reported that about the only activity of Communists in Vienna was the early morning painting of signs with the legend "Ami go home" liberally distributed over sidewalks, streets and buildings. Communist activities are kept at a minimum by thousands of policemen on duty at all times, the Vances report.

The travellers went to Italy by Way of Semmering Pass for which a special pass is issued to travel through the Russian zone.

Cities visited in Italy were Venice, Genoa, Pisa; Portofino on Italian Riviera, a quaint little fishing village, now an Italian national monument; Florence, Pisa, Rome, Vatican and Naples,. They Spent three months in Positano, a beautiful little village nestled at the bottom of a tremendous mountain of rock on the Mediterranean Sea. Mr. Vance began a novel of suspense while there, an ideal place for stories of mystery and intrigue.

From Italy Mr. and, Mrs. Vance went to Paris, to visit Monsieur Kirzenbaum, an artist friend. Jersey, in the English Channel was the next stop. One of the most impressive things noted about Jersey, according to the vacationers, were its brilliantly hued flower beds.

Mr. Vance worked for six weeks in New York doing a television script for Captain Video, before the couple drove back to the West Coast.

Source: *Maria Feht*

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/735325529856201/posts/1987169714671770>

1967 G.H. Lillian A Visit With Jack Vance: 1967

(Cosmopolis #58 -2005)

By Guy H. Lillian III

Note: The earliest interview cited in Hewett and Mallett's The Work of Jack Vance is dated 1976. The following account is therefore of some historical interest. It was published in MagiCon Progress Report 2 in 1990, in anticipation of Vance's Guest of Honor appearance at the 1992 World Science Fiction Convention in Orlando. The text is copyright 1990 by the author and is reprinted here with his permission .

Twenty-five seconds ago, I set aside the issue of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine which contained Harlan Ellison's article "Xenogenesis."

As you probably know, Ellison's article was a catalog of the rude, repulsive, obnoxious, intrusive things science fiction fans have leveled upon professionals of the genre . The offenses cited ranged from bruising a writer's feelings by publicly informing him that his work was unfamiliar and therefore worthless, to disgusting physical assaults. It was a powerful piece of writing. It made me cringe .

Because I remembered...

The following is a verbatim entry from my diary, 4 November 1967. I was 18. I'd just started college at the University of California at Berkeley. I knew nothing. I didn't even know that it was an act of intolerable rudeness, once you discovered that a for-real professional gee-whiz science fiction writer actually lived near your home, to do as I'd done: call him up and ask if you can come meet him .

But I'd done it. And, tiredly, the writer had said sure, come on up. So my father had guided me to the correct address in the Oakland hills, and I'd met Jack Vance, and I wrote about it that night.

4 November 1967. I met Jack Vance this afternoon after a steep climb up the narrowest of roads. He'd left a note pinned on some nails sticking out of a board leaning up against his unfinished, skeletonic garage—he's tearing down his old house and building a new one at the same time on the same spot. I'd missed his note at first and thought that I'd have to wait, but on looking at Vance's snoozing cat, caught a glimpse of it and dashed down to read, "I AM IN BACK. YELL OR MAKE A LOUD NOISE." I shouted his name and from inside the dusty carpenterneeded caverns came an answering, "yeah! Come on in." I went in and was greeted by a pair of large legs descending a ladder. This, I thought, This is Jack Vance .

And so it was, a much larger man than I'd imagined with a paunch, glasses, thinning hair. He was wearing old clothes and asked my name and said he'd be with me in a minute, then again mounted the ladder. In seconds he was down, apologizing for how the place looked, then inviting me upstairs into the house proper .

Vance's house [as it was then] is primarily one room filled with old books, including a bound set of LIFE, the old humor magazine. Jack put his hands, with very fat fingers, into his workpants pockets and his large quiet and tired face assumed a wistful look as he told me why he bought them: [when he was] a boy in San Francisco his grandfather had owned such a set, and Vance had read them all and—here he wrinkled his brow and shook his head ever so slightly, wondering -- when he saw this set in a junk shop, bought it. He didn't know why...but I think he really does .

He's an interesting man, but not a weird one by any means. He reminded me of my own father in his attitude about things. After showing me his Hugo—he wasn't sure where it was ("Should be one around here someplace,")—finally saw it in a large empty aquarium along with an Edgar Award he won "for some murder mystery I wrote" (a surprise, since I didn't know he'd won an Edgar), and pouring me a cola, we sat down and talked a little about Cal, politics, writing, science fiction. Vance looks upon writing as "Just my job," which was somewhat of a sobering surprise for me: I half expected him to look upon this activity as art, a burning flame within him that must flare...a romantic's view of writing. No, Vance doesn't seem to even enjoy his work that much—looks on it as just that, as his job

How does it feel to win an award for his writing? Vance shrugged, “Ah, I don’t give a damn, but,” when one of his stories takes a Hugo, or an Edgar or a Nebula, it sets a mark for him to hit again. He has to be as good or better in his next story, or else he loses face—to the public, to the editors, and most importantly, I think, to the mirror. But he knows everything he writes nowadays is “salable”—and short stories and novelettes such as “The Last Castle” are out... “only novels now are financially profitable for me.” Just a job, just a job .

It’s demanding, he said, an awful lot of hard work . When writing science fiction, he said, one has to know what he’s talking about. Vance pointed at the copy of *The Star King* I’d brought for him to autograph. “Hell, I made a beaut in *The Star King* there. I gave Rigel a set of planets and Rigel’s a young star. I—I know about these things, it was just plain clumsiness.” He’s tried to write his way out of that particular cul-de-sac in the two books in the *Star King* series that follow, *The Killing Machine* and *The Palace of Love*, the latter on sale downtown but which he still hasn’t received from the publisher .

If he said anything to me that I could take out of there and keep, it’d be, “The most important thing that a writer has to have is self-confidence; I know I can write, and so I can write.” Yeah, so maybe I learned something worth a lot personally after all. But I learned other things, too: that writing is, for Jack Vance and so very likely with most other free-lancers, an economic chore rather than art; a job rather than—or perhaps in addition to—a song that has got to rip its way out of the self. Writing for me must never be such a thing that I’d tend to shrug it off. Vance, I think, takes much more pride in his creations than he lets himself reveal .

His fiction is marvelous—and if I could write anything so marvelous I’d be bursting with self-pride inside. But it isn’t enough for Jack Vance. Just like my father he wants a boat (only Jack’s building his, along with his house), and like many a man he wants to sail around the world .

After an hour or so I had to leave, and Jack had to get back to work on his house. Like him, my generation is tearing down and building up, on the same spot, at the same time. We shook hands outside and Jack apologized in case he’d sounded either “too weird” or “too stuffy.” To me he only sounded intelligent and honest, not “stuffy” at all. “It’s a popular misconception that science fiction writers are weird,” I said .

Jack grinned and scratched his thinning thatch of hair

“Well,” he said, “some of them are.”

I thought for a second of asking who, but I didn't, and like I say we shook hands and when I left he was smiling . He was walking back to his undone work when I turned away to go back to my car. [End of excerpt.]

I went on that evening to write in my diary about my girlfriend, whose name was Kate and who had red hair and who was wonderful and who dumped me like a Hefty Cinch-Sak four months later .

You can see why the aforementioned Ellison article made my eyelids tighten and my face squinch as if I'd bit- ten something preternaturally sour. What a TOAD I was . I invited myself to a man's house and took up an hour of his time with nonsense. I dared project my Berkeleyan insolence toward men who worked for a living onto a being of accomplishment and purpose. This sort of thing happened often. A few months after my assault on Vance I called up Poul Anderson and begged myself an invitation to his house. How could I do that? I was lucky Vance didn't blow me away with a shotgun. Why didn't he?

These are obvious questions with obvious answers. I was gauche because I was young, enthusiastic and honestly loved science fiction. Jack let me come see him and escape alive because he was generous, forgiving and kind. He knew that it was important to a young person to be welcomed into the adult world—and he no doubt felt that he could spare whatever time stolen from his house, his writing, his private life. His was a marvelous attitude. When I saw him at the 1985 Austin NASFiC, a mere 18 years later, I did what I have always tried to do with those fine, generous, forgiving and kind people of science fiction I belabored with my company when I was new to all this. I thanked him for his patience with me when I was young .

His wife remembered me. He didn't. Sic Transit Gloria Mundi, huh?

Well, the lessons taught on that visit remain. Writing is work. Rewards are meaningful only if internal. And there is still that look in his face when he

talked about that set of magazines...that remembrance of the reading he did, when he was a boy, and how it filled his heart with laughter, and wonder .

Just the sort of stuff we've been given, throughout his career, from Jack Vance .

Guy Lillian is now a public defender in Louisiana and a multiple Hugo Award nominee in both the fan writer and fanzine categories. His fanzine Challenger can be found at <http://www.challzine.net/index.html>

COSMOPOLIS thanks David B. Williams for his mentioning this article and assisting in its republication in this issue. Thank you David!

1973 Frank Herbert

From an interview with Vertex magazine:

HERBERT: Well, I didn't cut my teeth on science fiction. I began reading science fiction, I would guess, in the forties, the early forties. I'd been reading science fiction about ten years before I decided to write it.

VERTEX: Who were your favorite authors?

HERBERT: Well, I did read some Heinlein. I shouldn't really tie it down to ten years because I had read H. G. Wells. I'd read Vance, Jack Vance, and I became acquainted with Jack Vance about that time. Jack came along about six months or so after I'd decided to write science fiction. I heard he was in the area where I was living, and just walked in on him one day. We wound up, about six months later, our two families, going to Mexico. We lived in Mexico for a while and plotted several stories together. We're still very close friends. I read Poul Anderson. You know, we could list names here for a long while. I read the field when I started writing it. I wanted to see what was being done.

Source:

https://www.reddit.com/r/dune/comments/jiv53k/who_influenced_frank_herbert/

1982 Bertram Chandler A Jack Vance appreciation

I'd been a great admirer of Jack's work for quite some time before I had the pleasure of meeting him. It was when he, with wife Norma and son Johnnie, spent a few weeks in Sydney some years ago. Unluckily his stay did not coincide with one of my periods of leave (I was still at sea at the time). Nonetheless, Susan and I saw quite a lot of the Vances. I recall a dinner that the four of us enjoyed at a rather posh eatery in Jersey Road, Paddington. I forget its name but I remember the meal and the conversation (The duck with cherries was quite good.) At the next table to ours were four members of the blue rinse set lingering over their coffee. At our table we were discussing the recently published Birthday Honours List, the one in which the Beatles received their awards - M.B.E.s, if I remember rightly. Jack was sympathizing with those who, as an act of protest, had returned their own C.B.E.s, O.B.E.s, M.B.E.s, etc. to Her Majesty. Declaimed he, in a very American accent, "If your Queen had ever seen fit to honour me, and then if I saw those hairy insects getting the same decoration, I'd turn in me button!" (Ears began to flap at the next table.) Said I, deliberately putting on a very Orstralian accent, "Well, Jack, I didn't notice Sir Douglas Fairbanks Junior turning in his button." Said Susan; in her too, too County voice, "It all goes to show the absurdity of the Honours system, doesn't it?"

The ladies at the next table hurriedly finished their coffee, cast dirty looks in our direction, paid their bills and left.

.../... When last I met Jack, in 1979, his pride and joy was a large, conventional yacht. Unfortunately I was spending only a very short time in Oakland before returning to Sydney and so missed out on taking a trip in the vessel. Had I done so I should have been very much the passenger. Unlike me, Jack was at sea only for a relatively short time but I am sure that he has all the seamanlike virtues. He is also a most competent carpenter - although, perhaps, his carpentry is not in the same class as his writing. If it were he would have achieved fame as a cabinet maker. (But if he hadn't gotten into the writing racket he might well have done so.)

Twice I have been a guest at the Vance home in Oakland. It is a big house, its interior comfortably untidy. As far as a guest is concerned it is Liberty Hall;

you can spit on the mat and call the cat a bastard. The Vances love good food and conversation and are not averse to imbibing the occasional beer. But yet they tend to avoid many social activities, such as big conventions and the annual S.F.W.A. banquet. Jack has an undeserved reputation for having no time for fans - although he has never gone to the extremes that Harlan Ellison is alleged to have done.

In Jack's case, I am sure, this apparent stand-offishness is due to shyness, to the humility exhibited only by the truly great. He is essentially a very good - in the true sense of the word - person. Although he does not enjoy the big get-togethers, which too often tend to get out of hand, he likes the smaller occasions at which he can meet everybody. He is, perhaps, a better listener than a talker, one who knows that he does not know everything and who is always ready and willing to add to his knowledge. And yet, with friends around him and his banjo in his hands he can, in his own quiet way, exercise very real control over a party.

He is a master craftsman - of whatever craft to which he turns his hand. His standards, in all things, are high.

***Source : Article in Science Fiction Magazine Australia 04-1982
Tschaicon***

1985 Jack Rawlins About Jack Vance

"Had I followed an early bent, I might have been a great scientist."

Jack Vance has always been reluctant to divulge much about his life, not because there's anything to hide, but because, he says, it doesn't interest him to do so. He's a friendly but not public person who would prefer that his books speak for themselves. As a result, he has become surrounded with an almost inexplicable aura of anonymity and reclusiveness—so much so that for many years a persistent rumor circulated within the library community that Vance was in fact a pen name for Henry Kuttner.

He is, in actuality, a remarkably normal person whose life centers around his work, his house, his wife Norma, and his son John II. The family gardens, sails, and cooks together. His life has been remarkably stable: he's been living in and working on the same house for thirty years, he and Norma have been married nearly forty years (married August 1946), and he has devoted himself to the same career—freelance fiction—for the same four decades.

Jack was born John Holbrook Vance (the nom de plume on his mystery and detective fiction) in San Francisco, California, on August 28, 1920, a date some critics believe is at least four years too late. His great-great-grandfather supposedly arrived in California eleven years before the Gold Rush. Vance grew up in the country around the Sacramento River delta. He has said that as a youth he would stand by the mailbox waiting for the latest issue of *Weird Tales*, and it has been argued that his work was heavily influenced by the style and tone of that magazine. He seems to have spent his early years reading the popular pulp adventure fiction of the day—Robert E. Howard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, the *Oz* books, Clark Ashton Smith.

He graduated from high school early, worked for a few years, then entered the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in mining engineering. He soon moved to physics, journalism, and perhaps English (Norma says he "took a little of everything"), graduating with a B.A. in 1942. During the rest of the war years he served as a merchant seaman, and later worked as a carpenter and a horn player in jazz bands.

Toward the end of his college days he decided to become a freelance writer. He has always resisted the temptation to attribute his art to the direct influence of other writers or works, claiming that he learned the craft of writing by doing vast amounts of it during a long, solitary apprenticeship in the Forties and early Fifties. He discounts much of his early work as the hasty first drafts of an unpolished tyro.

*His first real success came with the Magnus Ridolph stories, featuring a cocky little dandy who trouble-shoots intergalactic problems with the Vancean hero's mixture of logic, wry self-interest, and con artistry. In 1950 Vance published his first novel, *The Dying Earth*, a series of related tales he had written in previous years and been unable to sell separately. Considered by many a masterpiece of fantasy adventure, the book is set in an infinitely distant future when the sun is burning down and the world is dying with it, the few survivors bathed in ennui. It demonstrates for the first time Vance's ability to capture subtle, evocative, emotively-rich ambiances on paper.*

*In 1963 he published *The Dragon Masters*, set on an alien world where man's descendants wage war with an off-world race of dragonoid aliens, each side using troops of genetically engineered mutants bred from captured enemy soldiers. The book won a Hugo Award for short fiction from the World Science Fiction Convention. In 1963 he also published *The Star King*, the first of five novels centered on the Demon Princes. These books constitute his finest, most sustained series of novels, as well as his best developed character, Kirth Gersen. Gersen's quest to rid the galaxy of its five worst outlaws (one per novel), becomes a distinct kind of nightmare, with each book suffused by its own distinct flavor, exquisite and elusive.*

*In 1965 Vance published *The Eyes of the Overworld*, often called a sequel to *The Dying Earth*, but in reality a completely different book. Whereas *The Dying Earth* is melancholic, brooding, mythic, full of grand gesture and stately allegory, *The Eyes of the Overworld* is devoted to the black-comic adventures of Vance's great con artist, Cugel the Clever, who wanders through a world populated entirely by other con artists, with each new encounter a battle to see who out-cons whom.*

*1966 brought *The Last Castle*, a novella that won both the Nebula Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America and the Hugo. This*

*curious story features a noble class who reside, fastidious and effete, as self-imposed prisoners in their own splendidly archaic castles, while a race of downtrodden country-dwellers methodically destroy one fastness after another. 1968 saw *City of the Chasch*, the first of four volumes in the *Planet of Adventure* series, the most sophisticated expression of a myth first used in *Big Planet*, in which a culturally neutral Earthman wanders through a series of small cultural enclaves, constantly facing anew the challenge of decoding and surviving a fresh set of cultural mores and shibboleths. In 1969 he published *Emphyrio*, the best expression of another Vancean myth, in which an unremarkable but fey youth meanders though life gnawed by unresolved questions. His quest for answers almost accidentally topples a stagnant, repressive social structure.*

*In 1975 Vance received the Jupiter Award for best novelette of the year from the Instructors of Science Fiction in Higher Education, for "The Seventeen Virgins" (later reprinted as an episode in *Cugel's Saga*). He has also been Guest of Honor at science fiction conventions in Sweden (1976), Vancouver (1979), and Melbourne. In 1984 he was voted a *Life Achievement Award* at the World Fantasy Convention. Vance has also carved out a small reputation as a mystery novelist, winning an *Edgar Award* in 1960 for *The Man in the Cage*.*

A well-travelled man, Vance has spent much of the last thirty years building a quirky, idiosyncratic house set on a steep hillside deep in the eucalyptus groves of the Oakland hills, with hand-made Italian oak panelled ceiling in the dining room, among other novelties. He says that whenever the house is finished, he'll start remodelling. His hobbies include classical jazz, bluewater sailing, and carpentry.

Vance talks about his work as something quite apart from the science-fiction mainstream, as he himself stays aloof from the rather inbred SF community. He reads little science fiction, his friends in the business (like Frank Herbert and Poul Anderson) are staunch but select, and he almost never makes public appearances at conventions. When I asked him if he had seen any recent science-fiction, he said only *Star Wars*, because the producers had sent him free tickets. He takes a fierce pride in his work and very much wants it to be considered seriously, but has little interest in formal critical attention or attendant honors: when I asked him about the numerous awards he'd

received, he couldn't remember the name of the World Fantasy Convention plaque which he had received only months earlier, and could not recall his Jupiter Award at all.

He knows his own work well, has the names of characters and plot details from twenty-five-year-old stories at his fingertips, but is obviously uncomfortable discussing his work as ideology or implied lesson; he thinks of himself as a writer of adventure stories, and is comfortable talking about his art in dramatic terms—plotting, pacing, characterization, dramatic timing, and the like. His reluctance to support an ideology is also true of his private life as well: he has officially described his personal politics as "above and between left and right," and his religion affiliation as "none."

—Jack Rawlins Chico, California November, 1985

Source : © Jack Rawlins with his kind permission

1988 Tim Underwood 'Green Magic': Fantasy or Autobiography?

What follows is an informal recollection of the man known as "Jack Vance". Who is he really? What's the basis for the mystery surrounding his personal life? I've known him for years and John Holbrook Vance definitely seems normal and outgoing, at least on the surface. Yet his ingenuous manner belies a severe biographic and artistic reticence that's difficult to explain.

So I think his clandestine past might be worth examining, if for no other reason than to quiet the rumors.

But first a little recent history: about Underwood/Miller, the Vance household and publishing in the mid-'70s. I met Jack Vance in 1975 and Chuck Miller soon after. At that time Arkham House and Donald M. Grant were publishing science fiction and fantasy hardcovers but the other sf specialty presses from the '50s and '60s had quit or collapsed. Science fiction was truly a ghetto. Major "mainstream" authors received high quality signed editions from the Franklin Mint and elsewhere, but sf authors were still being published primarily in paperback, not hardcover.

No one was thinking seriously about producing deluxe signed editions of science fiction.

Chuck Miller and I decided we'd chance it. *THE DYING EARTH* was then out of print and very hard to find. Jack Vance's agent was happy to oblige with the necessary permissions as long as we paid in advance. I wrote to Jack, who promptly invited me over to dinner. Sure, he'd sign 111 of the books for us. Our entire edition subsequently sold out in less than six months and the rest, as they say, is history. There are a dozen small presses issuing signed limited editions of science fiction now -- the field is overcrowded. But we were there first, with a collection of enchanting fairy tales from a man almost no one had met.

(Some even doubted his existence: the Library of Congress listed "Jack Vance" as a pseudonym of Henry Kuttner.) I lived in San Francisco at the time. Jack, Norma and John Vance lived half an hour across the Bay. I visited as often as I could. Back then Jack had very little contact with the sf field and was thought of (by science fiction fans) as a recluse. He and Norma held frequent

parties and entertained guests from all parts of the world, but with the exception of Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert, their eclectic circle of friends didn't include writers or publishers. Especially not publishers, since Jack had been robbed by the best of them during his 30-year stint in the pulps, digests and paperbacks.

Anyone who has read Jack's elegant refined prose might expect to meet a dignified and dapper gentleman author, lounging at ease in his library. This was not my experience. Whenever I arrived there - usually with boxes of books to sign - Jack was invariably out back sawing two-by-fours, or working up on the roof, or tiling a bathroom, or laying down a new slate floor.

Their house is perched on a hillside; in those days it was continually in upheaval. Some part was always under construction and cordoned off. New rooms sprouted in all directions: up, down and sideways. Long-delayed custom oriental rugs were arriving from India, one ceiling was being painted in intricate designs, another was inlaid with carved wooden tiles. The breakfast room was being paneled with Hawaiian Koa. John was busy building an enormous fireplace, a grandiose hutch and an elaborate bar. One day the living room suddenly disappeared and soon you couldn't find the kitchen. For a year there was no kitchen (and despite all that, Norma's dinners were renowned).

I remember meeting Jack and wondering who wrote his books.

My first guess was. Norma. She was producing typewritten drafts from Jack's multi-colored longhand manuscripts (which no one else could decipher), she was well-dressed, witty and intelligent and she conversed like a writer. Jack on the other hand was charming and rugged. He looked like a healthy longshoreman who had come into money but who still enjoyed an honest day's work with his hands. Most of all Jack liked playing and listening to jazz from the '20s. (He was first published in his college newspaper as a proselyte of "hot jazz"; he's equally enthusiastic today). Jack rarely discussed writing, didn't care for other authors' works and never read science fiction. Norma, however, seemed to know everyone in the field and, unlike Jack, she was very familiar with the plots and the stories in his books. It was definitely puzzling.

* * *

Such is the nature of Jack's peccadillo: he isn't shy or secretive by nature but he will not discuss his writing or his past. The word "biography" gives him the shudders, which makes you wonder what he's hiding.

Here's what we do know. By his own choice Jack is estranged from his literary contemporaries. He has evolved a unique narrative voice which, in its maturity, peculiarly seems to have no antecedents. His early influences, Edgar Rice Burroughs, James Branch Cabell, Lord Dunsany, Clark Ashton Smith, impacted on his imagination but not on his style. It's as if his tales have literally come from another world.

Maybe that's a clue.

This could be another: Jack is said to work late in the evening in seclusion with a word processor, in a special room underneath the house. But it's been years since anyone has actually seen him in the act of writing.

Vance's novels make you feel like he's actually lived in the alien cultures he so vividly describes. If you will suspend your disbelief for a moment we may find an explanation for that. Jack is known to be infatuated with paranormal phenomena. Could he at some point in his career have dallied with seances and automatic writing, with what Shirley MacLaine calls channeling? This might account for the sudden jump in the quality of his work around the year 1964. It would explain a lot of things, including his occasional odd behavior. Consider this scenario...

By day he's up on the roof hammering shingles. At night, when the five moons rise, he's alone in the basement, slumped in his favorite chair, channeling a bizarre alien Intelligence from the Fifth Dimension who literally dictates all his stories! Does Jack Vance receive instructions from Beyond? Is it true he shares his royalties with an unearthly Muse. Jack's obscure origins and secretive writing habits lend themselves to obfuscation. He would rather be judged, he says, entirely on the merit of his literary works. But how can we be sure they're really his? Without authenticated information, the world will never know.

* * *

Now let's be serious. Some writers resist biographers and their own autobiographic impulses for valid reasons. Marcel Proust comes to mind: he felt his life was less valid than his writing. But modern literary critics from Henry James onward correctly consider an author's entire life when evaluating his work. James was right when he said books can't be judged in a vacuum: after examining Nathaniel Hawthorne's life he faulted Hawthorne for not making more of his material. The message of our times is clear: a man's life is inseparable from his art.

With that example in mind let's look at what is known of Jack Vance's background. Jack grew up in a small California town, went to college briefly, met and married Norma. They travelled extensively and often lived abroad. Jack worked at various jobs and wrote at night. Success and recognition came late but by all accounts he has done well for himself. It would be instructive to know what experiences shaped the man who has written great sf and fantasy as well as numerous murder and suspense novels.. Why the biographic reticence? It can only lead to speculation.

Some years ago Jack spent weekends on a delta houseboat with Frank Herbert and Poul Anderson. After it sank under mysterious circumstances Jack was seen in a wet suit, diving repeatedly into the dark Sacramento waters. Why did this incident go unreported? We also know the Vances and the Herberts once moved to Mexico together. What were these two authors doing on a desolate ranch in the Mexican desert, in an area where UFOs are frequently sighted? There were rumors afterward that the two men conducted strange experiments involving message flags. Norma and John must have been there but so far they're not talking. When will the real story be told? An autobiography would clear the air. Come on Jack, the world is waiting.

Article in « Cosmopolis » fanzine edited by George L Mina

Source : Wil Ceron

1989 Marty Halpern A Meeting with Jack Vance

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 Burroughs as a kid -- Barsoom!

P.G. Wodehouse is my God. I think he's the greatest 20th Century 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 you" 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!

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1989 Joe Bergeron A Visit to Jack Vance

Jack Vance is my favorite writer. What follows is an essay I wrote which was published in one of the progress reports for Magicon, the Orlando World Science Fiction Convention in 1992, at which Jack was Guest of Honor.

When I was a dreamy teenager I picked up the Lancer edition of *The Dying Earth* and was immediately lost in its sensual pleasures. While it became one of my favorite books, for some reason I didn't read any other Vance for a long time. I had the feeling that in *The Dying Earth* I had read Vance's masterpiece, and that anything else must inevitably be a disappointment.

Luckily for that benighted boy, in 1980 my friend Terry Sisk (Graybill) acquainted me with books like the *Demon Princes* and *Tschai* series. I became a Vance collector, reading and loving everything I could find. I tried my hand at Vance-related art, but an early painting based on *The Dying Earth* failed to satisfy me. I desisted until *Araminta Station* appeared in 1987. My painting of Glawen and Sessily seemed good enough that I thought Jack Vance himself might be interested in seeing it. I wrote to him and included a photograph of the painting. He replied with a hand-written letter of praise. Encouraged, I wrote a longer letter that talked about his writing. He answered that if I was ever in his area I should come and stay at his house (my emphasis)! I'd been looking for an excuse/opportunity to visit Oakland for some time, there to visit a female of distinctly Vancean charm. The thought of combining that mission with a visit to Jack Vance was irresistible.

A few months later I flew, not to the Bay, but to Los Angeles. I'd decided to make the trip even more Vancean by going wandering with my uncle Bobby. A former industrial chemist, Bob Bergeron retired early to a remote valley in the southern Sierras.

When we reached Oakland we called ahead and warned Norma Vance we were on our way. She said she was looking forward to our visit. It would provide a distraction for Jack. She made me feel we were doing them a favor by coming to visit...a good sign of a skilled hostess. She instructed us to open the downstairs door and yell to announce our arrival, neither of them being too spry about descending the stairs anymore.

The trip to the Vance house involves steep, narrow streets and some of the tightest hair-pin curves I've seen since Pike's Peak. The house is built into the side of a hill. We pulled into the driveway; a pole light immediately came on. Good, I thought, they've noticed our arrival. I opened the door, and we walked right up the stairs and appeared in their living room, taking the Vances by

surprise. They had in fact been unaware of our presence. "Just like that, huh?" said Jack. I deduced that I'd just had my first encounter with a motion-detector security light. Oops.

Despite our brazen entrance, Jack and Norma received us cordially. Jack described how their house had evolved from a small cabin thanks to his carpentry skills, later supplemented by those of his son, John. The house has a multi-level, multi-awinged layout. John was currently making yet another addition, a deck just off the kitchen. The hillside falls away so steeply on that side of the house that the deck provides a potential suicide leap. Yet it's overshadowed by trees tall enough to form a green canopy overhead. Sunlight filtering through the greenery sends a rich light through the tall windows surrounding the breakfast table. Sitting there, I could imagine that the house was located in a wild forest rather than a residential neighborhood. Hanging over the table is a chandelier. It had swayed in the big earthquake that had occurred only weeks before.

As we sat around that table, Jack began to test us. With verbal jabs and loaded questions he went about determining whether we measured up to his standards of taste and good sense. I fancied that I held my own in that sparring match, but later I wasn't so sure. Jack Vance is nothing if not opinionated. He had savage criticism for several artists, including some who have illustrated expensive editions of his books. I began to suspect that his good opinion of my own artwork might be due to his inability to see it clearly. He also expressed withering views on the skills of writers whose reputation is comparable to his own. And he made the unqualified statement that jazz is the finest form of music ever devised by Man. I fell far in his estimation when I failed to agree with that.

I confessed my own writing ambitions, describing an idea I was thinking of developing. Jack bluntly told me he didn't think much of it. I continue to think the concept has possibilities...but I haven't written any of the stories yet.

Jack lost little time in offering us something to drink. I don't drink much, but I accepted a glass of wine to mark the occasion of meeting one of my heroes.

Jack seemed discouraged. The near-total loss of his eyesight had worsened a native cynicism. He described how blindness affected his life and work. I could well imagine the pain of blindness to someone so visually oriented, a man whose name is synonymous with color and vivid imagery. But it was clear that Jack had suffered no other loss of his faculties. His mind and wit were unmistakably sharp. At the time he'd just completed *Madouc* and was about to begin *Ecce* and *Old Earth*. He was experimenting with voice-synthesis software to permit his computer to read his manuscripts back to him. Between that and touch-typing he hoped to maintain a steady output of work. I hoped that

technology would indeed permit the free expression of his ideas. In my opinion few of his contemporaries still produce work as strong as Vance's recent novels.

Jack was more willing to discuss his work than I had expected. I shared my admiration for his elegant dialogue. "The world would be more interesting if people really conversed the way they do in your universes." Put to the challenge, Jack tried to extemporaneously spout a few lines in a Vancean vein. He failed to convince me. Evidently, discourse of such elegance comes more easily at the keyboard than to the tongue.

I was bemused by Jack's pragmatic attitude toward writing. Far from being a driving force, or a release for stories and fantasies that would otherwise haunt him, he claimed that to him, writing is just a job, a source of income, a craft for which he found he has a knack.

Throughout this conversation Norma bustled about the house, tossing in an occasional comment. Her interest in Jack's writing was evident. She named her favorites from among his books, among them the neglected *Emphyrio*, my own favorite.

At some point John Vance came home from a volleyball game. A pleasant, personable guy, he struck me as someone whose function is to cushion occasional collisions between his parents. Like Norma, he made us feel welcome. Jack Vance, it seemed to me, had the advantage of a smart, supportive, and patient family.

Jack was keen on showing the interesting features of the house. Among them was a painted portrait showing him holding a banjo, with a sailboat in the background. According to him it wasn't really a portrait; he had just served as a model for an artist friend of his. But to me, a picture of a banjo-wielding Jack Vance by a sailboat is a Jack Vance portrait, whether he thinks so or not.

Wistfully he told us of his love of sailing; lovingly he described the glassy texture of the waves.

He pointed out the tiles on the kitchen ceiling. He'd hand-painted every one. They were a source of particular pride to him. The designs were pleasant, vaguely Pennsylvania Dutch in character. I found it strangely touching that a man who has turned out such a body of literature should be so pleased with a simple handicraft.

Norma put that kitchen to good use. With a flourish of fire and a hammered iron wok she soon turned out an excellent stir-fried dinner. The dining room was paneled with dark wood and was dominated by a massive table straight from some Asgardian jarl-hall. One end of the room was occupied by a bar

more elaborate and well-stocked than you'd find in some hotels. As two vagrants who were bumming meals from friends and acquaintances all up the West Coast, Bobby and I were delighted by this hospitality.

Before Jack came in, Norma tried to apologize for his irascibility. But I saw no need for that. Jack Vance was pretty much the person I had expected him to be. He was certainly challenging, but enjoyably so. I felt, perhaps pretentiously, that his stories had given me some understanding of his personality. The more time I spent with him, the better I liked him.

Bobby also had no difficulty dealing with Jack. He'd never read a word of his writing, and wasn't overawed by literary achievement. To him, Jack was just another opinionated curmudgeon. He was Jack's equal in willingness to share his opinions. They debated the merits of jazz and talked about sailing.

When Jack and Norma announced it was their bedtime, we asked permission to camp out in their driveway. They agreed, but offered me the guest room at the base of the stairs. There I spent the night with their cat, who was old, fat, and companionable. It was a night to ponder life's unexpected twists. They had brought me far from home, to sleep in the home of a man whose writing I cherished. I was still partly the dreamer who'd loved *The Dying Earth* sixteen years before. Enough of that boy remained so that I felt a little magic in that house.

In the morning we were offered breakfast. I prevailed on Jack to permit me to photograph him while he sat at the table, looking a little grumpy in a grey sweatsuit. Finally I handed Bobby the camera so he could photograph us together.

Bobby and I thanked the Vances for making us feel at home. We got in the car and coasted down the hill, en route to other adventures. The Vance house became again a breeding ground for gorgeous fantasies featuring piquant heroines and mordant heroes prone to sauntering down esplanades and checking into hotels staffed by odd little men with punctilious manners.

Jack died on May 26, 2013, the last of the great writers of the Golden Age of science fiction.

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<http://joebergeron.com/jackvance.html>

1990 A. Rosenblum Interview

Graal magazine s n° 4

Interview with Arlette Rosenblum

Arlette Rosenblum has translated (into french) many of Jack Vance's works, including *The Face*, *Suldrun's garden*, *The Green Pearl*, and the first volume of *Araminta Station*, as well as the latest ones published by Rivages SF. She talks about her work as a translator and her approach to Vance's work.

GRAAL: How did you get into translation?

Arlette Rosenblum: By chance, a game of fate, a whim of the spinners and weavers of our lives who amused themselves by twisting the thread of mine and interweaving it with publishing as a modest conduit instead of the illustrator I had intended to be. One of the courteous ways to turn away an illustrator is to show regret that you can't use your talents while piles of manuscripts languish in the dust waiting for an eye that can decipher English. And that's just it, I could.

G: Have you always translated science fiction?

AR: No. In fact, I started out as a ghostwriter for a famous translator, a job I would never have dared undertake on my own out of modesty. Then I found myself at Opta, where I translated first detective stories and, as Alain Dorémieux was looking for serious translators for SF, science fiction. I have a wonderful memory of the job: of the short stories that often seemed so difficult, of the team, Alain Dorémieux and Michel Demuth, and of the people around them. It was really a house where I went with pleasure until its collapse, but the collaboration had lasted well for twenty years I think. I had translated elsewhere too, of course, but not SF, and never in such a cordial atmosphere. I

translated a lot, a lot of different texts, because I was translating for the Opera Mundi group and the now defunct "Lectures pour tous": I had to work fast and well. It's a good school.

G: Is there an ethics of translation?

AR: It seems that there are two schools of translators. The translator who writes nonsense out of ignorance, haste or vanity, believing that what he or she writes will please the French reader much more than what the English author has imagined - let's call him or her the translator-adaptor. Publishers like this a lot. A text that runs, with clichés and buzzwords, is great for them. They don't care if the original loses its rhythm, its atmosphere, sometimes even its substance.

That's not my style. The author offers me his work, I try to sink into it, to forget myself, to try to transcribe in my language what I feel he wants to say in his. As long as it is transmissible, of course. I don't impose my style on his, as we do at Reader's Digest (I worked for them for ten years, so I know what I'm talking about).

G: How did you discover Jark Vance's work?

AR: By chance. I was still more or less freelancing for Hachette. They were looking for a translator for short stories. My name was mentioned with praise when Jacques Goimard (director of the SF collection at PP) mentioned him. And one day I went to Presses-Pocket to ask for a translation. A Vance was given to me: here it is.

G: Are there any particular problems in translating Vance's texts?

AR: Yes, it's difficult, but it's a challenge and I like his style. Let's take the names, for example. Did Jack Vance choose them by pure chance - a sound that stuck in your ear does the trick - or by association of ideas? In Space Opera, for example, there is an unsympathetic character who, in the theater, would be called the traitor: he is Adolph Gondar the sinister, the black soul. The black soul? Gondar is the former capital of Ethiopia, a country that - for my imagination at least - evokes black (black as soot, black as an oven, black as an Ethiopian - without the slightest idea of racism, note, just black). So is

there an ulterior motive in the choice of this Gondar, in the manner of Italian comedy where typical characters have typical names?

In the same way, there are many Scottish words in the Vancian vocabulary and sometimes studying their etymology allows us to better transpose them into French.

Speaking of Italian comedy, theater and music are often present. Vance's works have the flexibility of the rich articulation (he has been reproached for this) of the *comedia dell'arte*. Often the conclusion is a climax or a joke. Remember the end of *The Face of the Devil*: the patrician who did not want a neighbor because of his mine, this zealot of an apartheid based on gold will see forever this horrible face hovering like a moon over his palace. It's comical. A thin argument and a novel that spins and bounces in cascades.

Everything counts in Vance's book, and sometimes even the things that don't seem to. And that's why it's difficult, or shall we say tricky, to translate.

Jack likes to play with words and names, both in their sound and their meaning in the rest of the story. Each time I have to ask myself what I should focus on in the translation: the exact meaning or the word play.

G: Do you correspond with him for the translation? What text are you working on?

AR: I corresponded a lot with Norma and visited them at their home in Oakland, California in 1991, I was supposed to stay 8 days and I stayed a month and a half!

At the moment I am working on "The Wheel of Time" by Robert Jordan (Rivages SF) which is the seventh volume and I am terribly behind.

G: According to you, what is the particularity of Jack Vance ?

AR: Vance is above all a "teller of tales", a bewitching storyteller as the oriental storytellers were in the oriental markets: he is a stylist, a writer, and if you don't respect his style, it's over, the story doesn't seem to hold up, the landscapes become stereotypes. He has a rhythmic prose, sometimes fast, with short sentences, sometimes with a satirical verbose breadth where irony pierces.

I translated *Big Planet for Opta* a long time ago. In the documents that Norma Vance was kind enough to send me, I discovered with horror that I had translated a redacted version and - at the same time - this confirmed the impression I had had while translating: that there was a gap somewhere. So I had a good sense of the essence of Vance's style and thought. I also learned from my correspondence with him that he had lived in Europe for eight or ten years during various stays.

G: Which of Vance's works do you prefer?

AR: I would put *The Chateau d'If* first, it's strong, beautifully crafted, suspenseful and in my opinion a masterpiece. There is *The Narrow Land*, a superb evocation of a future from the past, if I may say so, something like the re-emergence of a coelacanthian prehuman. There is the ironic *Masquerade on Dicantropus*. There's the lovely and unpublished *Phantom Milkman*, a ghost story with humor and immanent justice rolled into one impeccable short story.

Actually, I read *Emphyrio* in translation, I don't remember reading *The languages of Pao*. I'd rather talk about the books I've translated because, in the end, I like the original texts better. My favorite is *Suldrun's garden* because the beings in it seemed flesh and blood to me, even when they were ogres or wizards, and because of the fairy-tale and down-to-earth atmosphere at the same time. Because of these landscapes of mountains, moors, trout streams. Because of the ocean and the boat trips. Because of the little people who appear there.

G: Vance doesn't like to talk about himself, but considering his style and the themes he tackles, what idea could one have of the character?

AR: You know the famous phrase "*Mme Bovary, c'est moi*". Vance's hero is Gersen and Jubal Droad, Roger Wool and Dame Isabel. A person with cunning and practicality, humor and resourcefulness, fatalistic and with a sense of what is right. In the short stories, we discover a sensitivity that is not as apparent in the novels.

G: Do you think Jack Vance is as well known as he deserves to be?

AR: I think that Jack Vance, known for a few short stories like Rumfuddle, which I misunderstood (not read in the original), or his novels, deserves to be even better known for all his unpublished stories. He is difficult to translate, because he does not take himself seriously (the scene of the chess-playing automatons, for example). He has flaws, scenes that he reuses, images that he repeats and repeats, this is a bit noticeable in the novels, not at all in the short stories which seemed to me, such as Dust of Far Suns, of great strength and perfect economy.

Source : Magazine Graal Hs n° 4 - 1990

& site Jacques Garin

1994 Grant Stone Interview with Grant Stone Australian radio

"As host of the Faster Than Light radio show, you have interviewed many science fiction personalities. Who are some of the most interesting people you've interviewed? "

...../

"Someone like Jack Vance, who I interviewed in 1983 when he came for a convention, needed a lot of editing. He was a guy who would rest for 15 minutes between answers and when he wasn't talking it was a lot of umm... and ahha, but with a little editing it was acceptable. You can't do much about people's voices, but you can do something about their lack of response. "

Source

<http://www.webring.org/l/rd?ring=sfzines;id=10;url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Emalcolm%2Eid%2Eau%2Fiq%2F>

(disappeared source: it is no longer traceable -05-2021)

1995 A Visit with the Vances

(in Extant 15-2006)

By Paul Rhoads

(This account was written in 1995, when my wife and I went to California for our honeymoon. We visited friends in Los Angeles, and drove up the coast...)

Before going to San Francisco I had written to the Vances at least once to let them know the dates, and that we would be staying with my cousin Hester in Berkeley. When Genevieve and I got to Hester's it turned out Jack had called several times, and we were all invited to dinner. Hester didn't know what to make of Jack; she even seemed a little suspicious. I was gratified by the attention and returned the call as soon as possible. Norma answered and we spoke briefly; she passed the phone to Jack and his first words, in a tone of idyl curiosity were; 'Well...what have you got to say for yourself?' *

He asked me how long I would be in San Francisco, was displeased to learn it would be a short visit on account of all there was to do, and began advising me what I should see, and planning to take me to several places outside town. At last we arranged for dinner the next day; he said to come around six, but then said to come earlier, say 4:30 or 5, but then decided that we should come any time after three.

The next day Genevieve and I showed up at three. Jack had given exact directions which, carefully followed, took us through a dauntingly complicated labyrinth of streets, highways and roads. Finally we wound up a steep drive perched in defile between precipitous and friable slopes covered with eucalyptus trees. The Vance house, at the end of a precarious driveway clinging to the flank of a hill, presents a blank facade obscured by eucalyptus, an irregular wall of wooden slats, stained dark brown, which seems dug into the hill to the left, and to the right is perched out into leafy spaces on slender concrete pillars. An enormous old Lincoln was parked in the driveway.

I knocked on an unprepossessing door and a voice called out to come in. We entered a long, narrow flight of stairs, and at the top we found ourselves in a large space, limited on one side by a wall of glass, with a deck beyond, projecting out over leafy spaces with views of the narrow tree-choked valley; the most notable features were a few giant eucalyptuses dominating the rest, swaying ponderously in a wind (still fueling several majors fires up and down the coast[†]) like stalks of hyper-atrophied grass.

We met Norma, their son John—busy at carpentry—and John’s new wife, Tammy, busy with house work. Norma is smiling, bustling and tautly tubby. Tammy is very thin, blond, very polite and discreet. Jack was sitting with his back to us, in a dining alcove by the kitchen which terminates the space in one of its extensions. I did not approach him; in any case we were talking with Norma, and John who explained his carpentry project—redoing book shelves and making a display case—the books themselves were in dozens of boxes, completely filling a part of the place. There were framed cover illustrations at the head of the stairs. I took an interest in these, and the resultant conversation provoked the unexpectedly strange experience of hearing names I know so well—‘Suldrun’ or ‘Rhialto’—coming from the mouths of strangers, names I had never heard spoken in 20 years of intimate familiarity, except by two other people. * Something surprising quickly became clear, confirmed in later conversations with Jack: generally speaking I am more familiar with the Vance oeuvre than anyone ‘chez Vance’. Having read everything again and again, having the stories fresh in my mind, it is, after all, not amazing that my memories should be more complete and accurate.[†]

At last Jack ponderously advanced. He boasts a ‘paunch of noble proportions’ and moves without assurance. His face, which is striking at first sight for its weather-beaten aspect, used an engaging and benign expression.

Norma said; “Jack; Paul is right there in front of you.”

Jack responded peevishly; “I can see him, Norma!” but instead of shaking hands he did something totally unexpected; he reached out with his left and patted my belly in a companionable way, and offered me something to drink. There followed a colloquy about where the drinking party should install itself (porch? kitchen table? dining room?). This was carried out in peevish exchanges. Jack used an attitude of bored annoyance, while Norma seemed a long-suffering and nervous caretaker of an unreasonable child.

In the first instants of our visit these four strangers had revealed themselves as extremely friendly, welcoming and generous, but I could see that ‘chez Vance’, as Jack had called his house while giving me directions, the good would have to be taken with the bad.

At last we were seated around the table in the alcove. Here were more windows giving upon the shaggy views of eucalyptus. When I commented upon them, Jack brusquely wished them all cut down, as if they were over-grown weeds. The alcove is paneled in some exotic wood. Tower-like, it rises two stories, and in the space hangs a wrought iron fixture of six green lamps. A balcony with a wrought iron rail affords a glimpse into a room above, painted blue.

This all sounds quite vancian, but the actual impact is not vancian at all. It is a curious effect; described in words the house is like something out of one of Jack’s stories, a veritable catalogue of vancian decorative notions. The dining-room, for example, has one wall of river stone, rustically built, with a fire place. Opposite is a sumptuous bar, with tight ranks of bottles on shelves in front of a mirror, with colored lights above and a fancy beer dispenser. To one side hangs a grotesque mask made in ceramic. The wooden ceiling was carved in Kashmere by a wood carver Jack met while living there for three months in a house boat. The table is massive. A large case against the back wall displays hundreds of crystal objects. The opposite wall is made of many glazed doors of small panes, with a clerestory of stained glass, purple and green. Hanging outside, a tavern sign; The Laughing Sun and the Crying Moon.* Per the description we should feel like we are robbing Pergolo, or patronizing the inn of Blue Lamps, but in actual experience, these elements adds up to no more than a cramped though quite pleasant dining room. The vivid atmosphere of vancian poetry is absent.

The actual effect, though wholly agreeable, having so little in common with the atmosphere of the stories, I only slowly realized how surrounded I was by vancian things. Jack and John built the house over a period of forty years.*

One of the first things Jack said to me was how much he enjoys my letters, that they are the favorites of all the letters he receives, and he apologized for responding so seldom. This was gratifying to hear, but especially so because of the intense nature of my feeling about Jack’s work. His stories are a consolation, even a remedy for me, not only for the ills of life in general, but—

it seems to me—in particular for the specific malaise of someone like myself in the kind of world in which we live. Being an over-heated sort of person, I could not restrain myself from communicating with Jack, and some of my letters must have been fairly maudlin. But he responded, always warmly, though briefly and rarely, and though I worried I might be a pest, his long-standing invitation to visit was always renewed.

Once installed in the dining alcove we had to be served. This, again, was complicated. Genevieve had tomato juice. I had a beer and Jack a more elaborate drink, made by John at the bar, while Jack repeated the injunction that it should contain something besides water. Our presence was an excuse for some legitimate drinking but an effort was made to contain the situation. The bustle and bickering attending all this was uncongenial to conversation, but Genevieve, oblivious to things which have such strong effects upon me, launched in and announced to Jack, in her strange English, that his books are my “bible”. Jack responded in his mild voice that he is modest about his work; he is “just like anyone else”, but “has a knack for the thing”. I said something about how I knew his work so well that, though I had only just met him, I felt familiar with at least some aspect of his inner self, and that artists can’t help but reveal themselves. Jack smiled and said; “But that’s the name of the game, isn’t it?”

Jack wondered where Hester and Ignacio were—I explained they would come later. Norma began to prepare dinner with Tammy’s help. There were various things going on, and coherent conversation was not easy. Genevieve seemed ill at ease and interrupted with her usual inapropos comments born of inattentiveness, failure to understand English properly, and indifference to her husband’s sensitivities! And Jack is both dreamy, and one of these people who at times has trouble in any role but source-of-conversation. In this confusion and difficulty, I found myself in the more orderly and congenial situation of getting a tour of the house from John. Jack chatted with Genevieve and played the banjo. He did the latter with a modest skill, singing a folk song about a train wreck with relish. I dutifully applauded his performance but he accused me of insincerity, and teased me. This was more than I was prepared for; in a strange gesture of self defence I offered to play the piano for him, but he said no, I would “probably play some religious music”.

John explained the interesting evolution of the house, but also, in the accommodating role of guide-to-Vance-fan, showed me photos of his father in

younger days. Impossible to recognize the sympathetic but almost ravaged face of today in the somewhat inscrutable and sober face of the past. John hinted at hard times Jack had known as a youth, and showed me an unclear photo of Norma as a young woman, assuring me, to make up for the quality of the photo, that she had been very beautiful.* I alluded to the bickering—which made me very uncomfortable; John was sympathetic.†

Thinking about the photos and studying Jack's face, I was finally able to make sense of it—though again, like the house, it was a matter whose clarification required translation into language; here is the vancian face we meet in his books: the 'pelt' of black hair, the 'long sensitive nose', the 'wide mouth drooping at the corners' with 'cheeks slanting down to a small, neat chin'. And yet Jack, and his face, remind me neither of Gersen, nor Cugel. If anything he impressed me as a Rundel Detteras, but the bluntness, the heartiness, the expansiveness is soon discovered to be a glaze only, a wash of color, a would-be style, a wish. On the one hand Jack is sweet natured and sensitive, to an almost painful degree. On the other he is introverted, retreating into silence or becoming unexpectedly truculent, a truculence, when Norma is not its object, usually blunted or maneuvered around with humor. Just as often he is swept off by capricious imaginings erupting in jubilantly recounted scenarios.

There were many of these, inventions suddenly told, about the people present in person or subject of the conversation. One such flight concerned Robert Palmer, a famous rock star (unknown to me) and Vance fan, an Englishman who lives on lake Como. Jack was discussing Robert's music, then reported a speech—which at first seemed an actual account but, as it became clear, was an improvised story—where he explained to Robert that he did not like his music, and advised him to start singing like a jazz singer of the 20s, which Robert did, and as a result went quickly from millionaire to pauper. These scenarios usually wound up at some such punch-line. They are a glimpse, I think, of Jack 'at work', of his faculty of invention and delight in narration.

John hinted that his father had been an extremely gifted boy, for whom the backward rural surroundings in which he grown up had been painful—indeed, the theme of the sensitive, intelligent child growing up among surroundings which do not correspond to their elaborate and gorgeous hopes and dreams is

a major vancian theme. John also said that Norma claims Howard Alan Treesong is Jack's alter ego.

One of the first things we talked about—thanks to Genevieve, since I never would have brought it up—was the new book, *Night Lamp*. But Jack was happy to talk about it, and even more so to mention he was well along with another book, which he felt was his best. The title is *Ports of Call*, which he is also pleased with. In a far-away voice he recounted how it involves a ship which goes from port to port.*

Later he was discussing the evolutionary precedents of homo-sapiens, according to a book he was reading (in fact listening to on tape, because it turns out he is almost totally blind and walks into walls if not guided) and his own theory about the Neanderthals, when John broke in teasingly to warn me that his father was a fountain of information, but with all the made up words in his books I had better be careful what I believed. So I mentioned how I had long thought those words were invented, until, but by bit, I had come across many of them, and that I knew of no writer who used so extensive a vocabulary. Jack smiled though all this, and claimed that, indeed, he did not make up too many words. I mentioned 'nuncupatory', but before I could make my point Jack said he had invented that one, to which I pointed out that it existed, and is to be found in the OED though its definition does not correspond exactly. We then settled on the vancian meaning (irrelevant).†

Jack spoke of his travels, which have been extensive, including a three year trip around the world. I asked if he had been in Triest, which he describes so convincingly in *Ecce* and *Old Earth*. He said no, but that it must be something like how he describes it. ‡ I asked about Rolingshaven and Maastricht; again, he had never visited them but stressed they must be more or less as he describes them.

He described his ceramics project with John, which seemed to have been quite an enterprise, and called for John bring up samples. John returned with a modest stack of unfired and bisque plates and bowls, made by some kind of stamping process for which they had made the forms but which, they explained, had never worked well. They had built a kiln but, according to John, it also had not worked properly, because of uneven heat. Jack was particularly proud of one of the plates, and pronounced the form perfect. He had me inspect it, and then held it himself, feeling its proportions between his hands,

as if lost in an ecstatic dream. I got the impression from John's hints that the venture had never gotten far. Jack enthusiastically described a computer program which permitted experimentation with glazes; one enters proportions of glaze ingredients and the computer shows the resultant color. Another dream!

Before dinner I was alone with Jack and John in the dining room. Jack said my voice reminded him of a certain friend, and asked John if I looked like him. John described me; my appearance is opposite the friend's, who is short and stout. But Jack said that I seemed to be a good person, like this friend.

In the dining room there is a framed black and white photo of a sloop. Jack had bought it in the hope of taking a long cruise in the Pacific with John, but could never get enough money together to do more than maintain it, and the boat was eventually sold; another evanescent, half-realized wish. Jack said to John that, when he made his first million, he would buy him a boat. John, a marine engineer who designs scientific submarines, would like to go off to sea, but Tammy, a nurse in an infant intensive care unit, is dubious.

Jack said; "As you can tell, I am a romantic", and admired my going off to France to live in chateaus and so on. He was curious about the chateaus, and interested to learn there are so many. He quizzed me about the French aristocracy. He said Oakland was a good place to live, and much as he loved travel was glad to know it was there to come back to. He wondered if I planned to stay in France forever, and said that Oakland and France, and a few other places, are probably the best places to live. He was sad to learn about the unhappy state of French society. Clearly he is not left-leaning in his politics, and Norma even less so. At one point she railed against the Democrats.

The dinner with Hester and Ignacio came off well. Jack questioned Ignacio about his teaching,* but eventually dozed off and slept though much of the evening. Norma made a spectacularly delicious piece of pork, with a bowl of mashed potatoes in three colors; white, orange and green, the tints provided by the addition of other vegetables. This bowl of potatoes was the most 'vancian' object of the visit. Norma had been inspired by a picture in a magazine, but it had actually shown three different vegetables of the same texture; in Norma's dish the three colors all tasted the same, which vitiated the vancianness since, beyond the visual effect, they lacked the penetrating aspect of taste.

After dinner we made vague plans to get together again; I said I would call the next day. Jack wanted to take us to a town called Locke, a “ghost town” with a “saloon” he favored.

I called the following evening, and Jack made a date for the next day, at 10 A.M. Ill at ease, I said how gratified I was to meet him and get to know him, but that I didn’t want to take up his precious time. He replied most touchingly that, in fact, he lives a lonely life with little intellectual stimulation; he sees few people, except occasionally some old friends who, he hinted, offer few new insights.

Genevieve was feeling under the weather and preferred staying at Hester’s. Besides, she added, she couldn’t understand English well enough to participate properly, and I should be alone with Jack. She added that she was exasperated by watching Norma who, with Tammy, went about their culinary preparations at a maddeningly slow pace. “I could have done the same thing in two minutes!” she complained, referring to an *hor d’oeuvres* which had taken an hour to prepare. (Genevieve’s nickname in her own family is ‘the rocket’.)

So I went alone, and before long was being driven to Locke by Norma, in the enormous Lincoln, with Jack in the back seat. John warned me about his mother’s driving, and indeed it was a little precarious, but we got home in one piece. On the way, in spite of blindness, Jack explained the sights. Inspecting the map I was amused to notice that we were driving across what looked like a map of the Fens of ‘Trullion’. Here was where Jack had grown up, along the “sloughs” and islands of the Sacramento river delta.[†] The grand trees of Trullion were usually lacking, but otherwise it was the Fens!

Jack had grown up near the town of Oakley. He talked about old sand mines he had explored as a child, before they had been boarded up, and described the pleasant feel of the cool sand underfoot. He recounted picnics in cemeteries with his school friends, and how once they had tried to scare a superstitious boy by having his brother dress in a sheet and run down the hill. But the brother had stumbled over the sheet and the effect was spoiled—a real-life event with a vancian twist.

I asked Jack about his early life. He told me about his wealthy grandfather, whose death seemed to have left his family unprotected and even homeless. The family was dispersed and Jack wandered around, working at this and that.

Finally, during the war, he went into the merchant marine where he wrote his first book (Mazirian the Magician); a hard and unhappy time, as John had suggested.*

Talk of Trullion led to hussade. It seems that students at some university had requested exact rules. I said I thought the rules were fully detailed in the book; Jack said the only hard part would be the traditions, the denuding of the sheirl, the music and so on. I pointed out that each world had its own traditions, that they were flexible and could be depended upon to take care of themselves, to which Jack agreed. I mentioned that even if hussade turned out to be unplayable it could be convincingly portrayed cinematically, which led Jack and Norma to tell me how movie ‘options’ had been taken on various books but that nothing had ever come of it. Jack would like his books made into movies and thinks they would make good ones. We spoke of the movie success of Frank Herbert, and other writer friends of theirs who became rich. I said I had suspected to find them fabulously wealthy, and was surprised they were not. Norma insisted they were “comfortable”. After describing the success and wealth of his writer friends, Jack added; “but they’re dead and we’re not!”

We arrived in Locke, a row of decaying frame houses perched along a dike and leaning against each other as if they were about to collapse. The main and only street is a narrow way flanked by wooden buildings, many in disrepair, all lacking new paint. The sidewalks are wooden, roofed over in a continuous porch. It was drizzling. Jack put his hand on my shoulder to be led. He was curious what I thought of the place, and it was indeed picturesque in a satisfyingly vancian way. There are Chinese signs everywhere and a ubiquitous odor of steak.† Near the end of the street a door unexpectedly leads into the saloon. One enters a big dark room, quite high; the first thing I noticed was the ceiling, which was the strangest I’d have even seen. It was decorated, or simply covered, with crumpled dollar bills which seemed to have gotten there by being thrown (with some sort of adhesive). There was nothing orderly about their distribution. Along the left side was a bar running the length of the room, completely occupied by hefty men on stools. Behind the bar the wall was filled with all manner of decorations, the most impressive being a giant moose head, and other large stuffed animals.

The first project was bathroom. I guided Jack into the cramped lavatory, and thought I had him properly positioned when I realized he was about to pee

on the floor, so I hustled him forward. In resigned tones he explained that such things were one of the worst aspects of blindness.

The dining room was at the back, was under a low ceiling with better light, the better to see the picturesque filth. Jack had advertised it as a restaurant without menu; you came in and got served, and that's how it was. There was a little bowl of salad with Russian dressing, a truly wonderful steak, and mushy garlic bread, well seasoned. Jack asked the cook where the steak was from, and was not surprised it came from the mid-west. He said California beef was inferior. He put plenty of salt on his steak, which reminded me of the Piri Tam episode in *Ecce* and *Old Earth*. I mentioned this, and Norma thought I was referring to the health faddist planet* visited by Glawen and Chilke. We laughed about both episodes.

Jack was keen I try Sierra Nevada beer, of which he thinks highly.

Jack is blind, seems in poor health, is distinctly over-weight and eighty years old, but often gives the impression of a being a bright child.

We talked about art; Jack said it was a question of natural ability. I agreed to some extent but insisted there were things which could and should be taught, things most amateurs never get past. Jack was dubious but interested and wanted examples, which I gave and which intrigued him. It was a characteristic exchange. Jack's curiosity is of a sort that seeks to boil things down to specifics which can be known by being figuratively touched and felt. This seems to me one of many in some ways child-like qualities he has—Norma has child-like qualities also—but nothing is more indicative of this delicious curiosity than this kind of probing, as well as how Jack receives the answers; not as something to argue about but as a possibly wonderful vista. He is by no means indiscriminating, but he often enjoys putting his own opinions and attitudes to the test. It seems like a developed delight in, or a talent for discovery and self-discovery, as if phenomena, and one's reactions to them, are all marvels to be contemplated, tasted and wondered at.

Also regarding art; when I told Jack we intended to go to the museum he said; oh, how could we want to go see more paintings! And when I reported we had already done so he exclaimed how tiresome it would be, and wondered why we bothered. He complained about the dreariness of religious subject matter. But added that he liked Giotto, which surprised me because this is one

of the most sober and restrained of all painters artists, who treats only religious subjects, uses muted colors and quiet forms, and to the unsophisticated would tend to seem formulaic and dull.* Jack also expressed the opinion that watercolors is a greater medium than oil.**

On our first visit there had been conversation about beauty, and Jack took the relativist position. There is an amusing conversation in *Night Lamp* on the subject, and I was familiar with the nuances of his position. Specifically we were discussing different art forms and their rank, particularly jazz. I later wondered if Jack, like so many people, does not take such positions from a feeling of ‘cultural inferiority’, in his case perhaps a defensive reaction against the status of science fiction;† he thinks of himself as a ‘si-fi writer’. When discussing Vance with others I always insist he is not, because, to the extent he is, the work has an inevitably lower rank.‡ However this may be, and despite his bluff ‘regular guy’ act, Jack cannot said to be ‘low class’ if for no other reason than his rare natural finesse, of which his writing, as well as the suave aspect of his personality, is so full. He perhaps cannot be called ‘highly cultivated’, even though he is well traveled, well informed, and well read. He can speak several languages to some degree, and spoke some French with Genevieve, taking delight in doing so. But he does not know painting, as can be told from his books—though discusses it often enough. The protagonist of *Wyst* is a painter, or would-be painter.* The description of Jantiff’s inspiration even seems like the most personal and revealing thing Jack has ever written about his own artistic feelings and ambitions.† In this conversation about art Jack said he thought he would have been a good painter, and described the painting he would like to do, which are sometimes mentioned in his stories.‡ His feeling about art seems linked to painting, not so much because his work is ‘visual’ in some way—in fact he is economic in his descriptions—but because it is so vivid, so striking to all the senses, and yet so quiet, so pungent, yet so without apparent literary ‘effects’, as painting delivers its message soundlessly and instantly.

He probably knows little music as well—aside from early jazz—though *Space Opera* shows he is not simply unfamiliar with it. Of course he is highly sensitive to music as such, as the stories strikingly demonstrate. Here again, just as he can imagine how *Triest* must be, so too he feels his way into painting, now a world lost to him.

Still, I was surprised to find Jack a less cultivated sort of man than I expected. An aspect of this impression was his pronunciation, or my reaction to it. This reaction now seems irrational and not apropos, but it contributed to my impression. It turns out that *The Dying Earth* is not Jack's title; he calls the book *Mazirian the Magician*. When he was telling me about this, at first I didn't understand what he was talking about, partly because he speaks softly but what threw me off most was how he pronounced *Mazirian*; not 'mah-ZEER-ri-an' but 'MI-zur-rin', and he pronounces 'Ecce' 'EH-kee' not 'EH-KAY'. The pronunciation is always "simple", he said. Norma said the main pronunciation error is 'Tchai', pronounced 'chay', not rhyming with 'why' as I had always done. The baron is UN-speek buh-DIS-y rather than 'UN-spik BAH-dissy', though Jack said it's fine for people to use whatever pronunciation they like.††

Norma and I were in the middle of a discussion when Jack announced that perhaps we should head back. At this Norma flared up and said whenever she was talking "that didn't matter!". When we got settled back in the car Jack impishly but good-humoredly said she could now "talk her head off". They decided to take me sight-seeing along the sloughs to where they had kept the houseboat—built by Jack and owned in partnership with Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert. Jack was glad to answer my questions about the boat, and I saw many another that must have resembled it moored in the sloughs. We drove along dykes in the rain, and came to their old mooring, and were turning around to go back when there was a most terrible argument about whether to go right or left. Jack had the facts on his side, as I could see, having the map on my lap, but Norma argued with a strange violence. She accused Jack of being "stupid", of not knowing how to behave, and she using some strong language. Jack's language was strong as well, but he lost interest in the contest first, at which point Norma immediately muttered that he was probably right, and turned as he had indicated. There were similar such incidents, though none quite as notable; one involving a puddle we had driven through. They seem dependant upon, but almost permanently on edge with each other. I had thought, after our first visit, that much of Norma's peevishness was justified, to the extent that she seemed a bit pestered by her family, but Genevieve noted a hard side. Jack picks her up on all kinds of things he could with no prejudice let go, but Norma has a streak of bitter reaction that is painful to see. On the other hand she is attentive, sweet, alert and sharp, and interesting and fun to talk to.*

On the way back Jack dozed off and I asked Norma about herself, and also her part in Jack's writing. It seems Jack works more on his manuscripts than Norma approves, but when at last he is done he hands her a pile of paper, printed out of his computer, and, she says, never looks at it again. These manuscripts, she says, are a terrible mess; words half written, margins ragged, confusion everywhere—a result of Jack's blindness. It is Norma's job to make order. Jack uses a computer with a program called "Accent", which reads back to him what he has written. Norma decides the paragraphing, and when she feels Jack has indulged too freely in alliteration she corrects this—a revelation which shocked me. Still, she disclaims any creative contribution and calls her job 'dog-work'.†

Expressions like 'dog-work' are strikingly vancian, and Jack and Norma's spoken language bears much resemblance to Jack's prose. For example, when giving me directions to his house the first time, he often used the word 'proceed', much to my amusement. But he and Norma talk this way with such simplicity, so normally, that the vancianness of it is sometimes imperceptible. The vancian voice is therefore, to a certain extent, a product of his California roots.

We got on the subject of some of their friends, and Norma expressed affection for them, but complained in certain cases about 'sycophantic' behavior. This gave me pause; I did not want to fall into the error! Jack's company can be great fun, but the rapport de force is not equal, and it is hard not to be subject to the situation.

By now the sun had come out and the Fens had taken on a whole different aspect. We stopped for gas and bathroom. Norma took Jack in while I pumped the gas. Then I helped Jack out while Norma paid for the gas. Jack settled into the car, muttering affectionate things to me such as; "you're a fine fellow, my boy!" Then he said, referring to the natural act he had just committed; "now there is one of the great unsung pleasures of life!" I suggested if anyone could sing those pleasures it would be Navarth. Chuckling, Jack said he would poke around in the 'annals of Navarth' to find such a poem. I said how much Navarth delighted me. Jack laughed and said he particularly liked Navarth, and thought of him as somewhat of an alter ego, the character in his work he felt closest to.

Back on the road Norma complained about publishers; money delays, poor typography, bad cover art. She had been obliged to go over Night Lamp six

separate times, and even then the text was published with errors. She explained how, with the part computers play in publishing now, the editors do no editing.

Back at the house they invited me to dinner. I again bought up the subject of cover illustrations, and offered to do something for Ports of Call. They like Christiansen's work, and he is the only one who seems to read the books and try to capture their spirit. They don't seem to be aware of Christianson's shortcomings, but I didn't go into that; he is certainly the best cover illustrator they have. They have a framed full size photo of one. It is about 2' x 3', showing the goblin fair from Lyonesse, with many of the main characters. But Christianson verges on cartoony. His figures are on the clumsy, with silly, shallow expressions. The cover of Suldren's Garden is the best thing of his which I know.

They have an original by another artist, a cover for The Anome done in gouache with celluloid overlays for repaintings; an unattractive object. Jack was not enthusiastic about my doing a cover for logistical reasons, but finally it was decided that they would send me a chapter of the new book, in disk form, with indications of what they would like—it is always the publishers who handles this, so whatever I might do would be shown to them, to take or leave.*

Norma made BLTs. Their kitchen was recently completed. It has a polished marble all-around counter, a gigantic restaurant stove and mammoth refrigerator. The ceiling is divided into casements, the panels decorated with colored flowers, designed by Jack and painted in by a friend, a drunken Englishman.

Jack spoke much about food. He told me about the best pork he had ever eaten, cooked in Kashmere over a bundle of vine cuttings.

During dinner Robert Palmer called. He had gotten an early copy of Night Lamp and was thrilled to find a star named for him. Jack spent most of the conversation joshing him; he told him I was there, that I was a great rock singer, that Robert will have trouble with me.

I took the opportunity to sketch Jack. He sits often with his head thrown way back. At first his eyes are open, but eventually he closes them. Sometimes he bows his head forward, or rocks gently. While we had been with him two

days earlier he had fussed with a tiny pile of crumbs under his finders on the table cloth, with great delicacy separating them out then gathering them together, eyes closed, head back, his words soft and dreamy. † While Norma talked with Robert and his wife, Jack told me about them. They were drunk, calling from Como at 4 in the morning. A party seemed to be in progress at their mansion. Robert is apparently a sort of mystic, full of vague fantastical ideas which he likes to “ramble on about”. After these unflattering but not unfriendly remarks, Jack added that he was a “very decent fellow”, and that he had “never known him to do any unkind or thoughtless thing to anyone”. * Jack spoke softly and seriously, and at that moment, more than any other, I felt in the presence of that deep and concealed sub-strata of Jack’s books, his preoccupation, behind the confused and problematic aspects of life, with kindness.

Jack announced he was going off to work, and I rose to say goodbye. Jack shuffled away and disappeared down a stairway to a room John had decided not to show me because it was such a “disgraceful mess”. I was going to leave when Norma made a mournful and even bitter complaint that Jack was the only attraction, that no one stayed to see her, so I abruptly sat down, and we had a very long, and very pleasant conversation. As we talked the sound of the mechanical voice reading Jack’s prose back to him, came indistinctly up though the floor. I tried to catch some of the words but they escaped me, like the sea voices in *Wyst*, and I was left with a strange impression of that monotone, masculine, robotic voice.

When I was finally leaving Norma asked my opinion of another illustration hanging by the stairs. She said it showed the scene of Calanctus and the Murthe from *Rhialto*. (She had to search for the these names, in a book published 15 years previously, which I found more easily.) The picture did not correspond to the book; I complained about that, and Norma was surprised to learn that *Rhialto* is one of my favorite books, and then remembered the essay about *Rhialto* I had sent.‡

I forgot to mention that in the first hour of our first visit John brought out two copies of *Night Lamp*, one for me and one for my father (who they knew about, as another fan, from my letters). They often mentioned my father and hoped he would visit. They treated me like a dear old friend.

This was not a mere mannerism. A few years later I underwent a serious surgical operation and the Vances invited me to convalesce in Oakland, where I spent several weeks. Later they stayed with us in France and, with my father, we made a voyage to the south in search of the original cassoulet of Castelnaudary.

Source : Extant#16 -2006

1996 Mike Berro signing event advice

28 Oct 1996

Supercrown in Sunnyvale has confirmed Nov 9, 2:00-4:30pm for the Vance signing. They currently have 150 copies of Night Lamp in stock, with more coming. They will also have several copies of the limited edition available. You can call (408) 732-7057 right now and order copies to be signed and shipped to you. The organizer of this signing said that Jack had a signing earlier this year, and so many people showed up with so many paperbacks that he was thinking of never doing another signing. Crown may limit the number of books to be signed per time in line to just a few (in addition to any new books purchased.) Vance may not want to stay the whole 2.5 hours, so get there early.

<http://www.vancemuseum.com/jvip/archive.html>

1997 Grand master Award Presentation

The Grand Master Award to Jack Vance on 19/4/97 at the Nebula Awards, Kansas City, USA.

Vance thanks his wife Norma "without whom he would not exist, who tells him when he is wrong and who does an enormous amount of work". (applause)

Then Vance talks about his mother who, as a boy, gave him fantasy books to read, among them "The King in Yellow".

The atmosphere of these books had a great influence on him. Then he tells that his mother read in 1915 the first publication of Tarzan and that she started to collect Burroughs' books which will become his childhood readings as well as H.G.Wells, Jules Verne, Tom Swift, the Motor Boys and many others, in particular the Roy Rockwood : "Lost on the Moon", "Through space to Mars" it was to be the first SF stories published in the USA after those of Wells and Verne

Thanks to these readings he plunged early into SF and he thanks his mother for it.

In response to fans' questions, Vance says that his first short story was published in 1945. "To live forever" was his first full-length story (novella), not under that title, of course. Many of his titles have been changed by publishers and that bothers him (he laughs).

He adds that he would like to see some of these titles nominated as "The Worst Ever".

About his "career" he thinks it will be chaotic for a few more years.

The conference is over, there is a lot of applause.

Capobianco (president of SFWA: Science-Fiction Writers of America) gives Jack Vance his award and reads a tribute to him: elegant stylist... and inventive in details and language, and to quote "The Dying Earth (A Magic World)", "The Languages of Pao" and the Lyonesse series.

Again, much applause.

Testimony source : unknown

1998 Claire and Robert Belmas Our meeting with Jack Vance

Friday, October 30th, 1998. At UTOPIA (French convention)

8:30 p.m.: The large amphitheater of the Palais des Congrès du Futuroscope begins to fill up. SF professionals, writers, and publishers are there; but it is above all a crowd of anonymous people, amateurs and fans who have come to meet their favorite author who settle in front of the stage where the first "officials" take their places.

21:00: All the guests of honor are now on stage. Around Bruno Della Chiesa who will animate the evening, we notice Jacques Chambon, Jacques Sadoul, Caza, Arlette Roseblum, Siudmak, Jacques Goimard ...

Nearly four hundred people, mostly young people, now occupy the stands.

9:10 p.m.: Applause crackles, an ovation rises, the public is on its feet: guided by Paul Rhoads and accompanied by his wife Norma, Jack Vance has just entered the amphitheatre.

Bruno Della Chiesa defines the principle of the interventions: each guest will ask a question to Jack Vance. Then, the floor will be given to the audience.

Jacques Chambon opens the debate: how did the writer's life influence his work?

The author answers with bonhomie and sincerity. He tells the periods of his life that have marked him the most. It is the occasion to discover Jack-the-countryman, Jack-the-boater, Jack-the-failed physicist and Jack-the-carpenter, who sees the edition of his first short stories. Jack Vance will answer a total of thirty questions.

And, as the evening progresses, a simple, accessible character emerges, with a head full of images and stories whose magic he wants to share. A storyteller first and foremost, in the vein of those who used to gather the crowd on street corners.

Here, no pretensions, no great theories, no convoluted constructions:

"My characters? I love them all, in the same way, the good ones and the bad ones. I want to talk about them... Yes, they all express themselves in a rather refined way, but it seems to me that this is how characters should speak, in fiction... Where do I get all these stories from? They just come to me, and I need to tell them... "

Until the end, despite the tiredness that eventually breaks through his voice, Jack Vance will answer with the same kindness.

When the microphone circulates in the audience, it is always the same words, the same emotion that come back: "Thank you... Thank you for making me dream. Thank you for having invented these worlds. "It is not difficult to understand that, for many of these speakers, reading a Jack Vance novel is a great moment in life.

A particularly enthusiastic fan comes on stage, brandishing a camera bristling with metal extensions that hold flashes: an invention of his, he says. "In my photos, Jack, you'll be the most beautiful. "

The evening ends with the awarding of the Utopia 98 prize to the writer and a new ovation that raises the audience.

It is true that you were the most beautiful that night, Jack. And all of us who didn't know you well discovered an author who doesn't come to show us how interesting he is, but to tell us: "Listen... I'm going to tell you a beautiful story... "

<http://pulpstories.free.fr/jackvance.html>

1998 Denis Bekaert The voice of Jack Vance

Friday, October 30, 1998, night falls on the Futuroscope.

The miles of the day are already forgotten, the luggage is at the hotel, and this trip to Poitiers together with my brother is already taking on a pleasant taste of adventure. We are on the right path: Utopia 98, European science fiction festival. We did our exploratory tour earlier, the publishers' lounge, the exhibition hall. Look! On the Caza stand, a box of herbs for Chasch*, a life-size cardboard Roguskoï. The right track, for sure, the one of Jack Vance!

We are here for him, Jack Vance, 82 years old Californian, who spends a few days in France at the invitation of the festival organizers. What does this master of adventure look like, this man who has been telling me stories before I go to sleep for so many years? I came to hear his voice.

An announcement at the book stand: people with badges are expected at the 7:30 p.m. cocktail party at the Palais des Congrès. Of course, we don't have a badge, but we like the idea of some socializing. In the meantime, we have found the festival-goers' trail (those with badges) and we drink a beer at the bar of the Melchior Hotel. They are all there, the bearded ones, the bald ones with glasses, the young hairy ones in sweaters, some impeccable americans and the italian guests of the festival (four hands: one for the bloody mary, one on the plate of peanuts, and two for the conversation...).

OK, it's time. I quickly realize that I don't have Keith Gersen's ingenuity or composure to get into the cocktail party. Too bad, I still have the camera in my pocket, like a net ready to catch the big Jack Vance butterfly. At the bottom of the stairs, I take the opportunity to point out to my brother the familiar faces: Jacques Goimard (Presses Pocket)*, Jacques Sadoul (J'ai lu)*. A small man with a funny multi-flash camera appears and climbs the stairs. My brother jokes: "Next time, I'll come dressed as an alien! ".

Well, let's go to the amphitheater; let's choose the best seats, and let's not forget the translation helmets.

In addition to Goimard and Sadoul, other personalities take the stage. They are soon introduced by Bruno, the talkative host (inspirer?) of the evening, who turns out to be a serious fan of the great man. There is Doug Headline (from Rivages)*, Jacques Chambon - if he knew how many times I could read his splendid introduction to the JV Golden Book - the illustrators Caza and Siudmak, Arlette Roseblum and representatives of the Axolotl association and the Vienne county (co-organizers). From my seat, I can look at the backstage. He is there!

"Ladies and gentlemen! From San Francisco, California, Jack Vance! "

I take a photo of him, guided by Paul Rhoads and followed by Norma his wife. He is magnificent, imposing and ... blind.

Bruno della Chiesa invites each person to ask a question, then it will be the turn of the room. An excellent idea!

Jacques Chambon starts off strong: He reminds Jack that he has written to him twice to ask for biographical information.

Jack kindly complies. His story is fascinating in itself.

I remember here two episodes: When he was 18 years old, pushed by the necessities of life (separation of his parents), he decided to stop being the boy with a passion for classical culture to whom no one speaks and to become a real man and to know real life. He will return to literature only in his years as a merchant marine (the forties). Jack would later specify that the short stories in *Dying Earth* were written at sea and sent home during ports of call. He would not find them until a few years later, when he was still a carpenter. The other interesting element is that he made three trips with Norma in the 1950s, and each time he went broke, which pushed him to write more and to seek success. Moreover, he considered his intrusions into the realm of "mysteries" as commercial attempts without success. Sadoul asks Vance again if he thinks that his life has influenced his work, if he has transposed real-life situations. Jack replies that he cannot say for sure, but that he is sure that everything he

has written comes from him, nourished by multiple experiences in very diverse environments. The academic and very learned Goimard asks if he accepts for his work the reference of nominalism.

Jack: "What was the question? " Laughts in the room....

Arlette doesn't ask any questions, she just gives her sincere thanks and compliments Vance for the music of his language. Jack thanks her in turn for the quality of her translations. He knows that he is very well translated in France, and declares himself pleasantly surprised by the number of his fans here. Arlette, responding to the audience, mentions Suldrun, Thaëry and The Book of Dreams as her favorites.

Caza mentions the colors and the strong evocative power of Vance, the ideal writer to illustrate according to him because his descriptions are extremely precise. Caza slips in confidence that he is currently working on a project around Tschai but that he cannot say more for the moment. (comic strip, feature film of animation, cd-rom ? Mystery...).

Siudmak has an opposite conception of the illustration, since he does not want to influence the reader by representing characters and to be thus an obstacle between two imaginary, that of the author and that of the reader. He prefers to compose a variation based on elements present in the book (water, wind, heat...) and asks Vance which elements are the basis of his inspiration. Jack is intrigued by the question and says that outer space itself is rich enough to cause anxiety, tension and interesting characters. They become vulnerable and therefore ripe for adventure.

Many fans in the room thanked Jack for the happiness he brought them and recognized the opportunity to meet him as a dream come true.

To Serge Lehman's question that the characters all speak with refined language under any circumstances, JV answers that it is much more fun for him to write this way and that he never wants to be unpleasant to his reader. JV also indicates that Cugel (pronounced Kougueul) remained his favorite character even if he loved them all, and that he had a lot of fun writing his adventures.

Concerning the alleged machismo of his male characters, Jack denies any desire to paint them in this way, but when Bruno asks Norma the question again this time, he hastily answers for her: "Norma thinks like me! " Laughs in the room, and Jack smiles.

The little man with the alien camera asked a very interesting question in my opinion: Why not a fifth part to Tschai, Adam Reith on Earth? JV said he thought about that, but that he would have destroyed the whole story by giving it an extra message. The only possible climax was the liberation of the men and the departure of Adam. Jack also said that when he started writing, he had the whole story in mind.

Several wishes for Jack's long life were expressed and the awarding of the Utopia 98 prize concluded an evening that seemed to have delighted the main person concerned, who showed an affability and kindness at all times.

He remained on stage for a few moments at the disposal of his fans to sign a few autographs with a very sure hand (the hand of a blind man who executes a gesture with application). I let my ear linger and learned that he tunes his banjo like a guitar in the New Orleans style. So now you know how to tune your Khitan. The euphoria of the evening pushes me to all the audacities: I slip behind him and my brother takes a picture of me in his company. The trick is done! What a souvenir! But the book that I took with me remained at the hotel! No matter, tomorrow we will follow the trace of Jack Vance again in search of a signature. Perhaps you will find somewhere on these pages the proof that we have succeeded.

Thank you to the organizers of this wonderful evening, and to Jacques Garin who spread the word on his site, and without whom I would never have heard Jack Vance's voice.

First Published Jacques Garin site :

<http://pulpstories.free.fr/jackvance.html>

1998 Philippe Monot SF Convention « UTOPIA » - Futuroscope*

Excerpts* from the article by Philippe Monot*

"I HAD DINNER WITH JACK VANCE... AND I DIDN'T EAT ANYTHING.

»

Dinner with Jack Vance, Philippe Monot, Christophe Arleston*, Paul Rhoads.....:

.../...

" 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 is not sure 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 own right. It's not about Pulp. There are very talented authors and their "language" is truly appreciated. Christophe adds to this by mentioning some names, Bilal, Manara, Rosinsky...

Jack shrugs; 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, nods. "We understand that it's no by now, but that it can be discussed later."

I talk to Jack about his unique way of creating 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 can very quickly 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.

(...) I want to know how Jack proceeds in the elaboration of his plots. 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 small. I may or may not use it, but it will not have escaped me. Sometimes one of those ideas leads me to think about it further, and then other ideas come along. 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. 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 get the story in order, to determine what is really important and what is peripheral. 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 holding the pen or not?"

"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 as the story progresses, the events he experiences can make 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 to make him change his mind for one reason or another at that point."

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 get it right, 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. Then 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 this 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. I think he's fine the way he is. 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've 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's why the sun is dying, and the day looks 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."

**Notes :*

Excerpts: Here, only the interview with Vance is included, the original article is a testimony of a participant to a dinner party at the Utopia convention, whose story is more about the local French Sf scene (translators authors-publishers editors)

Philippe Monot : French writer and anthologist (1968-2019) inspired by Vance and Le Guin

Philippe Arleston : French comic writer (Lanfeust de Troy)

Futuroscope : is a French theme park based upon multimedia, cinematographic futuroscope and audio-visual techniques. Based near Poitiers West France.

Full article in French:

<https://www.nestiveqnen.com/jack-vance-interview/>

2000 Patrick Dusoulier Report

Jacques Garin on his French site [vance.jack.free](http://vance.jack.free.fr) reports:

Axolotl (P.Dusoulier- translator) who met Vance on December 29, 2000 tells me :

I had dinner with Jack and Norma in Oakland, at his son John's, at the end of December. We talked about Lurulu, of course, and Jack told me "I've found my momentum on this book..." = he found the right rhythm. Twelve chapters are "ready", i.e. sent to the editor. He also promised me "lots of surprises", he had a big smile on his face... No details, of course."

<http://vance.jack.free.fr/jackvance.html>

2000 Till Noever Visiting Jack Vance

Till Noeve (Cosmopolis 6 06-2000)

From May 15 - 19 I attended the 2000 Apple World Wide Developers Conference in San Jose. I had been to one of these conferences in 1996 and had contemplated visiting the Vances at that time. Then I thought that I did not want to inflict myself at a moment's notice. This time, however, I planned it well ahead and thanks to the intermediary services of Mike Berro, managed to reach John Vance. John told me that I was welcome to visit - and visit I did.

May 20 was a hot day in the Bay Area. Unseasonably so, as everybody assured me. I rented a car in San Jose and drove up to Oakland, to show up in the late morning at the house that Jack had built.

Trepidation! When I got out of the car it was one of those moments where I was not really too sure that it was happening.

John, the only one at home, welcomed me and immediately put me at ease. Uneasiness receded to the background. We chatted. John offered to put me up for the night - unless I had other plans. I accepted: even if I had had « other plans », I think I would have accepted anyway. There are more important things than other plans. At some point during our chat, little Glen came crawling down the stairs - very gingerly and tiredly. He eyed me with some suspicion, and gladly accepted the offer of his father's lap as a safe vantage point from which to observe me.

Norma, Tammy, and Alison (John and Tammy's little daughter) arrived some time later. Alison played shy. That did not persist for long. She is a charming little cutie, who reminded me very much of my own daughters when they were that age. Norma and Tammy proceeded to practice what John had started: putting me at ease. It's been a long time since I have found it so easy to talk to people I had never met before, and to like them so much. If there is a role model for hospitality, here it is.

I presented Norma with a coffee-table book about the city I live in (Dunedin, South Island, New Zealand) and two bars of genuine New Zealand Whittaker's chocolate (the next best thing to Swiss chocolate). Norma made all the right noises, and promised to be good about making sure that she and Jack did not scarf it all at once.

(A good piece of chocolate, as « Fletcher », in that enchanting romance, Still Breathing, points out, needs the right time and place to be properly enjoyed. I hope Jack and Norma have found a right time and place by now.)

Some time later John and Tammy went off to do parent-things (kiddies' birthday parties - how well I remember them...) while I followed Norma to their new residence: John and Tammy's former house, just a few minutes' drive away. When my flimsy rental pulled up behind Norma's American tank outside their house, trepidation reared its head again.

From inside, I heard a strange robotic voice. Norma explained that Jack was writing. He has got a customized computerized setup to get the work done. I have a professional interest in such matters and I am in awe of what people have done to help facilitate his activities. Even more in awe that Jack can produce such marvels as Night Lamp (which is one of my favorites) under such difficult circumstances.

Presently, Jack appeared in the kitchen. Trepidation peaked. We shook hands.

He was human. Good! My nerves stabilized.

Norma procured beer (for Jack) and a cup of tea (for me) and began to prepare lunch - while Jack started quizzing me about my not-exactly-common name. Norma continued with taco-making (allowing me to do the odd bit of chopping, thus enhancing my feeling of usefulness) as the three of us chatted away. Jack propounded on the topics of his choice. He expressed disdain for physicists like Stephen Hawking, who think they will be able to construct a theory-of-everything - a disdain I share. He also declared (and I paraphrase) that jazz was the most advanced form of music created and practiced by human kind - an analysis with which I don't necessarily agree. I would put it in #2 place, right next to blues - the #1 spot in my musical hierarchy of preferences

being taken up by the symphonic work of Jean Sibelius. Never got around to mentioning that though. Jack had other things to say.

The conversation ranged far and wide. With all the chatting, lunch was late-ish, but who cared about lunch? I was talking to my hero; literally, the only guy for whom I have ever felt anything approaching admiration. I hope I hid it well. Maybe Norma noticed, but if she did, she did not let on. Bless her. I was in a state. This was Jack!

Late lunch over, with the temperature and humidity climbing to dizzying heights, Jack excused himself and returned to his work. I was sad and glad at the same time. Sad because the meeting was over, glad because I had felt vaguely guilty about interrupting his work - and maybe in the process depriving the world of some critical piece of Lurulu. A scary thought!

Norma and I chatted some more. She filled me in on matters relating to the VIE and the January Work Festival. We talked about Jack 's writing; writing in general; writers; family; life; stuff. Norma's a delight to chat with.

Time to go. I said goodbye to Norma and Jack and returned to John and Tammy's. Tammy offered me pecan pie for dessert - with whipped cream. Real whipped cream - not the ghastly American substitute gunk that comes from pressurized cans. Now, two of the ways to my heart are through good chocolate and fresh whipped cream. Need I say more? I was in love with these people.

We chatted and presently everybody went to bed. On Sunday morning Tammy made waffles. Another nostalgic memory of the days when I lived in Atlanta, just over ten years ago. Maple syrup, strawberries and cream, too. Omigod, can I bear to leave here?

I had to. I was planning to see another friend near San Luis Obispo and then there was a plane waiting, too. I took some pictures of the family. Alison posed like the actress she is going to be one day. Little Glen squinted suspiciously - or maybe he was just more interested in his food than the guy wielding a camera. Ryan was off playing technological games with a buddy.

That was just over a week ago. Hard to believe. But there are pictures, and so I guess it did happen.

They say you should never meet your heroes, because you might find they have feet of clay. Well, no worry here. I met some remarkable human beings, whom I wish I could get to know better.

Maybe one day...

2001 David G. Guessbook Vance museum

My father introduced me to Jack Vance books 20 years ago when I was about 15. He has been a big fan since the late 50's and in the 60's he was living in CA (going to school) and found his phone number (under his real name) in a phone directory. My father was studying ceramics and knew Vance was interested in such things so he called him thinking he might be able to meet him and talk about his art. So my father called him and Vance admitted that he was, indeed, the author, but was not eager to meet my father. One of my father's friends (smoking pot in another room) got on another line and began to make barking noises which quickly ended the call.

David Gilhooly <david_gilhooly@hp.com>

Davis, CA USA - Wednesday, April 25, 2001 at 11:03:10 (PDT)

Mike berro at

<http://www.vancemuseum.com/jvip/guest/guestbook.html>

2001 Bryan Zetlen
Chat JVMB with B Ztlen, John Green

bzetlen
mars 17, 2019#3

Good enough

Thanks for responding. I'd expect that any conversation with that good man would be interested. I wrote a note and will post it later. We talked in Oakland in 2001.

Cheers Bryan

JackVance began writing fantasy and SF around the time I was born after WW2. I was raised more or less by parents who were refugees.

My father died in the early 50s as a result of injuries in a POW camp so I wandered around in early childhood unsupervised. It was an unpleasant time and became a compulsive reader when I was 3-4 yrs. old. I was solitary and did a lot of reading whenever I was able. I walked to school and most days I would buy a Daw or Amazing Stories or similar books at the drugstore on the way to school – I spent a lot of quarters.

When I read the first of his books I came across, the Tchai series, then the Demon Princess series, Big Planet, Space Opera and so on. I went looking for everything else including his equally brilliant and strange fantasy stories and novels. Two of his characters in those series somehow clicked in my kid brain and for twenty then forty years, I would look all over the world for his work in bookstores, online or wherever else I could find them.

So far just a kid enamored with a wonderful writer and his entirely, to me, plausible ideas. I sussed from many of his stories that he'd been a naval or merchant marine sailor – merchant marine was the correct one.

Fast forward to 2000. My colleague Steve Melnikoff, a high-energy particle physicist and I are in the Oakland Hilton prepping for meetings at Lawrence Livermore the following day. We were watching the Oakland Raiders invading the hotel so went to the bar.

At the time, Steve was an expert on issues having to do with accelerator radiation and I was a lesser light as the test program manager to assess the star wars weapons that had actually been built for integration into aircraft and spacecraft. (ultimately I vetoed that idiocy for all three weapons but not before running tests. Like giving a 15 years old boy a 50 cal machine gun to play with.

While we talked in the bar, Steve, a sci-fi reader of a different sort, asked me whether I'd been successful in locating where a now older Vance lived. As he mentioned it, I remembered that Vance had been a merchant mariner and that many of them settled around Oakland after the war. We still had phonebooks then and I looked him up.

I called and a older grumpy woman answered. I introduced myself and before I finished, she yelled 'Jack its one of them'. She came back and explained 'Jack is older and he's nearly blind. He does appreciate your interest but he needs to conserve his strength. I'm sure as a fan you'll understand. She was quite sweet now and says, 'would you care to leave a message?'

I said I'm sure that he hears this often, but his books, and especially two of his characters were life saving role models for me as a young man, Kirth Gersen and Adam Reith. (I remembered thinking that I was a parody of a besotted fan, a kind of Trekkie, senior citizen version. She asked me to wait, then Vance came on the line sounding like a superannuated fan himself. '

Which characters, he asked?' He said I only remember one of them, Kirth Gersen. He asked me what I did for work and I got out about 3 words before he said, 'do you know anything about energy weapons?' Mr. Vance, I said, yes I do, I'm something of an expert on them.

I also said, I can't believe you're asking me about futurist system and weapons! Your versions are entirely plausible. He said 'I am completely non-technical, I grab stuff from popular mechanics and magazines'. We talked for just a few minutes about rail-guns, neutral particle beam weapons, steerable microwave and so forth.

Then he said, ‘are you a drinking guy’ Yes I said. ‘Do you know where I live?’ No sir I don’t. ‘Well pick up a bottle of decent scotch and we’ll’ have a talk, I’m going to pick your brains. His son came on after and asked that I not come. He was upset and he explained that his dad’s popularity meant a succession of uninvited fans – a hardship on Vance.

We spoke again briefly and I wished him happiness for the influence he had on me as a young boy.

Vance, my revered philosophical teacher and mentor, through his writing asked me about a topic that I was able to discuss with some authority.

It was as though Arthur Clarke asked my advice on positioning geostationary satellites in the Clarke belt or Jonas Salk (whom I met as a child, consulting me in vaccine delivery methods.

David you have my gratitude for reading my poor account.

It happened as written and I can still recall my delight and shock at simple being able to talk with him. I have other literary heroes and heroines but Vance was the guide of my adolescence in his work and his ideas.

Cheers and thank you,

Bryan

Edward Winskill
mars 29, 2019#7

Interesting. I speculate that you may have caught Jack at a bad time; he was crusty perhaps but usually welcoming (as indeed it sounds he was when you called). Much might depend on the actual chronology; the first VIE work party took place at Jack and Norma's in January of 2000, and quite a few of us were there in person. Norma put on a great paella spread and Jack made time for everybody individually during the weekend. I would not be surprised if

contacts by fans increased thereafter and may have caused some inconvenience now and again. Just speculating.

I visited Jack by myself a second time a year or two later, calling while I was in the Bay area on business, and was invited by; of course at that time I had previously met him, and I was a board member of the VIE corporation, as was John. Had a great lunch and talk; John was working on a most interesting engineering project at the time. And, indeed, Jack was eager to discuss a metallurgical article from the current issue of Discover magazine. Notwithstanding that he did not do 'hard' SF, he was personally interested in technical engineering matters; this tracks the things he expressed to you.

bzetlen

avr. 11, 2019#8

Mike and Edward,

I appreciate the feedback and Mike's clean up of the text. I do have to respond however about your comments interpreting my conversations with Vance.

Edward's comments sound like a book report and I doubt that the man I only slightly knew would be interested in these interpretations of his comments and our private conversations. I guess we all have a bit of that ownership thing for people we admire. Jack came into my life in the 50s when I was a child. I trusted him, odd thing for a kid. but I did trust him and made occasional course corrections based on what I read and remembered. I understand that impulse to guard and intervene for someone you value. From what I've heard here, I had far less of an acquaintance with him than most of you, but my recollections of our talks are mine and don't require filtering through anyone else's memory. That is neither a defense or an offense. You folks had more opportunity to know the man. I treasure the time and extraordinary talks we had for what they were, my own accurate childhood guesses about him and the wild coincidence of those phone discussions.

JohnGreen
avr. 17, 2019#10

I would guess that it was just John that that was concerned as he probably had to cancel a few invites that Jack made since he tended to always do them.

John is a good man and had a lot to deal with with his aged and chronically ill father.

I was lucky enough to spend some days with Jack and his family and some of the European crowd that helped with the vie.

I brought a flute being an accomplished player principal in an orchestra for example for about two decades and I was able to play along with him on anything he wanted to do with good rhythm and harmony which thrilled Jack at least. but I got a little too encourage maybe and I went out and bought some non-alcohol beer and shared it with Jack.

At this time Jack had a lot of diet advice by sub specialist doctors and for reasons that probably aren't that important he was avoiding alcohol but less importantly avoiding malt and since you can now buy non-alcohol beers and enjoy most of what a beer offers it actually turned out to be an incredible experience for him. For years he had not touched anything.

I vividly remember sitting with him as he took a long slow swig of a cold non-alcohol beer put it down and said "manna from heaven".

Jack then actually told me a story he never got to write down which was based on his own experience as a merchant Marine stopping at an island in the Pacific where the boys would typically go off to drink gamble and pay for erotic needs. Jack was a bit shy and instead went to a small eatery where he had a beer and a sandwich with a friend. while they enjoyed their break there also sat a couple of nice looking well-dressed young women also having their lunch at a table and one kept glancing at him as he glanced at her and he got the nerve up to ask her if she would be interested in him taking her out later. her answer was demure and respectful, and explain that she would have to bring her friend along.

so he arranged for a friend with him to go out with these two young women and pay for dinner and had to rent a cab and drove out on the coastline to a small secluded place that served up at dinner and then later brought them back home.

Jack was last to bring this young lady home and I don't recall the name he told me but he did remember a lot of details about her. after he gave her a respectful kiss she invited him in and he did spend the evening with her and the next morning she prepared him breakfast.

he had fallen for the woman and by the day the ship left he had worked up the nerve to propose because it would be a great boon for her to get off the island. I think he may have even borrowed or traded for an engagement ring. He made an honest proposal and the girl was moved but had to tearfully tell him it couldn't work and Jack knew from her eyes and affect that she was sincere and sad and left dejected without pressing for more.

on the ship after they left this port he told the story to one of the older men of the crew, and the older man told him, "You know she was a prostitute." and he realized that this was true.

this is the first time I've shared this with anyone.

It was the next day that John took up the subject of the beer with me and he was a bit angry. I explain my case and then the next day he came back and told me that he was glad his dad was getting to enjoy a cold beer again, and it was all good.

source

JVMB

2002 David Alexander How To Kill Dogs

And Other Jack Vance Reminiscences

By David Alexander

[1st published : Cosmopolis #28 2002-07]

I don't know how Jack Vance will react to this publication.

Many writers thrive on publicity, or at least enjoy it. But not Jack. He has always believed that a writer's personal life should be somewhat hidden so as not to color on the reader's perception of his (or her) work.

Somewhat in deference to that philosophy, I won't try to relate any aspect of Jack's stories to any trait of his personality, character or upbringing. But, I will jot down a few remarks about Jack Vance himself.

Poul Anderson is directly responsible for my meeting Jack. Several years ago I was teaching a junior college class on Science Fiction and Poul was our guest speaker.

I happened to mention that I greatly admired Jack's work and Poul revealed (perhaps to Jack's dismay) that Jack lived in Oakland. Sure enough, there he was in the Oakland phone book.

With some trepidation I called Jack and asked if I could meet him. He said that I could, provided that I did not talk to him about writing. I found him at his hilltop home, on his hands and knees, laboriously installing a slate floor in the living room. Somehow or other I managed to avoid mentioning his writing and our friendship began.

In the following years I often found Jack immersed in the building and re-building of his home. Jack's eyesight was very, very bad and it was with not a little concern that I watched him operate the radial saw or hoist four by fours into place. I particularly remember one Saturday afternoon when I found him

clambering from beam to beam some twenty feet above my head. I was certain that he was going to lose his grip, plummet earthward, and land on me! Fortunately for both of us, my fears were unfounded. Month by month, year by year, the house took shape and not once was I fallen on. As the years went by, I would often take friends to the Vances for one of Norma's famous Sunday dinners (Norma Vance is one of best cooks it has ever been my pleasure to encounter) and I took increasing pleasure in giving my friends a tour of the house which I had watched take shape: "That ceiling is hand-carved walnut from Jack and Norma's trip to Pakistan. Those painted panels on the kitchen ceiling were specially created by their friend Tony over a period of a several month long visit. There is the famous slate floor. The walls of the breakfast nook are solid Koa wood from Hawaii. That fireplace Jack built and mortared, stone by stone.

There is the breakfront which John Vance built by hand, beginning with raw oak planks and ending in that magnificent contrivance of wood and glass and metal." On those visits the Vance household was always a place of laughter and activity. Norma would labor in the kitchen to cook a gourmet dinner for the six or ten or twelve guests. Some of the ladies (and the men) would help by cutting carrots or peeling avocados. Others would gather in the dining room where they would drink wine or sample one of the Vances' fifteen or twenty varieties of liquors and talk about everything from the political situation in Singapore to why all modern music is abysmal noise (Jack's constant point of view); the complete uselessness of dogs, or the various strong points of one computer or sail boat over another.

The participants at these evenings were always diverse: Dennis the boat repairman and Citroen aficionado would usually be available to decry the vices of steelhulled boats or to praise the virtues of his three or four Citroens. Tim Underwood or Hayford Pierce would gently prod Jack on any one of several of his pet topics: the magnificence of classical jazz; the worthlessness of professional football; the iniquity of most politicians.

Jack, in turn, would give as good or better as he got, more than once making pointed remarks to Tim about the 'cult' of vegetarianism. (It is no secret that the portion of *The Book of Dreams* making reference to "the dark side of vegetarianism" was inspired by Jack and Tim's good natured bantering on this topic.) The guest list usually included persons of diverse professions: doctors, architects, pottery makers, cabinet makers, contractors, a lawyer (me), nuclear

physicists, computer hackers, and even, occasionally, a writer, an agent, an editor, or more rarely, a publisher.

One Sunday night I stopped by Jack and Norma's on my way back from skiing in Tahoe to find a party in full swing, complete with band. In the middle of one of Jack's banjo and kazoo solos the phone rang. It was Donald Wollheim, publisher of DAW books. He and Elsie had flown into Oakland International, rented a car, and promptly gotten lost. They were stranded in an abandoned Texaco station down by the freeway. Would I go and rescue them? I found the Wollheims huddled in their rented Dodge Dart and led them through Oakland and up into the hills.

At this time, both were in their late sixties. Finally, about nine-thirty, we reached the one lane road where Jack's house was situated. Then, carefully, we drove up the narrow, rutted, semi-vertical driveway to Jack and Norma's hilltop home. ("If you step three feet to the right," I warned them, "you will fall down an embankment to the road sixty feet below and surely be killed." This turned out to be untrue as recently Jack did fall down the embankment to the road below while on a nocturnal garbage emptying mission and he was not killed, or even seriously injured, though the garbage did take a hell of a beating). Anyway, after successfully negotiating the edge of the Vance Cliff I led the Wollheims up the 15 stairsteps to the living room where the party was now in full swing.

With great weariness, Don and Elsie collapsed onto the couch and accepted a refreshment. Jack left the band to fend for itself and came over to welcome his guests. For some reason I do not now remember, I decided to set Jack off in absolutely the wrong direction.

"Jack," I said brightly, "have you told Don about the new manuscript you are going to send him?" "Ah," Jack said, playing along, "which one do you mean?" "You know, Jack, the coffee table book you've been working on: How To Kill Dogs." "Oh, that book!" Jack replied enthusiastically. "No, I haven't, but I should. Don, this is a wonderful book, a big seller! It's an illustrated book describing forty-two methods of killing dogs through the ages." At this point Don looked like a man who had just been offered a canapé consisting of a squirming tarantula impaled on a toothpick.

Sensing that Don was a bit disoriented and somewhat vulnerable, Jack continued: “The first chapter is entitled Medieval Methods of Killing Dogs. Picture this: a drawing of a bedraggled hound with one end of a chain clamped to his hind leg and the other welded to a cannonball. In the next picture, the dog is sailing through the air, his ears back, his tail between his legs, on a collision trajectory with an encampment of raiding Norsemen.” The Wollheims envisioned this scene with an expression of vast dismay.

The more Jack expounded, the harder I laughed, the more disoriented Don and Elsie appeared and, in turn, the more fanciful Jack became. The last chapter I can recall, before I practically rolled off the couch, had something to do with mad scientists, venal dogs and coruscating laser beams. (This joke became a favorite with Jack until one time he ‘pitched’ the book to the Editor In Chief of one of his publishers who took him seriously.

At the end of his ‘proposal’, she told him icily that she had two dogs which were the love of her life, and then turned her back on him and stalked away. After that, *How To Kill Dogs* was not mentioned very much.) Over the years the parties have continued unabated.

The books have emerged, longer and longer, from Jack’s basement computer, and Norma’s cooking continues as good as ever. I cannot envision a time when all that should change.

I realize that there is little in this brief essay that is profound, but perhaps it will strike a chord of resonance with those of you who read what Jack writes. The only connection I will suggest between Jack Vance’s books and Jack Vance the man is to observe that Jack’s characters inhabit worlds which do not lack for fine ale, invigorating teas, hospitable inns, talented musicians, and waggish scamps—which is not such a bad life at all.

Source : *Cosmopolis* 28 - 2002

2003 David B. Williams

This really happened to me

/ Report from Marcon 38

by David B. Williams

Cosmopolis 39 -06-2003

I never believed it could really happen. No way was Jack Vance, my literary idol for 40 years, actually going to show up, at the age of 86, as scheduled, at a public event only 180 miles from my home.

During the week before Marcon 38 in Columbus, Ohio, May 23-25, I checked the convention's webpage every day, waiting to see what would happen to thwart my chance to meet Jack Vance. One of the other guests of honor had already cancelled. Jack would catch a bad cold, the Big One would buckle the runways in Oakland, something would divert the path of destiny.

But the day arrived. An unavoidable appointment trapped me at the office until 5 p.m. The Marcon opening ceremonies were scheduled for 8:30 that evening, and it's a three and a half hour drive from Indianapolis to Columbus. The guests of honor would be introduced at the opening ceremonies, so that would be the first chance to see Jack Vance. You can imagine how difficult it was to keep from exceeding the speed limit—but it was the eve of Memorial Day weekend and the state troopers were out in force.

I pulled into the parking lot at 8:29 and rushed into the hotel, seeking the convention registration area because I would need a badge to get into the session. But I actually didn't need a badge to see Jack Vance. As I crossed the lounge area toward the function rooms, I recognized Jack and Norma sitting at a small table enjoying drinks with just one other person.

I had forgotten the time change between Indianapolis and Columbus. Indy stays on Eastern Standard Time all year while the rest of the zone goes on Daylight Saving Time. It wasn't 8:30 in Columbus, it was 9:30, and the opening ceremonies were over. At least that meant there was no line at registration. I got my badge in about 90 seconds and hurried back to the lounge. There were Jack and Norma and their one-man entourage, sitting all by their lonesome.

This was an unsurpassed opportunity. I'm a rather diffident fellow, but at the risk of being branded a schmeltzer, (one who attempts to ingratiate himself, or mingle, with individuals of a social class superior to his own.—Night Lamp) I strode to the table and asked, "May I introduce myself?"

I was welcomed and urged to sit down as if they had been waiting for me. Jack and Norma's companion turned out to be Bill Schultz, old friend of the Vances from his California days who's now at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. He was on hand in the role of guide dog, he later explained.

Jack opened the conversation with "David Williams, that's a Welsh name, isn't it?" and it progressed from there, ricocheting from naming conventions in various cultures to historic highways to astronomy when I mentioned that I was an amateur astronomer. Jack proved to be informed on stellar interferometry, adaptive optics, and other topics in contemporary astronomy. He said later that he reads (that is, listens to) mostly non-fiction— science, geography, history.

I mentioned that my specialty is eclipsing binary stars, and Bill asked whether there was anything new in that field, which led to the calibration of the Cepheid distance scale and the expansion of the universe. I said something about some new concept in cosmology and Bill leaned back with a look of dismay. "Have I stepped in it?" I asked.

It turns out that Jack Vance is a skeptic regarding current thinking in cosmology, and he was off and running, questioning the reality or implications of red shifts, dark matter, and the cosmic background radiation. Bill valiantly defended physics as we know it; red-shifted photons can't be 'tired light' because photons would have to interact with something in order to lose energy, and we haven't detected anything like that. But finally I deflected the entire discussion when I said to Jack: "I endorse the theory you put forward in Morreion, where the magicians traveled to the edge of the universe and found a planet being shaved off as it passed the edge." This tickled Jack, who laughingly declaimed, "Nothing threatens Morreion!"

Jack Vance likes good food and drink and sports a goodly paunch. During the conversation an amusing situation developed. Jack tends to lean back in his chair, and the front of his shirt pulled loose from his waistband, exposing an inch or two of tummy. Norma noticed this and coaxed him to tuck the shirt

back in. I had to smile. Jack was drinking a Heineken. At such a moment, what true Vancean wouldn't recall Cugel's encounter with the mermelants, who asked: "Do you carry beer? We are beer drinkers of noble repute and show our bellies to all!"

Our chat went on for an hour. I was surprised that no one came up to shake hands or ask for an autograph. But the average conventioneer is in the 15-25 age range and mostly oriented to visual media and gaming, too young and too oblivious to literary SF to realize what an honor it is to have Jack Vance as a guest of honor. Well, I wasn't complaining.

About 10:30 we said good night and parted. As I made my way through the late-evening convention crowd, I had to reflect that there was one benefit to Jack's loss of sight. He couldn't see all the Imperial Troopers and Klingons who were sporting about the hotel, the sort of sci-fi thing for which he has expressed disdain. About 30 feet from where we had been seated, I passed a couple clad in black leather. She was bent over, and he was flailing her broad rump with a lash.

The next morning, I was inspecting the convention schedule, a large matrix of panel topics and participants. I couldn't find a mention of Jack Vance anywhere, until I noticed a line at the bottom announcing an autographing session that afternoon. Surely that couldn't be all. I searched again, and finally noticed 'Kaffeeklatsches with Jack Vance' as the fourth footnote at the bottom of the Friday schedule, amid listings of hours for the art show, dealers room, etc. I was jolted upright when I read that the first session began at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, and it was now 11:20. Signups for these events were required, so I raced to the registration area. Seven of the eight slots had been taken, I signed in as number 8 and hurried away in search of the hotel restaurant, this kaffeeklatsch actually being a lunch.

I arrived just a minute or two late. Most seats at the long table were filled. Jack was seated on the corner at one end, Norma and Bill on the corners at the other end, the chairs at the head and foot of the table remained empty. I nobly went down to the far end to sit with Norma and Bill. I had enjoyed my moment with Jack and could give someone else the chance to take the seat next to him (wouldn't you do the same?). But nobody else came in, and the waiter suggested that I move to the open place at the other end. Okay, I thought, and accepted the suggestion. For the next two hours I sat at Jack's right hand,

wondering whether I should buy a lottery ticket that day; it seemed that luck refused to fail me that weekend.

During lunch I interjected an occasional comment, but I didn't need to ask questions, what with the other Vance fans taking turns. Here's what I learned:

— The mystery novels *Isle of Peril* as by 'Alan Wade' and *Take My Face* as by 'Peter Held', published by Mystery House in 1957, were unsold manuscripts that were finally taken by this publisher as a package for a trifling payment, \$100 each (Jack said there were three manuscripts, but I only find these two in his bibliography).

— Jack believes that Jack Gaughan's illustrations for *The Dragon Masters* in *Galaxy* really caught the readers' attention. "I take my hat off to Jack Gaughan for his magnificent illustrations," he said. He thinks the illos made the difference for his first Hugo Award winner.

— During this and later encounters, I noted how Jack pronounced names from his stories. Unspiek, Baron Bodissey, is pronounced UN-speek, BAH-di-see. The emphasis in *Morreion* is on the middle syllable: moreEYE-un. Pao is pronounced PAY-oh, two syllables with emphasis on the first. Jack pronounces *Tschai* as 'shay' but accepts 'chy' as a reasonable choice. *Ridolph* is RYdolf. *Cugel* of course rhymes with bugle, and the emphasis in *Lurulu* is on the first syllable, LOO-roo-loo.

— Jack is fond of the *Cugel* books, kind of likes the *Cadwal* trilogy, thinks the *Lyonesse* set is pretty well done, and likes *Ports of Call*.

— *Lurulu* is "just about ready" to go to Tor, his publisher.

— Jack sees himself as a frustrated musician. "Music means a great deal to me," he said. But he couldn't make it as a musician, one reason being his fingers, which aren't agile enough.

— Favorite places from his world travels are Ireland, the Dordogne region in France, Positano in Italy before it became a big resort area, and Tahiti was great until he and Norma contracted a tropical fever and had to scuttle their plan to continue around the world.

— Jack met Norma in late 1945 or early 1946. He had left the Merchant Marine and was working as a carpenter. He was standing around a building site one day when he chanced to look over the fence. On the porch next door, he saw a young woman, 18-19 years old, who was petting a little cat. He thought she looked wonderful, the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. So "I made her acquaintance, one thing led to another, and we got married" in August 1946.

— Jack concedes that he doesn't write for the lowest common denominator. "I don't have any stupid fans."

— Jack is as fond of the epigraphs he wrote before each chapter of the Demon Princes novels as his fans are. Galaxy editor Fred Pohl, however, didn't want to include them in the magazine's serial installments.

When everyone else had taken their turn, I took a shot. Would you do something for me? I asked. In all your books the heroines are these waifs who are mistaken for boys until more closely examined. If you write another book (and here he interjected, "I am"), how about a heroine or hero's special other who's tall, buxom, with broad hips and voluptuous thighs? This suggestion was emphatically rejected. "I don't like fat-ass Marilyn Monroe types!" he said very forcefully. I thought he might thump the table with his fist. So much for my one attempt at influencing the works of Jack Vance.

When most of the guests left, Jack wanted to stay for a beer. So two or three of us joined him. In this relaxed setting, I essayed an arcane question, a little apprehensively because I know he often dislikes discussing his stories in detail (and, in fairness, he often can't recall what he intended when he was writing a story 30 or 40 years ago). The question had come up a couple of times on the Jack Vance discussion board: What was the relationship between Pnume, Phung, and nighthounds?

The Pnume and Phung resemble each other physically. Nighthound eggs were deposited on the walls of a Phung cave. Did he intend these three creatures to be different phases in the life cycle of the same species? Or are the Phung 'boisterous Pnume'? No, he replied, they are different indigenous species, the Phung a subspecies of Pnume perhaps, but not different forms of the same species. (Perhaps a parallel example would be humans, chimps, and gorillas or African wild dogs, jackals, and hyenas, all similar in form but different species.)

The autograph session was well attended, with a long line of Vance fans toting satchels of books, including at least one VIE set. I saw some nice specimens, the Avalon editions of *Big Planet* and *Languages of Pao*, the Doubleday hardcover *Emphyrio*, etc. Jack signed and signed, the halfhour session was extended to an hour and finally had to be terminated so he could get to the next kaffeeklatsch (where yet more books were signed).

At the second kaffeeklatsch, Jack talked a bit about his writing style, his quest to construct rhythmically pleasing “or not unpleasing” sentences. “The secret is not to stop the reader’s eye in the middle of a sentence. The reader should not be aware he is reading.”

A participant raised the issue of Jack’s gift for creating neologisms. Everyone liked ‘chife’. But Jack was rather shocked when I informed him that ‘nuncupatory’ is in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (unabridged). Its obsolete meaning is to name or declare. Jack thought he had made it up and certainly uses it differently.

There was more discourse about his travels and his favorite places. That got Jack into another of his favorite topics, ocean sailing. When John II was 19 or 20, they acquired a 45-foot ketch, the plan being to sail the South Pacific. But Jack wasn’t able to raise the cash reserve needed to finance the expedition, John needed to start college, and the static costs of owning the boat were high. They managed to sail up to Oregon and back, but Jack saw that this was one dream that wasn’t going to happen and finally sold the boat (to Norma’s relief).

While the topic was sailing, I noted that many of Jack’s book-jacket bios have stated that he was torpedoed twice in the Merchant Marine, and I asked if these had been serious incidents. But Jack said no, he had never been torpedoed and didn’t know how the story got started. He began to say something about other threatening situations but abruptly closed the topic: “Well, I don’t want to tell any war stories.”

There was also some discussion of his friends Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert. Jack seemed to recall Anderson with particular fondness. He also told how one day Frank Herbert enthusiastically described a story idea about a planet that was all sand and had giant worms and things, and asked Jack what he thought. Jack wasn’t particularly impressed but nodded and made polite noises. Later, after *Dune* was published and became a huge success, Jack was

surprised and amused when Frank told interviewers that it was all thanks to Jack Vance's encouragement.

Jack said that he had never really cared for Frank Herbert's stories because so many of them contained an element of mysticism. He noted that in his own stories he is always sardonic about priests and religions in general. (His own religion seems to be single-malt Scotch, to which he is devoted and reverential.)

The last kaffeeklatsch convened Sunday morning at 11:30. Talk of food, drink, and travel led Jack to state his philosophy of life: "The only basic reason for being alive is pursuit of romance—I don't know a better term—the ambition to do all the wonderful things" life has to offer. Someone asked him how or why he started writing science fiction, and Jack began describing his childhood, when he was an omnivorous reader and very bright. He entered high school at age 11 and knew more about almost everything than anyone around him. Among the many things he read were *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories Quarterly*, so his interest in fantastic literature began in childhood.

Later, after working for several years at any job he could find, he was able to enroll at the University of California with a small scholarship. He took an English class to fulfill course requirements. Each week the students had to turn in a composition, and one week Jack decided to write a science fiction story. After the teacher had read the submissions, he told the class that there were some excellent stories in the batch but added "we also have a piece of science fiction" in a scornful tone. This would have been circa 1937-38 and represents Jack's first SF manuscript rejection.

Jack also discussed the interest he and Norma developed in ceramics (this would have been around 1948- 49). They opened a shop called 'Ceramic Center' to do firing and sell supplies. They didn't do very well, however, and closed the business. But ceramics remained one of Jack's enduring interests. Later, when they had room at their home in the Oakland hills, he installed a gas kiln and wheel and continued to pursue "this absolutely fascinating set of crafts."

The Vances acquired the Oakland hills home as "three lots and a little shack" very cheaply in 1954. As a qualified carpenter, Jack remodeled and expanded the house over the next 30 years, "throwing the old house out the

windows” as he replaced old with new. Ultimately, one wall in the bathroom was all that remained of the original cottage. Today, after almost 50 years of residency, the Vances no longer live in the celebrated Oakland hills house; son John had a family and a small house, while Jack and Norma were living alone in the big house, so not long ago they traded.

Jack was asked about his world travels again. At least in the early years, he and Norma traveled cheaply. When Jack managed to get a couple of thousand dollars ahead, they would set off and vagabond around Europe, Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific, returning home with an empty bank account. He knew his career had turned a corner when, after the third or fourth trip, he arrived home to discover that he had more money in the bank than when he started.

Most of Jack’s stories from the 1950s to 1970s were written entirely or in part in foreign lands. I asked whether he found it difficult to write in strange surroundings. No, he said, he began in the Merchant Marine, sitting on deck with a clipboard on his knee, and that’s what he continued to do—whether camping in South Africa, living on a houseboat in Kashmir, or sitting under palm trees in Tahiti.

I also asked why so many characters in Jack Vance stories are such penny pinchers and tightwads. Rhialto complains about the extravagant compensation he must provide to the Minuscules who are repairing his waypost—two ounces of honey and similar quantities of other provender for a single week’s work! After *The Killing Machine*, Gersen has an income of about 1 million SVU per day. But on the planet Moudervelt, he declines to pay the initially requested sum for the landing fee, the hotel room, even a piddling 2 SVU for a local travel guide. The way Jack smiled, you could tell he enjoys writing these bargaining scenes. They may be a form of wish fulfillment, because he conceded that he isn’t an adept bargainer himself.

While talking about travel, Jack admitted to utilitarian familiarity with French, German, and Spanish, knowledge that renewed itself each time he and Norma stayed awhile in one of these language areas. I pointed out that he also had some knowledge of Japanese, which he had studied in an Army Intelligence program at the university in the first year or two of the war. Jack said that at one time he knew a thousand characters of Japanese and was very good at writing it, but the language was too idiomatic and he never became fluent in spoken Japanese.

The subject of languages also led me to point out that, while Jack's stories are premised on the infinite mutability of human cultures, he doesn't allow it for languages. Jack said that he adopts several conventions in order to make his stories possible. One is a universal language, since it would be impractical to tell planetary or interstellar stories if language was handled realistically. Another convention is to ignore the fact that alien proteins would be highly poisonous. He allows for adjustment of atmospheric pressure when landing on a new planet, and taking medications to thwart native pathogens, but ignores the protein problem.

We could no longer ignore the time problem. The session had lasted almost two hours, and it was just about time to go. Jack signed several more stacks of books, and departing guests took the opportunity to tell him how much pleasure his work had given them. I shook the hand that wrote *The Dying Earth* and *Emphyrio* (literally—Jack is right handed and wrote all his manuscripts longhand until his eyes failed). Then I turned to Norma. “I hope I'm not the first Jack Vance fan to say thank you for everything you've done over the years as enabler and unindicted co-conspirator, typing all those manuscripts and making trips like this possible,” and Jack agreed, saying that no one realized the true scope of Norma's contributions to his work.

Then it was hail and farewell. During the three and a half hour drive back to Indianapolis, I mentally relived the whole experience. I also thought of all the questions I forgot to ask. Oh well. Finuka had smiled, the rite had not been scamped, I had met Jack Vance. It really happened!

2003 Norma Vance A Different View of Jack Vance

by Norma Vance

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Most of you reading this have probably read at least one biography of Jack or, if not, you are acquainted with his writing. As his wife, I have the inside track and instead of enumerating all his literary achievements, I have decided to write about the person you may not know very well, but who I hope you will enjoy getting to know.

My first impression of Jack was that he was— different. Certainly he was daring: to appear on a girl's doorstep with a bag of donuts and ask if I could make some coffee? The 56 years since have not altered my opinion. He is still daring, but his most notable quality is persistence; somehow the two seem to belong together. Persistence is what accomplishes things like excavating tons and tons of dirt to make room to build a house, or writing books, lots of books.

The rustic little house and property we bought in Oakland was not ideal, but it was cheap and the three lots of hillside provided plenty of room for our five cats to roam. The terrain, however, was a challenge, hardly any space on which to build. Using a pick-axe, shovel, wheelbarrow and hard work, Jack created a building site. Wall by wall the rustic cabin disappeared and in affordable stages became a really comfortable place to live. All the while Jack made time to write. This could not have happened without his drive (or persistence).

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During the time the contours of our property were being changed, there was general concern that a nuclear war might develop. What did Jack do? He was already moving tons of dirt, so he dug a tunnel into the hillside: a few feet forward, then a turn to the left for about five feet, then a turn to the right and another turn left, terminating in a chamber of about eight feet on a side. He shored up walls and ceiling with heavy timbers, installed a small fireplace for comfort and light, a chimney to vent smoke. Before heaping extra dirt over the

top of the excavation, he laid heavy black plastic over all. With lanterns and candles the space began to look habitable.

One day, when noise and activity in the house made concentration difficult, Jack retreated to the cave. He brought with him a thermos bottle of hot coffee, a canvas slingback chair, a pillow to rest his clipboard on. He made a fire in the fireplace, lit a lantern and set to work. Peace at last! But as luck, or Mother Nature, would have it, rain began to fall. Not long after, a trickle of water found its way down to the plastic, then underneath it and finally into the cave. Drip-drip-drip! Onto Jack's head and shoulders, clipboard and paper. That was enough! The fallout shelter was a failure, though not entirely. The fireplace provided a safe venue for a young male child to satisfy his firebug tendencies.

A more successful venture was the treehouse. We had lots of big eucalyptus trees and our son John, as do many boys, wanted a treehouse. Jack chose a huge old tree which, about fifteen feet up, had branches suited to supporting a platform. He installed a ladder, then a platform made from two sheets of 3/4" x 4' x 8' plywood. The walls also were plywood, with two windows and a door. There was a front porch with access through a hole in the platform.

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John and his friends enjoyed this playhouse for enough years, so that when a terrific windstorm blew it to the ground, along with its supporting branches, there was no great sorrow—just a little sadness.

One of Jack's most enduring interests is in the culinary arts. He likes to read recipes, read about memorable banquets such as in the Epicurean, concoct his own recipes and feasts, cook; take note of the latest best dining spots and of the talented chefs who make simple ingredients divine. Naturally this interest has its downside and dieting is the result. Luckily for him our son is not so affected. Jack has been known even to make a detour to a place called La Pyramide, in Vienne, whose repast was so memorable that I'm sure it will never be equaled. The remarkable thing is that we stopped at the restaurant on Easter Sunday, without reservations. Madame Point, who stood in the doorway to welcome guests, or to send them off, welcomed us more warmly than we deserved; the epitome of graciousness, she requested a waiter to seat

us and thus began the most memorable meal we had ever had, or hoped to have, in our lifetimes. We also sampled M. Pic and Paul Bocuse, which are highly rated, but we still liked La Pyramide the best.

When John was about six months old, I went back to work. Jack did much of the cooking for several years; one of his favorite activities was to create beautiful, delicious breakfasts for John. Some were so appetizing he took pictures of them, I guess to remind himself of what a pleasure it was to nurture his son and at the same time indulge his passion for cooking.

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Boats. They represented Jack's dreams of travel and adventure. Boats have always been at the forefront of everything for Jack; always studying plans to build his favorite, always looking for the safest, most seaworthy craft. At one time he bought plans to build a Piver 36' trimaran, even got so far as to finishing and fiberglassing the three hulls. Then Mr. Piver disappeared during a coastwise jaunt to the south in his trimaran. He was never found. This rather dampened Jack's anxiety to own a trimaran. He sold the three hulls and began his search anew.

We bought a 17' cutter-rigged Venture for our son to learn about sailing and be part of Jack's crew; a 35' ketch-rig Columbia for Jack; then a 45' Explorer designed by Huntingford, because the Columbia didn't seem large enough to accommodate a crew of three or four. The first two boats were sold and the Explorer documented and named Hinano. One of the happiest periods of Jack's life was spent in the company of John, rigging Hinano, installing all sorts of hull-strengthening devices, radar, running lights, radio, safety net and railings, choosing sails, buying charts and planning itineraries. But at the same time glaucoma was stealing Jack's eyesight and John needed to start his studies at U.C. Berkeley. All was put on hold, though Jack continued his search for a compatible crew and still made plans.

With John unavailable and anyone else Jack would have enjoyed cruising with also unable to join him, he reluctantly decided to sell Hinano. Besides, the berth rental and upkeep were just too expensive for us to keep a boat that size indefinitely. For a millionaire maybe, but not for us. As luck would have it a man named Jack Storer fell in love with Hinano and was thrilled to buy her. For a shakedown Jack Storer invited a couple of friends to go with him to

Monterey. On their arrival drinks of congratulation were consumed and when the supply ran out, his friends retired; but Mr. Storer decided to go ashore for another bottle. Unfortunately his foot became entangled in a mooring-line and Jack Storer was found dead in the morning. I'm not sure if this warned against falling in love with a boat named Hinano, sailing to Monterey, celebrating the adventure, or taking off in a dinghy by oneself. It certainly gives one pause. We were stunned and saddened by Jack Storer's departure.

Years before, when John was still a baby, Jack drew plans for a houseboat and showed them around to several acquaintances, but they were too cautious to be interested. However, his pals Frank Herbert and Poul Anderson were both adventurous in nature; they eagerly joined the partnership to build a houseboat. This was a happy time. Jack built the pontoons in our driveway and fiberglassed them there as well. Finally they were ready to be moved to a beach on the bay near Point Richmond. Several friends had now joined in the work, enjoying the sunshine, salt air and companionship. Every stage completed was cause for celebration; a party atmosphere prevailed.

Poor Frank Herbert could not stay the course due to medical problems. Also he and his family were planning a move further north, which meant he must give up being a partner. Eventually his place was taken by our guitarplaying friend Albert Hall, who had been joining us regularly to work. After the work-day was finished, Albert's songs and guitar kept us all happy, and occasionally we'd adjourn to a favorite restaurant with fish on the menu.

After the platform and under-pinnings were joined to the hulls, the next step was to move it to the water, where the cabin was built. One evening the owners of the little cafe, selling hamburgers and other sandwiches on the pier, brought a bottle of champagne to christen the houseboat, which was done immediately, though it never was given a name—just houseboat .

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An outboard motor was installed at the stern, and connected to the steering wheel in the forward cabin by a Jack Vance innovation: two long reinforcing rods enclosed in an aluminum pipe. The mechanism performed remarkably well. (Incidentally, the nautical wheel was a gift from Frank Herbert.) The

houseboat was painted white with blue trim inside and out. Six foam mattresses were installed on the bunks, curtains (which I made) were hung, toilet and wash-basin installed in the head and a potbellied stove for the kitchen-livingroom. Now it was time for relocation to the sloughs of the Sacramento-San Joaquin-Mokelumne Rivers delta. Jack and six other men and boys made the maiden voyage up the Sacramento River. An overnight at Dalrelio's Yacht Harbor and an early start the next morning brought them in good time to Moore's Riverboat Yacht Haven on the Mokelumne River. This same moorage is where 'Houseboat' met its demise a few years later, but not before many happy memories were earned.

Our houseboat was ideal for life on the sloughs: vacations, parties and overnights, which usually were spent away from the harbor. The houseboat glided along the sloughs to find an ideal anchorage. In the summer there were blackberry bushes loaded with ripe berries to be picked from Houseboat's deck. When the sun set we lounged on the porch with feet on the railing, a favorite night-cap in hand, and listened to the sounds of insects, animals and bird calls; it was sheer delight. Mornings were usually cold, but after stoking and lighting the little wood-burning stove, we soon had the cabin warm and cozy.

Jack and I were planning a trip to Ireland with John and likely would be away for a year or more. We would have to transfer ownership of the houseboat to our friend Ali (for Alidor) Szantho whose pleasure was fishing and he chose another partner who also enjoyed fishing. They felt the houseboat sat too low in the water for fishing, so they removed the heavy ceiling panels. The boat popped up in the water at least a foot, maybe more. This little alteration may have caused the houseboat's demise or perhaps it was a misadventure of some kind. We will never know.

I have mentioned Jack's daring and persistence and now I'd like to refer back to a younger Jack Vance— before Norma—for further evidence.

At the age of 18 Jack was living with his Aunt Nellie (his father's sister) in San Francisco, right next door to the twin house his mother had owned at one time. This privilege was afforded him in exchange for doing minor chores around the house. Along with almost everyone else Jack was fascinated with the construction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Before, there had been only a ferry-boat fleet to convey cars and passengers from the San

Francisco side of the bay to the Oakland side and vice versa. The only alternative was to drive to San Jose; then cross the city from west to east to join highway 680 north and on to Oakland.

Steel towers were already anchored at intervals into the floor of the bay and soared upward very high; I'm guessing at least 200 or even 300 feet (This is a guess; they are probably much higher). Cables also were being put in place between the towers.

One evening Jack rode his motorcycle to the building site. He secured it to a pole, then looked around, neither seeing nor hearing anyone. There may have been a sign warning the would-be trespasser to Keep Out, but he did not see one. Work on the bridge continued day and night; it would be a challenge not to be seen, since his plan was to climb the cable to the top of the first tower.

At the beginning the cable presented a gentle slope, and as he neared the tower the slope became steeper and steeper. The cable was approximately two feet wide with a wire rope on each side to grasp for security. The mere thought of being in such a situation would scare me so much I wouldn't even be able to grasp the rope, whereas, according to Jack, he felt no fear at all. He reached the tower in about twenty minutes and almost immediately heard voices coming toward him from the direction of the second tower. The only thing that gave Jack pause was the thought of being caught where he knew he should not be, so he turned around without hesitation and carefully made his way back to the ground. Why did he do it? Because of the thrill.

Sam Wainwright was a student at U.C. Berkeley when Jack first met him as a reporter for the Daily Californian. Sam's brain worked overtime. He was brilliant and at the same time a bit mad. He was always doing something new, planning and organizing. Everyone knew of him because he made news, but not many friends. He was ridiculed more than appreciated. Jack saw past Sam's quirkiness, appreciated his wit and became his friend.

Sam organized the Thumbwagger's Club. So far only two persons had joined. Jack did not become a member but went along with the first competition to get a story for the Daily Cal. The game was to see who could thumb a ride from the foot of University Avenue, all the way to Salt Lake City, and back to Berkeley first. There were four people so Sam ordained two teams: Sam's and Jack's. All four wore T-shirts with a thumb on the front.

Jack's team got the first ride. The driver actually recognized them: "Oh! You guys are the Thumbwaggers!" Late afternoon the first day they made it to Reno. Sam's team made it to Sparks, Nevada. In the morning Sam's team got a ride with an Indian (American) driver who claimed to be going in the direction of Salt Lake City, but after driving 50 miles into the desert, he said goodbye and took off on a side road. What a predicament! Jack's team got a ride to Winnemucca, but the fun had waned for both teams.

Jack had heard that the Santa Fe Railroad was nice to hoboes and let them ride without bother, so he and his partner headed for the railroad tracks. No one seemed to be about, so they entered the caboose and made themselves comfortable, even built a fire in the stove. They were beginning to feel drowsy when the railroad 'bull' entered the caboose, brandishing his club and shouting. "Who do you think you are? Get out of here! Now!" (This was not a Santa Fe train.)

"But the train is moving too fast."

"It will go faster! You heard me. Jump!"

"Gulp. Let's get off now; it might not be too bad." "Jump! I mean now!"

The train was rumbling along at 15 or 20 miles per hour. They jumped and received a few bumps and scrapes but were not seriously injured.

Jack's team made it back to Berkeley the next day and Sam's team finally arrived a day and a half later in some disgruntlement.

Jack remained friends with Sam for many years, but he eventually became annoyed with him because no matter how many times Sam consulted him about various problems, especially with the ladies, Sam never was able to act on the advice. Later, when Jack heard him on the phone to me, asking for the same advice as previously, he lost all respect for him and forbade him to call again. Poor Sam! Great potential, but unable to use it where it counted.

Jack had many friends while attending U.C., some of them full of the Old Nick. Thinking up tricks and mischief seemed to ameliorate some of the pressures of getting an education. Jack and three of his friends theorized that they could hoist a Communist flag to the top of the Campanile by doing the

following: First they should place some stout twine around the four corners of the tower, tie the ends together, leaving a bit of slack. Next a cluster of five helium balloons should be tied to the string at each corner. Then the flag should be attached to the twine on the side visible to the most people. Each of the four mischief-makers held a stick with a string attached to a hook, the idea being to place the hook over the twine and jiggle it to keep the balloons moving upward and thus raise the flag. What was not counted on was a very strong wind which came up and almost at the same time the campus cops came by on their normal rounds. The wind alone could have spoiled the fun but when the boys saw the cops they scattered in every direction. There was so much noise and confusion with the wind that no one ever guessed who the culprits were.

Well, I could write more but I don't have the time right now—and maybe that's a good thing.

Norma Vance – Cosmopolis

2003 Alexander Feh Visit to Jack Vance

Taken from Internet Forum,

June, 2003

I need to gather my thoughts -- much has been seen, much has been said! On our way back from California the air conditioner in my car failed in the middle of Nevada desert. I feel baked, as if I've spent three days on the hot beach.

I had a long, five-hour talk with Jack on the previous day, in his house. I will describe my impressions and Jack's opinions in a series of small topical reports here. I think it would be better than posting one long detailed report. I am open to any questions, and will answer them to the best of my ability.

Regarding religion, I can confirm that Jack Vance strongly disapproves of it. He said: "We've got one life, and that's it!", slammed the table with his heavy palm, and even fractured the stem of his glass of Scotch, to make a decisive, emotional point. He thinks that religion stems from primeval ignorance and fear, and asked me if I agree with the notion that Christianity created and promoted anti-Semitism.

Of course I agree. Muslim anti-Semitism is a relatively new phenomenon - - Islam has been tolerant to Jews in the times of its cultural peak. European Christian Church, on the other hand, has been persecuting Jews from the beginning, and always endorsed indoctrinating children with the notion that "Jews crucified Christ". One cannot easily forget being beaten by the six good Christians for being half-Jewish.

Whisky out of Stemmed Glass

I've brought with me a bottle of 15-years-old Laphroaig. Jack Vance was visibly pleased -- he likes that stuff. Glasses for whisky were put on the table

by somebody from John's family. These were thick-walled carved-crystal glasses on inch-long stems. I am not much of a whisky drinker but, as far as I know, short, flat-bottom glasses are usually served when it comes to whisky. Jack probably thought so, too, and forgot that his glass had a stem.

After slamming the table with his palm while fustigating religion, Jack Vance took a glass, made an emphatic wide gesture, and struck the old piano with the foot of the glass, thereby breaking the stem and spilling the whisky. Norma was, perhaps, afraid that he could cut himself, and immediately chastised him for it; Jack was somewhat irritated by her paying too much attention to this trifle. I put another glass into his hand, and Jack forgot about this incident.

Actually, I made a fool of myself by bringing also a bottle of a sweet 1940 Crimean Massandra Muscat. Jack Vance doesn't like sweet wine, and didn't hesitate to tell me so. Alas, my precious bottle from Stalin's cellars remained there on the table, almost full and forgotten! But it started Jack on a long speech about Russia.

Jack Vance told me that he's been always terrified by the dark proclivity of Russian governments toward torture and murder. Jack has been reading Chekhov's book about hard labor for exiles on Sakhalin Island, and Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago. He was unusually emotional about Peter the Great's sadistic tendencies, telling me several times that he couldn't imagine how a father could make a trap for his own son, and then torture him for hours. Somehow, he was preoccupied for a while with that "father torturing his son" theme. I had a definite feeling that he wanted me to argue on Peter's behalf (after all, Peter's son Alexey, being a greedy, devious, weak and hysterical man, made a secret treaty with the Orthodox Church, and even with the Vatican, conspiring to overthrow his "godless" father and to kill him).

Jack asked me if Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great were from the same family line. Strange question. I guess he was testing my knowledge, as earlier he was testing my Russian patriotism. Unlike most Russians, I don't have any patriotic sentiments but I know the basics of Russian history, of course. I gave Jack a short lecture on Ruerichs and Romanovs, Ivan being the last in the Vladimir Monomach's viking line of Ruerichs, Boris Godunov's interregnum, Mikhail Romanov being elected for his stupidity by the boyars who needed somebody easily manipulated. Forgot to mention Dimitry the Impostor and

Vassily Shuisky, but I don't think Jack was particularly interested in Russian history -- he was mostly interested in my attitude toward Russia. I also told Jack that not only Ivan and Peter killed their sons, but Peter's father, Alexey Romanov, killed his elder son by "blessing" him with the heavy, gold-cased icon for marrying without permission.

Jack asked me about the current state of affairs in Russia. He was interested in knowing why I wouldn't want to return there. I explained that Russians have an opportunity now to tell and print almost anything they want, and even (to some extent) to start a small business, but that they prefer playing old games of persecution, theft, and deadly intrigues. When an old mining horse is finally given an open pasture, she continues to go in circles. Life without deadly danger seems flat, unspiced to the Russians, the idea of earning their living by honest work bores most of them. Why work if you can steal? We agreed with Jack that it would take at least several generations for Russians to forget their old ways, and to get used to be self-controlled rather than police-controlled.

During this conversation about Russia I have read aloud a letter from Jack's Russian admirer (Siberian SF writer who promotes Vance on Russian Internet and helps me with publishing my Russian translations of Jack's works). I also confirmed my worst suspicions: Vances haven't been paid a penny for all those numerous third-rate Russian translations of Jack's books printed in Russia. Jack said that he doesn't give a damn about payments but Norma and John were concerned, and made me repeat my promise that I would do anything in my powers to prevent further pirating of Jack's books in Russia. Yes, I would, but translator's powers are very limited.

Jack Vance Assuming the Pose

Jack Vance did assume a pose regarding payments due to him, his fame (he is undeniably famous, and he knows it), his reputation as compared with the reputations of the contemporary writers, and many other things. It is understandable in his position. At the same time, he repeated twice or thrice, firmly: "I may die tomorrow."

I have never met a man with whom I would agree more on more points than Jack Vance. Our only (notable) disagreement was about tastes in music. There we had a shouting match, though I think I made my point. I'll tell about it separately.

Jack Vance is physically strong for his age but has that saintly look of an old sage (partly because he has a habit of turning his face straight up with remote, unseeing eyes looking far through the ceiling when he thinks and asks questions). Jack Vance looking straight at you, with his head slightly down, is intimidating, almost fearsome -- nothing kind or saintly there! When I was leading him through the restaurant hall (they've got two stupid steps up, leading to the central bar area, followed by the two stupid steps down -- architectural "innovation", I presume), I told Jack that people around were smiling after looking at him. He asked, somewhat aggressively: "Why is that?" I said: "I suppose because you have a very kind appearance". "What a joke!" - exclaimed Jack. - "And they tell me I insult everybody around!"

Like his creation Treesong, Jack Vance speaks in several voices.

He has a canorous, resonant voice when he emphatically disagrees with something. His voice isn't high but isn't low, either. I would describe it as a high baritone or a low tenor.

When Jack Vance discusses things in which he is casually interested -- cosmology, physics, the origin of the languages and cultures, evolution of man, poetry, translation, writing, jazz, musical instruments, peculiar situations and notable characters -- his voice becomes much softer but remains expressive.

There is a special sharper voice when he asks teasing or testing questions, double-meaning or deliberately misleading (Jack often uses this kind of a double-level conversation that has an obvious meaning for the intellectually flabby but also a second, contrapuntal level for the "sapienti".)

The most curious voice Jack Vance has when he speculates on difficult matters, when he is not sure of his opinion but makes the best guess or a conjecture -- he grabs his forehead with one hand, hiding his face, and starts to swing from side to side, like a caged animal; in these moments his voice becomes one of the whining, wondering child talking to himself. In fact, he

is talking to himself, in half-sentences, allusions, connotative references of most unexpected kinds.

His last, most significant voice is silence. Three or four times during our conversations, faced with the argument he didn't foresee, Jack had suddenly become serious, silent, almost frightened -- like a chess player who has encountered an unexpected opponent's move, and doesn't know yet if that move is devastatingly strong or exhilaratingly stupid. He doesn't like it when somebody else comes up with the idea or comparison or argument that he didn't apprehend. This amazed me most of all: finally, first time in my life, I've met a man who actually says nothing when he has nothing to say!

I must mention that, being near Jack Vance, I had, almost all the time, a weird forefeeling. Not only I knew in advance what he was going to say but I constantly noticed that he understood what I was going to say -- not from some half-word or first intonation, no -- before the words were spoken. Neither I nor Vance believe in telepathy but if I were more mystically inclined I would describe this rapport as a beginning of ESP.

Jack Vance on Traditional and Modern Christianity¹

I recalled an interesting exchange of questions and answers that took place in the very beginning of my first conversation with the old writer. This exchange reflects Jack Vance's (as well as mine) understanding of the difference between traditional and modern Christianity.

Q: "What do you think of Christianity, in general?"

Jack Vance: "Well, two or three hundred years ago, in Europe, practically everyone was a Christian. You cannot hold it against them."

Q: "But is it understandable to be a Christian in our times?"

¹ The statements about Christianity that A. Feht attributes to Vance have sometimes been disputed. It might be worthwhile to also consult Paul Rhoads' article "Is Jack Vance Anti-Christian?" in the 2003 cosmopolis magazine:
<https://www.vanderveeke.net/foreverness/cosmo/Cosmopolis-41.pdf>

Jack Vance: "It is understandable if one grows up within the confines of traditional religion, goes to church regularly with parents... It becomes a habit people don't think about."

Q: "What if a grown-up, educated man converts to Christianity today?"

Jack Vance: "No, that I can't approve. We've got one life, and that's it!"

Later, Jack Vance made several very sarcastic comments on the origin of religion, and confirmed that he is an atheist. Jack Vance is against even the slightest attempts of linking science with religion, and called Pemrose's books on physics an "obfuscation" (Pemrose mixes complex, advanced physics with some mystical notions). For the same reason, Jack Vance disagrees with the Big Bang theory, which, in his opinion, is "too anthropomorphic" a conjecture that doesn't fit the observable facts. When I called the Big Bang theory a "creationists' creation", Jack Vance laughed and agreed. Jack Vance was very angry at the bee-hive attacks by the proponents of the Big Bang theory on Fred Hoyle. He said: "They've been beating, and beating, and beating poor Fred on his head until he finally hollered: "I give up, I give up!" But Fred was right!" I've noticed that Jack Vance becomes very emotional when he talks about cosmology.

When we talked about anti-Semitic atrocities and attacks, Jack Vance made the following statement, loudly, and no less than two times: "Christianity is a root of all anti-Semitism!"

Jack Vance and Music

This time I'd like to say a few words about Jack Vance's attitudes toward music. Since I disagree with Jack on some very important points pertaining to music, it is a somewhat unpleasant task.

From the very beginning of our first conversation, Jack Vance made it clear to me that he knew in advance about my musical preferences, and didn't concur with them. In particular, he said that Beethoven's symphonies are no more than "intellectual entertainment for tawdry gentlemen in dress-suites, with monocles in their eyes". Jack mentioned, however, that he likes

Beethoven's chamber music, specifically his string quartets. I could only conclude that Jack Vance never paid attention to his choice of performers when he listened to Beethoven's orchestral music. Modern recordings of Beethoven's symphonies, and even some older ones (von Karajan's, for example) can create an appalling, boring, totally warped impression of these beautiful, deep, and inspiring compositions.

Later the same day, Jack Vance invited me to listen to a couple of tape recordings of early jazz pieces made by the group called "Black Eagles". Knowing that his musical tastes are very peculiar, he was aggressive about it: "It will take some time, and you may not like it. Do you want to listen? Yes or no?" After some consideration, I said "Yes". And so it began -- repetitive, screeching variations on a vigorous but simplistic harmonic sequence, reminding me of a mad merry-go-round that went off the rocker and spins about the amusement park, falling trees and breaking soda fountains. I wasn't shy about sharing my impressions. More than that, I called this music "primitive".

Jack Vance was angry! "'Primitive' is a wrong word to say!" - thundered Jack. - "Those are very subtle variations, very difficult to improvise, built upon a solid base, and changing in time like an ornament changes in space". I was taken aback by Jack's emotional reaction but stood firmly on my ground, saying that "primitive" may be a wrong word but, surely, this music, in comparison with the best classical achievements, is simplistic, as even the most beautiful Oriental ornament is simplistic when compared with the Claude Lorrain's landscape. Jack Vance vehemently disagreed, saying that I don't understand jazz. I hurried to confirm that I know practically nothing about jazz, which is as alien to me as Hindu sitar music.

And here I appealed to Jack's formidable intellect. I said: "Millions of Hindus are capable of sitting for hours, enjoying the subtle variations in their beloved sitar music -- variations that to our untrained ears seem more like monotonous coyotes' howling. Can you imagine that early jazz created a similar impression upon my untrained ears?" Yes, Jack could imagine that. "Well, then!" - I said, - "Do you agree that these are three completely different languages: early jazz, sitar music, and classical music?" "Yes, that is so," - nodded Jack Vance. "Why don't you write your books in Laotian?" - I asked. Jack Vance was surprised only for a shortest moment, then laughed. I started to explain that classical music has at its disposal a much larger lexicon,

understandable and familiar to much larger audience. Jack Vance interrupted me, saying that I made my point, and that he fully understands what I was trying to demonstrate. He fell silent for a minute, even sad.

To further corroborate my argument, I suggested to Jack Vance that he, perhaps, made his conclusions about classical music on the basis of bad performances, since in our time only a careful research allows to find a recording of classical piece, which is not played by the people who couldn't care less about what they are doing, as long as they play the right notes more or less in time. I invited him to compare, for a minute, the beginnings of two different recordings of Bach's "Mattheus Passion", made in 1980s and in 1940s. I explained that the first recording, a modern one, was made by the most professional German singers and musicians, using the best possible electronic equipment, while the second, old recording, was made in the tragic times of Second War by the German musicians who knew this music and its meaning by heart, conducted by Wilhelm Furtwaengler, and registered using a single electrical microphone.

Jack Vance listened for a minute to each of the two recordings. He was visibly impressed by the second, old one, and said that there was a startling difference between the two, that he liked Bach played by Furtwaengler very much, and that I made my point again. He said that even the sound seemed to be much better in the old recording, and that it was amazing, considering the difference in the technical equipment.

Our argument about music ended there. Jack Vance didn't touch upon this subject in our further conversations neither during the same day, nor on the next day. Of course, I didn't succeed in changing the 87-years-old writer's tastes in music. But I hope that I gave him something to think about. At least, he didn't seem to be angry with me any more.

As a final touch, let me remind those who seem to find a lot of cultural support in Jack Vance's peculiar interest in early jazz that Jack includes any and all styles and forms of the post-WWII jazz, together with any rock and pop and rap and hip music, into that category of modern music that he reckons to be "abysmal noise". Also, he values classical music, and agrees with the notion that it speaks in a complex and most diverse symbolic language. Thus, Jack Vance's tastes in music cannot serve as a consolation to the cultural insolvents.

A Few More Things About Jack Vance

Jack Vance said that he is writing another book, because there is a lot of unused material left after finishing "Lurulu". He refused to reveal the name of his new book, and refused to tell Bruce if the Fountain of Youth would be found in "Lurulu" or in his new book. He just smiled and shook his head.

He didn't want to talk much about his books, saying that he doesn't remember details. But he gave an answer to my question about names like "Dasce" and "Alusz", saying that those "sc" and "sz" letter combinations are "just decorative". He pronounces "Alusz" as "ah-LOOSS".

Jack Vance thinks that a good translation of poetry into another language is impossible, and I agreed with him. "How, then, are you going to translate those pieces of poetry in my books, Navarth's verses, for example?" - he asked. I said that I would write new pieces of poetry creating similar effects, and that I am not a stranger to poetry, having published two books of Russian versifications. Jack said that I gave a satisfactory answer.

Jack Vance asked me, what English or American poetry I liked most. I mentioned E. A. Poe, P. B. Shelley and Kipling but said that lately I am attached to FitzGerald's translations of Omar Khayyam's "Rubaiyat", and that some of his four-liners ("Quatrains!" -- corrected me Jack) are, in my opinion, among the best pieces of English poetry. Jack surprised me by supporting my point of view; he even recited the first stanza, mentioning it as his favorite morning battle-cry:

"Wake! For the Sun, who scatter'd into flight

The Stars before him from the Field of Night,

Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes

The Sultan's Turret with a Shaft of Light!"

I answered by reciting my favorite Stanza 72 (and was somewhat scared by noticing that Jack Vance not only knew it by heart but remembered the number of the stanza, too!):

*"And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
Lift not your hands to It for help -- for It
As impotently moves as you and I."*

That stuff was written a thousand years ago, and it's as fresh as yesterday's!
That's poetry!

Jack asked, why I picked one of the most depressing stanzas as my favorite? I dived into the deep matter of the difference between Russian-Jewish and Anglo-Saxon temperaments. At that point, Jack asked about the origins of my last name, and was amused by my account of INS's adding an "h" to it as a compromise between the true "Fet" and their mistaken "Felt" (they couldn't remove a letter from their papers when I entered the US but agreed to change "L" to "H" as a compromise). I said that I don't mind the "feht" spelling, because I like to burn the bridges behind me.

Jack Vance surprised me in many ways. He recites from "Faust" in German. Unlike most Americans, he knows very well the difference between "kazakhs" and "cossacks", and even drunk kumys! He speaks freely about the details of sadistic Mayan-Aztec culture (he disapproves of it vehemently). He condemned progressive taxation. He thinks that any society, inevitably, is stratified into castes, openly or latently, and that the most we can hope for is some measure of vertical mobility that allows talented people to get closer to the top. Jack Vance thinks that modern American society is one of the most benign in history but that political correctness and other socialist "experiments on people" are iniquitous and should be stopped. Jack Vance disapproves of both liberals and conservatives, saying that "a thinking man cannot take sides,

or, if he does, he does it only temporarily, for the moment, depending on the subject."

When I complained about the obvious persecution of talent and achievement in the modern world, Jack Vance called upon me to be more optimistic and open. "Thinking men are out there," - he said, - "you just need to find them, they usually keep low profile." Jack Vance said also that success is a matter of luck, not of talent, and that it has always been so.

Jack Vance doesn't collect anything himself but is extremely interested in the process of collecting and in collectors' psyche. He agreed with my notion that the main attraction of collecting is using the advantage of knowledge in order to spend a dime on something worth a hundred dollars. Again, he pleasantly surprised me by approving such a "mercantile" interest.

Jack Vance asked me if I am happy with my life, generally. I said: "No! I am greedy, I always want more! I want to see every country, to speak every language, to conquer the world with my music, and to fix every injustice!" Jack smiled, and said: "Me too! I've never been satisfied with what I have done."

Jack is skeptical about space exploration, reckoning that it is too expensive and risky to be viable, but he agreed with me when I said that if there will be a profit to be made in space, then human conquest of space will really begin. "That is a good point," -- he said. -- "Money will do it!"

We didn't make any photographs and didn't ask for autographs. Jack noticed it, and was pleased: he is visibly tired of "tourist visitors."

I've had a definite impression that Jack Vance mostly hides his real self from the people who surround him. I am not saying this to grind some ax or to lash out at somebody in particular. It is an inevitable, tragic fate of a genius. The man who writes Jack Vance's books is deep down there, refusing to read any contemporary literature, reacting to all modern music (including post-WWII jazz) as to "abysmal noise played by the automatons", and laughing at abstractionist paintings.

"Any art -- literature, music, painting -- is simply a language of symbols," -
- says Jack Vance. -- "If an artist uses understandable symbols and has enough
talent, he conveys his emotions and his view of the world to the others. If an
artist invents anew his own language that nobody understands or that is
difficult to learn, then, no matter how talented he is, he is not understood or
he is misunderstood. A piece of art becomes a Rorschach test, in which
anybody can see anything they want. This is not art." Jack concluded: "Excuse
me for using a bad word once, but everything that these art historians and
musicologists write about art is BS! Art is a language, and that's it!"

Alexander Feht

Source:

<http://feht.com/essaysetc/visittojackvance.html>

2005 Koen Vyverman Rumfuddle

2005 (?)

(...) But, 'Rumfuddle': what a crazy title! In the story, the uncle of main character Gilbert Duray occasionally organizes a weird party at which films are shown that his guests find terribly hilarious. Such a party is called a 'Rumfuddle', and the participants are the 'Rumfuddlers'. But what does this mean? There isn't a drop of rum in the story, and what would that 'fuddle' mean? I often wondered, and after a while I found out that even the English Vance readers had no idea.

The meaning of 'Rumfuddle' remained a mystery for a long time, until during a visit to Jack in Oakland the truth almost happened to come to light. The conversation was about the world trips the Vance's liked to make, about the many impressions of all kinds of exotic places, peoples and cultures that Jack left behind from such a trip, and how some of those impressions left their traces in the worlds of his own work. Jack always enjoyed telling about his travels, as those who have read his autobiography will surely agree. Almost casually, Jack remarked that he sometimes memorized or noted certain sounds and words from the foreign languages with which he was confronted on his travels. Sometimes these were words whose timbre he found fascinating, but sometimes he noticed something because it just sounded very funny. Like that one German verb that means 'make a terrible mess of something', what was it again ... Oh yes! Herumfuddeln! So now you know why Rumfuddle is so hot, and if you read the story you will see that it is also a very appropriate term!

* Note WJ Ceron: "Herumfummeln"

Source: Wil Ceron (Dutch newspaper)

2005 David B. Williams

Jack and Frank

By David B. Williams

Jack Vance found most of his friends outside the SF community, but he did develop relationships with several writers in the Bay Area. Anthony Boucher (the most common pseudonym of William Anthony Parker White) was a writer of mostly humorous tales for *Unknown* and *Astounding* in the 1940s and one of the founding editors of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1949.

Boucher was a leading figure in the *Elves', Gnomes', and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder, and Marching Society*, a social group of SF writers and fans in the Berkeley area. The club's journal, *Rhodomagnetic Digest*, published "Seven Exits from Bocz" in 1952, a story Vance had written in 1949 but couldn't sell.

Poul Anderson joined the group when he moved from Minnesota to the Bay Area in the early 1950s. He and Vance became fast friends for the next 45 years, until Anderson's death in 2001. They had so much in common that they almost never discussed writing, which suited Vance very well. Robert Silverberg got acquainted when he moved to the Oakland hills in the late 1960s.

But we have much more information about one of Vance's SF writer friends, Frank Herbert, thanks to Brian Herbert's biography of his father (*Dreamer of Dune*, Tor, 2003).

In 1952, Jack and Norma Vance returned from their first European sojourn. The trip had exhausted their finances, and Vance's agent, Scott Meredith, got him a scriptwriting job on the early television SF serial, *Captain Video and his Video Rangers*, for the Dumont Network. The Vance returned to California, taking up residence on a small farm near Kenwood, north of San Francisco.

At the time, Frank Herbert was a reporter for the nearby Santa Rosa Press Democrat. Herbert had sold his first SF story the previous year. He quickly

arranged an interview when he learned that a well-known SF writer lived in the area. (At the time, Herbert drove a 1950 Hillman automobile, a remarkable omen considering that Vance's landmark *The Dying Earth* had been published as a Hillman paperback in 1950.

Brian Herbert describes Vance in those early years: "A large, scholarly man with thinning hair, Jack wore eyeglasses that had thick, round lenses. He was intense and could be gruff. But his coarse outer shell was frequently employed as a shield, preventing prying eyes from peering into his private world. The real Jack Vance, if he permitted anyone to see that far, was generous and effusive, an exceedingly nice man.

Jack would probably laugh today, but to Frank Herbert, Vance at that time was a successful writer, a man with a name in the SF field who made good money and drove a bright yellow Jeepster convertible.

The two men shared several interests and quickly became friends. Within a few months they decided to move to Mexico and set up their own two-man writer's colony. In September 1953, Jack and Norma Vance, Frank and Beverly Herbert, and the two Herbert boys, Brian (age 6) and Bruce (age 2), crammed into a Jeep station wagon purchased by the Vances and headed south to Lake Chapala near Guadalajara.

A minor tragedy occurred along the way. During a rest break north of Mazatlan, at a monument marking the Tropic of Cancer, Norma set her purse on the car's fender and then forgot about it until they had driven several miles down the road. "When we arrived back at the monument," Brian recalls, "we saw the purse on the ground. It had been run over. Inside, Jack's favorite writing instrument, a fountain pen, was ruined. Since Jack did his writing by longhand, this was a serious matter, indeed. His favorite writing instrument felt right in his grip and disseminated ink perfectly. With it he had written a number of excellent stories. The pen, silver and black, now lay crushed beside a Mexican highway.

At Lake Chapala the Vances and Herberts moved into a large, two-story adobe and white stucco house on a hillside overlooking the lake. Brian Herbert recalled the challenges of being a small boy in a house with two writers: "Whenever the men were writing, usually from midmorning to late afternoon, they enforced strict silence throughout the premises. The house had a long

outside corridor where I played with my toys. Especially a little army tank. I was in the habit of simulating war noises, and as I immersed myself in fantasy and made too much commotion Jack or Dad would bellow from one of the rooms, 'Silencio!' ('Silence!') or 'Callate, niño!' ('Shut up, boy!') Dad was at his typewriter in one room clacking away, while Jack labored in another room, writing longhand passages that would subsequently be transcribed into typewritten form by Norma.

Chapala was a sub-tropic locale boasting vivid sunsets and a large population of flies and cockroaches. "Each morning we developed the habit of shaking out our clothes and shoes before putting them on," Brian Herbert recalls. "Many roaches entered through the drain in the bathtub, and if Mom or Norma saw them when they wanted to cosmopolis 60 •4take a bath, they came out and waggled two fingers (like cockroach antennae) at one of the men. Then Dad or Jack went in and flushed the filthy creatures down the drain with hot water.

Chapala was an artists' colony and popular with tourists; costs were high by Mexican standards. After a couple of months, neither writer had sold anything and funds began to dwindle. The Vances and Herberts moved a few miles down the road to Ciudad Guzman and a smaller, more economical house (some of the rooms had dirt floors). But with no checks arriving from New York editors, after another two months they had to pack up and return north. By the end of the year they were back at the Vance farmhouse near Kenwood.

While neither writer sold anything during their Mexican stay, both did begin to develop important stories for later publication. Herbert worked on the manuscript for a novel titled *Under Pressure*. He would finish it in 1955. It sold immediately to Astounding and was published in hardcover by Doubleday with the variant title *The Dragon in the Sea*. The Science Fiction Book Club also bought the book, and Universal paid a modest sum for movie rights. This first novel provided a much-needed boost to Herbert's usually lean finances and helped to establish him as a SF writer.

Vance received the initial impetus to write his most important early novel, *To Live Forever*. According to Tim Underwood, "One night Frank and Jack tossed around an idea for a novel and afterward flipped a coin to see who would write it. Jack won the toss and the book became *To Live Forever*," his first contract for an original adult novel. Ballantine published *To Live*

Forever (Betty Ballantine's title, not Vance's) in 1956 in both hardcover and paperback editions. Vance defined a new stage in his career with the later remark that *To Live Forever* was "the first of the type of stories I write today."

Back in California, the Herberts stayed with the Vances at their Kenwood farmhouse for several more months, until Frank landed a speech-writing job with U.S. Senator Guy Cordon of Oregon. The Herberts relocated to Portland and the Vances soon bought a ramshackle cottage in the Oakland hills, which they would rebuild and make their home for the next fifty years.

The Herberts returned to California in 1959 and settled in San Francisco in 1960, renewing their association with the Vances. The Vances introduced the Herberts to the Andersons, and the three couples shared many dinners and outings together.

The Herberts had moved to San Francisco because Bev Herbert had been hired as an advertising writer for a major department store. At this point Frank's freelance writing career had reached its nadir, and he took a job as night picture editor for the San Francisco Examiner. He sold six SF stories in 1960–62, but most of his attention was devoted to a major project, his "desert story."

In 1957, Herbert had toured a U.S. Department of Agriculture research project near Florence, Washington, which was testing how to stabilize sand dunes by planting poverty grasses. Herbert flew over the site in a small plane and was awed by the view of sand dunes like waves on a great sea. He never published a planned magazine article about the project but soon began researching an idea for a novel, eventually reading more than 200 reference works and compiling hundreds of pages of notes.

Vance recalls that one day Herbert enthusiastically described his idea for a big novel about a desert planet, giant sand worms, Spacing Guilds, and more, and asked Vance what he thought. Vance wasn't particularly impressed but nodded and made polite noises (he never really cared for Frank Herbert's stories because so many of them contained an element of mysticism). Later, after *Dune* became a huge success, Vance was surprised and amused when Herbert told interviewers that it was all thanks to Jack Vance's encouragement!

Herbert was busy writing his big novel in 1962 when Vance enlisted him and Poul Anderson in a joint venture to build a houseboat for use as a floating cottage on the waterways of the nearby Sacramento River delta. This interest in waterborne housing has been reflected in a number of Vance stories: the houseboats in “The Moon Moth” (1961), Navarth’s domicile in *The Palace of Love* (1967), and Jantiff Ravensroke’s moody evening on the family houseboat in chapter 2 of *Wyst: A lastor 1716* (1978).

The pontoons were constructed in Vance’s driveway, then moved to a beach on the bay near Point Richmond. “This was a happy time,” says Norma. “Several friends had now joined in the work, enjoying the sunshine, salt air and companionship. Every stage completed was a cause for celebration; a party atmosphere prevailed.

Then disaster struck. A storm blew up, one of the pontoons rubbed against the dock until the fiberglass coating wore through, the pontoon filled with water, and the boat sank. Vance donned a wet suit and he and Poul Anderson re-floated the boat by filling it with blocks of plastic foam. The foam was extremely buoyant, and elaborate efforts had to be devised to force it underwater. Anderson described raising the houseboat as “an epic of men against cosmopolis 60 •5the sea that would have been worthy of Joseph Conrad if Joseph Conrad had written slapstick.

After the sinking, Herbert dropped out of the consortium. But while working on the boat, the three SF writers had plotted a story about an underwater thief, intending to use the pseudonym “Noah Arkwright” in honor of their partnership. Due to other work, neither Vance nor Anderson could get to the project, so Herbert eventually wrote it himself as “The Primitives” (*Galaxy* April 1966).

The first installment of *Dune* appeared in *Analog* (the renamed *Astounding*) in December 1963, the same month that Vance’s *The Star King* began serialization in *Galaxy*. It needs to be noted that *Dune* wasn’t an overnight success. After its magazine appearance (Herbert was paid three cents per word) the novel didn’t find a book publisher for several years. Then it slowly gained an audience, and sales grew year after year. Eventually, *Dune* and its sequels would make Herbert a millionaire.

In 1964 Herbert bought a house in Fairfax, 20 miles north of San Francisco, and 56 acres of undeveloped land more than 100 miles further north near Willets. He intended to build a house there on weekends with his own labor and that of volunteers like Jack Vance. Herbert wanted to develop a subsistence farm and experiment with various alternate energy methods. But the site proved to be too distant and a drain on both time and finances. Within a year Herbert put the Willets property up for sale.

He didn't abandon the idea of a rural retreat, however. In 1967 he purchased an old farmhouse on ten acres near Colfax, about 50 miles closer to Fairfax. Vance was again enlisted as a volunteer carpenter. They tore off the old house's roof and began framing in a complete second floor in place of the attic. Then Herbert seriously injured his back lifting construction materials and compounded the injury when he slipped on ice at home.

By the end of the 1960s, Herbert was unhappy about the rapidly growing population in the Bay Area, the increasing traffic and the crowds at his favorite fishing spots. His writing income was beginning to rival his salaried job. Finally, he resigned from the Examiner, sold his home and the Colfax property, and moved north to Puget Sound, where he had grown up.

Vance and Herbert never lived in the same geographic area again, but they kept in touch. For example, Brian Herbert recounts a phone call from Vance to his parents one Sunday in 1982. Herbert mentioned that he was going to write a fifth Dune book. Such an extended series required a continuing elaboration of titles. Vance quipped, "Did the publisher ask you to call it *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Dune*?" No, Herbert replied, "Gunga Dune."

Jack congratulated Dad on his success. A few moments later, Mom came on the line and mentioned my three book sales. Jack congratulated me as well, and spoke a little about his own career. A modest, self-effacing man, Jack didn't boast. But I knew he was a science fiction superstar in Europe, where people lined up for blocks to obtain his autograph.

In 1974, Bev Herbert, a constant smoker, had been diagnosed with lung cancer. Miraculously, treatment was successful and she enjoyed complete remission. However, the radiation therapy on her lung damaged her heart. Her condition declined slowly for a decade, and she died in 1984 of cardiac failure.

Frank Herbert died suddenly in 1986, at the age of 65. He was being treated for pancreatic cancer when he suffered a pulmonary embolism and died within minutes. Brian Herbert writes: “In a daze, I made a number of telephone calls, including one to Jack and Norma Vance. ‘I’ll raise an empty glass for him,’ Jack said, his voice breaking as he referred to an Irish tradition, saluting the warrior who has not returned from battle.

Source : Cosmopolis 60/ 04-2005

2007 Happy triumph : putting a period to the VIE adventure

(Extant 23-2008)

By Greg Hansen

In April of 2007, Bob Lacovara and I joined John Vance on the VIE's board of directors. The new board worked through the summer and fall to tie up loose ends, and in early December executed a Certificate of Dissolution, thereby setting in motion the process to dissolve the corporation.

The VIE had been officially incorporated on January 15, 2000. A photograph published in COSMOPOLIS #1 records the event: the founders are gathered around a table in the Vance's dining room, faces aglow with anticipation and excitement, a great journey about to begin. As I glanced at the photo a few weeks ago it occurred to me to propose a culminating gathering at Oakland. We would review the corporation's status and transact any remaining business items, take part in a meal and final raising-of-the-glass, then contentedly contemplate our golden pathways. It seemed a worthy book-end to the project.

And there was indeed one significant business item remaining: final disposition of surplus funds. The VIE project received just over \$1 million in revenue and, despite capricious foreign exchange rates and the numerous calculations, re-calculations and (sometimes!) miscalculations along the way, finished its affairs a few thousand dollars to the positive. No royalty had been paid to Jack for publishing rights to his work, and the board determined to pay one from these leftover funds. A gathering could provide a chance to present Jack—and perhaps even to surprise him—with this royalty payment.

I half-jokingly suggested the dinner scheme to John; to my delight he instantly agreed. He and his family would be visiting Oakland from New Jersey over the holidays and a date of December 29th was set. John agreed to say nothing to Jack about the royalty, it would be a complete surprise. A bout with pneumonia hospitalized Jack in mid-December but he made a quick recovery, and as his stamina and capacity grew so did the invitation list for the dinner party.

At length came the appointed evening. Turning onto Valley View Road I saw the famous hilltop grove of eucalyptus trees, then stopped the car at the foot of a narrow, unpaved driveway. The driveway traversed a steep hillside and as I peered up through the windshield wipers I thought of Jack's disastrous nighttime garbage-emptying mission: how many times must he and that garbage can have rolled over each other before they hit the street below? Easing up the gravel driveway I vowed to use discretion.

At the top of the grade I found myself on a level parking area of no great dimension, parked the car a respectful distance from the house, and stepped out into the steady rain. A large golden retriever noticed then loudly objected to my presence; knowing that Jack has little use for dogs I wondered if I'd found the right place after all. But John answered at my first knock and invited me inside. I was first to arrive and he greeted me congenially, then hurriedly finished mopping muddy dogprints from the floor (the dog belonged to him) while Jack was getting dressed in the next room. Left to my own devices I spent a few minutes observing the place from the kitchen table.

I was struck by the house's pervasive sense of benign disarray: a kind of charming, comfortable dilapidation. Books were much in evidence, and while I was too nervous to look at any of them closely I did take note of a row of gold-stamped leather spines on a low bookshelf near the window. On the far side of the living room an old, yellowed computer sat on a chipped plywood table, surrounded by antique recording devices. The venerable chair in front of the computer was missing much of its upholstery—large pieces of cushion thrust up through gaping holes—and at some point it had been mounted on slab of plywood with metal casters underneath for ease of movement. I thought to myself: There it is! The origin of literary greatness, the bastion of one of the twentieth century's greatest authors! Though it was hard to believe it could be so when the furniture and equipment seemed better suited for a landfill. The curious juxtaposition of shabby and sublime continued throughout the house. In the kitchen, upward-facing track lighting had been installed to illuminate the lovely coffered ceiling, but of twelve original light-bulbs all but three had burned out. High on the breakfast alcove wall the original Winged Being drawing hung—crookedly. Items and oddments covered every horizontal surface in the living room and kitchen: small statues, sea-shells, framed photographs, glassware, various pots and vases. A long credenza near the stairway supported many dozens of books which, though obscured by low light

and a layer of odds and ends, turned out to be an alphabetized collection of nearly every English edition of Jack's work. I shuddered to think what would happen if there should be a short in the electrical system, or if someone were careless with a candle. A battered ukulele sat on the table. I picked it up and misfingered a few chords, then realized it was his ukulele and gently set it back down, next to a container holding three slightly rusty metal kazoos. By and by Jack made his way round the corner from his 'bedroom', a twin bed pushed into a far corner of the living room. He moved slowly hand-over-hand along the countertop, and as he joined me at the kitchen table I forgot all of my carefully practiced lines.

I was petrified of conversation with Jack. On the airplane to Oakland I'd re-read every interview and encounter published in COSMOPOLIS and EXTANT, and was all too aware of his frequent tendency to tweak visitors' noses. What's more I knew Jack appreciated people who were 'masters of special skills' and who could make conversation on arcane topics like cosmology and classical jazz. I fretted that nothing in my experience could possibly interest him.

But Jack quickly put me at ease with his warm and humble manner. And frankly it's hard to be intimidated by a fellow who is so advanced in years, completely blind, and who—dressed as he was in a rumpled striped shirt, worn trousers, wind-breaker and black knit cap—looked like a hobo recently turned out of his boxcar! We made small talk for a moment or two. "What are you drinking?" he asked me; "Working on a root beer," I replied. "Ooo, that sounds good I think I'll have one too," he said and I sprang up to fetch it—only to be stopped short by frantic miming from Jeremy Cavaterra in the kitchen. Jack interpreted the silence and my lack of movement correctly: "Am I not supposed to have that?" he grunted.

"No Jack, the doctor says no root beer. How about a tonic instead?" Jeremy offered. Surprisingly tractable, Jack accepted happily and asked me if I enjoyed tonic water. I admitted I'd always found something else more tempting than straight tonic water and couldn't recall ever drinking it. Jack said he was no longer allowed alcohol, but that he found tonic water a very satisfactory substitute.

And so it went. He asked me what I did for a living. I replied that on my father's advice I had graduated from the Institute of Definable Excellences and become a financial analyst, and that if Myron Tany had not hit upon 'economic

fluxions' he would have ended up just like me (one carefully practiced line I did manage to remember.) Jack's laughter seemed sincere. I told him how it felt to discover his writing, and that my son had recently read and enjoyed *Big Planet*. Jack thanked me warmly, but I couldn't tell if the praise made him more pleased or uncomfortable.

He asked me how I felt about jazz. I answered honestly— if reluctantly!— that jazz is a language I do not understand. He spent a moment rhapsodizing about the golden age of classical jazz in New Orleans, then went on to denounce the so-called 'new jazz' invented by Dizzy Gillespie and others. According to Jack, they invented new jazz to 'come up with a music that white people couldn't handle', but were foiled when white musicians took up the style and soon were making as much abysmal noise as the black musicians. He had a satisfied laugh at the thought, then picked up the ukulele and began strumming and singing. I couldn't make out the words of the song, and frankly it didn't sound very jazzlike to me, but it had a sweet sound and when he finished singing I applauded.

The conversation skipped around without dwelling very long on any topic. I got the impression Jack was in 'interview mode': many of his comments were very similar to answers he'd given in previous interviews, if not verbatim repetitions of them. He tried to make bold sweeping statements and feel outrage at the absurdities of life, but I could tell his heart really wasn't in it. No doubt about it, this was not the same Jack Vance who had kept interviewers on tenterhooks for years and who'd toyed with the uninitiated. He seemed to lack the mental energy for verbal gymnastics, and indeed he stood and moved about only with great effort. Jack's age and health challenges have slowed him considerably, as must surely be expected.

John's fiancée Alexia was staying at the Vance home, along with her father, Bill Schulz. Bill is a professor of mathematics and has been a frequent visitor to Valley View Road through the years. In fact, Alexia accompanied her dad on many of those visits and has known John since she was two years old.

Alexia is young (early thirties, I'd guess), pretty, darkhaired, with a sunny disposition. She holds a Ph.D. in theoretical astrophysics from Harvard and is now engaged in post-doctoral research at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Einstein Drive) in Princeton, NJ—John & kids moved to Princeton recently to accompany her.

At this point John sat down with Jack and me at the table and we got down to business. Bill pulled up a chair to observe. John began with a few words about the VIE: the corporation had achieved its stated purpose and was now being wound-up; this small gathering was, in fact, a final meeting of the board of directors, convened to review the corporation's status and transact any remaining business. He introduced me as corporate secretary and a member of the board then gave me the floor.

I ventured a few words about the project and how it had succeeded brilliantly in spite of challenges and opposition...

“Feht! That son-of-a-bitch!!” Jack exclaimed, suddenly free of any sign of lethargy. He leaned back in his chair and filled his lungs for further remonstration.

“Now Dad,” John broke in chidingly, “this is an official meeting...let Greg make his report.”

“Alright.”

I pointed out that the corporation was very nearly wound-up, current in its obligations to vendors and taxing authorities, its seller's permit closed-out, final tax returns in preparation by the CPA.

“With some money left over, right?” Jack interjected.

“Dad, let Greg make his report!” John admonished. “Yeah Jack this is official VIE business,” Bill echoed from the foot of the table.

“Okay, okay, I'll keep my mouth shut,” Jack shot back somewhat peevishly. Exasperated, John argued that he wasn't trying to ‘shut (Jack) up’ and that no offense had been intended or should have been taken. Back and forth they went until Jack furrowed his brow and growled “Enough said!” In the awkward silence John nodded at me to proceed.

I took a deep breath and reassured Jack that he could interrupt me any time he saw fit. “There's no way to put a price on the value of publishing rights to your entire life's work,” I continued, and Jack seemed to perk back up. “Not enough gold in Fort Knox. But, with a surplus in the VIE account, the board

recognized an obligation to make a royalty payment to you and has unanimously voted to do so.”

“How much?” asked Jack eagerly.

I told him and he shouted in surprise. “By god, if I had more energy I’d simper for you!” he exclaimed, well pleased with the money—and with his clever remark.

John offered a few words in praise of the VIE volunteers, the indefatigable Paul Rhoads in particular, and Bill made a short speech of gratitude on behalf of his fellow subscribers. And thus, without fanfare, but with the quiet satisfaction of a difficult job well done, ended the VIE.

A knock on the door announced another guest’s arrival: David Alexander. David is a long-time friend of Jack’s from Palo Alto who has been paying social calls since the early 1970s. He breezed into the kitchen and took a seat at the table just as John got up to fetch Norma from her apartment at the assisted living center.

All this time Jeremy was a blur of activity in the kitchen, peeling potatoes and carrots and stirring various bubbling concoctions on the stove. The aromas were enticing. Jeremy is a writer, composer and long-time admirer of Jack who lives with him as a caretaker. He’s also a first-rate cook. Jack suddenly leaned back and announced that Jeremy had helped him to write another book: his autobiography! David and I exclaimed our delight; I felt like dancing a jig. It turns out Jack has finished recording the book on audiotape and Jeremy is in the process of transcribing it—they expect it to run to as many as 250 pages. Jack’s literary agent has said he can get Jack an advance for the book and publishers are being considered (Tor?), though with such a unique project “all publishing options are on the table.” No clear idea as to when the book will be available.

Not long after this John returned with Norma in tow.

Norma is also slowing down with age, problems with her memory having required her to move to the assisted living center for more constant care. Her distant memories remain strong but she is at a loss to recall recent events, and often becomes disoriented in the middle of a thought. When she arrived her

white hair was tousled and she wore a frayed gray cardigan sweater over a purple sweatshirt and lounge pants. Seeing David and me at the table she put a selfconscious hand to her hair and said: “Oh, I didn’t know there would be guests tonight! I would have dressed-up if I’d known!” I gathered she had been told, but had forgotten. Hearing her voice, Jack greeted Norma tenderly: “Hello you old gal.” Norma smiled and took a playful swipe past Jack’s chin with her fist.

After several more minutes’ conversation Jack began to grow uneasy regarding the whereabouts of his other guests. “Johnny!” he bellowed, “where’s Bob Silverberg? I want you to call him!”

John called down from the upstairs balcony: “Its not yet six o’clock, dad. Let’s let them be late first before we pester them.”

“But I want Bob to be here!” Jack protested, boyishly eager to see his friend. “I want you to call and remind him!” If John made response to this I did not hear it.

John’s kids Allison (10) and Glen (8) appeared from upstairs and John introduced them. They are an intelligent pair, reserved but not shy and quite well-behaved for their ages. Glen is very fond of chess and soon enjoined me to play with him on a small chess-table in the living room. He plays aggressively and had me on the run at first, but a miscalculation cost him his queen and then the game. Glen proposed two-out-ofthree and I accepted. As the games progressed Allison did her best to help my cause, offering timely suggestions and even liberating my captive queen when Glen’s back was turned, but her efforts were in vain; Glen won the final two games handily and thereby became Chess Champion of the evening.

As Glen and I played the other guests arrived. First: Bob Mielke, who Jack declared was once ‘a red-hot trombone player, one of the ten greatest jazz trombone players in the world,’ along with his lady friend Lois. Bob is now stooped, shuffling and wears a white fringe of Captain Ahab beard; he looks more likely to hold a corn-cob pipe to his lips than a jazz trombone. I asked him if he still found time to put the trombone through its paces. He gave a sour chuckle and observed that the trombone “...now puts me through its paces.

Next to arrive were Robert and Karen Silverberg, Robert looking natty in his evening clothes and splendid white goatee. As a science fiction author Robert is even more famous than Jack. His manner of dress, posture, and mannerisms betray a certain vanity which, while it more generously (and even fairly) could be adjudged appropriate ‘professional dignity’, seemed almost haughty in contrast to Jack and his eccentric home. Inspecting Jack’s VIE set later in the evening, Robert remarked: “The guy sure wrote a lot of books,” then turned and waited expectantly. A moment later David Alexander caught the irony of the remark and exclaimed: “Oh, but not nearly so many books as you’ve written, Bob!” At this Robert nodded and joined the general laughter.

Last to arrive was Tim Underwood, of Underwood-Miller publishing fame. He’d driven the two hours from Nevada City for the occasion. Tall and spare with large round glasses, Tim proved himself to be a most amiable fellow. He’d not been to see Jack for quite some time—at least ten years. John confided that during Tim’s last visit Jack had teased him mercilessly about his vegetarian diet (the line ‘Such is the dark side of vegetarianism’ from *The Book of Dreams* was inspired by Tim’s proclivity.) Tim had declined all subsequent invitations and Jack’s teasing was strongly suspected as the culprit. John gave him an emotional hug when he arrived. I heard no vegetarian jibes from Jack as the evening progressed, though Robert Silverberg impishly said “You have a nice vegetarian gauntness” to Tim as he leaned over the pan of vegetable curry prepared specially for him. However, moments later Tim surprised everyone by adding a hamburger to his plate. “I thought you were a vegetarian!” David cried out. “Well, I used to be,” was Tim’s diffident response, and there it rested.

As Jeremy prepared dinner I kept myself busy: playing chess with Glen, stoking the fire in the corner fireplace, helping set out the silverware. But at length I swallowed my anxiety and joined the conversation at the dining table. When I claimed an empty chair between Karen Silverberg and Alexia, Karen kindly introduced herself to me and I admitted I was more comfortable in company of children than famous authors. She and Alexia seemed to appreciate the remark and their polite laughter made me feel better.

I asked Karen how she’d met Robert. She recounted asking for his autograph at a book-signing, and how he’d paused and looked up at her and asked: “What’s a good Jewish girl like you doing in Texas?” followed shortly by “And what are you doing for dinner?” Certainly Robert Silverberg does not lack self-confidence.

Alexia then commenced an explanation of dark matter, and how the gravitational lensing effect around large cosmic objects can be used to gauge their mass and density, and calibrate the potential interaction between ‘dark’ and baryonic particles (no kidding.) She spoke with clarity and youthful energy but I could tell that Norma, sitting across the table, was having difficulty following the conversation. Norma smiled and blinked and seemed altogether uncomfortable. I tried to draw her into the discussion and then tried to change the subject to something simpler, but she had a hard time hearing and understanding me in the babble of voices. She announced “I just need to get up and walk around a little” then stood and excused herself from the table. I felt a pang of sadness for her. Once the consummate hostess and chatty center of attention, Norma was now, in some ways, ‘on the outside looking in’.

During and after dinner small knots of people clustered in conversation throughout the house, to the periodic accompaniment of ukulele and kazoo from the dining room. I found myself talking with Tim Underwood. When I introduced myself as one of John’s colleagues from the VIE, he mentioned that he’d not seen any of our books and was curious about them. I promptly steered him over to Jack’s set where he picked up a volume and examined it with great interest. Opening the book he oohed with pleasure at the typesetting, complimenting the generous margins and gutter and praising the ‘leading’ between lines of text. “Books were typeset this way in the 20s,” he said, “before publishing companies became more concerned with paper costs than legibility. These wide margins and the extra space between text lines are so much easier on the eye.”

I was all ears: here was a man, experienced with both quality book publishing and the life and work of Jack Vance, seeing the VIE for the first time. I asked what he thought of the typeface and Tim turned his practiced eye back to the book. “It’s appropriate,” he said after a moment’s consideration, “the look of this font goes very well with Jack’s style.” He asked what font it was and when I told him it was an original font designed for the VIE he nodded approvingly.

A thoughtful look crossed Tim’s face and he brought up a book project he’d been intending to do: publishing both Cugel stories together in a definitive illustrated edition, to be titled *The Laughing Magician*. He said he’d had the rights for 7-8 years but had never gotten around to doing it, and that perhaps he should use the VIE texts to proceed with the project. John and David drifted

over to where we were standing, and John and I took turns describing the textual restoration process and the VIE electronic text archive. Tim seemed most impressed.

Then he paused for a moment before relating a couple of strangely coincidental phone calls he'd received earlier that day. The first came from a collector just as Tim was leaving his home to drive to Oakland. The caller had asked 'When are you finally going to finish *The Laughing Magician*?' Surprised, Tim had replied: 'You won't believe where I'm going for dinner tonight...'

The second call had come a few hours later, after Tim had checked into his hotel room and deposited his suit-case. As he started the drive to the Vance's, the wife of a customer called to say that her husband had passed away, and would Tim be interested in purchasing her late husband's complete collection of U-M Vance books? Tim was often in financial straits in his younger days and had been forced to sell his own copies of the books, so he was delighted by this opportunity to own them all once again. John, David and I marveled at the cosmic coincidence, and heartily agreed with Tim that these were auspicious circumstances indeed to begin a Vance publishing project. John promised to get the Cugel texts to Tim as soon as he could.

The hour had grown late; guests began departing. As Robert and Karen Silverberg were leaving, Karen pointed out that Robert had recently written 'a vancean story' for George R. R. Martin, who is editing an anthology of short fiction written in *The Dying Earth* milieu. Robert didn't share very much about the project, except the title of his story—which I've forgotten, alas!—and that several other prominent authors were contributing to it.

As the evening wound down, John left Tim, David and I to put the kids to bed and our conversation turned to what a wonderful writer Jack is, and what we appreciate most about his work. We discussed Jack's personality: his disdain for snobbishness, his uncomplicated and exuberant approach to writing. David shared an insightful story: years ago John was building a hutch for the dining-room. Jack observed that "John does very good work, much better than I could ever do. But he needs to learn to be a little more slap-dash." What a wonderful irony, and how true! The precise, painfully scientific approach will always yield inferior results where great art is concerned; there is something ennobling and realistic about imperfection. Picasso spent his

entire life trying to paint like he did when he was three years old. Jack's writing, for all its elevated style and imposing quality, has at its core the vigorous, beating heart of Jack's own unique personality; perhaps that is the secret ingredient after all.

We marveled at Jack's home, at the priceless architectural features, the wooden walls and floors burnished by time and steeped in creativity. "There have been so many parties here," Tim reflected, "so many good times, so much joie de vive. There's such a positive atmosphere in this place, such a wonderful vibration emanating from it!" And we fell silent for a while, enjoying the feeling of consensus, that bond which quickly forms between people who, though they do not know each other well, agree on so many things.

And I smiled to myself, realizing that my fears about the evening had been in vain. I hadn't said very much in the course of the night but I had done a lot of listening. I am not a writer, I am a reader; I am not a talker, I am a listener. And my participation is important both to literature and to dinner parties at the Vance's.

After a moment I noticed that Jack and Norma were sitting quietly together at the kitchen table, clearly exhausted. We remaining guests didn't want to leave but, sensing the time was at hand, we exchanged e-mail addresses and promised to connect again. I bid a sincere good-bye to David and Tim, John and Norma and Jack. As I clasped Jack's shoulder he reached over and patted my hand with his own, his wide palm warm and dry, the back of his hand wrinkled and age-spotted. "Greg," he said, "you can come here any time."

Source : Extant 23 dated JAN 2008

<https://vanderveeke.net/foreverness/cosmo/Extant-23.pdf>

2008 JVMB Jazz

emphyrio
Posts 173
Registered User
Jul 14, 2008#1

... at least if you have a certain facility with audio hardware.

Paul Rhoads, who for reasons we need not revisit is unable to post here, reports:

I talked to Jack last night and it seems that

the machine he bought to help him play jazz--he wants to lay down multiple tracks of himself on various instruments--is too difficult for him to work alone. Is there not someone in the sector who could

spend some time helping him with this project so close to his heart?

If anyone is able to supply the relevant technical support, perhaps they would email me: emphyrio [at] dragonchaser.net and I will make the necessary introductions.

Thanks to anyone who can perform this good deed!

David Pierce
Posts 1,969
Jul 27, 2008#5

We'll withdraw my dad's idea. I received some emails from Paul explaining that this project is different from what I thought. Apparently it is an initiative involving profit, and this is clearly spelled out in Tim's post, which it seems I did not read carefully enough. I just thought Jack would be

sitting at home recording himself for fun, like for family and friends. My dad thought that if he recorded some trumpet tracks, Jack might like them and decide

to use them. Hope Paul's project works out well for all involved. –Dave

emphyrio

Posts 173

Jul 28, 2008#8

A volunteer with the necessary expertise from San Fransisco has stepped forward, and events are, I understand, proceeding to the satisfaction of all involved--particularly Jack.

Any 'profit' involved is purely of a moral nature--no money is changing hands. Jack gets to enjoy his music and the kind volunteer realises a long-held ambition to meet Jack as well as the satisfaction of carrying out a good deed.

KBoudreau

Posts 1

Registered User

Aug 26, 2009#17

Hi everyone. I'm the one who volunteered to help Jack out with his recording endeavor. I've kept quiet on the project, but since there seems to be

some recent interest in this here, I'll shed some light on what may come to be. I think it's safe to say there probably will be a recording available

of Jack playing his favorite tunes at some point in the future, though I'm not sure when.

I have been recording Jack in his home once a week for over a year now, and we have recorded well over one hundred "takes" of around twenty to thirty songs. Some are classic jazz tunes, some are not. We have been using a digital 8-track machine and a single microphone, and Jack is doing all the parts, overdubbing himself.

When I started on this project, Jack had not played or recorded for some time, and it has taken a while for him to get the hang of multi-track recording,

but he has progressed well. He is somewhat of a perfectionist, and so we have done many takes of certain songs, and certain parts of certain songs. When we get around ten to twelve tunes or so that he is at least satisfied with, we will look into making some cds for sale or making mp3s available. The project is

not done, and will likely continue as long as Jack's interest and health holds out. Jack has stated that this project is for his fans, and will not likely

hold a wide range of distribution or appeal. He is certainly having a great time doing it, though, and It's a lot of fun for me as well.

In case anyone is interested, Jack is playing: baritone and tenor ukulele, banjo-uke (or banjolele (actually it's a Gold Tone Little Plucky)), Hohner

Chromonica in B flat, C, G, and E, various rusty kazoos, washboard, and jug.

Source: Chat JVMB

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/viewtopic.php?p=28405#p28405>

2009 David Pierce Jazz

"For Jack Vance"

DAVID PIERCE

JVMB août 12, 2009#11

The way I approached Jack, years ago, was to write him a short letter about the great time I had watching an impromptu performance by The Sons of Bix, at the Central City, Colorado, Jazz Festival. This group was a one-time gathering of well-regarded old-timers such as former members of The Queen City Jazz Band and Lu Waters. I didn't mention Jack's writing at all. A week later he called me and we had a very nice phone conversation in which we discussed jazz, sailing, teenagers, and the dangers of smoking. Then he called my dad and they had a fantastic conversation about traditional jazz, of which my dad is an exponent and collector. They both worked in record stores as teenagers and enjoyed talking about 78 rpm recordings and bands such as The New Orleans Rhythm Kings. I don't think Jack is much interested in talking about his writing, so I avoided the topic. He was very easy going and we were able to simply talk as regular people. I hope my experience is helpful to you.

I never got to meet him, but we had a nice telephone conversation, and he had a lot of advice for me about raising my daughter, which I appreciated. He is actually a very kind, caring man. He told me he doesn't like movies, which I already knew but was interested to hear his reasons for this opinion. He practically made me promise I would never smoke cigarettes. He talked a LOT about his son John's sailing adventures...Jack is obviously a proud father.

Importantly, Jack turned me on to a GREAT book called "White Chords," by Richard Sudhalter, which demonstrates that in the jazz of the '20s and '30s -- what Jack listens to -- white musicians contributed almost equally to blacks in the development of the artform, which is not a well-known fact and somewhat suppressed by the media. In secret, many white and black musicians jammed together in those days and made great music, or studied one another, just as Louis and Bix did. Sudhalter has a great 2 CD collection called "White Chords" that I heartily recommend. Instead of the unmentioned subject of

writing being the 800 pound gorilla of the conversation, it seemed natural to both of us not to talk about it, and I was quite happy with that.

Sorry Gersen, I got the name of the book and 2 CD volumes wrong: It is "Lost Chords: White Musicians and their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945," by Richard M. Sudhalter. It discusses the surprising influence that both white and black musicians had upon one another and the development of jazz, which is a fact largely unknown, because there has been a sort of "politically correct" sympathy toward blacks as this music being their exclusive invention, their great contribution to western culture. And it is true that the music developed from African tribal rhythms into the improvisational street music of New Orleans, with such mysterious legends as Buddy Bolden, circa 1911. But very quickly, some really influential white musicians began forming bands and recording; the black musicians listened to this and there was a powerful cross-fertilization of the genre. You can hear some cuts here. One song called "Jack Hits the Road," from the second disc, I found a perfect addition to a sort of Jack Vance tribute album that I was compiling, and used to have a bbs for.

Source JVMB 2009 Source JVMB

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/for-jack-vance-t3425-s10.html>

2010 Frederik Pohl Jack Vance: The Master of the Dragons

THE WAY THE FUTURE BLOGS INTERNET BLOG

Post by Frederik Pohl

One weekend last summer — to be exact, on the morning of 19 July, 2009 — a lot of New Yorkers got a surprise when they opened their Sunday Times Magazine. What they found was particularly pleasing to those among them who chanced to be science-fiction fans, for there in that prestigious journal was a critical — and very favorable — essay on a writer that it called “one of America’s most distinctive and underrated voices.” And the owner of that voice, it said, was none other than our own Jack Vance. It was not only Carlo Rotella, the critic who wrote the Times piece, who thought so. He was able to quote Michael Chabon (“Vance is the most painful case of all the writers I love who I feel don’t get the credit they deserve. If *The Last Castle* or the *Dragon Masters* had the name Italo Calvino on it, or just a foreign name, it would be received as a profound meditation.”) and Dan Simmons, who said that discovering Vance “was a revelation for me, like coming to Proust or Henry James.... He gives you glimpses of entire worlds with just perfectly tuned language. If he’d been born south of the border he’d be up for a Nobel prize.”

As one of those Vance-loving sf fans myself, I read the Times piece with astonishment and pleasure, for science fiction has long had a bad press — slightly relieved in recent years by the impressive earnings of writers like Frank Herbert and Isaac Asimov — from most of the country’s respectable journals. But what this piece said was not only interesting, it was precisely true. Jack Vance not only imagines wonderful things to tell us about, he embodies his visions in a special individual kind of language that is all Vance’s own.

I came late to Vance. Most of his early stories appeared in magazines and other places that I didn’t normally read. Friends with my best interests at heart did try to persuade me to give this Vance person a try, but I never quite got around to following their sage advice. Then Horace L. Gold began to find the

editing of *Galaxy* too much for him to handle. I helped him as needed for a while; then he retired and the publisher asked me to take over.

I not only had read little of Vance, I had never — unusually among the sf writers of the '50s and '60s — happened to meet him. We had many friends in common among the writers who lived, like Vance, in the Pacific Northwest, and they didn't fail to keep me informed of his doings. With Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert, he had for a time owned a houseboat, and when one day it sank at its moorings, Vance was the one who worked out a way to refloat it.

With his late wife, Norma, whom he had met and married when they both were still college undergraduates, Vance was a world traveler, visiting unlikely spots all over the map, and writing whole books in improbable places. He had begun writing while in the Merchant Marine in the South Pacific in World War II, and kept it up in whatever part of the world he happened to be visiting at that specific moment. Whatever the locale, Jack wrote his stories in longhand, whereafter Norma typed them up to send out..

And then one day, after Horace had retired and I had inherited the batch of stories he had bought, I was going through them and I discovered one or two I had never seen. One was by Vance, and it was called "The Moon Moth." It was the story of an Earthman posted as a diplomatic official on a planet whose people appear in public only when wearing ornate masks and communicate not by talking but by singing.

It caught my attention. Vance was what I thought of as an ornamental writer — mannered prose, complex sentences, formal dialogue. That was not necessarily a good thing. I'm as fond of *Remembrance of Things Past* (or whatever they're calling Marcel Proust's masterwork now) as the next man, but I don't normally find that kind of linguistic mastery in the slush pile of a science-fiction magazine. Done beautifully, that sort of thing is beautiful. Done poorly, I send it back to the writer.

This was definitely in the beautiful territory.

One of Vance's scholars has reported that Vance was impressed by the equally ornate style of James Branch Cabell. Both Vance's and Cabell's styles are similarly inflated, but I don't think they are mannered in quite the same way. No matter. "The Moon Moth" was a fine story. I scheduled it for an early issue and sought more. It took a while, but ultimately my efforts did bear fruit as I received a new Vance manuscript called *The Dragon Masters*.

I read it at once and instantly loved it. It concerned a planet inhabited by humans, but from time to time visited by spaceships from another planet, this one inhabited by intelligent lizard-like aliens, called dragons, who kidnap humans for the purpose of breeding them into fighting troops. When they have achieved their purpose they have an army of mutated humans in several different types, including giant warriors. The dragons use these to capture more humans for their breeding experiments. However the humans of the raided planet have managed to capture one dragon spaceship with its crew, well before this story starts, and are breeding dragon warriors in the same way that the dragons breed (formerly) human ones.

It struck me as the perfect Jack Vance story, with a handsomely imagined setting, a carefully invented plot line, embellished by his unique use of language. I got busy.

I called Jack Gaughan, the most inventive of our stable of artists, and asked him to come in to discuss a particularly challenging set of illustrations. The wonderful thing about Gaughan was that he understood what I was asking for a good deal faster than most illustrators, and he did not disappoint. He came through with a bunch of his best work, including a cover and interior black and whites that involved thumbnail sketches of each of the purpose-bred races each side had created out of the captured samplings of the other.

I loved it.

I wasn't the only one who did, either. When at last that issue was on the stands the reader mail was good, and when it came time for award voting *The Dragon Masters* had — of course — won a Hugo (though, curiously, it was

described as a short story, I have never known why) and Gaughan had won an art Hugo of his own, specifically for *The Dragon Masters* work (and, I believe, the only time the award was given for a specified set of illustrations rather than for general high quality.)

Sometimes being an editor is fun.

For me the fun quotient was diminishing around that time. I have long believed as an article of faith that no one should hold the same editorial job for more than a decade or so, because (I believe) the best work is done when it is all fresh and new and after a while the editor is just going through the motions. A few years after *The Dragon Masters*, I proved that point by making a serious mistake with another Jack Vance story, *The Last Castle*. Jack had divided the story into a number of chapters and added a clutch of scholarly, but irrelevant, comments at the beginning of each chapter. Editors are put upon this Earth for the purpose of correcting an author's errors in such matters, and I set myself to improving Jack's chapter headers by cutting them fifty per cent or so.

The mistake wasn't in making that decision — those chunks of prose were excessive and seriously distracting — it was in doing the cutting myself without first asking Jack to fix it. When he saw the published version he was unhappy. When I ran into him at a meeting of the Science Fiction Research Association in Lake Tahoe a little later his first words were, "Fred, you shouldn't have done it," And he never sent me another story.

Actually he didn't have many opportunities to do that. Not long afterward, I took a week off to go to a film festival in Rio de Janeiro, and when I came back to the office I found that Bob Guinn had taken advantage of my absence to sell the magazines to another publisher.

Indeed, that was his right; he owned them. But I think he suspected that if I were around when he was making that deal I might have talked him out of it, and I certainly would have tried. It wasn't a good idea. But by then it was a fait accompli.

I took it as a reminder of my convictions about the relevance of longevity to performance in an editorial job, and actually as an opportunity to try something else for a while. (The other publisher had no idea how to run the magazines, as I had expected. They hung on for a couple of years of dwindling quality and then were folded.)

For a time, I lost touch with Jack Vance, as I did with many of the Galaxy contributors after that. Then I heard that things were not going as well as he deserved for him. First came the word that he was losing his vision, and then that Norma had died. Before the blindness became total, he was still managing to get some writing done by scribbling a word or two, in giant letters, on each sheet of paper and then writing the next word or two on another sheet, und so weiter.

Since then we do keep in some sort of touch by the occasional phone call, and I was happy to learn that he now has a sensitive high-tech computer system to write with. He's too good a writer, and too good a man, to be condemned to silence.

This entry was posted on April 25, 2010

2010 S.Friedli Dogs and Cats

Post From JVMB forum

My impression of Jack was that he was a cat enthusiast, more or less. Evidence comes from the implicit authorial attitude of such stories as "Cat Island" (1946), and Rexie the "hotel cat" in Bird Island (circa 1947), and also (my) casual discussions with him. My guess would be he was attracted to the regal independence & indifference of the Felidae clade, along w/ that occasional vixenish disposition -- yet which seems always forgivable.

This always surprised me. For Jack would appear so nicely to "fit within" the informal world of "dog people" (of which I am one). Rather than cool indifference & aloofness aligned w/ the generally withdrawn and self-contained (and introverted) "world of cats", Jack was openly gregarious, convivial, hospitable, and obviously extroverted. Such, conventionally, is representative of the "dog world", just as "dog people" readily & warmly recognize among each other. (One can be socially amicable & companionable without being a "dog person" of course.) (I am speaking very stereo-typically, sorry!, and I don't mean to offend cat enthusiasts! . . . rightly or wrongly, these are the social clichés.) But Jack -- incorrectly as from out of my experience -- opined (to me) that cats were more intelligent than "dumb dogs"(!) (exactly as he related to me). Of course, it's truly the other way around, bless Jack's heart. I can only speculate that this mis-perception about canines was something from out of Jack's childhood that took root as truth for him. That is certainly not unusual.

On my couple visits w/ Jack there was always a household dog present -- different ones in 2010 and 2011. But I know from his son John that the dog's purpose was to function as an Alert Dog, barking at the approach of visitors . . . which dogs do so well and cats are incapable of (irrespective of putative intelligence, ha ha!). This was for those instances when John had to be out on errands and our Grand Master was alone and without eyesight. It was a smart idea!

The pix below was the 2011 Alert Dog, keeping a close eye on me from the back of the house (John was doing lots of exterior work, so this was mid-project), where John was showing me the 1950's Nuclear Fallout Shelter (that seconded as Jack's Hideaway Writing Room), all of which Jack laboriously dug out of the hillside behind the house. Quite amazing!!

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/viewtopic.php?p=43424#p43424>

2016 John Vance The Joy in the Complexity of Life –

JACK VANCE, ALL-ROUND MAN AND SCIENCE-FICTION POET

Interview with John Vance about his father's life and work

Jack Vance was born in 1916 in San Francisco, just about one year after the first metal-built aircraft lifted off ground, and he died in 2013 in Oakland, when a vehicle named "Curiosity" was exploring the surface of Mars for signs of life. One is inclined to agree when he writes in his autobiography that he "had been fortunate enough to live through an interesting and eventful epoch." An epoch that - among many other things - has also seen the rise of the new literary genre "Science-Fiction", in which Vance himself - although he rarely appeared in public - was one of the great leading characters.

The attempt to discuss the influence of his work on modern Science-Fiction and Fantasy would go beyond the scope of this article and is also not the subject here. Suffice it to say: The list of authors who thank Jack Vance for his "wonderful books" and for inspiration for their own work is long and says more than the one or other essay from the last years. It includes names like Ursula K. LeGuin, George R.R. Martin, Neil Gaiman, Dan Simmons, Tanith Lee, Robert Silverberg, Lucius Shepard, Mike Resnick, Terry Dowling, Dean Koontz – to mention just a few ...

Vance's productive time – taking into account also his autobiography, published in 2009 - lasted almost 65 years. During that period he published more than 60 novels and about 80 shorter works. Among his novels, the legendary tales of the "Dying Earth", the "Lyonesse" trilogy and the "Demon Princes" five book series are probably best known. But also novels such as "The Blue World", "Emphyrio" or the "Planet of Adventure" series are true genre-classics and excellent examples for the much-invoked "Sense of Wonder".

In the field of short stories - besides his HUGO and NEBULA award-winning stories "The Dragon Masters" and "The Last Castle" - "The Moon Moth" is outstanding and considered by many to be the best SF story of all times.

"The guy who wrote all that junk for so many years - he seems like another person", said Vance 2009, at the age of ninety-two. And - asked if he would pick up the pen again: "There are no more stories in me. Only this one that I'm now toward the end of telling."

This last story, his autobiography, entitled "This is me, Jack Vance!" (Ger. "Gestatten, Jack Vance, Verlag A. Irle, 2010), can, with all its color and adventurousness, its Vance-typical stylistic elegance and simultaneous down-to-earth attitude, be mentioned in one breath with his best stories. It shows Vance as a multi-faceted personality, craftsman, jazz-musician, engineer, sailor, lover of life and organizer of extended parties, family-man and - he almost forgot to mentioned it - as an author.

Long before he started writing, he planned a system to travel the world and live in any of these "far-off places with sweet-sounding names" a life as a traveling writer. "And," as he writes, "by some freak of circumstances it worked out."

The freedom and the expansive experiences of this lifestyle combined with a blooming imagination found their way directly into the heart of his work. If you add to this an excellent eye for people and places, a great sense of humor and an expressive talent - which earned him, not only among his fans, the name "Shakespeare of Science Fiction" - you might have understood a little bit about the author Jack Vance.

Some other bits I hope to find out from his son John (* 1961) who lives at the Vance residence in Oakland and has kindly agreed to an interview.

Hello John. Do you think your father would have stopped writing if he had made a breakthrough as a jazz-musician?

Thomas, thank you for arranging this interview.

He probably would have stopped writing. Fortunately (for us!) writing was a more practical way to pay the bills.

Music was in his head always; he described to me several complex pieces he composed in his dreams.

You manage the literary heritage of your father, you run the website jackvance.com and you design the spots for the Spatterlight YouTube

Channel. At the same time you keep in touch with the fans and give interviews like this one. Do you still have time for other things?

We're busier than ever now that we've separated from our literary agent. The responsibility will pay off though because we can now respond more flexibly and quickly to opportunities that arise, large and small. We'll do more for Vance over the years ahead—as independents—than we could have before.

I don't work alone, thankfully. Koen Vyverman manages the EU, and we collaborate with friends like Arjen Broeze, Menno van der Leden, Chris Wood, Steve Sherman, Rob Friefeld, Wil Ceron, Andreas Irle, Patrick Dusoulier, Joel Anderson, Howard Kistler and others.

Working with Vance is a family project, and I enjoy it.

Two years after your father passed away you still receive a flow of toasts and personal words of farewell under "Foreverness" on your homepage. How is it that his readers are so close to him? Is there a special type of "Jack Vance Fan"?

Vance fans are imaginative, practical, intelligent, and have specialized talents or skills. They are travelers, builders, engineers, scientists, physicists, artists, writers and so on. They have a zest for life and live beyond the ordinary, and gravitate to Vance because they recognize the voice of a kindred spirit. That's my view of Vance fans, in full theoretical glory!

In the nineties the Vance Integral Edition project was realized by his fans, supported by you and your family. The complete work of Jack Vance was re-released in its original form. Can you say a few words about this project and the corresponding German edition by Andreas Irle? Are there any other - current or planned - fan activities?

The best way to explore the VIE is by researching *Cosmopolis*, the project newsletter maintained online, with other VIE resources at www.integralarchive.org.

Editors and proofreaders had altered the stories in different ways over the years, sometimes significantly, often clumsily. Among other worthy goals, the VIE set forth to restore stories to as-written condition. Paul Rhoads dreamed up the project and provided the inspirational lead for a great swirl of volunteers. Restorations were based on evidence from original manuscripts, correspondence between my parents and editors, and consultations with both

my father and mother. The work took years to accomplish, and ultimately involved several hundred people who collaborated worldwide over the internet. My duty was to oversee the legal side of things, and do the banking and bookkeeping.

The VIE had to be one of the first instances of crowd-sourcing—if not the first on such a grand scale. The publication spanned 44 volumes and was printed in two grades: a “Reader’s” Edition, and a leather-bound “Deluxe” Edition. The only work that didn’t make the edition was *This Is Me*—the autobiography, which wasn’t written yet. Around 650 sets were sold, and they were a good investment—the books are eagerly sought by Vance collectors everywhere, and their value has doubled.

Another fruit of the VIE was the digital output, a set of files which encompassed all of the stories, lovingly restored. Every new publication in English since the VIE (and every new translation, such as those by Andreas Irle—whose high-quality hardcovers inspired the size and shape of the VIE volumes) has made use of those files. The VIE was truly a pivotal event in the late publication of Vance.

Spatterlight Press was formed in 2012 to produce and sell Vance in e-book form, from the VIE texts. The enabling force to do this once again came from a fan—Arjen Broeze—who emailed me offering to take on the formatting job. One thing led to another, and the work was done.

Spatterlight Press has evolved now to become a profit-sharing concern with a broad mission to publish Vance, or help others to publish Vance, in as many languages, territories and formats as possible.

Fan-activities are always possible. Interested parties should get in contact!

The short story collection "Songs of the Dying Earth", published in 2010 is also some kind of a "Fan Project" - but a very special one. It is a tribute from well-known SF and Fantasy writers to your father, edited by George R.R. Martin and Gardner Dozois. How did this book come into being? And will there be a German translation some day?

I don’t know who conceived *Songs of the Dying Earth*, but am grateful to all the authors, and George Martin and Gardner Dozois in particular, for making the project happen.

Contributors include Dean Koontz, Robert Silverberg, Matt Hughes, Terry Dowling, Liz Williams, Mike Resnick, Walter Jon Williams, Paula Volsky, Jeff VanderMeer, Kage Baker, Phyllis Eisenstein, Elizabeth Moon, Lucius Shepard, Tad Williams, John C. Wright, Glen Cook, Elizabeth Hand, Byron Tetrick, Tanith Lee, Dan Simmons, Howard Waldrop, Neil Gaiman, and Mr. Martin himself. The collection is rich, wonderful, and pays a tremendous compliment to my father—a tribute he appreciated deeply (though characteristically, he couldn't understand why people made such a fuss over his work!) A German edition of *Songs of the Dying Earth* is possible; we'll need some good translations to begin.

In the “Songs ...” JV is once more called the “Shakespeare of Science-Fiction”. Did your father like Shakespeare at all? Or Science-Fiction?

My father read everything in his youth—including Shakespeare, and the “Science-Fiction” of the day. But he did not return to these as an adult, as far as I know.

During an interview from 1976 JV explained he didn't read much in the field of F&SF, although there were some excellent writers such as LeGuin, Lem and Dick already active at that time. Wasn't he interested to find out what his "competition" was doing? Or was he relying on his own, uninfluenced vision only?

He was influenced by authors he read in his youth, but didn't read the work of his contemporaries. He also didn't re-read his own work, once it was delivered to the publisher.

Numerous authors have tried to differentiate between Fantasy and SF, sometimes with questionable results. It would be interesting to know whether your father - whose work was highly suitable to undermine such efforts - ever discussed these distinctions? How did he describe his own "genre", which was often - for lack of a better term - named "Science-Fantasy"?

He didn't have a comfortable answer to the question, but if asked would reply “Fantasy and Science-Fiction”—though he also wrote worthwhile Mysteries.

A recurring pattern in the stories of Jack Vance is that the culprit is defeated with cleverness and foresight. The theme is employed with irony in the Cugel-narratives, where Cugel's strategies often bounce back on him. Here, as well as in his more serious stories, the punishment of the evil-doer is sometimes draconian, and revenge plays an important role. Do you see a cause for this in your father's life, which might explain these ideas?

His youth and early adulthood spanned the Great Depression and Second World War; difficult and dramatic times certainly. Anyone curious about his life should read his autobiography, which is a pleasant and enjoyable book.

Cugel's escapades may have been inspired by uncomfortable and difficult employments my father held during the lean years of his youth. We can only wonder at the innovative revenges and comprehensive punishments!

JV once explained that he considers cultural traditions to be enormously valuable because they make people's lives so much more complex and interesting. On the other hand, the protagonists in his novels are often those who tear down traditions and destroy rigid social structures. Can you explain this apparent contradiction?

Traditions and structures are torn down because they are unjust, repressive or exploitative. Destruction occurs as a necessary step to allow a new era of peace and freedom. Even Cugel didn't pursue anarchy for its own sake (though it was often left in his wake).

Your father had great interest in "non-literature" activities. Crafts, long distance travel, jazz music and much more. It looks like this lifestyle made his stories possible in the first place. Exotic elements in his stories seemed authentic because they were inspired by exotic experiences in real life, in any part of the world. The same might be true for technical or craftsmanship details. Do you agree with that? If so, what is your favorite example for it?

Hints and references to his life are everywhere. He had a habit of employing the names of friends and acquaintances for amusing purposes, generally flattering—though not always—sometimes with distorted spellings or other twists. Even I show up at one point—or more accurately, my offspring does, 50 or so generations removed! He referred frequently to menus and drink because cuisine and merry-making were eternally fascinating; sailing craft and space-yachts reflect his abiding interest in travel at sea, not only the mechanics but

the accoutrements and rhythms of life underway. He enjoyed building and flying kites, which show up here and there. Ceramics and glass show up now and then, an offshoot of the enthusiasm he shared with my mother. And architectural topics are a recurring theme undoubtedly stimulated by his years of carpentering. He built many structures, but the family home is my favorite, of course.

You participated in many of the above mentioned trips, for example to Tahiti. The idea of writing under palm trees while the family explores the lagoon in an outrigger boat and a Polynesian chieftain who arrives with his entourage to unleash the party of the century, is hard-to-beat writer's romance. I guess even Hemingway and Jack London would have raised their hats. How was the real, daily life on the road? What are your memories of that time?

My parents looked for picturesque, inexpensive places to live for weeks—even months at a time. By my fourteenth year we'd lived well over two years overseas, in such places as Tahiti, Australia, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Madeira, South Africa, Pakistan, Kashmir, and Sri Lanka.

The lifestyle wasn't always fun for me. I missed pets and friends at home, and suffered each time leaving wonderful new friends I made abroad. But the overall experience of course was rare and wonderful, and gave me valuable insight over the years into the people and conditions of the world.

Of many memorable times, the six months we lived in Ireland, over the course of the winter of 1969, in a cottage on the shores of Lough Corrib, left the deepest most emotional mark on all of us. The scenery, weather, people, music, green grass and crumbling stones, peat-stained water of the lough itself were reminisced over many times. Thinking of those days I'm swept over by nostalgia, bittersweet now with both parents gone.

Some of the texts of your father, and also some titles, were changed without his permission, or against his will. The commercial interests of publishers then and still today were often in contradiction to artistic freedom. Today, however, there are far better options for the author for self-publishing, for example Ebooks or Books on Demand. Did your father ever comment on these alternative methods of publication, in the time since these media exist?

The Internet, electronic publishing and POD technologies became widespread and relevant late in my father's years, when he was blind and unable to personally experience the media. So, even as Spatterlight Press was established and grew, he was unable to grasp the implications of the technology on business and industry..

Today many authors twitter with their fans, and they are reminded by their publishers to carry on doing this since it increases sales figures. Your father's style was quite the opposite. As a person he very rarely appeared in public, Regardless of whether this would still be possible today - do you think this somewhat "mysterious" aura of Jack Vance was more of an advantage or more of a disadvantage in those days?

He might have capitalized more on his fame than he did, but his absence also I think had the effect of insulating his work from the vagaries of style. That's an advantage, in the long term.

JV initially studied physics but found the subject (and also his fellow-students) boring after a while. In most of his stories technical details are given little attention, scientific aspects are often de-familiarized and mixed with magic. Does this reflect an ambivalent relationship to science? Fascination for the topics on one side, but a rejection of their dry formalisms on the other side?

He didn't reject the sciences, in fact he directed me as much as he could to study math, physics, and chemistry. But his own nature, intuition—and possibly education—were tuned better toward social matters than the physical world. You can sense this in the writing.

"The Moon Moth" is often considered not only the best story of JV, but perhaps the best Science-Fiction story at all. Is there anything special about the creation of this story? Is your father's remark, that he is always happy to get an award but sometimes feels that he got it for the wrong story referring to "The Moon Moth", which at the time walked away empty handed?

He never discussed his feelings regarding Moon Moth with me, so I can't answer the question specifically. But it's true that, while recognition was slow to build, it did eventually come—not specifically for Moon Moth, but for his overall accomplishment. And that did please him.

You either understand immediately the meaning of “there is music in a story” or you will never understand. In JV’s stories this is undoubtedly the case - sometimes literally when his characters act like musicians in a jazz band which - after having played their solos and burnt their fireworks - let the song run out in a quite unspectacular way. In other words, if a story has reached a certain level of complexity or is bizarre enough, JV sometimes seems to lose interest. Therefore the one or other ending of his novels reminds more of the end of a jazz session than that of a book. I just wanted to describe my impression here. Do you have a comment to it?

I expect there were times when he became bored with a story, or was excited to start the next book, and so rushed a conclusion. He became more disciplined and generally better with endings, in later work.

The transition between Ports of Call and Lurulu deserves special mention. As he explained at the time, Ports of Call was intended to be a single book but became too long —so he cut it in half, and with very little ceremony. This termination received unflattering commentary but I people should realize that he was struggling at that time with undiagnosed diabetes, and had been almost completely blind for many years. My mother’s ability to assist effectively had also declined significantly by then. So he was working under very difficult circumstances.

According to his own statement JV’s writing turned out best when he wrote for his own amusement. He took a lot of pleasure in thinking up the most sophisticated formulations. When asked about his favorite authors he mentions those in first place whose way of expression and style he enjoyed the most, and not so much those who put focus on special topics. It seems that for him - as reader and as author - it was in the first line the sound that makes the music. Would you agree with that?

Contrivances—special topics amusing for a moment but without lasting value, did not interest him. And he was openly contemptuous of fashion in any form, be it clothing or in the realm of ideas. Below the surface of every human circumstance he perceived motives and conditions which were basic and common across the ages, which might be distorted or modified of course, yet remained recognizable and constant. These were the features that were “real” to him, and everything else was foam and vapor.

His taste in reading tended toward authors who tapped timeless themes and wrote in authentic voices without pretense or conceit. In late years he settled upon a list of respected, favorite authors which reveals his overall taste in fiction: Margery Allingham, Robert Barnard, L. Frank Baum, M. C. Beaton, Rhys Bowen, Max Brand, Edgar Rice Burroughs, John Dixon Carr, Robert Chambers, Raymond Chandler, Agatha Christie, Philip Craig, A. B. Cunningham, Jeffrey Farnol, E. X. Ferrars, Dick Francis, Erle Stanley Gardner, E. X. Giroux, Sue Grafton, Zane Grey, Victoria Holt, Ngaio Marsh, Daphne du Maurier, Lawrence Sanders, Dorothy Sayers, Clark Ashton Smith, Mary Stewart, Rex Stout, Jules Verne, Patricia Wentworth, and greatest of all, P. G. Wodehouse.

One of the most famous characters in your father's stories is Cugel the Clever, who is quite a cunning character. If you compare the two Cugel stories from 1966 and 1983 there seems to be a certain change in Cugel's demeanor and his behavior in the later story. He is more often the victim and not the perpetrator. Did your father ever talk about this fact? Was there a specific reason for this change?

With age my father became more certain in his writing and more comfortable in his life. Plots became fuller and smoother, themes broader and less pointed. Cugel became less caricatured, and perhaps more humane? Humor seeped in where there was little place before, and Cugel's predicaments became more elaborate and amusingly poignant.

Is there a character in your father's stories whose personality is similar to his own?

My father was practical, passionate, imaginative, generous and gregarious, sometimes fickle; and just a bit rogue. He had more in common, I think, with complex characters like Treesong and Cugel than conventional hero-types like Gersen or Reith.

Can you say a word about the process of writing? And about role of your mother Norma? How did the daily writing work in Oakland look like? Did you have to be quiet as a child when the white flag was raised at home?

My father kept notes on bits and scraps of paper, sometimes in notebooks. First drafts were written in fountain pen, on paper folded in half over the short

axis, rotated to form four-sided leaflets. Each leaflet was numbered sequentially and labeled with “A” and “B” external faces; interiors were used to expand or rewrite passages, make notes, list ideas.

His “hand” was a scrawl which took practice to decipher, words or phrases sometimes defying the most discerning reader of all, my mother. He practiced calligraphy on occasion, and “doodled” extensively. He enjoyed using colored inks. Some of his manuscripts are pleasing to look at, for aesthetic quality alone.

While he worked as a carpenter, writing was done in the evenings and at night. Coming home, he would bathe, dress comfortably in pajamas and a robe, and sit with feet propped up resting a clipboard on a pillow in his lap—generally with a refreshing adult beverage in reach.

First drafts went to my mother for typing and correction of small errors and inconsistencies. Her first typewriters were manual, of course—and it was a big day when she got her first electric machine, an IBM Selectric. She carried a small manual machine while traveling.

Returned to my father, the typed manuscript was scrutinized, pulled apart, re-assembled, written over, expanded, compressed and distilled. He was uncompromising about clarity and economy of expression, confident with vocabulary but disinclined to use a fancy word where a simple word would do. He was un-attached to his work and excised blocks of it without sentiment if he felt the story was not optimally advanced.

My mother typed a second draft, typically which required less editing, though large changes were still possible and not uncommon, to the final stage.

The third typing was reviewed and corrected one last time. Paragraphs and sections might still be struck or rewritten. This copy generally went to the publisher.

In the 1980’s, with the help and encouragement of our friend David Alexander, my father got his first word processor, and it wasn’t long before my mother was similarly equipped. The chatter of her typing was replaced by the buzz of a printer. The process was the same but the tools were different, and manuscripts covered in colorful doodles became a thing of the past.

As his vision became worse, my father depended more and more upon a text-to-speech processor called *Accent*, whose synthesized voice will always be in my head. *Accent* was only an aid at first while larger and larger fonts were

used on-screen—using *BigEd* software provided by our friend Kim Kokkonen; but gradually it became the primary reference. Finally the monitor became superfluous, though I kept a small CRT in the system for maintenance, file-deletions and so on.

He was never able to use a mouse or GUI, so we ran DOS. He used *SmartKey* heavily for keyboard aliasing (strings like “Schwatzendale” were so much easier to input by macro!). Keeping definitions up-to-date was my responsibility.

Enhancements for his work and living spaces included desks, shelves, and platforms for monitors with keyboard shelves hanging from joists above, with casted platforms for his chair to roll easily into place, all of which I built to his specification. I glued materials to his keyboards to improve navigation by feel, which we called “architecture”; without these odd and unimportant-looking bits of foam, metal, balsawood, plastic and sandpaper he was unable to work.

After Lurulu the PC was used only to organize his index of jazz music, and keep the telephone numbers of his friends (*This Is Me* was dictated, and transcribed by Jeremy Cavaterra). Finally the PC was turned on only rarely, the phone numbers of his friends stored in the memory-dialer of his telephones—which were also “architecturalized” heavily.

That’s how it went over the years. As a youngster I was fairly quiet, so it wasn’t often necessary to “shush” me—there were a few times, of course.

Has there ever been an interview with or about Jack Vance in which the houseboat was not mentioned? Probably not. If I was committed to originality just a little bit, I would not ask the question, but I cannot resist. The thought that JV, Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert constructed a houseboat together and floated along with it is quite fascinating for the SF reader. You must have been 7 years old when the boat was built, what do you remember about this event? Did you also get to ride on it?

My parents were socially active in those days. Authors, school teachers, mechanics, musicians, neighbors, plumbers, all sorts of people passed through taking time to relax, argue, enjoy food and drink, listen to and play music in so-called “jam sessions”.

The Sacramento River delta region was familiar and dear to my father, and he thought it would be marvelous to take such occasions on the water, anchoring out or tied to shore among the reeds. Frank and Poul were convinced, and the project was born.

The boat was a simple construction on pontoons and quickly built. The first frames for the pontoons were assembled in our driveway, but the kit was soon transplanted to Point Molate, an unassuming location just upstream of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay. The boat was eventually powered upriver and moored at a small marina near Moore's Riverboat on Brannan Island.

Many happy occasions ensued, with the Herberts, Andersons, Albert Hall family and others. There was even a jam-session or two on board. The phase ended when our next travels began, and the boat was donated to Ali Szantho—our larger-than-life Hungarian soccer-enthusiast friend, who used it for fishing. Eventually the boat went adrift in bad weather, hit some rocks and sank—for a second time, but that's a different story.

My father once began building a trimaran in our driveway, in which he hoped to sail the South Pacific. He finished the center hull, and it was a lovely thing; but when Arthur Piver—the boat's designer—went missing in the Pacific in 1968 aboard a similar design, he decided a larger monohull was necessary. He sold the hull and continued to dream.

Despite extraterrestrial exotics and cosmic fiction, it is the beauties of our own world that the stories worship in the first place. Even mankind—although dishonest and egoistic until the sun goes out—deserves some sympathy, be it only because of their eccentric personalities and crazy traditions. Would it be far-fetched to see the work of your father as an expression of his love for the beauties of nature and the complexity of human coexistence?

Awareness—perhaps subliminal—of the strangeness and improbability of existence, was never far from his mind. He had a sense of wonder about the universe, and his place in it, that always hovered in his consciousness. Humanity was neither special nor sacred; our oddities, weaknesses and foibles were ruefully amusing, without bitterness or cynicism. He simply accepted humanity for what it was, good and bad, and played his part without offense or deference. He worshipped beauty, while it lasted. His inner drive and

determination from an early age was to make the most of himself and his time, to squeeze as much from life as he could.

What to make of his writing each of us must decide on our own. But his sensibilities are woven through it, everywhere.

Jack Vance has, in comparison to some bestselling authors in F&SF, an unusually faithful and loyal, but somewhat smaller fan-community. Some critics take the view that the big commercial success bypassed him because of the absence of a “main work” like for example Tolkien or Asimov had it. Reading "This is me" one finds that his life was his “main work” - and he did not even miss to provide the story of it in the end. Do you think your father would have liked this interpretation?

Yes, I think he would!

Are there any plans or inquiries concerning a film version of a Jack Vance story? The "Dying Earth" for example? I must admit, the idea of Johnny Depp as Cugel, as suggested by some, has something to be said for it...

The Demon Prince sequence is under option now for a pilot show, to be offered to cable TV with the goal to produce a series. We'll see if this happens. There has also been interest shown in Tschai.

Johnny Depp might be interesting as Cugel, but he wouldn't be my first pick. I personally would choose an actor who was talented, but relatively unknown.

If only Peter Jackson would take up the Dying Earth!

Thomas, thank you for pursuing this interview—and for being so patient seeing it through! I hope we will both see Vance far into the future.

--John

Quotation:

“I did not ask to be born as a king or - since we are on the subject - to be born at all.”

King Audry of Dahaud in “The Green Pearl”

Interview : Thomas A. Siebel & John Vance published in Fantastische #61 -2016

Source : John Vance

2019 David Russel

<https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/my-jack-vance-collection-t3753-s370.html>

Published : 6:28 AM - Aug 03, 2019

from: Tschai

Mike, I'm David Russell, and created the Tschai portfolio back in 1980. The collection was first offered at the World Fantasy Convention in the same year.

I met Jack Vance at the 1977 Port Townsend Writer's Workshop, and thereafter we became good friends.

I likewise did work for Daw Books and Underwood/Miller, but thereafter lost interest in book illustration after entering the film business as a concept and storyboard artist.

Many years later, I was tapped by John Vance to create covers for the Spatterlight editions of Jack's works. Some of these illustrations were based on my original designs for the Tschai portfolio.

Published : 11:18 AM - Aug 03, 2019

MikeTransreal

Hi David, welcome, and thanks for clarifying a tiny piece of Vance history for us!

Glad your move into the film biz was successful but it's a bit of a shame that a second portfolio was never published...

Published : 11:35 AM - Aug 03, 2019

from: Tschai

Thanks, Mike, glad to be here.

It took quite a few years before I could return to illustrating Jack's marvelous stories.

Throughout the 80's and early 90's, I would visit Jack and, with his input, sketch ideas for future illustrations. He was a great and generous soul.

Published : 11:59 AM - Aug 03, 2019

From: MikeTransreal

Great picture of you and Jack! And Adam Reith still in his flightsuit/overalls by the look of the 2nd illo...

Published : 7:52 PM - Aug 03, 2019

From: Edward Winskill

Great stuff! The instant I saw the above illustration with the girl I knew the exact scene, before I saw the tag line at the bottom....really fine.

I hope we hear more from you here, David.

Source : Jack Vance Message Board (tapatalk)

2020 John Vance Discussion about Jack Vance

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN VANCE II (APRIL 2020)

John H. Vance II is the only child of Jack and Norma Vance. And raised three children in the house that he and his father built with their own hands. He is now an “empty-nester” living in the old house with his fiancé, four cats and a dog (and the house remains a work in progress).

John has worked actively with fans to preserve and promote his father's work, starting with Paul Rhoads in 1999, an association which led to publication of a subscription-funded set of 44 volumes known as the Vance Integral Edition, now sought after by collectors and hardcore fans alike. John manages his father's legacy through the publishing company Spatterlight Press LLC.

John made his career designing and operating submersible systems and other marine equipment.

Robert Matthew Knuckles: Vance's "Dying Earth" is often cited as the inspiration for the Magic System of earlier Editions of Dungeons & Dragons. How did he feel about the level of influence he had on such a phenomenally popular game and its many imitators?

He was hardly aware of it. After a letter or two with Gary Gygax at the start he had little feedback, and of course zero income from the situation—so he had no way of knowing.

Aldo Defraites: My question is this: When will Night Lamp be released on Kindle? Great book! Loved it

Aldo, you can purchase and download .epub or .prc files of *Night Lamp* right now, on jackvance.com under our Spatterlight Press imprint. The story should also be up on Amazon soon, along with our POD edition of the story.

Donovan S. Brain: What's your favorite footnote?

Dad had fun with footnotes, and a lot of peripheral story-telling went into the small fonts. But with so many to choose from I don't honestly have a favorite; I do reread the work frequently though and will try to sift one out!

Koen Vyverman offers this morsel from *Night Lamp*, and it's a standout:

Unspiek, Baron Bodissey, a philosopher of Old Earth and elsewhere, and creator of a philosophical encyclopaedia of twelve volumes, entitled Life, was especially scathing in regard to what he called 'hyper-didacticism', meaning the employment of abstractions a half-dozen stages removed from reality to justify some pseudo-profound intellectualism. Toward the end of his life he was excommunicated from the human race by the Assembly of Egalitarians. Baron Bodissey's comment was succinct: "The point is moot."

To this day the most erudite thinkers of the Gaeen Reach ponder the significance of the remark.

Mike Garber: To what did Jack credit for his remarkable talents for dialogue?

Dad generally would not discuss writing, so we have to guess answers to questions like this. I myself would postulate that Vancian dialogue arose as a byproduct of dad's word-craft rather than any stylistic intent on his part. He worked consistently at polish and economy, trimming and arranging phrases for clarity and impact in the simplest constructions he could find. Dialogue might emerge from this way of writing having an arch, elegant flavor, possibly? It's true also that he had a mischievous sense of humor, and it may simply have amused him that every character, scoundrel and muck-spattered peasant should converse with elegance!

John Grayshaw: What stories did he tell you about WWII and being in the Merchant Marines? What did he say about working in Pearl Harbor just a month before it was attacked?

Dad did not see combat (and was never torpedoed, despite the suggestions we see on some dust covers). He spent the war chugging back and forth across the Pacific aboard Liberty ships. Anecdotes are best in his own words, which you can read in his autobiography *This Is Me, Jack Vance*—but one of my

favorites concerns a distilling apparatus he built in the forward compartment of one of the ships. For a period the still was employed to create successfully stimulating beverages, using scrap fruit taken from the mess, but when the skipper eventually found out he took a dim view and placed a seal on the locker to preserve evidence for prosecution at the end of the crossing. Dad sweated bullets for fear of being jailed once the ship reached port, but in the end was saved by a technicality. The skipper broke the seal to exhibit the enormity to peers ashore before legal processes had started, and the evidence was considered contaminated so could not be used for prosecution. Thus Dad was saved the inconvenience of doing time.

Another incident concerned Dad's habit of practicing cornet in the bows during watch, while the skipper cocked a wondering ear to the tentative strains and trills which drifted back to the bridge. Dad's eyesight was poor, so his watch-keeping was probably not of much use anyway.

At Pearl Harbor, he enjoyed the beauty of the place but felt no love for his job in the Navy, having been demoted several times due to incompetence, to the point where his job was degaussing hulls, a strenuous activity dragging heavy copper cables through dark nether regions of vessels below the waterline. He got himself out of Honolulu a month before the attack. In retrospect he felt extremely lucky to have gotten out when he did, or as he put it—"he might never have left".

John Grayshaw: Who are some of the writers your father grew up reading?

Robert W. Chambers

Edgar Rice Burroughs

L. Frank Baum

Lord Dunsany

Amazing Stories, Weird Tales (Seabury Quinn, H. P. Lovecraft, C. L. Moore, Clark Ashton Smith) Jeffery Farnol

Kenneth Grahame (The Wind in the Willows)

Adam J. Meek/Richard Philips: I'd like to know what Vance Sr. read for pleasure?

P. G. Wodehouse	M. M. Kaye
Erle Stanley Gardner	Mary Stewart
Dick Francis	Victoria Holt
Georges Simenon	Phyllis Whitney
Robert B. Parker	Anya Seton
Robert Barnard	Donna Leon
M. C. Beaton	Deborah Crombie
Ruth Rendell	Lawrence Sanders
P. D. James	Vincent Lardo
Agatha Christie	Bill Crider
Patricia Wentworth	Hugh Pentecost
Marjorie Allingham	Erle Stanley Gardner
Ellis Peters	A. B. Cunningham
E. X. Ferrars	Jonathan Kellerman
E. X. Giroux	Tony Hillerman
Rhys Bowen	Arthur Upfield
Patricia Moyes	Philip R. Craig
Dorothy Sayers	Ross Macdonald
Dorothy Simpson	John D. Macdonald
Georgette Heyer	John Dickson Carr

John Grayshaw: I've seen interviews where your father said he hadn't read science fiction or fantasy since he was a kid? Was that true? And how did that effect his work?

He did not read F or SF as an adult, nor did he re-read his own work. He was also not a movie-goer and so didn't participate much in popular culture from the 60's onward. He did see the first Star Wars movie however, in 1977, which he enjoyed (though he thought the lightsabers were silly).

We could theorize insularity made his work "more original," though he was individualistic enough that he'd probably not have been swayed by another's work in any case. Who can say?

John Grayshaw: Did your father have favorites of his works?

I believe that he was quietly happy with all of his later work, though he explicitly disclaimed what he referred to as "his early junk", referring to more amateur work from the 50's. In later years, *Lyonesse*, *Cadwal* and *Night Lamp* were standouts. So much time went by after he wrote *Emphyrio*, *Durdane*, *Demon Princes*, *Planet of Adventure*, *Rhialto* and the later *Cugel* tales that he started to lose track of it.

If pressed to identify one absolute favorite, I think he would have chosen *Lyonesse*. *Cugel* was the character he enjoyed writing the most, Navarth a close second.

Andrew ten Broek: Maybe another obvious question for John Vance II, but his father wrote quite a few stories. Did he ever read some of them to you as a child?

Not a single one, in fact. But he and my mother did both read other things to me; the usual Beatrix Potter, Thornton Burgess, Oz, *Wind in the Willows* and so on.

Blaine Savini: Obvious question...Which of your father's works is your favorite...not necessarily his best...and why?

I can't identify a single favorite because he wrote in different styles. I would point to *Strange People*, *Queer Notions* among the mysteries, or either of the Joe Bain titles. *Lyonesse*, *Rhialto*, or the later adventures of *Cugel* are brilliant

of course. Among SF titles I've returned often to *Maske: Thaery*, *Showboat World*, and *Wyst*. "Dodkin's Job" amuses me... *The Dragon Masters* is superb, of course, "The Moon Moth" as well. *Gold and Iron* (*Slaves of the Klau*, first published as *Planet of the Damned*) is gritty and powerful. There is much to choose from.

John Grayshaw: Was your dad's writing a significant part of your family life? What I mean is was it talked about, part of dinner table conversation, and so on, or was it regarded as just dad's job?

Writing took place practically every day, wherever we were. Both parents were involved, the work permeated our lives. The names of other authors were familiar, publishers and agents, fans who went on to become writers and so on; many I never met but familiarity made them all feel part of the family. Talk of correspondence, deals, editing, checks in the mailbox or poste restante, the sound of my mother's typewriter were always in the air. In old photographs I like to search for Dad's clipboard, fountain pens, or inks, which may be found in a surprising number of images.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have any good writing advice?

His basic approach was to never use a fancy word when an ordinary word would do; be concise, use words effectively and efficiently; let every sentence move the story forward. Keep your personal voice out of the story; the author should be invisible at all times.

John Grayshaw: He wrote both fantasy and science fiction stories, so what did he say or feel about the differences/similarities between the two?

We never discussed this.

John Grayshaw: What are some of your fondest memories of your father and what are some of the funniest memories?

Funny memories tend toward the memorable misadventure, like the time dad fell off a dock into San Francisco Bay carrying our camera. Or when he tumbled down the hillside with our trash can, late one summer eve.

Dad was 46 when I was born (my mom was 35). He was never a prankster, mischief maker, outdoorsman, or athlete. He did not goof-off physically. Conversational humor for him was usually facetious and often highly so. His company was staid, from my point of view. I was the tolerant recipient of many lectures. But I was a good kid, and he and my mother were both kind, generous and indulgent with me. I have fond, sentimental memories of my entire childhood in fact.

The lasting impressions I have of my dad are bittersweet and difficult to articulate. Rather than specific moments or events, the older I get the more I treasure what I can only think of as his “spirit”. Life and existence, to him, were an impossible gift of inexpressible magnitude. He made me appreciate what I have, and inspired me to make the most of it.

John Grayshaw: Vance traveled a lot. Tahiti, South Africa, Italy, Kashmir. Did you travel with him?

Dad travelled around the Pacific during his stint in the Merchant Marine, before he was married in '46, then with my mother before I was born, into Europe and Morocco in 1951-52 and 1957 from San Francisco via the Panama Canal, Mexico in 1953 with Frank and Bev Herbert. In 1964 when I was 3 years old, they set out around the world to the west, but returned to California from Sydney when my mother contracted hepatitis (probably while in Tahiti). In 1969 we toured Europe in our VW convertible and spent 16 months from Ireland as far east as Istanbul, returning home with the car on a freighter as far as Panama, wrapping up with a detour into Colombia to visit friends before turning north to drive through Central America and Mexico home to California. In 1973 we set off again around the world (not driving), this time to the east, and made it around in 13 months. Travels continued after that but were less ambitious, to France, Australia, Corsica, England. For some of the later ventures I was in my teens and stayed home watching the house and pets. In 1993 I traveled South America for 4 months with a friend.

Ben Sheppard: One of the recurring features of Jack Vance's works was the intricate and exotic societies of the inhabitants of other worlds, very often human colonies, with no memory of cultural affiliation to Earth. Did the countries that he visited influence this, and if there is one, which country influenced him the most?

Dad wrote mysteries after traveling to North Africa (*The Man In the Cage*), French Polynesia (*The Deadly Isles*), Italy (*Strange People, Queer Notions*), and Central America (*The Dark Ocean*). Those travels definitely informed atmospheres and depictions. *The House on Lily Street* takes place in Berkeley and Oakland during the 50's, and *The View From Chickweed's Window* in San Francisco, both areas my dad knew well. Beyond that, he scattered nuggets of experience and intuition throughout the matrices of his imaginative extrapolations.

No country had greater effect on dad though than his homeland, the United States of America, whose dynamism and can-do nature was reflected in the attitudes of many of his protagonists.

***John Grayshaw: How involved were you in the Vance Integral Edition?
What an undertaking!***

I was nominally President of the project, but the role was symbolic. Even in my thirties I was a somewhat shy kid, so I kept my head down, did the books and acted as purser, trying to stay out of the way mostly, which for the most part I succeeded in doing. It was indeed an undertaking, and for the last year or two when egos crashed and factions lay waste across newsletters and message boards, we held our breath to see whether we'd finish, or need to send everyone's money back. There were some grim moments. Enough to say that we were never more relieved than when the last books were shipped, and people could go back to their own lives.

But all said and done, the significance of the VIE cannot be overstated. Dad's work was largely out of print and, like that of most other authors of his generation, on the verge of foundering for lack of commercial interest. If not for the foresight, persistence and gigantic effort of Paul Rhoads, and the hundreds of volunteers who pitched in thousands of precious hours, Vance might be no more than another footnote in the golden era of SF.

The VIE must have been one of the first, if not THE first large crowd-sourced project ever.

The project pleased collectors and commanded the respect of our commercial publishing partners, but other benefits came from the digital text archive which was left after the books were delivered. VIE texts have been used

in every English-language Vance publication since then, and in some fresh foreign translations as well.

VIE texts are the basis of the e-book and POD offerings of our self-produced imprint, Spatterlight Press.

John Grayshaw: The way Vance wrote so beautifully and so detailed about alien languages, I wondered how many Earth languages did he speak?

Dad's family spoke German around the house, and so he did as well as a child. But as an adult he was fluent only in English. He knew a smattering of German, Spanish and French, and could thrash his way through simple constructions when the need arose.

John Grayshaw: Did you go with your father to science fiction conventions? Any memories of these?

Dad didn't go to conventions often, in fact ever—unless he was Guest of Honor. It wasn't obvious, but the truth is he was a bit bashful and prone to fumbling in the spotlight. And he didn't feel he had very much in common with some of the typical attendees. I went with him to one in Metz, France, around 1980 or so, also one in Melbourne Australia in the early 80's. It was fun to be wined and dined.

John Grayshaw: What was your father's friendships with Frank Herbert? Any stories about it?

Frank first met my parents in 1953 in Kenwood, California where my parents were renting a picturesque farmhouse among oak trees with a big field nearby which dad used to fly enormous hand-built kites. Frank was a reporter then for the Santa Rosa Press Democrat and came out to interview dad for an article which appeared with the title "Science Fiction Author is UFO Expert". They became friendly and the families went on to share adventures over the years.

Frank and Bev with Bruce and Brian joined my mom and dad on an expedition to Chapala, Mexico in late 1953 where they rented an apartment together and set up a "writer's household". Each day a flag was hoisted at a particular hour and the kids had to keep quiet so writers could concentrate. In

the early 60s Frank partnered with my dad and Poul Anderson to build a 30' houseboat for use in the San Joaquin River delta, which was used to anchor out in the sloughs among the tules, drink beer, listen to music and argue politics and philosophy. When the houseboat sank Frank lost interest, but Poul and my dad soldiered on and raised the boat using 55-gallon drums, slings and an air compressor.

Dad shared an anecdote regarding the time Frank told him of an idea he had for a story, set on a desert planet where, "They mine something called Spice!". Dad assured Frank that the book would not sell.

When the Herberts moved to Port Townsend the families drifted apart, but remained in touch until Bev died, then Frank.

John Grayshaw: What was your father's friendship with Poul Anderson? Any stories about it?

After Poul died dad described him as the friend he admired, respected and revered more than any other. Dad could be fickle in friendships but Poul was honest, staunch, a gentleman and simply a fine human being. His mother Astrid was beloved by us all. Dad had a prickly relationship with Karen, who undoubtedly thought he was a pain in the neck; still, the families enjoyed many occasions together, expeditions, trips aboard the houseboat, vibrant dinners full of wine, tasty food, personalities, music and argument. Good times.

John Grayshaw: Other than Herbert and Anderson did he have other close friends in the writing profession?

Mom and dad were acquainted with many other authors, if not necessarily close. Herbert and Anderson were closest through the years, especially Anderson. Beyond that, they were friendly with Ursula Le Guin, Reg Brettner, Avram Davidson and Alan Nourse. Dad spent some time with Charlie Brown and the early Locus gang. In the 1980's we met Terry Dowling, who remained close.

John Grayshaw: Are there any unpublished Vance works in drawers or archives somewhere or is everything published?

We do have scraps of poetry, some youthful short stories, a lot of correspondence, travel journals and so on, but everything else of significance has now been published.

John Grayshaw: Do you know of any future adaptations of your father's works in TV or movies?

That dad was never “discovered” by the film industry has always been disappointing. Dad used to dream that “lightning would strike” one day, but it never came in his lifetime. *Bad Ronald* was made into a movie for TV in 1974, and *The Man in the Cage* was the basis of an episode of Boris Karloff’s “Thriller” series in 1961. Dad also wrote for Captain Video in the 50’s. *The Demon Princes* was optioned a few years ago for a TV pilot, but the pilot was never made. There’s been talk lately regarding *Planet of Adventure*, *Lyonesse* or a *Dying Earth* story. But the fire has gone out on everything with covid. So the short answer to the question must therefore be, unfortunately, “no”.

Dad’s work would do magnificently in the hands of the right group. We hope fervently that, one day, “lightning” may still strike.

John Grayshaw: Was your father a writer who sailed or a sailor who wrote?

Influenced by the blue Pacific during his time in the Merchant Marine, Dad always dreamed of owning a sailboat and cruising the South Pacific. This and the general topic of boats was always a favorite topic around here, at dinner table or over drinks. In fact during the late 70’s and into the 80’s dad owned a string of boats, starting with a 17’ fiberglass sloop he gave to me for my sixteenth birthday, setting me loose without ceremony on SF Bay, culminating with a 45’ ketch he named *Hinano* after the Tahitian beer. Our income could not however support both owning a boat and constructing a home at the same time, and the house came first. So, the dream was abandoned. I enrolled at Cal, and we sold *Hinano* owing the bank as much as when we started.

Dad was a writer who dreamed of cruising, but never got to do it.

John Grayshaw: I know music was another of his hobbies. Was he passionate about it? Did he write music?

Dad was absolutely passionate about music—so long as the topic was focused more or less narrowly on traditional jazz, which he was wild about. I've heard recordings of the Turk Murphy band taken in the fifties where I'm sure I can hear him shouting in the audience. Music was always a feature in this household.

He enjoyed classical music as well, but not to the same degree. He didn't write any music but mentioned dreaming compositions in his sleep.

He was competent with the harmonica and in the 70's taught himself to play the ukulele, strumming the old standards with four string chords. He accompanied himself singing and playing the kazoo with gusto. He would provide a vigorous, even boisterous performance for anyone interested, until the end of his days.

In 2007 dad was introduced by Paul Rhoads to a fan named Kevin Boudreau. Kevin became one of dad's closest friends in those late years, when they teamed up to record music. Tuesdays without fail Kevin would show up to work through tracks with dad, which he would take home and carefully stitch together. After a few years they put together a collection entitled "The Go For Broke Jazz Band". The music is idiosyncratic but the performances heartfelt; dad felt like a star.

Glimpses of music turn up here and there in dad's writing. My favorite is in *Gold and Iron (Slaves of the Klau, Planet of the Damned)* when Barch takes Komeitk Lelianr on a date to see Turk Murphy at Hambone Kelly's. The sensations which Barch goes through once the rhythm begins to drive are assuredly the same dad felt himself.

John Grayshaw: What were some of your father's hobbies other than writing, sailing, and playing music?

Dad fell in and out of love with all sorts of ideas and activities, like kite flying; stargazing; swimming, and boating. But his most persistent interest was in ceramics, a subject he indulged in with my mother early in marriage. They had a storefront on College Avenue in Berkeley called "Ceramic Center," with a studio with kiln, wheel, and glazing supplies. It was a losing endeavor commercially but always a magic moment when they opened the cooling kiln to see richly-colored ware inside.

This enthusiasm provided a backdrop for *The Potters of Firsk*, also wherever glazes were mentioned, for example in *The View From Chickweed's Window*.

He and my mother amassed a small collection of blue and white pottery from Portugal and picked up specimens of different styles, wherever they travelled.

John Grayshaw: Did your father have a writing routine he stuck to?

In early days (before I was born) he would write whenever he had the opportunity, which continued into the early 70's while he worked during the day as a carpenter. In those days he would arrive home dirty and sweaty, bathe, shave, slap on Lilac Vegetal or Bay Rum, put on a robe and slippers then sit down with clipboard and fountain pens to write usually with a spritzer, highball or glass of red wine near to hand. He would work until late in the evening, then retire to do the same thing the next day. My mother worked office jobs during that period and continued for years after he began writing full time. At home she would transcribe his handwritten folio into typed manuscript, ready for a subsequent edit or to be sent off to the publisher.

Once he gave up carpentering for hire, Dad spent more hours with the clipboard, sitting in one of our green club chairs with his legs on a footstool he built for himself, equipped with a cushion my mother upholstered for him. He would take breaks to dig at the hillside making room for the construction of our house, using pick and shovel to hew out yard after yard of shale and dirt which he barrowed out to the fringe of the property and dumped downslope. From an early age I was engaged in this exercise as well. The house entered a burst of construction in the later 70's during which the final extension was built; when his eyesight deteriorated early in the 80's he stepped aside, and I took over *. After that he wrote more or less continuously, punctuated with bouts of listening to or playing music, socializing on the phone, listening to books-on-tape, or hoisting himself onto an exercise bicycle and peddling steadily for 20 or so minutes, a routine he kept daily for the rest of his life.

*One might think after all these decades the house would be complete, or nearly so; but due (at least in part) to the casual nature of construction in the early days, I must tear out and rebuild as often as not. So, the house remains an ongoing project!

John Grayshaw: Did being legally blind since the 1980s slow your father's writing down? Did it slow his travels or his enjoyment of some of his other interests?

Dad transitioned early to word-processing under DOS, at first relying on custom software to provide enormous fonts onscreen which he could still make out visually, supported by audio support from a text-to-speech processor called Accent. As time went by his vision diminished even farther and he relied more and more on Accent. Later he could not use a screen at all, and I kept a small monochrome monitor in the system only for maintenance.

The first story he wrote on the word processor was *The Green Pearl*. Considering what followed, blindness could not be said to have held him back, but eventually of course productivity did wane. *Ports of Call* and in particular *Lurulu* went through some serious cogs and gears to finish. Lack of vision was not the sole problem however as he was then diabetic, maybe running out of steam after many decades of work.

Travels were curtailed, but not entirely so long as Mom or I were present to guide him. Eventually we used a wheelchair to get him around outside the house, which was a great relief for us all. At home I installed rails and other devices which he used to access his compact sleeping and toilet arrangements. When even travel became out of the question, he remained cheerfully engaged with friends and family around home.

John Grayshaw: What kind of research did your father do for his books?

Aside from travel we talked about earlier, whatever "research" he needed he accumulated during his youth by reading everything he could lay hands on. Personal experiences through the Depression and WWII also provided fuel for the fire. For most of his career, memory and experience gave him whatever he needed.

John Grayshaw: What is your father's legacy?

A large body of wonderful imaginative stories full of heroes, dastards, events and consequence. He is considered by many to be SF's premiere stylist, the best writer in science fiction.

A home to live in full of quirks and memories.

In a personal context, a way of seeing against the vast impersonal context of the physical Universe, how precious and rare a thing it is to be alive aware and cognizant; how foolish it is to fritter away time without care or heed, the lesson that we should live to the utmost, while we are privileged to be alive.

As follow-on, here are some interesting links.

There's a 1976 radio interview with dad here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FogkeDLMRA8&t=4s>

<https://archive.org/details/JackVanceInterviewOnHour25In1976>

or

<https://vancesque.net/audio/1976-Jack-Vance-radio-interview.mp3>

Dad sat on a panel at Norwescon in 2002. Three segments are here:

The Houseboat:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRRhbQ0JbRk>

Travelling:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6jyGlnel54>

Writing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djbmr0H_1BQ&ab_channel=Spatte_rlight

John Grayshaw—thanks for putting this together, and helping us to share and promote my dad's work.

All the best—John



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