



The Brave Free Men

Jack Vance

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Durdane is in the grip of the devilish Roguskhoi. Raping and pillaging in their lethal thrust to their heartland, they annihilate all who cross their path. With spirits sapped by years of silent tyranny, the men of Durdane stand impotent, their faceless leader a prisoner in his own palace. One man alone can save Durdane - the musician Gastel Etwane. But even he is unaware that worming through the land is a corruption more deadly than anything the Roguskhoi can inflict.

The Brave Free Men Details

Date : Published October 15th 1987 by Ace (first published 1973)

ISBN : 9780441072040

Author : Jack Vance

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy, Novels, Space, Space Opera



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George says

The problem I'm having with this series is that the quality of Vance's imagination seems to outstrip the quality of his prose. Shant is a fascinating set-up, the use of colour and the alternative semantics that go with it is a huge consideration. As is the government of the Anome and the alternatives posited. The mix of technologies, lost secrets along sied glass and crystal craft, the genetically engineered monsters of the Rugoshki and even the musical instruments described. In fact, there's way too much to fit into so short a book. Everything is rushed, to the points of heavy exposition at points, and major shifts in ideology are adopted for too quickly for plausibility. It's a shame, because the ideas, the stories being told here, are great.

Federico Kereki says

An enemy is vanquished, another enemy pops up, and you must keep reading on!

Jaro says

Read in VIE

Peter says

I'm a sucker for a weird subgenre of story- those about someone organizing and leading a small, unlikely army and overthrowing one or another long-held societal arrangement. Bonus points if it's ideologically simpatico — a revolutionary people's army, say — but I'll take it even if it's just private kingdom building. What can I say, I like a good story about delegation! Usually the prose is disappointing in these stories and the dorks who write them — often frustrated wannabe (or actual) military officers — can't restrain themselves from going on at tedious length about maneuvers across imaginary, indifferently-related maps. But I'll still give them a look when I see them.

The second installment of Jack Vance's "Durdane" series finds our hero, Gastel, organizing just such a force, the titular "Brave Free Men," to repel a rapacious horde of not-quite-orcs, the Roguskhoi, from destroying Shant. He has his work cut out for him. Shant has plenty of aristocrats (and killers) but no military tradition. The descendants of religious and ideological enthusiasts dumped onto a colony planet millennia ago, the inhabitants of its Shant's various cantons concern themselves with maintaining their various arbitrary cult rules and general societal stasis.

Anyone familiar with midcentury scifi knows much of what happens next. Gastel and the few men he can trust have to overcome the hokum and conservatism of their backward culture. They do this largely by freeing indentured servants and enlisting them in the titular army. There are various technical challenges to overcome, betrayals both suspected and real, people telling them Shant can't change and the heroes telling them it has to, etc.

What distinguishes Vance's take on this plot is skepticism of the enterprise. In the end, the mobilized people of Shant beat back the hordes. Gastel sets up a new government with a parliament (but with no house apportioned by population, I noticed!). But the big reveal in the end — where the Roguskhoi came from — reframes the whole existence of Shant. Without giving too much away, it's revealed that the hordes that almost destroyed the planet were somewhere between a joke and a speculative venture by powers much bigger and colder than anything Gastel can conjure up. If Shant is nothing but a dumping ground or playpen for amoral interstellar empires, then what larger purpose does change serve? Well, presumably we'll get some kind of answer in the third and last book. ****

<https://toomuchberard.wordpress.com/2...>

TJ says

The Brave Free Men was first published in 1972 in digest form in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Released in 1973 as a novel, this is the second book in the three volume Durdane Chronicles. It is a continuation of the story begun in The Anome and should be read after that book and not as a stand alone novel. This is the second time I have read this series and I liked each of the books even better after rereading. Although the three books are not the very finest Vance has written, I found them fascinating, easy to read and entertaining and recommended them to all Vance fans.

The first book, The Anome, introduced most of the characters and had interesting revelations about the government, customs and culture of Slant. The Brave Free Men is more action oriented, continuing the story but focusing more on getting the corrupt government to work properly and motivating the citizens to actively defend themselves against the invading Roguskhoi.

In The Brave Free Men the main protagonist, Gastel Etzwane, now has control over the Faceless Man and the government. He and his supporters must mobilize the entire country to defend themselves against the Roguskhoi who keep increasing the frequency and intensity of their attacks on the people of Shant. The Roguskhoi invade towns, killing all men and children and kidnapping the women. The citizens of Shant do not know where these monstrous humanoid creatures came from but suspect that a neighboring country might have created them from cloning to use as a weapon against the Shant.

A single Roguskhoi can handle ten equally armed men in combat, but the Roguskhoi have only simple weapons such as clubs so the challenge is to invent and manufacture new more technologically advanced weapons that can turn the odds in the fight against the Roguskhois. Slant has also been without any wars for over a thousand years and has no military or combat trained citizens. The whole country must now mobilize to defend against the invading Roguskhoi.

Rallying the citizens proves to be very difficult, however, because the people are extremely passive and have only known the dictatorial, highly centralized and controlled government of the Faceless Man who had total control over their lives but also protected them and kept things peaceful and crime free. When scientists, for example, are asked to invent new more advanced weapons to supplement their swords and crossbows, the scientists want to know exactly what weapons the Faceless Man wants. They are not used to thinking independently or being innovative or creative and expect detailed instructions on how to proceed. The citizens are used to the total control and protection of the Faceless Man and do not know how to take initiative, organize or defend themselves. Many of them are in situations similar to indentured servants with such low wages and high expenses that almost no workers ever pay off their debts to earn their freedom.

The Brave Free Men is easy to read, interesting and bristling with action. There is enough resolution at the end of it that the third volume, The Asutra, could be considered optional reading. But I found The Asutra to be an intriguing continuation of the story and the most satisfying of the three books so advise reading it next. I think the Durdane Chronicles are underappreciated by some Vance fans because Vance created some marvelous works of genius that tower over almost everything else in the genre. I rated The Brave Free Men at a 4.

Rog Petersen says

An heroic tale of bureaucratic administration restructuring.

Ivan Stoner says

God dang Jack Vance is good. Who else could casually throw in a really worthwhile interchange about individuality vs. traditionalism like this?

Dystar said: "Without my torc I would be mad with joy."

Mialambre seemed astounded both by the .concept and by Dystar's response. "How can this be? The torc is your representation, the signal of your responsibility to society."

"I recognize no such responsibility," said Dystar. "Responsibility is the debt of people who take. I do not take, I give. Thereafter my responsibility is gone."

"Not so," exclaimed Mialambre. "This is an egotistical fallacy! Every man alive owes a vast debt to millions—to the folk around him who provide a human ambience, to the dead heroes who gave him his thoughts, his language, his music; to the technicians who built the spaceships which brought him to Durdane. The past is a precious tapestry; each man is a new thread in the continuing weave; a thread by itself is without meaning or worth."

Dystar gave generous acquiescence. "What you say is truth. I am at fault. Nonetheless, my torc is unwelcome; it coerces me to the life I would prefer to live by my own free will."

Daniel says

The Brave Free Men stands as a libel against oppression and it is when Gastel Etzwane is solidified as either a hero and a wise leader. It tells the story of Gastel Etzwane to either free Durdane of bizarre man-like alien beings Roguskhoi threat and its ascension as a leader and reformer. The premise discussed by Vance is admirable: what could lead the people of Durdane to victory against these alien beings is the sense of freedom which catalyzes the individual actions previously hampered by the oppressive power of the Anome.

D.L. Morrese says

This sparsely told tale is the sequel to The Faceless Man (AKA The Anome) and the second book of the Durdane trilogy. The books are no longer in print but Kindle editions can still be purchased. The copy I have (shown here <http://dlmorrese.wordpress.com/2012/0...>) is a limited hardcover edition published in 1983 that I found at my local library. Apparently, they are quite rare.

This book continues the adventures of Gatzel Etzwane as he tries to defend his country, Shant, from the mutant Roguskhoi. Unfortunately, the culture and government of Shant, as they currently exist, are ill equipped to address the situation, so Etzwane must first take control of the government, revamp society, restructure the bureaucracy, develop new technology, and oust the Roguskhoi -- and he has only 251 pages to do so. Vance manages to have him pull it off believably, which is quite an accomplishment.

The way he does it may not appeal to some modern readers, though. He summarizes much of what happens, 'telling' the story rather than 'showing' it. He restricts the point of view to a single character, Etzwane, and therefore relates much of what occurs in either narrative or exposition.

The plot is interesting, and the setting and characters are imaginative and well conceived. I recommend it.

Howard says

13

Goutham says

This is not my favorite Vance book (that honor goes to Eyes of the Overworld), not by a long shot but it shares so many characteristics that make Vance's books such a joy to read. Every Jack Vance book I've read demonstrate such fantastic knowledge about so many aspects of the world and this book is no exception. You need only read Vance's descriptions of the kind of music his characters play or the kind of dishes available at the many inns to get a glimpse of how much you might be missing out on in this world. The behavior, motivations and reactions of each of his characters are explained so concisely and masterfully that I dont think anything can be added/subtracted to make it better. I dont know of any author who is better at analyzing the range of human emotions than JV.

Rog Harrison says

Probably only the third time I have read this as I struggled to get a copy although I had copies of the first and third books in the series. I eventually found a remaindered USA copy for 22p in Woolco back in the 1980s!

This starts where "The Anome" finished so you do need to read both books. It's a good read and things are not always as they seem as the protagonist finds out towards the end!

Ellis Knox says

Classic tale of rebellion.

Unsung Stories says

The problem I'm having with this series is that the quality of Vance's imagination seems to outstrip the quality of his prose. Shant is a fascinating set-up, the use of colour and the alternative semantics that go with it is a huge consideration. As is the government of the Anome and the alternatives posited. The mix of technologies, lost secrets along sied glass and crystal craft, the genetically engineered monsters of the Rugoshki and even the musical instruments described. In fact, there's way too much to fit into so short a book. Everything is rushed, to the points of heavy exposition at points, and major shifts in ideology are adopted for too quickly for plausibility. It's a shame, because the ideas, the stories being told here, are great.

Karl says

Volume II in Vance's Durdane series, consisting of three interconnected novels, written over a period, between 1971 and 1973.

The Durdane trilogy comprising THE FACELESS MAN (a.k.a. THE ANOME), THE BRAVE FREE MEN, and THE ASUTRA.
