

The Moon Moth (Graphic Novel)

Jack Vance , Humayoun Ibrahim (Illustrations)

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A classic science fiction tale finds new life in this graphic novel adaptation.

A fascinating blend of murder mystery and high-concept science fiction, *The Moon Moth* has long been hailed as one of Jack Vance's greatest works. And now this intricately crafted tale is available in glorious full color as a new graphic novel. Edwer Thissell, the new consul from Earth to the planet Sirene, is having all kinds of trouble adjusting to the local culture. The Sirenese cover their faces with exquisitely crafted masks that indicate their social status. Thissell, a bumbling foreigner, wears a mask of very low status: the Moon Moth. Shortly after Thissell arrives on Sirene, he finds himself embroiled in a an unsolved murder case made all the more mysterious by the fact that since everyone must always wear a mask, you can never be sure who you're dealing with.

The Moon Moth (Graphic Novel) Details

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Author : Jack Vance , Humayoun Ibrahim (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review The Moon Moth (Graphic Novel) for online ebook

Raina says

Vance is one brainy guy. The language and concepts here are amazing.

Basically, it's a space future, and there's this planet where everyone wears masks, 24/7. Masks denote status and there are strict, potentially lethal consequences of getting the etiquette wrong. As if that wasn't enough, all speech on this world is accompanied by instrumental music, played by the speaker on hand instruments carried around on everyone's belts.

Add to all this a government agent trying to catch a fugitive without being able to see the faces of anyone around him. Crazy crazy complex.

This was originally a short story published serially in the 60s. The illustrations of this graphic adaptation have a nonwestern quality to them. The masks the characters wear look like they're from ancient south american or southeast asian mythology. Before the body of the story, the volume includes an essay on Vance and his significance originally run in the New York Times Magazine.

While I admire the sophistication of this, I can't say that I was ever sucked into the story. It's a bit too cerebral for that. A bit too unfamiliar. It has qualities similar to The Arrival by Shaun Tan. What a great way to get a taste of Vance's work, though.

Jake Swanney says

Summary of The Moon Moth:

The new consul for Earth, Edwer Thissel, goes to the planet Sirene and has difficulty adapting to the culture there. It is class based, where different classes have different masks they have to wear, and different instruments they used to communicate with.

Edwer then learns of an assassin that has landed on Sirene, but he is unable to find out who it is due to the masks. He manages to find the assassin, but the assassin unmasks Edwer. Edwer turns it around to his advantage, and the assassin is killed by the natives.

Picture address: <http://i.gr-assets.com/images/S/compr...>

The style of art in this book is an interesting choice, but Vance makes it work. It is full color, and there are multiple instances where the sound coming from the instruments is represented as colors and shapes.

I personally enjoyed this graphic novel, however I feel like there were places where the plot simply advanced too fast. At some point it was easy to lose track of what was happening at a particular scene, causing me to have to reread the previous page or two for context.

The main character, Edwer, changes immensely throughout this comic. At the beginning he knew none of the customs of Sirene, but by the end he had become a very influential person on the planet.

Yes, I recommend this book to people who enjoy sci-fi. There are definitely some hard sci-fi notes in there, and is a fairly heavy read for its size.

Becky says

I enjoyed the creativity of this piece, and the artwork. It put forth the kind of imagery that is likely to stay with me. I was a bit distracted by the singing speech, as it was set up to convey subtlety of power differences between characters, and I knew I was missing out on the conveyance of this, because I didn't have a handle on what all of the instruments meant. Use of the clapping blocks for talking to servants was the only one that stuck - I can imagine lots of people from my past who would have chosen the blocks to talk to me!

I think I will have to explore Jack Vance further, given this was my first introduction to his work and once I get used to wherever he's coming from, I might really enjoy his work.

TJ says

This is not Jack Vance's great short story, "The Moon Moth." It is an adaptation by Humayoun Ibrahim. Excerpts from Vance's short story are included in this graphically illustrated book. If you have read and love the short story, then you might want to read this adaptation. I do not recommend it by itself, however, and doubt that it was intended for those who are not already familiar with the short story. The illustrations are cartoon like but seem fine, although I already had my own imagined images after having read the story about four times in the past month. My rating: 3 "Liked it." My rating for the short story was a 5.

Logan Young says

This is the first time I have read Jack Vance (I realize this is an adaptation of his short story into a graphic novel) but I really enjoyed it. The world he created was so unique with a population that had such a distinct culture, and it was pretty miraculous how the artist was able to pull off how this society communicates exclusively through music. The art is pretty cool as well, not like mainstream comics at all. The plot itself was solid too, no complaints on that.

Perhaps my one complaint is that at times it moved a bit too fast. There were instances where I was reading and I suddenly didn't understand what was going on and had to turn back a couple pages and reread what just happened. Also since you never see the character's faces, just their masks (which they change from time to time) it was a bit hard for me to keep them straight. I'm sure it was easier to do that in the short story, which I will make sure to read eventually since I enjoyed this graphic novel so much.

jenni says

an illustrated adventure in cultural incompetency

Austin says

this book was a very interesting book I can't really explain this book it is weird. but I did enjoy it you have to read it to try to understand it. I liked it tho

I gave it a 3 stars because it was hard to follow nut it was still good it is about this other life on a different planet made of people with masks on. I would recommend this book to someone who likes a weird story.

Jared Millet says

Vance's "The Moon Moth" was an interesting choice for a graphic novel adaptation. The story hinges on concepts that lend themselves to the graphical format, such as the masks that all the characters wear, and ideas that don't - namely the music that permeates all Sirenese conversation. That Ibrahim managed to pull the latter trick off is no small feat. His art style leans more toward Spiegelman or McCloud than that of mainstream comics, which is appropriate for a story heavy on personal interaction and light on action scenes. The only thing you lose in such a translation are the sweeping alien vistas you'd expect on a waterworld where everyone lives on houseboats and traveling cities.

"The Moon Moth" does succeed in capturing the flavor of a Vance story, if not the language itself. This edition begins with a reprint of a long tribute piece to Vance that was originally published elsewhere. If you're not already a Vance devotee, skip it and just read the story, then come back to it at the end. Then track down the original story the book is based on and read that too.

First Second Books says

I initially read Jack Vance's short story 'The Moon Moth' when I was in high school; in talking to our editorial director about books we had read in childhood, it was great to find that he also remembered this story vividly.

Jack Vance is a spectacular world-builder; we're so pleased to be able to publish this book and give readers another way to come to his work.

Seth T. says

*[On Sirene, everyone who's anyone drives their own Noah's ark
(minus the two-by-twos of course)]*

Generally, the purpose of setting a story in a science fiction world meanders down one of two lanes. On the one hand, an author may hope to introduce in the reader's mind a critique of contemporary society, culture, or history by forcing a comparison of analogy. *A Brave New World*, *1984*, *Gattaca*, *Solaris*, even

Alien—these are stories whose goals are above and beyond the simple entertainment of the reader. These follow in the grand science-fiction tradition of giving readers easy tools with which to evaluate the current world-state by stripping the contemporary situation of its context. It's a time-honoured and noble pursuit.

The other option, less praise-worthy perhaps, is the simple use of science-fiction elements to decorate well-worn stories and make them seem fresh or exciting. *Star Wars*, *Predator*, *Treasure Planet*, *E.T.*, *Aliens*, or *Back to the Future*—there's nothing wrong with these stories in principle. They're fun and adventurous and make for an invigorating experience; but they're not exactly stories that couldn't exist successfully in non-science-fiction terms.

I have not read the works of Jack Vance—this *Moon Moth* adaptation is my introduction—but I hope his other works slide so neatly from these alternating taxonomies as well as *The Moon Moth* does. This isn't a work by which we examine our present culture's social ills; neither is it predictive, extrapolating out from some foreseeable future. And it doesn't even so much dance a thrilling adventure epic to save the world from the A.I. threat or span galaxies to watch the combat of empires unfold. It probably wouldn't make a great film (though a great film might be set in these fascinating climes). Instead, *The Moon Moth* seems more a development of possibilities solely for the sake of deducing the directions they might take a people.

The particular investigation at stake here is the quality and means of social communication if a civilization were to develop along a different, perhaps more elegant, vector. On Sirene, the world central to *The Moon Moth*, conversation is blatantly far from equitable. All discussion is embellished, pronounced, and finally given meaning through the use of instruments. Each instrument has a particular purpose, a goal through which status and intent is communicated. One instrument may convey wrath to a lesser member of the social hierarchy, while another when properly used may convey polite obsequience to a person of superior standing. Only the slave caste sings conversations unaccompanied by instrumentation, and that is a bare mark of their low station. Further complicating matters each citizen wears a mask, the make of which further codifies social station and directs which instruments should be played in conversation with each other citizen.

All interactions on Sirene are conducted according to the concept of personal honour. There is no currency beyond one's personal honour—or more properly, what personal honour one may convince others he possesses. A citizen may wear a grand mask if he has the honour to pull it off. A citizen may take goods of the finest craftsmanship if he has the honour that would allow him to do so. On Sirene fortune favours not merely the bold however, for overstepping one's honour may lead to a speedy decapitation. Foreigners, then, are at a distinct disadvantage on this world, and being an offworlder ambassador would be a trial of great magnitude for even the most quick-witted diplomat.

The Moon Moth is constructed as a sort of thriller, engaging a not-so-quick-witted ambassador as he tries to unearth a murderer whose face he cannot know—after all, on Sirene we all wear masks and may change our masks at will so long as we can keep up with the demands of the masquerade. While there is some excitement over protagonist Ser Thissel's dilemma as he tries to detect a man who may be undetectable, the plot is not the book's central joy. This is good because that avenue is rather thin and even as the narrative turns to its final twist, we recognize that the story may have only ever been an excuse for us to engage Vance's strange, intricate world. I was fine with the story, but Ser Thissel (nearly incompetent for much of the book) and reaching the climax were never my motivations for remaining in *The Moon Moth*'s grip.

Vance and his adapter, Humayoun Ibrahim, have crafted a world that I've returned to over and over again in thought over the several weeks since reading *The Moon Moth*. Not only is Vance's world fascinating, but Ibrahim's visual translation of the instrumental idea leaves me wondering how the story could have ever succeeded in bare prose. While I generally found Ibrahim's figure-drawing a weakness, the manner by which he effortlessly demonstrates both the instrument being used and the technical proficiency with which it is being played is so winning that I can hardly imagine the story in any other form. Comparing Ser Thissel's lurching melodic incompetence with the natural musicianship of Sirene's natives is caught by readers at a glance and the story's purposes are never hindered for lack of craftsmanship on this score.

[In case you missed it, he's playing a violin with a sword. Badass!]

There are some bumps to the road, however, the chief of which is the natural difficulty in translating a foreign language for readers in such a way as to make the text flow effortlessly. Because *The Moon Moth* is chiefly concerned with the exploration of a music/status based language, converting that simply to wholly verbal expression would be inadequate. There is some learning curve demanded of readers and Ibrahim does what he can to help by providing at the book's frontmatter a visual glossary of several instruments, the sounds they make, and the social implications of using each instrument. For the first few exchanges readers will doubtlessly be turning back to this glossary as an aid to understanding. Due this break in the reading rhythm, one's first experience of the text may feel staggered and a bit too staccato. I felt some of this myself but found a second reading to be far less punctuated and discovered a rhythmic sense that I missed on my first read-through.

[This is basically like the inside cover of Vietnamerica that you keep flipping back to so you can tell who's who throughout the story]

I'd be tempted to understand that kind of difficulty in the reading experience as a knock against the work, but in *The Moon Moth's* case I think the complexity of the idea merits the work it requires of the reader. As I said above, I've come back again and again over the intervening weeks to the concepts Vance and his interlocutor present in this small book. It's such a fascinating excursion into what makes a language and how language can direct a people that I can't help but enjoy it, despite any initial reservations I may have held. Ibrahim presents a colourful, intricate world—one only partially of his own making, but one worth our time nonetheless.

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Gabriel says

[disclosure: I won this in a Goodreads First Reads Contest]
So that's how you write a mystery short story!

Actually, I still don't know (well, from this book anyway. I have other examples if I decide to read them). And that's the only real problem with this adaptation. Too many of the clues are glossed over in a couple of panels. The musical instruments used with dialogue (a cool SF trick that added lots of flavor to the tale and worked really well in the graphic novel format) were not all included in the front page, or at least the

variations used were unclear.

All in all, this was a neat story with a cool world idea (no money, just your prestige denoted by your mask, your deeds and the instruments used to talk with) retold with wonderful drawings. I do feel (like a few other reviewers have said) that quite a bit was cut out of the story to make it fit. Actually, let me amend that. I feel Humayoun Ibrahim, in choosing his panels, thought he was telling a lot more of the story through the art than he really was. There were quite a few details that were lost on me, as someone who has not read Jack Vance.

And no, the 12 page "sing the praises of Vance" essay that introduces this graphic adaptation didn't really get me interested in reading his stuff. I might pick up a book somewhere at sometime, but I'm not rushing out anytime soon. "The Moon Moth" was an interesting short ... but if I want awesome SF that is written with a literate bent, I'll just read Samuel R. Delany.

Christina Scholz says

Well. There was an attempt at adapting Vance's story into a graphic novel. I would have appreciated a style that was at least a little more about detail, especially when things like "intricate carved panels" are mentioned (while the artist is showing plain surfaces in the picture). But it is plot-wise that this adaptation suffers the most. The murder mystery is introduced quite far into the book - and then reduced to a Cliff Notes-style summary. None of the ironic humor and none of the mounting suspense survive. Also, when I read the original short story, I had this impression that unexpected plot-twists were lurking behind every turn of the page. Sadly, this graphic novel can't hold up with the joy of reading Vance. Not by far.

Monique says

I bought **Moon Moth** through bookoutlet.ca for a crazy cheap price. I enjoyed most titles from :01 (First Second) and the price was too good to pass up, so I feel pretty forgiving right from the start.

Moon Moth was good, but not great.

Adapted from a short story by Jack Vance, **Humayoun Ibrahim** does his best to translate a rather complicated story into a more visual format. I instantly loved the thick lines and solid colours of his illustrations. The clumsy panel transitions, inconsistent pacing and inability to draw a person running in a realistic fashion are a bit of a problem. While I enjoyed the vitality, personality and vibrancy of his style (so much potential here), it's pretty evident that Ibrahim is still developing as an artist.

Jack Vance's story is creative and humorous. It feels as though he's trying to say more than what is immediately evident. From the foreword written by Carlo Rotella, you'd think that Jack Vance was some sort of underdiscovered genius. And perhaps he is. If this is a taste of his work, I'd be interested to find some of his books.

There was a lot I enjoyed about the graphic adaptation of Moon Moth, but also a lot I found clumsy and awkward. It's hard to recommend, but if you find it for \$2 (like I did) then I'd say grab it and give it a go. I'd be interested to see more of Ibrahim's work, especially if he has improved upon some of his pacing and illustration mistakes.

Anthony says

What can I say about Jack Vance? Not a thing. The forward to this graphic novel by Carlo Rotella entitled “The Genre Artist” (originally published in Time magazine in 2009) extols the virtues of a Jack Vance story because of his way of creating an occasion and opulent speech in what some might consider just lowly genre fiction. I could not attest to any of this having never read a Jack Vance novel. Then out of the blue comes “The Moon Moth” a graphic novel adaptation “Based on the Classic Short Story,” and I begin to believe that their might be something to the praise heaped upon him.

In this story, Edwer Thissell has been assigned to be the new consular representative to the planet Sirene. Sirene is a place where everyone wears masks and everyone converses by singing with the accompaniment of various instruments. Every mask and every instrument used signify something about the user’s status in relation to others and it is with status, also known as Strakh that one gets what they need. Thissell threw himself into studying and preparation for his new post, but such endeavors did not truly prepare him for the odd customs and quick, harsh justice for missteps in custom. In addition to having to awkwardly stumble through the customs of this new planet he has received orders to apprehend an assassin who has made his way back to Sirene. This man is an Out-Worlder like Thissell, but in a world of masks he is going to be hard to find.

Based on the story premise and the dialogue I certainly now believe that Jack Vance is an unheralded master of words that transcend the sci-fi and mystery genre in which he writes. Just the idea of such a planet with such customs and the dialogue he creates for it speaks to a very imaginative and exacting mind.

What I still cannot speak to is Vance’s ability to set a scene. In this adaptation I am only getting Ibrahim’s take on Vance’s world. In that I am quite disappointed. What this story really requires in a graphic novel is greater detail and a more refined color palette. Just one example of why I say that is found on page 19 and 20. Thissell is preparing for life on Sirene and the computer is telling him about the planets ways; it educates him of their occupation with intricacy; their intricate craftsmanship, symbolism, language, and interpersonal relationships. On page 19 it refers to the intricately carved panels of the houseboats and the intricate symbolism of the masks they wear. These two items are visual in nature and therefore, visually, should be intricately rendered; however I did not find this to be the case. I appreciate simplicity in some graphic novels, but this story begged for more detail.

If nothing else, this graphic novel adaptation has moved me to want to read the original short story. And, maybe I missed it, but why hasn’t anyone made this into a movie?

Annise says

Some parts were too simplified and glossed over - it lost some of the effect from the story. Beautiful pictures and lovely illustrations of the masks, the dialogue boxes also were used creatively. I wish more emphasis was put on the instruments, though, and explained a bit more throughout the story as the narrator makes his faux-pas.

