



The Asutra

Jack Vance

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From the furthest borders of the Durdane, strange rumours are spreading. For in Caraz's land of exiles and murderers, deeds are being done more terrible than any of its most ruthless dwellers could commit. And so it is to the mountains of Caraz that Gastel Etwane must turn, certain in his heart that his old foe is not yet finished. And sure enough, amidst the rocky wastes there moves a menace whose horror the men of Durdane can scarce imagine. For as Gastel Etwane has long since guessed, their enemy, the monstrous Asutra, is simply not of their world...

The Asutra Details

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From Reader Review The Asutra for online ebook

Federico Kereki says

A finish to the trilogy, but a bit short.

Daniel says

Gastel Etzwane finally finds out who is the actual alien race who menaces Durdane. The insect-like Asutra. Etzwane then visits a remote land which is considerably reduced to a medieval and barbaric way of life. The end is quite surprising and atypical. But it completes the saga very well. It is either spatial adventure and a mystery story abundantly permeated with strange characters and even spatial battle action.

Peter says

Jack Vance, "The Asutra" (1974) - The end of the Durdane series takes the hero, Gastel Etzelwane, far from home to figure out the secret of who's been sending weird murderous aliens to mess with his homeland. Accompanied, sometimes, by a supercilious and self-serving historian from Earth, he first ventures to a distant continent and then is shanghaied to a faraway planet.

He finds out the truth, but one thing about Vance is that he's a pretty strong skeptic of the notion that the truth sets anyone free. Enslaved on a faraway planet, Gastel finds that his world was little but a source of raw (mostly human) material and a site for experiment for two rival but symbiotic alien societies. The titular Asutra, brainbugs that exist parasitically on other species, and the Ka, a put-upon society from a gross swamp planet that used to be enslaved by the Asutra before turning the tables, have shaped the destiny of numerous planets in their efforts, mainly to dicker each other out of one crappy swamp world. The Asutra want the world because they had it before and think it's nice (they have others); the Ka want the world because it's their ancient homeland, and their entire culture is encapsulated in a 20,000-canto epic about how shitty it is but how much they love it. The depiction of the Ka is one of the better scifi depictions of wounded, small-nation nationalism I've ever seen.

Gastel, enslaved by the Ka, does his thing- looks for opportunities, and plays music (specifically, the Song of the Ka- the Ka reward slaves with leniency if they can learn bits of the Song). For the second time in three books, Gastel overcomes the inertia of an imprisoned people to lead a rebellion. For the second time, he succeeds. But for the second (and for the series, final) time, he finds that while rebellion improves his personal fortunes, the structures remain unchanged. After daring escapes and desperate battles, he and his fellow prisoners slaves are freed essentially as the result of an unseen negotiation process that didn't have them in mind at all. He returns to Shant and the parliament he put in place is bickering. He -- and his homeworld -- are just as caught in the dynamics of history (not just human, but natural history too) as they ever were. The best he can do is take up music again.

The Durdane series (and much of his other work) places Vance squarely in the tradition of universal pessimism that runs like a black thread through speculative fiction. Unlike others in the tradition, like Lovecraft, he handles it with a light touch- inspired by that other great artist of the circular life, P.G.

Wodehouse. He very cleverly uses the traditional tropes of pulp scifi -- the individualist hero, the bold rebellions, the implementation of "progressive" change -- to engage the reader in a bait and switch. It'd be easy to write the hero failing. But the hero succeeding, and for it not to matter in the face of a big, weird cosmos? And for the whole thing to be a lot of fun anyway? That's what sets Vance apart and what makes the Durdane series more than the sum of it's parts. ****'

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

Florin Pitea says

It was O.K., mostly.

Todd Bradley says

I've only read Vance's fantasy stories in the past, though bits of them have a sci-fi feel. And this, my first Vance sci-fi novel, has a bit of a fantasy feel. It was good, but not a book I'll be compelled to read again and again.

Hunnapuh Xbal says

Los Asutra fue mi primer contacto con Vance y el libro me atrapó totalmente, pese a ser el tercero de la trilogía, porque admite lectura independiente y solo me extrañaban algunas vagas referencias que hace a los libros anteriores, pero que en realidad no afectaron para nada la comprensión de la historia.

Los mundos de Vance son fantásticos, completos, bien estructurados y muy complejos, las especies de estos mundos son totalmente fuera lo común, el tratamiento que da a lo inverosímil es excelente, como siempre hay largos recorridos llenos de aventuras, exotismo y música.

Vance da a los músicos siempre papeles más allá de simplemente distraer a sus público con sus habilidades, sus héroes son músicos, creo que Rothfus ha retomado estas "tecnicas" Vanceanas para narrar historias con su Kovthe.

Fue hasta muchos años después que pude leer los primeros libros de la Saga, pero al final me quedo con Los Azutra como un viaje memorable a la épica y la aventura.

David says

This is the last of the Durdane trilogy, and offers an interesting conclusion - one I admit I wasn't expecting. The whole saga is about power and manipulation, from the Faceless Man who wields absolute authority over the human beings of Shant to the 'Asutra', who are strange symbiotic creatures that live inside the bodies of humanoid beings. It's a bit less compelling than the first two volumes, but an absorbing read nonetheless - and a must for Vance fans.

Carlex says

Lo que más me cautiva de las historias de Jack Vance es su capacidad de imaginar mundos y sociedades muy diferentes a la nuestra. En el ciclo de Durdane, -del que esta novela cierra la trilogía- nos muestra, como no podía ser de otra manera, las muchas culturas del planeta Durdane, cada una con su propia religión, leyes y costumbres.

Nuestro protagonista es Gartzel Ertzuane, quien deberá escapar del fanatismo religioso que tiraniza su cantón para empezar a correr mundo como músico. Sin embargo, el futuro que deparará una vida de aventuras muy alejada de la despreocupada vida del artista. En la trilogía descubriremos quien es el misterioso Anome, que somete a todos los habitantes a una ley común. Y después el planeta entero se verá amenazado por una misteriosa raza, los Asutra.

El desarrollo de la acción no es el fuerte de este autor, pero a cambio nos regala con un maravilloso worldbuilding y unos personajes muy "sui generis", marca de la casa Vance.

Me quedo con más ganas de este hacedor de mundos que es Jack Vance.

Hojaplateada says

En esta tercera parte, la saga pasa decididamente de fantasy a ciencia-ficción. Termina todo de repente. La historia es muy buena.

Jaro says

Read in VIE

Derek says

It's impossible to talk about the book without referring to the ending. The resolution of all things--defeat of the alien Asutra, rescue of the kidnapped Durdane humans--lies with Ifness, the cold and self-interested Institute member for whom all this is an opportunity for advancement in the mysterious Institute.

In hindsight, events were perfectly appropriate. Ifness resolves matters his own way while Ertzuane leaps into the fray and takes a months (years? It's unclear) long adventure to the depressing planet Kahei. His adventure is ultimately rendered hollow because Ifness has dealt with it safely and bureaucratically. That Ifness holds no personal regard for Ertzuane--in fact, barely notices his absence--is true to his character and should have been obvious from the start.

Vance wrought a beautifully ironic, cynical conclusion to the Durdane trilogy that is intellectually satisfying (how could it have ended otherwise?) but emotionally sour, all the more so because the planet Kahei is so gray and unspeakably bleak compared to the Vance-typical Durdane: a frontier world of limited means, multiple bizarre cultures and strange conventions, sort of *A Princess of Mars* by way of Wodehouse, say,

where even the basest drudge is eloquent and enemies duel with impeccable manners. Even worse, Etwane's trip to Kahei is rife with passivity and sitting-still, that enemy of Vance stories that sucks away the marrow of energy like a preschooler revoltingly slurping a Go-gurt tube.

Rog Harrison says

I bought this book in the late 1970s so this is probably the fourth time I have read it. I did not enjoy it as much as the previous two books in this series. I had forgotten most of this book apart from the last part which I remembered quite well. In some ways I found the ending depressing.

Combiner says

A fun and satisfying sci-fi trilogy with the usual Vance trappings: sumptuous prose, detailed and exotic aliens, and perfect pacing.

TJ says

The Asutra was first published in digest form in The Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy in 1973. It was released as a novel in 1974. This is the third volume of the Durdane Chronicles and builds upon the first two novels. These two initial books in the series (The Anome and The Brave Free Men) should be read one after the other because they are really one novel in two books. The Asutra is best read after reading the other two, but I read it the first time (this is my second reading of the series) as a stand alone novel, and it made sense by itself because the beginning of The Asutra briefly summarizes the previous two novels. The Asutra was for me the most interesting of the three novels although I enthusiastically recommend all three to any Vance fan.

In The Asutra the main character, Gastel Etwane, has withdrawn from public life to devote himself to playing music, but becomes restless for some new adventure. He again encounters Ifness, the visitor from Earth, and learns more about the Asutra, an intelligent, alien creature that controlled the Roguskhoi soldiers who had attacked Shant. It appears that the Asutra, a technologically advanced species, could have used very sophisticated weapons but were experimenting by using the Roguskhoi with their primitive weapons. The home planet of the Asutra and the reason for their experiments are unknown.

Etwane hears rumors from mariners that on a continent called Caraz a large horde of Roguskhoi have reportedly appeared. He and Ifness decide to use a power vehicle from Earth to visit Caraz to investigate. A new adventure begins involving nomadic desert tribes, strange kidnappings, creatures called the Ka, and a risky rescue attempt that involves advanced alien cultures and other planets. It is difficult to discuss anymore without giving too much away.

I found The Asutra to be the most intriguing and complex of the three novels in the Durdane Chronicles. Each time I read it I liked it even better and noticed new details that made it more fascinating. The Asutra also brought a more satisfying conclusion to the Durdane Chronicles. What seemed like an ending after The Brave Free Men was actually only an intermission before the storyline took some twists and continued to develop until the underlying mystery was finally revealed and we arrived at a more complete resolution. I am

well aware that some Vance fans think the Durdane Chronicles are not among his very best writings. I won't argue with that because some of Vance's novels reach pretty lofty heights. But I have found the three books in this series to be well worth reading and like them even more upon rereading them. I rated *The Asutra* the first time I read it as a 4 but now consider it a 4.5 so am rounding it out as a 5.

D.L. Morrese says

This third book of the Durdane trilogy provides a satisfying and somewhat surprising conclusion to the story, which I will not give away because it's worth reading.

Gatzel Etwane again provides the single point of view. He would like to return to his relatively free and simple life as a musician, but his country and his planet need him, or so he believes.

He hears rumors of aliens and spaceships battling in a distant land, and he goes to investigate. Ifness, the man from Earth he met in the previous books, assists his journey by providing a flying boat. Etwane discovers much but not quite the way he planned to.

I don't want to give away much more of the plot, but I will point out that the book concludes with a unique and interesting twist, which almost makes the protagonist's entire adventure beside the point. All the things Etwane has done, while important in his mind, become minor, almost inconsequential footnotes in the implied story behind the story being told.

Etwane glimpses the larger story, one that involves Earth and other human settled planets and alien species, the fate of mankind and its place in the universe. By asking Ifness if he can accompany him when he leaves Durdane, he is asking him to make him part of this larger story. But he cannot be. That story isn't his. This twist is what, in my mind, makes the conclusion of this trilogy stand out.

This is a short book, 204 pages in hardcover. It is no longer in print. The limited edition hardcover copy I read came from my local library. It is available for Kindle, though.

The prose is sparse, stiff, formal, almost Edwardian sounding. Vance seldom uses a short, common word when a longer, more obscure one is available, and I'm fairly certain he made up a few of these. To be honest, I rather liked it because it was so different from the prose style of most books I read.

I recommend this trilogy because the setting and plot are original and interesting. The style may take some getting used to, but this is another good reason for reading it. It's not your typical, modern science fiction action adventure. It's different.
