

For Mantis on Vance - was RE: (urth) OT: further possible

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 May 2002

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 May 2002, 16:34

Apologies for the OT thread I am doubtless about to start.

Mantis wrote:

OTOH, while I'm not certain about the publication history of CANNERY ROW (did sections appear in magazines, etc.), my understanding of THE DYING EARTH is that it is 6 stories, and only one of them was published in magazine form--that was the same year (1950) that the book came out, and as such amounts to a publicity release (just as "The Tale of the Student and His Son" and "The Armiger's Daughter," two tales from TBOTNS, appeared in magazines). Or so it seems to me.

Hoom. Obviously, those are cases of taking chapters from a novel and printing them separately as short stories. If THE DYING EARTH was indeed written as a novel (about which more below), then that would be more or less the case here, except that -- really, the Wolfe excisions are hardly even chapters, given that they are separate stories read or told by persons in the novel, which would not be the case with a bit from TDE printed as a story.

So fix-up "in the classic sense of van Vogt," well hmmm.
Divining Vance's (probable) intentions rather than the publishing record (making TDE a "failed" van Vogt fix-up?).
Ah well, such quibbles! Look, blattid said "more of a fix-up," not "exactly a fix-up," so there's no quibble, even.

Indeed.

And while I would not venture to divine Vance's intentions (I'm somewhat of an intentionalist, but only where the author has marked a clear intentional trail, and, for that matter, only when the printed text doesn't clearly shout defiance to the intention so marked), this discussion caused TDE to drift rather precipitately to the top of my to-reread pile, and so I reread it over the weekend and ...

H'mmm. My first response was to wonder where the marvellously stylized Vancean dialogue was. I suppose that developed over time; and indeed, it appears somewhat more as the book goes along.

And my second response was to question how much of an influence on tBotNS this could really be; there's almost nothing of the flavor of the latter here, to my admittedly somewhat jaded lectoral palate ... none of the complexity of language, of incident, of character, even, really, of background. Granted I'm comparing a book I've just read almost as a newcomer to one I've pondered over for years, the background of TDE does not feel deep or complex to me -- no deeper than required by the necessities of the individual stories.

And that, really, is the See Below. For me, at least, the stories in TDE are very much individual

stories. There are links, characters from one appear in another, but they are, I think, less unified than (say) Leiber's yarns of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Episodes from a single and singular future world, but not, to me, producing anything larger as a group than the sum of the parts.

So for the more dedicated Vanceans on the list, I suppose the obvious question would be whether I, as a rather casual reader, am missing anything here? This book is the one most often cited when recommending Vance to a Wolfe fan; other than the gross-scale influence on New Sun, the fundamental idea (which, actually, wasn't entirely new here either) of this incredibly ancient Earth, is there something deeper?