



The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph

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Magnus Ridolph, at first glance, did not look like an interstellar troubleshooter. He was not tall and muscular, his skin had not been turned to a rugged color by the numerous distant suns he had visited, and his voice and manner seemed far too mild for an adventurer. Yet there was a chill hardness in his mild blue eyes that warned of the deceptiveness in his appearance.

Throughout the galaxy, there were men and other beings - Yellowbirds, Tau Gemini ant-things, Hecatian anthropes - who could testify to the deadliness that lurked behind those eyes.

In Magnus Ridolph, Jack Vance has created one of the most memorable characters of his award-winning career.

The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph Details

Date : Published April 1st 1980 by DAW Books Inc (first published 1966)

ISBN : 9780879975319

Author : Jack Vance

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From Reader Review The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph for online ebook

Peter says

Some classic tales about one of Vance's space sleuths. Sometimes a bit dated, in some other cases slightly predictable, but fun none the less.

Jamie says

This collection of pulp sci-fi short stories, all featuring Magnus Ridolph, aging intergalactic sleuth, is clearly not among Vance's very best. Yet along with some duds there are some nice surprises, with flashes of Vance's brilliant talent for vivid alien world building.

Magnus Ridolph himself is a Sherlock Holmes type, solving mysteries without much pretense. He lacks the flair found in Vance's typically young, impetuous protagonists, relying on the use of logic, analytical skill, a bit of conniving and only a bare minimum of daring.

There is no continuity among the stories, they can be read in any order, and I would suggest skipping the duds noted below. Recommended for Jack Vance fans.

Hard Luck Diggings 2/5

Sanatoris Short-cut 2/5

The Sub-Standard Sardines 2/5

The Unspeakable McInch 3.5/5

The King of Thieves 3.5/5

To B or Not to C or to D 3/5

The Howling Bounders 3/5

The Spa of the Stars 2.5/5

The Kokod Warriors 3.5/5

Coup de Grace 2.5/5

Goutham says

A decent read, even if nowhere near Vance's best. I'd love to get hold of that book Magnus Ridolph was reading in the library in 'Coup de Grace' detailing the various idiosyncratic races inhabiting the different worlds in the story.

TJ says

This is a collection of early Vance short stories originally published in magazines from 1948 to 1957. The first book edition was issued in 1966 by ACE in both paperback and hardcover and as an Ace Double with The Brains of the Earth The Ace editions had 6 of the 10 Magnus Ridolph stories that Vance wrote. A later

1980 DAW edition with the same title had 8 stories, and all 10 were in the 1984 The Complete Magnus Ridolph. Ridolph is a colorful rascal who contracts out as an interplanetary detective. His physical appearance is very unassuming so people, including those who hire him, underestimate him and try to take advantage of him. But Ridolph is very clever, outwits everyone and has a knack for unraveling every mystery or problem he investigates. It is a very easy read, fun, entertaining and often humorous. I found the stories to be quite enjoyable. I read the ACE edition first and then the DAW book about three months later and liked the stories even more the second time I read them. I recommend reading the DAW edition because it has two additional stories: The Sub-Standard Sardines and To B or Not to C or to D. My overall rating: 4. Below is a brief description of each of the stories:

"The Kodod Warriors," a 34 page novelette first published in 1951, is one of the Magnus Ridolph series. The "Women's League Committee for the Preservation of Moral Values" hires Ridolph to investigate and stop ritualistic battles on another planet (Kodod) where tribes of dwarf like creatures have bloody fights with each other while tourists with their tour guide watch for entertainment. The hotel in the region makes huge profits from the tourists who visit the planet just to watch these killings. Ridolph devises a clever scheme in this interesting and easy to read story that is arguably the finest of the Magnus Ridolph stories. I rated it 5.

"The Unspeakable McInch" is a seventeen page short story that was issued initially in the magazine Startling Stories in 1948. Magnus Ridolph is hired to visit the planet of Sclerotto to identify and deal with a murderer named McInch, whose real identify is unknown. The planet was settled by aliens from many different worlds who, despite their many differences, seem to get along and to have a functioning society. Tourists visit the planet just to see the many strange residents who live and work there. The authorities suspect that McInch is one of the city officials, each of whom is a different species. After arriving at the planet Magnus makes the rounds to interview all of the major city officials. The story is filled with bizarre, colorful alien creatures who make up the society. It is very entertaining, humorous and simply fun to read. I rated it a 4.

Howling Bounders is an eighteen page short story that was first published in Startling Stories magazine in 1949. Magnus Ridolph finds a business opportunity and cannot believe his good fortune. He is offered a plantation at a price that seems too good to be true. After moving in, however, he discovers that his crops are being attacked and destroyed by creatures called "Howling Bounders." Ridolph is too clever and persevering to give up, though, and devises a scheme to deal with the Howling Bounders and the seller who cheated him. I rated it a 3.

"The King of Thieves" is an eighteen page short story that was first published in 1949 in the magazine Startling Stories. This one is pure fun and places Magnus Ridolph on a planet where the inhabitants admire thievery and honor the most successful thieves, such as their king. Ridolph bets with another visitor that he can maintain more of his possessions, and the visitor agrees to place the bet with him. This visitor cheated Ridolph previously so he is bent on revenge. Both of them seem to have no limits on what they will do to win as each tries to outsmart the other. I was quite amused and rated it a 4.

"Spa of the Stars" is a nineteen page short story that initially came out in Startling Stories magazine in 1950. A huge luxury hotel and resort is opened on the planet Kolama but has only three paying guests because of attacks on guests by half ton "gorilla-things", flying snakes, dragons and twenty foot aquatic pincher beetles. For some reason there were no such attacks during construction, but only after opening. Management thinks the local creatures called Mollies who assisted with building the resort were somehow able to keep these predators away, possibly by their odor. Magnus is hired to investigate, but the people who hire him do not act in good faith. This is an easy to read, enjoyable story with humor and local color. I rated it a 4.

"Coup de Grace" is a twenty one page short story published initially in 1958 in the magazine Super Science Fiction. Magnus Ridolph is relaxing on a private space station called the Hub which is visited by many beings from other planets. Magnus is approached by an anthropologist who recognizes him and tries to hire him because he is fearful someone is trying to kill him. Magnus, however, is on vacation and declines the job

offer. The next morning the anthropologist is found dead and Magnus is asked by the owner of the space station if he will help investigate because no law enforcement authorities have jurisdiction over a private space station and he wants to see that the murder is brought to justice. Magnus feels he cannot decline the offer so begins to investigate. Because there are so many alien beings with different customs and cultures, Magnus decides to conduct what he refers to as a "cultural analysis" to narrow down who might be the most likely suspects. One of the aliens, for example, is from a warrior culture where it would be extremely shameful to kill another except in face to face combat. Another is from a culture where human sacrifice is done for religious purposes, but the anthropologist was not killed in the ritualistic way that this culture requires. It is a murder mystery with various colorful aliens as suspects, all cleverly investigated by Magnus. My rating: 3 "Liked it."

"The Sub-Standard Sardines" is as strange a story as the title suggests. First published in the magazine Startling Stories it is a twenty two page short story and one of two stories not included in the Ace edition of The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph. It is in the DAW edition and in the Complete Magnus Ridolph. Magnus is invited to a gourmet dinner of broiled grouse with truffles and compote of Marchisand cherries, Queen Persis salad, Sirius Fifth artichokes, incredible wines from three planets, and a final course of canned sardines. The dinner is magnificent until the end when he opens the can of sardines and they explode. Magnus is then hired by the sardine firm to investigate why some of their gourmet cans of sardines are bad and appear to have been tampered with. Magnus investigates by getting a job undercover at the sardine factory. It is a funny, bizarre, very creative story that even involves talking fish. I rated it a 4.

"To B or Not to C or to D" is a twenty page short story that was first published in Startling Stories magazine in 1950. It is also known as "Cosmic Hotfoot." It is one of the two Magnus Ridolph stories that are included in the DAW edition of The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph but are omitted from the Ace edition. Ridolph is deeply in debt and trying to hide from bill collectors when he is approached with an offer that will pay off his bills if he investigates why minors keep dying on a private planet called Jexjeka. Magnus is in debt because of the expenses of managing his own personal zoo, "that howling menagerie of monsters," so accepts the assignment after cleverly negotiating a contract. Magnus puts himself at great risk to investigate and is unsure if he can trust his employer, a "scowling man" with "carbuncle eyes" who has a reputation for being an "unscrupulous blackguard." I liked the story and rated it a 3.

mark monday says

synopsis: clever, elderly, and very snobby Magnus Ridolph constantly finds himself in debt; fortunately, his skill as an intergalactic detective always brings in the greenbacks. this is a collection of all stories featuring the urbane Ridolph.

Jack Vance is a favorite among favorites: he's easily my most beloved writer of science fiction and fantasy. and so I've been avoiding some of his lesser-known or less-respected works. why spoil what I love? or so I rationalized. but reading this didn't take away my appreciation. when you love something or someone, you love them despite the flaws. and here are the 2 star flaws: thin stories with even thinner endings, less impressive prose than what I'm used to, an odd focus on things Magnus (or perhaps Vance) considers ugly (mainly flab - LOL?), and an overall feeling that these were written sometime between breakfast and lunch.

it was interesting to see all of the Vancean hallmarks on display, even in a set of stories that were all quite slight: characters obsessed with the minutiae of exchanging "munits" (a standard form of galactic currency); highly eccentric and insular alien cultures; heaps of sardonic disdain; and an ironic, detached use of understatement when describing various dramatic, horrific, or awe-inspiring events. nearly each of the mysteries are solved due to Magnus' understanding of how different cultures simply don't use the same logic

or understand the same norms as most humans; any person who attempts to consider their own personal, culturally specific, subjective perspective as an objective way to look at a situation is a person who is just not getting the big picture, and will no doubt fail. it's sort of fun watching such people fail, in this book and of course in the real world.

Hector says

Entertaining tales about a very fun 'troubleshooter' (an older, diminutive mercenary-slash-con man with very expensive tastes) hired to solve mysteries and fix problems on various worlds.

Ghoule says

Coup de coeur!

Je pensais que j'avais trouvé tous les classiques que je pouvais aimer, mais Vance me prouve le contraire. Alors que je ne me suis jamais résolu à lire le Cycle de Tschai, les six nouvelles regroupés dans « Les mondes de Magnus Ridolph » m'ont jetées par terre.

En plus d'être courtes, fluides, dynamiques et intrigantes, ces nouvelles mettent en scène un personnage emballant : Magnus Ridolph. Je l'imagine comme un Éric Gauthier de 55 ans, la barbe blanche, l'air pensif, mais doublé d'une ruse redoutable.

Rouleur parmi les rouleurs, Magnus Ridolph incarne à merveille la vengeance froide de la victime qui se transforme en bourreau, dans des aventures entrepreneuriales qui ont pour cadre une forme de capitalisme sauvage et interplanétaire.

Le premier récit est jouissif : Magnus Ridolph vient de se faire frauder : après avoir investi de l'argent dans les actions d'une compagnie, il a tout perdu aux mains des fondateurs de la compagnie qui sont repartis avec l'argent. Or, sa ruse légendaire et une mission d'occasion lui permettent de se venger - dans le calme et avec style - de ses voleurs. Le tout se passe sur une planète peuplée d'extraterrestres dont les guerres servent de jeu de paris aux Terriens... je ne vous en dis pas plus.

Comme il est peu probable que nous soyons aussi rusés que Magnus Ridolph Si vous avez des actions à la bourse, rachetez-les et mettez-les en sûreté : la bourse est un jeu dangereux qui nuit à la société plus qu'elle ne lui rapporte.

Par contre, suivre Magnus Ridolph dans ses aventures, c'est un peu comme retrouver un genre de Robin des Bois - en plus rusé et moins généreux avec les pauvres - dans le futur. S'il est toujours heureux de s'enrichir, on sent qu'il a un code d'honneur et qu'il est prêt à redonner la monnaie de leur pièce à tous ces monstres qui pensent que la vie est faite pour voler ses semblables...

Mieke Van Immerseel says

I really liked this book since its a combination of short stories and in my busy life I can really appreciate this. Just a new little story per 2 weeks or so.

In my opinion Jack Vance can do no wrong and this book proved that to me once again. This author has such a vivid imagination and he can create these really complex and interesting main characters to his books. Magnus Ridolph is one of those intriguing characters and I wish this book was bigger because I couldn't get enough of this eccentric detective, if you will.

Damon says

Pretty good. I read other reviews which referred to this as "hilarious" - I think I'd say more "amusing."

Jonathan says

Outwitting fraudsters is most enjoyable whilst sporting a white beard and an urbane manner.

Curtiss says

One of the absolutely funniest collections of science-fiction short-stories ever written. The account of tourists betting on the wars between "The Kokod Warriors" is side-splittingly funny, especially the narrative from one of the warriors after Magnus Ridolph decides to set-up the visitor's hotel as a target after being hypocritically snubbed by a client who is a guest at the hotel.

Jack Vance demonstrates his usual droll humor throughout, as well as his ability to create alien worlds and cultures using only a few compelling word images.

Johan says

Some good old SF detective stories. Amusing.

Terry says

A collection of short stories, comprising the entire adventures of Magnus Ridolph, written by famed sf/fantasy/mystery writer Jack Vance. Magnus is a combination Sherlock Holmes and mercenary adventurer. He is an anti-hero, defying the expected appearance of the typical fictional adventurer, and being entirely professional, or perhaps profit-driven.

Magnus will take almost any case, but expects a fee commensurate with his considerable abilities. He possesses a James-Bond level of self-assurance, and for good reason. Travelling from planet to planet, alien culture to alien culture, each of Magnus' cases are different, each presenting a new challenge for Magnus and for the reader: things are never dull in the career of Magnus Ridolph. This thin volume contains all eight of Ridolph's recorded cases. It is SF's loss that Vance did not write a hundred more.

Florin Pitea says

Funny in places. More enjoyable than other books by the same author.

Bryan says

It is supererogatory for me to restate my enthusiasm for the writing of Jack Vance. A master wordsmith and storyteller, his writing is matchless.

So... what about Magnus Ridolph? It's not Vance's masterwork, but it's still undeniably Vance in his prime. The main attraction here is not Vance's exquisite prose (which is still evident, but slightly relaxed), but rather the amazing character of Magnus Ridolph.

Ridolph, a senior citizen, is not an action hero, and was created by Vance as a foil for the countless other stories written about adventurers who leap first and look later. Ridolph, in contrast, is aged but wise, and uses his intellect to solve mysteries (and to make witty ripostes to his adversaries to their bewilderment). Ridolph's fame spreads across the galaxy, and he proves his mettle here by using analytical means to resolve the issues in each story.

The best story is likely "Coup de Grace", which is also the youngest story in the batch, and very convincingly shows Ridolph's manner in utilizing cultural analysis to solve a murder mystery in deep space. But other stories are equally enjoyable, and in each case Ridolph finds an intelligent means of demystifying the story's central conundrum while at the same time disentangling himself from the deceptions and machinations of those who would seek to profit (at Ridolph's expense) from his work.

I've read this book twice now, and will definitely reread at some point in the future. Funny and smart, these stories deserve to be read and enjoyed by a wider audience. Find a copy and sit back, as you are in good hands when reading Jack Vance.
