



To Live Forever

Jack Vance

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In the far-future city of Clarges, you can live forever – if you can make the grade.

In Clarges, everyone competes for the ultimate prize: immortality. Gavin Waylock had that prize – the live-forever rank of Amaranth, but lost it when he was accused of murder. Now, after seven years in hiding he begins again the struggle to reach the top. But a strong-willed woman, The Jacynth Martin, is determined to see him fail – and failure means death.

SF Grandmaster Jack Vance crafts a classic tale of man against dystopia, rich in intrigue, suspense and dark humor.

- Last published by DAW in 1982--out of print for over 20 years!

To Live Forever Details

Date : Published March 1st 2004 by iBooks (first published 1956)

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Author : Jack Vance

Format : Paperback 367 pages

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From Reader Review To Live Forever for online ebook

Roberta says

This is gold, I couldn't put it away. I'll have to think about a review, though, today I won't make it justice.

Sue says

I have an old, beat up copy of this book, with the front cover MIA. It's a really good book that delves into power, money, and social power. It's one sci-fi book that I'd use when teaching a sociology course dealing with any of those areas.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

This is the first Vance novel I've re-read and it was pretty damn awesome the second time around. It is on one level a fairly typical Vance narrative where an amoral protagonist claws his way through a rigid, highly-organised society, only to bring the system crashing through and then become a space explorer.

But with Vance, the details are everything. There are the wonderful proper nouns - Vance's characters just have the best names ever - The Jacynth Martin, The Grayven Warlock and so on. His knack for naming places is just as euphonious - the chief settings of the story are the rigidly-structured city of Clarges and its licentious counterpart, Carnevalle. There's an elaborate social scheme, with eternal life as goal, plenty of lush description, pungent dialogue and suspense. One of the highlights is a description of a mime performance. Another Vance highlight are imaginary artforms - this time we are shown a form of water sculpture.

You can't really unconditionally applaud Vance's heroes but you have to admire the determination and ruthlessness with which they go about achieving their ends, and Grayven/Gavin is no exception. I'm not sure this goes in the highest rung of Vance's work - I reserve that for the Demon Princes books, the Marune books, Dying Earth and Lyonesse, but it gets pretty damn close.

Metaphorosis says

Wikipedia quotes Floyd C. Gale as saying "frighteningly logical...[t]he sick, inbred society of Vance's imagination comes fully alive, even though his characters remain mere symbols."

I really can't say it better than that. Where most Vance work is focused on atmosphere, attitude, and of course punctilio, *Clarges* (previously and better titled *To Live Forever*), is unusual in being a fairly direct exploration of a concept. The Clarges society is tightly restricted in space, and the bulk of the population work toward the goal of eternal life. The book imagines the effect and logical outcome of such a society. While Vancian characters are here, they're fairly low-key, and much less aloof than normal. The book is short, but effective.

Overall, recommended as an introduction to the Vance voice, or just as a good social SF thought experiment (that's also a good read).

CVIE vol IV

PS Why was this not retitled *The Graven Waylock*?

Ron says

To Live Forever was published in 1956. Before Sputnik, before the Pill, before Vietnam. Like 1984 and Brave New World, it was one man's guess where the future might head. It reflected the extent and limits of that day's science and sociology. In that regard, Vance must be allowed whatever vision he wanted to present. It was probably radical and hip then.

At the functional level, however the story features a "hero" who is hard to like, a society which seems simultaneously repressive and ridiculously open.

The storytelling is clunky.

Worst of all, the denouement is illogical and unsatisfying.

Reynard says

Ottimo esempio di fantascienza sociologica scritto da uno dei maestri della fantascienza.

Nel mio giudizio il libro non raggiunge le 5 stelle per le quali sarebbe servito qualche approfondimento in più. La lettura è comunque assolutamente consigliata.

TJ says

"To Live Forever" was first published in 1956. The title was changed to "Clarges" in 2002 when it was included in the "Vance Integral Edition." To Live Forever, was preceded by only two other Vance novels, Five Gold Bands published in 1950 and Vandals of the Void from 1953. Of course Vance had written many short stories and even some novellas by 1956 and was an excellent writer even in his earliest works. This is the second time I've read To Live Forever, and I liked it even better upon re-reading. It is only 185 pages long and is most interesting and satisfying when read slowly and carefully.

Although the storyline is engaging enough on its own, this novel is dense with ideas about society, life, culture, values, identity, meaning, etc. Ethical issues are laid out but in an impartial way. Do you really live forever if an identical clone with the same memory and personality takes your place if you die? Is it fair or ethical to deny advanced medical treatments to those persons who do not participate in the program? Why not extend the life of everyone and attempt to find other planets to colonize or enforce some means of birth control to avoid overpopulation?

The plot is secondary and character development is kept to a minimum. The focus is on creating a world or society where eternal life is an option for which one may strive but only a few can achieve. As usual Vance presents many ideas and much action in a few pages. Technological and scientific explanations are kept minimal. It is a satirical and thought provoking novel, more like Jonathan Swift than hard science fiction. Many parallels can be made to other societies where people strive for power, wealth, fame, social status,

prestige, etc. Unlike some novels of ideas, *To Live Forever*, is not at all slow or dull. Vance is simply too talented a writer to allow this to happen. The dialogue is lively and realistic and a fascinating alternative futuristic world and culture is created. Whether it is a utopia or dystopia is debatable.

The setting is in the far future when medical technology can significantly lengthen human lifespan, allowing some select persons to essentially live forever. To avoid overpopulation, though, only a fixed number of persons who register under the Fair-Play Act and then work their way up through levels or "phyles" are granted the Amaranth level. At this level they are genetically modified and permitted to live in the city of Clarges forever. Participants are awarded points for their social and cultural contributions through productive employment and participation in civic affairs. Points allow them to move up through the five levels or "phyles". There is tremendous pressure to advance. The competitive culture and emotional stress frequently cause people to become mentally ill ("catto") and many are committed to mental hospital called a "palliatorys."

There are five phyles under the Fair-Play Act and anybody may enroll once they are 16 years old. Each phyle level entitles a person to live a specific number of years. Brood is level one and a person is allowed to live to 82 years, the average lifetime for a person who does not participate. A Brood level person needs to advance or an assassin will visit and terminate him or her after reaching the age of 82. It is not difficult to obtain the second level which is called Wedge. At this level ten years are added to your life and you undergo a procedure that halts body degeneration so that you remain at the same age you were once you become Wedge level. At third level (Arrant) they add sixteen years more to your life so that you may live to 108. At fourth level (Verge) another 20 years are added so that you may live to 128. The fifth level is Amaranth, and if you reach that level you are put into "seclusion like a caterpillar" where a metamorphosis takes place and you develop the body of a 19 year old. This person will remain at that age forever with all the experience and knowledge he or she had previously. If a person at Amaranth is killed or the body destroyed there is a clone with all the updated cognition, memory and personality traits of the original that takes its place. Each person at Amaranth has five back up clones called relics or surrogates. Persons who do not participate in the Fair-Play Act are called glarks and live however long they can without access to advanced medical and genetic treatment. They are held in low esteem.

The plot involves our main character, Garven Waylock, meeting a woman, The Jacynth Martin. She was 104 years old when she reached Amaranth phyle but is now "a transcendently beautiful girl of nineteen." She has "The" before her name as an honorary title for being at Amaranth level but is hiding her phyle level to visit a place called Carnevalle where visitors of all ranks and phyles go in disguise at night to participate in "spectacular devices for diversion and thrill and catharsis." Garven works at Carnevalle and has a secretive past that he carefully hides. The meeting of Garven and Jacynth and their evening together change both of their lives forever and begin to have major consequences for the entire society. A careful reading of this thought provoking and entertaining novel will yield much more satisfaction than a cursory one. Those who want to be entertained without having to think much might also like this novel, although I would suggest other Vance novels as being more appropriate if lighter entertainment is your main interest. (Vance's *Demon Princes* series, for example.) This is a novel to read and re-read and would seem like a very good book for a classroom discussion.

Florin Pitea says

It was OK, but nothing to write home about.

Kat Hooper says

Re-read: August 2015. Audiobook version, which comes out soon from Blackstone Audio, is excellent.

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

In Clarges, a city in the far future, humans have conquered death. Unfortunately, there's just not enough room for billions of immortal people to live forever, so they've passed the fair-play act which divides society into 5 phyle which must be maintained at certain population ratios. Those who choose to participate in fair-play must register in Brood, the lowest phyle, and receive 82 years of life, after which an "assassin" visits and takes them away in a black hearse. By significantly contributing to society, citizens may move up through the phyle, adding several years of life with each step. A very select few will reach Amaranth and may have their bodies genetically modified (with 5 copies made, in case of accidents), making them youthful forever. This social climbing causes a lot of anxiety for the people of Clarges, so their mental hospital is full of people who've gone "catto" (alternating periods of catatonia and mania).

Gavin Waylock has been in hiding for seven years, but now he's ready to return to the immortal society that shunned him. He's back at the bottom and must use all of his wits to work his way up to the place he knows he deserves. Things would be a lot easier, though, if he hadn't just met The Jacynth Martin, because she's determined to keep him out of Amaranth.

One thing I love about Jack Vance is that he writes about things that fascinate me. As Gavin is trying to figure out how he can contribute something creative and meaningful to society, and thereby push himself ahead of everyone else, he tackles the field of psychology. I found it great fun to read Vance's ideas about the future of my field.

To Live Forever was written in 1956, at a time when "insane asylums" in the United States were full. Vance must have thought this to be a hopeless situation because while his characters are zipping around in aircars and have plenty of other cool future technologies, one of their psychotherapists tells Gavin that their hospital is full, and psychology is the only science that isn't progressing, because it's impossible to see inside the human brain.

I'm not surprised that Vance didn't foresee brain imaging techniques (though he actually uses a similar technology in this novel!), but it's amusing that it was only a few years later that asylums in developed countries were nearly emptied after antipsychotic, antidepressant, and anti-anxiety drugs became common. It's also amusing that, for fun, citizens of Clarges use different types of "stimmo" pills, some of which are basically antidepressant or anti-anxiety drugs. Hmmm... I wonder if they thought to try those on the cattos...

Though Mr. Vance's vision didn't seem to foresee much beyond Freud and Jung, at the same time one of his characters comes up with an idea to treat catatonic-mania that is stunningly brilliant and something very much like what is only now being tested as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder! Wow!

You don't have to be a psychologist to love To Live Forever. This is a fun, fast-paced, and clever science fiction novel, but it isn't at all "gadgetty," so it will probably appeal even to those who think they don't like scifi. It's also, as is common for Jack Vance, part humorously scathing social commentary.

Originally read 2010

Jakk Makk says

Too much world building in a short span combined with poor naming conventions. Are these the Gleeps or the Glarks? The subject of immortality tends to bore me, since I have no desire to live forever. DNF #2.

Jon says

Actual cover of my paperback edition:

Kayla Erickson says

Cool book. It's amazing how the main character is a murderer, but for some reason you want things to turn out right for him. What a creative idea, earning immortality by what you accomplish. Jack Vance has such vivid descriptions, and a great vocabulary.

Lyn says

Lyn's first message to SF/F readers: [Read more Jack Vance.](#)

Lyn's second message to SF/F readers: When reading Jack Vance, pay very close attention to the first few pages, as he will explain his wildly complicated and alien structural narrative as the story begins.

Lyn's third message to SF/F readers: Don't worry if you need to go back to the front and re-read to figure out what in the hell is going on.

Vance is that rarest of artful gems: a storyteller. The storyteller could describe a trip to the zoo or read passages of a phone book and find an audience enthralled and mesmerized in rapt attention. Combine this ability with a Grandmaster level imagination with a gift towards speculative fiction and fantasy and his contribution to literature is evident. That he displays wit and personality and is frequently hilarious is icing on the cake. With a cherry on top.

To Live Forever is Vance's 1956 publication that explores Malthusian scarcity with some delicious twists. This also has a bildungsroman quality and the anti-hero nature of the protagonist reminded me a little of Bester's *The Stars My Destination*.

Essentially, Earth has been decimated by an over-population catastrophe. One society has recovered quicker than all the rest and has built up an isolated community where eternal life can be achieved through science.

But here is where Vance earned his stripes: an eternal life is only available to those people who have accomplished career points to advance up a hierarchical slope towards immortality. This aspect was reminiscent of Poul Anderson's *Harvest of Stars* (which I may need to re-read).

There is an old saying that religion has been the cause of more wars than any other reason. I've always thought that was a load of crap – property, PROPERTY has been the cause and source of all of the world's wars and strife. The haves versus the have nots. Vance, mad genius that he is, has created in the expectation of eternal life a property right that has created a problem in utopia.

Good times with wild uncle Jack.

Matthew says

Clarges by Jack Vance
aka To Live Forever

Clarges—previously published under the title *To Live Forever*—is a fantastic early standalone Vance SF novel, which speculates about a future where—seemingly beneficial—scientific advancement has held back man's potential to colonise the stars. This was perhaps the first Vance novel to really strike gold—excluding *The Dying Earth* which was a short story collection—and shows many of the characteristic traits which adorn his later works. Clarges is a great example of how Jack Vance can create a really engrossing and believable culture from the ground up.

Set in a far future Earth, the society of Clarges live in a walled city, sheltered from the so called barbarians of the outside world. The novel tackles the issue of what would happen if biology advanced in such a way as to allow immortality among the human race. How could these advancements be used without the world becoming overpopulated? The society of Clarges have developed a system to overcome the horrors of Malthusian overpopulation by providing a Fair-Play Act which rewards hard work and contribution to society with the promise of eternal life for a select few.

Citizens who partake in the Fair-Play Act are divided into five categories referred to as phyles: Brood, Wedge, Third, Verge and Amaranth. When people register as Brood, they essentially enter a contract whereby they have a fixed life span. When their time expires they are terminated by assassins. Each successful contribution in their career allows them to progress upward through the various phyles, each of which extends the amount of life they are entitled to. A select few who are very successful reach Amaranth, which grants them immortality and five relicts—essentially clones which can be used in substitute in case death befalls them. The citizens of Clarges do not have to participate in the Fair-Play Act, if they want they can live a normal life and live to the average age. The people who choose this way of life are referred to as Glarks.

It's an interesting idea which Vance develops well to create an unusual atmosphere in Clarges. The citizens are so concerned with their so called slope that they do not have time to live a proper life; always thinking about their ticking lifespan and how they can break into the next phyle. This is summarised nicely by one of the minor characters, Jacob Nile:

Slope! Slope! Slope!—that's all to be heard in Clarges.

The protagonist of the story is Gavin Waylock, a very typical Vance character; a completely amoral person who will stop at nothing to achieve his goal. Nevertheless, he is a likeable character who you find yourself wanting to see succeed. Gavin meets an Amaranth woman called The Jacynth Martin at Carnerville—a place where the citizens of Clarges come to blow off steam and forget all about their slope, they come masked as to

be equal for a short time. However The Jacynth learns a secret about Gavin's past and thus begins a turn of events which begin to question the very foundations of the society of Clarges.

Clarges is quite a serious novel with very little humour in the dialogue, the following quote is a delightful exception and a glimpse of Vance's later attitude toward character dialogue:

Caddigan looked sidewise at Waylock. "Pladge has become a Whitherer, and now it's all I hear."

"A 'Whitherer'?"

"A person who ask 'Whither?'" said Pladge. "It's as simple as that. We've formed an association and we ask 'Whither?' together. You must come to one of our meetings."

In summary, I found Clarges to be a thoroughly enjoyable read, highly recommended to Vance fans and perhaps a great entry-point to those who have yet to read anything by him.

Gaetano says

Dopo un po' di fatica iniziale per capire il mondo in cui si svolge la storia, in un futuro abbastanza lontano dal nostro, leggere questo libro è stato abbastanza piacevole.

Ho trovato lo scenario piuttosto inquietante, con l'umanità divisa tra una regione isolata ed addirittura recintata elettricamente, dove si svolgono i fatti narrati, ed il resto del pianeta popolato da barbari feroci, abbruttiti da carestie e anni di conflitti.

Nella nostra Regione, culla della civiltà, vigono delle leggi inconsuete che dovrebbero garantire la pace ed il benessere.

Peccato che, dato che l'obiettivo a cui tendere non è il benessere sociale, bensì la vita eterna, lo stress è più alto del solito ed i manicomi (i Palliatori) sono pieni di matti che alternano momenti di catatonìa passiva con scatti di pura violenza.

E la lotta di classe diventa una lotta per l'ascesa al livello superiore a cui sono assicurati una decina di anni di vita in più, sino all'ultimo livello, gli Amaranto, a cui è garantita una sorta di immortalità.

Per sfogarsi e liberarsi da questa continua tensione per l'ascesa, chi può si reca a Carnevalle, una sorta di incrocio tra Carnevale e Las Vegas, con parchi divertimenti ed ambienti in cui concedersi piaceri in piena libertà.

Proprio da Carnevalle, dove è rimasto nascosto per sette anni, proviene il protagonista che si scontra con l'ostilità di una donna Amaranto (ostilità abbastanza meritata a mio giudizio, visto il suo comportamento) che ha scoperto il suo segreto passato.

Vance è abile a intrecciare la storia, sfruttando le regole da lui create (talvolta un po' scricchiolanti in quanto a coerenza), per arrivare ad un finale... travolgente.

Fantascienza d'annata (1956).
