
COSMOPOLIS

Volume 1, Issue 4

April 2000

Planet of Retribution

Zubenelgenubi, sun to the planet Golfo, plunged below the horizon like a stricken shriek.

Kirk Pearson doffed his casque, placing it on the pawnbroker's counter along with a pair of projacs and an ammunition belt half full of spare energy canisters.

The old man behind the counter squinted at him. "Are these canisters fully charged?"

"Look," said Pearson as he pressed carbuncles on either end of a canister. "See the yellow line move across the display? If the line reaches the other side, a full charge is indicated."

The old man grunted, tested each canister in turn, then shoved a pouch of terquins across the counter to Pearson and handed him a ticket.

"Don't spend it all in one place!" he cackled. Pearson granted him a perfunctory grin and departed the establishment. As he closed the door behind him he pulled his hood up around his face.

Approaching the Jutepicker's Inn, a huddle of dark structures flanking the harbor, he pondered his alternatives. He now possessed sufficient funds to remain in Slagtown for another two or three days if he were not recognized. He could attempt the desert on foot if he cared to risk an encounter with grass dancers, a course of action which was not to be considered. He might make his way up the shore but for a colony of Divestors he knew to occupy the beach some miles to the north. To the south lay the lands controlled by Fedor Karkassus, whose minions would eagerly take him.

The low-ceilinged common room of the Jutepicker's, dimly lit by a few tapers in sconces along the ancient stone walls, was occupied only by a dozen dogmaclastic monks in soiled habits clustered around a table drinking goolug, a bitter potation brewed from knuckleberries. The giant proprietor slouched behind his bar, regarding Pearson with eyes like marbles sunk deep in his skull.

"Make mine a pitcher of red ravage," said Pearson.

"We serve none of such off-world swill," replied the giant with a grimace.

"I'll settle for a pint of goolug," replied Pearson amiably. The man filled a stoneware mug from a tap, set it before Pearson, and spooned into it a dollop of green slime, the customary condiment. Pearson placed a terquin on the bar, took his mug to a table and sat contemplating his fate.

As the room began to fill with patrons he noticed a well dressed young woman approaching. To his alarm she stopped before his table, smiled, and said, "Greetings, stranger. Do you mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," he lied, "but would your companion be agreeable?" He saw no companion, but knew that a woman in Slagtown would not venture out without one.

"I need no companion," she replied with a stunning smile as she took a seat across from him. "Everybody here knows who I am. Welby!" she called to the proprietor, "bring another goolug."

"Who are you then, if I may ask?" he inquired politely.

"I am Fleuridian Karkassus, daughter of the infamous Fedor Karkassus, who deposed Glabrat Fowsdick, the Satrap of Northern Kloot, disbanding his army of Sticklers, and domesticated the great hairy erb by excising his forebrain. He also, as you must know, allows no obstreperous behavior in my presence."

Pearson concealed his trepidation as best he could. "Ah," he said, in what he hoped was an insouciant manner, "that explains much."

"Perhaps not as much as you suppose. Who are you, then, that ventures into a place such as this without weapons or a retinue?"

"I am a harmless anthropologist passing through on my way to study the Divestors to the north."

She smiled, shook her head, and looked into his eyes. "That fabrication lacks merit. I believe you to be the man who so upset my father that he would not tell me what you had done. He has every man, woman and child in his territory searching for you. What did you do to him? Are you not aware of his power and his capacity for revenge?"

Pearson glanced around anxiously. Leaning towards her he murmured, "If I were that man you can well imagine that I would be chary of your company. What do you want?"

"I am sorry to frighten you. It was thoughtless of me. I want only a reasonable amount of masculine companionship. Because of my father's admonition no man in this town will even glance at me. I am sick of this nasty hole!" Frowning, she took a long draught of her goolug.

"I would be pleased to oblige you in this regard," said he, "but just now I seem to be in imminent danger of my life. Your father probably has spies in this room, and I have no place to hide."

She smiled tenderly. "My air car is parked in the back. No doubt you have a space ship concealed somewhere?"

"You could conceivably be joking. If not, how could I trust you?"

"Do you have an alternative?"

He stared at her for a moment. "Let's go, then," he whispered urgently.

She took his hand and led him behind the bar to a small door. They passed through into the kitchen, out the back and into a small air sled parked on the beach. She assumed the controls and they were away into the blackness of the moonless Golfo night.

* * *

Silently they flew until dawn. "Look down," she said. "We are beyond my father's territory. See these hills? They are the foothills of the Denteries. Where is your ship?"

"Further on, in a forest near the sea. After we pass a town of white domes you will see the forest. Are you tired?"

"Yes, but not as tired as you. I will wake you when we are near."

Pearson reasoned that if she had intended to betray him she would have done so by now. He slept.

After three hours she awakened him; they circled for an interval, searching for a certain black mathal tree, under which he had concealed his ship. They settled to the ground and climbed from the sled.

Pearson's ship, an old Monamantic Void Strider, the most sleek and jaunty of its day, once resplendent in scarlet and apple green, with appurtenances picked out in gold, was now pocked and streaked by its many encounters with meteorites.

He opened the port, they entered, and he ordered their breakfast at the synthesizer. As they ate at the saloon table she glanced around admiringly.

"I have never been inside a space ship. I've never even seen one before. Not one like this. It's darling! It's small, but you seem to have all the luxuries of home. It must have cost a fortune."

"Yes," he said, grinning, "and your father paid for it."

"So!" she laughed, "that was it. My father! That's perfect. Then you would be my handsome prince, come to steal me away from the evil baron." She rose from the table, came around to him and folded him in an embrace. "Take me away to the ends of the universe!"

"Come outside for a moment," he said, smiling. He led her out of the ship and they sat in the shade of the giant mathal tree. He gazed into her eyes. Should he do as she wished? He longed to succumb. With effort he rose and went to the port.

"I would love to be your prince," he said sadly, "but under the circumstances it's impossible."

"What circumstances?" she wailed, running to him, clinging.

"Nuncupatory," he muttered. "I can't explain. And if I did you would not like what you heard. Good-bye, Fleurdian." He kissed her soft lips, wet with tears, then pushed her gently away. Pearson entered the ship, departed Golfo, and became, to the sobbing woman, only a memory.

Excerpt from *Planet of Retribution*, a novel in the *Deranged Astrophysicist* series

Zach Fance

Statistics

Editor's note. John Schwab reports this interesting milestone: all of the writings of Jack Vance selected for inclusion in the VIE are now either digitized, or assigned for digitization.

Current VIE Progress as of April 24, 2000

TOTAL NUMBER OF STORIES IN VIE	133
Assigned for digitization	131
Digitized	113
Assigned for 1st proof reading	108
1st proof completed	76
Assigned for 2nd proof	21
2nd proof completed	10
Assigned for correction:	18

I would like to thank all of you who have volunteered for text-entry work. As you can see by the list above, our job of digitizing texts for the VIE is almost complete. You have all done a remarkable job, and it has been a pleasure working with all of you.

There are a few tasks which may come up in the future, which could require additional digitizing work. If you would be interested in future jobs, please let me know and I will keep a list. These jobs could include digitizing from tear sheets or photocopies of typescripts. There is also the possibility that a couple of more particular tasks – not necessarily digitizing – could come up for which I would need a volunteer. Please let me know if you would like to be considered for one of these as well.

The only text at this time that still requires digitizing is *Crusade to Maxus* (Thrilling Wonder Stories, Feb. 1951). We have the book version of this story digitized, but want to digitize the original version for comparison. If you have a copy of the original, and would like to volunteer to digitize this, please contact me.

John A. Schwab, Text-Entry Coordinator

Proofreading Update

This month sees a gradual advance in our proofing progress, with our total “wordage” just 52,000 words short of three million (shy by the length, say, of *Big Planet*). The total number of assignments made to date is 131, of which 82 are complete. A number of new assignments – mainly to new proofers – were made last week, so next month’s update should see us comfortably through the three million-word barrier.

Help for New Proofers

Last week saw the launch of a scheme we had been considering for some time – proof-reading mentors. With so many volunteers attached to the VIE, it’s been difficult to provide the necessary level of support to all volunteers, so the three most experienced proofers, Steve Sherman, Chris Corley and Patrick Dusoulie, have been recruited to help and advise proofers as required. Each has written a short biography below. As introduction I would only say that these three are the project’s outstanding proof-readers and I had no hesitation in choosing any of them. All three have helped to develop the proofing process we have now, and now they’re ready to face the consequences.

Chris Corley is a web programmer of dubious provenance. After earning a degree in geophysics in 1986 and getting a taste of the oil industry, he decided to get a second degree in computer science. His career began as a scientific programmer for a small research firm, where his duties included writing and editing of technical documents as well as programming. In 1997 he forsook the research career path for the greener pastures of the Internet world; his current job still involves some degree of technical writing and editing. Chris lives in Austin, Texas with his wife and three daughters. His hobbies include bicycling and, of course, reading.

Patrick Dusoulie is a Frenchman, 53 years old, married with two daughters. He lives in Courbevoie, France, 15 minutes from the Champs-Elysees and works as IT manager for an oil company. He has many interests in life, foremost being his family, then learning languages, drawing cartoons, writing stories, reading books, listening to music, going to the cinema, travelling abroad, and of course, going on the Web ... He gets a bit more physical occasionally by walking in the mountains, when he can escape from Paris... He also enjoys food and wine, but then, this goes without saying. Jack Vance has always been his favourite SF author, and one of the

happiest moments of his life was when he went on the Web for the first time, searched for “Jack Vance”, and found he was not alone in the world anymore (he’s grateful to Mike Berro and his site). Then there was the *VIE* project ... and the rest is history (or soon will be—!).

Steve Sherman is an American, 56 years old, who lives in Munich, Germany and works for Compaq Computer Corporation as a software developer. His bachelor’s and master’s degrees are in political science, which he was studying when, in 1967, he learned computer programming as a research tool. He quickly discovered he preferred the tool to the research, and has been a programmer ever since. He left Los Angeles, California, for Munich in 1977, and has been working at the same job ever since (though, because of acquisitions, for six different employers). He also sings in an American Episcopal church choir (though himself non-religious), a spiritual ensemble, a Gilbert-and-Sullivan society, and a barbershop quartet.

One of these mentors will be assigned to every new proof-reader when they get their first assignment. Do make use of them – they are there to help and they’re keen to do so. Our aim is to provide constructive, friendly feedback within one working day, time zones permitting.

Missing In Action

Recently I have tried to make contact with a number of proofers who have been silent for some time. Unfortunately some of you have changed your e-mail addresses or had other difficulties in responding. When I lose contact with a volunteer who is undertaking an assignment I have no option but to reassign the work.

I would particularly like to re-establish contact with:

François Court

Jack Robson

Daniel Stedman

Keith Allen

Kelly Walker

Dominic Brown

Guido Posthumus

– if you are reading this please drop me an e-mail.

Ever Thought About Volunteering?

The *VIE* is, in many ways, a unique effort: intercontinental, Internet-based and, most importantly, administered entirely by volunteers. Nobody is being paid to take part in the *VIE*: for all of us it’s an honour simply to be involved. How many of us have felt aggrieved in the past at the neglect of Jack’s work, while lesser talents (fill in your own candidates here) flourish? The *VIE* is part of the drive to redress this travesty.

Everyone, volunteers and subscribers alike, is making an important contribution to helping the *VIE* take flight. For those of you who have been thinking about volunteering to help out with the project but who aren’t sure what it entails: have another think about it. As the project gathers pace we will need ever more proof-readers if the project is to come to fruition. You may have good reasons for not volunteering; but most can be overcome.

“I wouldn’t make a very good proof-reader.”

Professional proof-reading experience is not necessary (although if you have it, the address is tim.stretton@bigfoot.com). Enthusiasm is more important. There will always be someone dedicated to helping you and making your life easier. Each text will be proof-read many times: don’t feel that if you miss an error, it will make it through into print. We all miss things – but you may spot the one that nobody else does.

“English isn’t my first language.”

That’s no problem either. If your English is good enough to understand this newsletter, it’s good enough to help out with proof-reading. Sometimes speakers of other languages spot things which native speakers will gloss over. And of course you will never be the only proofer to read the text.

“I don’t have preferred editions of any of the books.”

That doesn’t matter either. Only a small proportion of jobs require the text to be read against a particular edition. In most cases the proof-reader will be looking for typos only; this doesn’t require any edition of the text.

“I don’t have time.”

This, of course, is the major reason for not volunteering. We all have other claims on our time: jobs, families, other interests. Don’t rule out volunteering just because you have a busy life, though. You can sign on to read as little as one short story to see how you get on. The average progress of proof-

reading jobs is less than 1,000 words per day. It need not be too time-consuming; we do not demand rapid turnaround.

Consider, too, the satisfactions to be derived from volunteering. Your name will appear in the credits of all volumes on which you assist; there is the opportunity to work more closely than you ever imagined with these marvellous texts; and there is the sheer satisfaction of a job well done. Most of us on the *VIE* Management Team only volunteered initially to do one or two proof-reads and our involvement has mushroomed from there: that's the ultimate testament to the sheer good fun that comes from being involved at the sharp end of the project.

Found an Error? Let Us Know!

Since being involved in the *VIE* I have found myself much more receptive to errors in the published texts when reading for pleasure. I'm sure I'm not the only one. What you might not realise is that we have a means of recording any textual glitches you come across. Send them to Suan Yong (suan@cs.wisc.edu) with a copy to me, setting out the error, the text, edition and page, with an indication of where on the page the error is. (It helps if you put the *VIE* title on the subject line.) These will all be picked up when the text is next reviewed.

Tim Stretton, Proofreading Lead

VIE Publicity Notice

The *VIE* is now entering phase two of the publicity effort. Phase one will continue in the background but emphasis now shifts to another direction. In phase two, we want to try to draw attention to Vance by alerting the media to the *VIE* project itself. We plan to approach print and broadcast outlets which take particular interest in the Internet and cultural phenomena.

We will call attention to the *VIE*'s many points of human interest: that it is nonprofit, literary, volunteer, Internet-based, world wide, and progressing speedily.

We are preparing a series of press releases focusing on these aspects. Please help by sending me suggestions of radio or TV shows, Internet or print magazines, newspapers, colleges – anyone or anything you think might be interested in

a project like the *VIE*. Please try to send e-mail or street addresses with your suggestions. We are especially looking for leads in countries besides the U.S.

If anyone wishes to help more directly in the publicity effort, please contact me.

John Robinson Jr.

What sort of Artist is Jack Vance?

The business of classifying artists with *isms* and *ists* should not be taken too seriously. I did my best in *Cosmopolis* Volume 1, Issue 3 to loosen the stubborn link between Vance and “science fiction”, and do not wish to be responsible for attaching a different label to him, however useful to the promotion of his *oeuvre*. Though I am impatient with stylistic denominators such as *realism* or *classicism*, given that verbal communication inevitably consists of words, we must choose and use them as best we can.

I recently acquired a little book on Giandomenico Tiepolo (1727 – 1804). Giandomenico is the son of the much more famous Gianbatista Tiepolo. For much of the son's artistic career he was assistant to the father, and this is generally how he is known – though the trained eye can often distinguish his hand in the father's work; one of those vast 18th century *oeuvres* that required an *atelier*. In the essay which accompanies the reproductions, Harry Mathews, after rejecting the common notion that Giandomenico's art is just an inferior version of his father's, tries to define its individual character. In the case of Giandomenico this is not easy; his work owes so much stylistically to his father that the untrained eye can't tell them apart – and even great connoisseurs have made attribution errors that have only been corrected by fortuitous discovery of documents. And yet his work is unquestionably marked by strong individual characteristics. Still, it is not easy to define what these are. Why? Exactly because they are so very individual. Mathews points out that Giandomenico's work is neither a prolongation of the *baroque* style of his father and the other *Rubenists*, which was going out of fashion, nor the ever more fashionable *classical* style, of which Poussin was the greatest exemplar. Searching for a way to define it, Mathews uses the term *naturalism*.



Poussin

The sense in which he meant this term reminded me of Vance.

This term *naturalism* should not be confused with the term *realism*, neither in its 19th century literary sense to label authors like Zola, nor in its use for contemporary non-abstract painting styles usually prefixed with a qualifier like *photo*, *hyper*, or *optical*. Literary realism, as Jules Lemaitre explains in *Les Contemporains*, is not more real than any other literary style. What is particular about it is a taste for the sordid. It is a style that revels in a vision of man as brute, slave to ignoble passions, oppressor or oppressed, living in a world that inspires disgust. Having explained this, Lemaitre then goes ahead and discusses works in the realist style as he would those in any other; because literary realism is a style, an approach, a taste, not a privileged art form that, because of a presumed orientation toward *reality*, gives us a somehow truer picture of life than another. In fact, as Lemaitre makes clear, *realism* may even be more unreal than other styles, a thing he does not in the least hold against it.

What then of Giandomenico's *naturalism*? Mathews' thesis, it seems to me, falls down at several points, and his typically contemporary tendency to slip into discussions of sex at the flimsiest opportunity is an annoying distraction, but what I retain of his idea is this: Giandomenico's vision partakes of

none of the special exaltations characteristic of either the *baroque* or *classicism*. It lacks both the divine excitement of the baroque Tiepolo, and the noble repose of classicist Poussin. Giandomenico's personal works are usually classified as *genre* painting, meaning paintings of everyday life; a thing neither his father nor Poussin ever did. And indeed, some of his paintings are just that: usually scenes of people at a fair, or enjoying an informal picnic, dance or acrobatic display out of doors. Yet these paintings, which by another hand might fall into *realism* in the literary sense, have nothing *realist* about them. They are tranquil, inviting scenes, with none of the sometimes sordid aspects to be found in northern genre painting by the likes of Jan Steen, Van Ostade, or David Teniers the younger. Also, they are not painted with typically *realist* attention to detail, but are broadly and decoratively conceived and, like his father's vast frescos of celestial beings cavorting in the clouds, are executed with brio.



Gianbattista Tiepolo

But many of Giandomenico's personal works can not be classified as *genre*. He painted a *Stations of the Cross* while still very young. Most notable among the non-genre works – works made famous about 15 years ago by a book of reproductions –

are the series of ink and wash drawings dating from the end of his life called *Amusements for Children*. These drawings certainly have elements of genre to them, but as many elements of fantasia. They show a world of Punchinellos, with false humpbacks, big-nosed masks, and tall truncated cone hats. In

scene after scene Giandomenico shows us his Punchinellos engaged in every imaginable kind of activity. As Mathews points out, Giandomenico's treatment of these varied scenes offers no overt commentary.



Giandomenico Tiepolo

Compare this scene of an execution to the celebrated contemporary treatment of the same subject by Francisco Goya, the latter an image regularly trotted out in the now wearisome propaganda assault on the horrors of war and political persecution. Giandomenico's image would never do for such a purpose. Unlike Goya, who gives us the supposedly instructive spectacle of the forces of evil expunging the children of light – all in contemporary costumes – Giandomenico simply gives us a scene of execution; one more spectacle in a varied human comedy: Punchinello executes Punchinello. It has no more political weight than his game of petanque. For all the bustle of both these scenes they are most deeply characterized by serenity. This is because of the sublime nature of Giandomenico's vision which, by a sort of divine indulgence, penetrates the hearts of men, contemplates their frail humanity, and looks beyond their sins to the sheer spectacle of the human drama.



Goya

Giandomenico's *Amusements for Children* reminds me of Vance. There is the same scope, the same serenity, the same underlying absence of political, or this-worldly, passions. This does not mean that Vance, any less that Giandomenico, does not have, or express, opinions, political and otherwise. It means that these opinions are tempered and nourished by a sublime viewpoint. Indeed, only such a viewpoint could make possible certain Vancian opinions which, as far as I can tell, are unique in contemporary literature. What other writer, apart from such as Solzhenitsyn, has dared confront such sacred contemporary idolatries as anti-colonialism? Yet in *The Domains of Koryphon* Vance does just that. Under the indulgent and discreet, if uncompromising, guidance of this book, all the obviousness of this contemporary mantric doctrine melts away. *The Domains of Koryphon* was written in the early seventies, at the frenzied apogee of anti-colonialism. Now, a quarter of a century later as we enter the 21st century, opinions are starting to change. Certain ex-colonies of France have actually requested re-admittance under France's administrative wing, and the historical truths about colonization, as well as the real results of de-colonization, are beginning to be muttered about.

(Editor's note. For an instructive view of the effects on a small society of the departure of a colonizing government, the reader is directed to observe the governments of the Caribbean islands. The results of the departure of Britain and France from the political structure of some of the islands are most instructive.)

But there is never anything polemical about Vance. If there were it would not be like Giandomenico's *naturalism*. So I am not insisting that Vance "courageously takes on establishment opinions" – he does, but that is not the point. The sort of polemics exemplified by Goya's execution painting, and so characteristic of today's cultural and political scene, are manifestations of the Manichean heresy. This is the idea that the world is a battle ground in a war between good and evil, two invisible forces of equal power, each commanding an army: the children of darkness and the children of light. The inevitable corollary of this view is that the opposing camp is composed of beings intrinsically evil, which should be expunged without mercy. Opposing Manicheanism is the view that different human beings, however contrasting their acts as measured by the rule of good and evil, are not different by nature. At the deepest level the worst among us are no less human persons than the best. This insight is the greatest philosophical support of the virtue of Charity.

Though he makes no secret of his opinions, Vance can not be said to argue for one side or another of any question. He is

not a polemicist. On the other hand, he is not above the fray in the sense that he owns an insight so superior it renders lesser insights nuncupatory. He is in the fray, as all honest folk necessarily are, and does not pretend otherwise. The difference



Game of Petanque

with Vance, as with other great Artists, is that whatever his personal convictions, his view of reality is unfraught with political passions. It is tranquil and large. He therefore makes fewer errors than others, but that also is not the point; the point is that this attitude that I designate with the adjectives "large" and "tranquil," allows him to present his view of human realities in a way that is itself above the fray. When his work refutes opinions that seem obvious, it is where these opinions are ideological; in other words, where they have no purchase on reality.

As an example, let's look at another question, a typically hot contemporary topic: the death penalty. Recently we were treated to a dishonest and tendentious use of this serious issue: the recent hullabaloo in the U.S. and European press about an execution or two carried out in Texas a few months ago. That the governor of Indiana simultaneously called a moratorium on executions in the Hoosier state, as was noisily pointed out, had, of course, nothing to do with what goes on in Texas, where it is apparently not felt that the criminal justice system is awry. Of course if the governor of Texas were not the Republican candidate for president, we would never have heard a word about these executions. And if the European press were not absolutely determined to prove by any means, however illegitimate, that *le Capitalism sauvage à l'américaine* is an inherently criminal *ideology* akin to fascism and is now being imposed on the world by the nasty planetary policeman, this propaganda blitz – completely forgotten now, only three months later – would never have occurred.

(Editor's note: In commenting on a draft of this article, Steve Sherman observes that this generalization may be true of the media in

France and England, but not necessarily everywhere else in Europe. In Germany, for instance, with the exception of Der Spiegel, the media are not habitually tendentious.)

The European motive – for those American *Cosmopolis* readers not *au courant* with European politics – is linked to an ongoing campaign to block people from looking squarely at Communist regimes and considering their nature. Because if they did, who would have time to talk about two lawful executions in Texas? They would be too busy talking about the dozens of criminal executions carried out every day in Communist China (to say nothing of Korea or Cuba et cetera). One or two genuine criminals, protected by rights, duly tried and convicted under law, in a state with democratic institutions, whose citizens can change the laws, vote their governor out of office, or emigrate whenever they like: this is news? The strategy of the European media has a double purpose: first; to identify nazism and the contemporary political right – exemplified for propagandized Europeans by America, believe it or not! – and thus eviscerate their opponents; and secondly to protect the reputations of many of the politicians and intellectuals whose support or approval of past or present Communist regimes would be most embarrassing if an equal sign were allowed to be drawn between Communism and nazism.

Finally it might be added that most of the people involved in this propaganda do not live in Texas. They know little, and care less, about the justice system of that state. What they are up to is obvious to anyone who looks at it with a cold eye. I digress with a dissection of this confused example because it shows so well a kind of illegitimate discourse foreign to Vance. *Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive!*

That said, where does Vance come down – but above all; how does he come down – on the question of the death penalty? First of all, it is clear enough that Vance is not against the death penalty as such. He has no patience with sociopaths and it poses no problem to him that they be expunged by the legitimate forces of social order. So much for the opinion of the man. It is a fairly ordinary, reasonable and respectable opinion. Its contrary, that capital punishment should be abolished, is also a reasonable opinion, held by enough respectable folk that it too can be called “ordinary.” Such is the fray. But what of Jack Vance the Artist, what of how he expresses his opinion?

One of the basic Vancian themes is life and, as usual, he comes at it from unexpected angles. From the macabre burlesque of *Clarges*, to the pathetic illusions of Dame Hester,

the Vance *oeuvre* is filled with references to the capital fact of each fleeting and precious moment of life. If Vance’s message had to be summed up in a phrase, it would certainly have to be one like: Savor the now! So with Vance death is rarely the mere plot engine it is in murder mysteries, or the mere decor it is in westerns. For Vance death is never gratuitous. It is always poignant and, throughout his work, the sense of mortality, if not omnipresent, is never far away. Take this passage from *The Killing Machine*, with its striking phrase pronounced by – whom else? – that person in all Vance most preoccupied by mortality: the hormagaunt Kokor Hekkus – here disguised as Seuman Otwal:

Otwal laughed negligently. “You just saved his life.”

“I saved our second payment,” said Gersen, “because I would have been forced to kill you as well.”

“No matter, no matter. Let us not talk of death, horrid to consider nonbeing! ...”

In Chapter 5 of *The Green Pearl* Vance takes pains to acquaint us with Sir Hune and make him a sympathetic character. In Chapter 7 Sir Hune flagrantly violates the new law. In a scene graven in the memories of all Vance readers, Aillas marches to Three Pines house and places it under investment:

Sir Hune had pulled up his gate and waited glumly for the summons to parley. He waited in vain, while with sinister efficiency the Troice contingents made their preparations.

Three Pines is bombarded.

Sir Hune was dumbfounded and outraged; where was the call to parley he had so confidently expected? And he liked even less the sight of the gibbet which was being erected somewhat to the side. It was strong and high, and well braced, as if prepared for much heavy work.

Sir Hune and his collaborators are forced out of their fort with fire and cut down with arrows.

... Some of the warriors leaped erect and fought with swords until they too were shot dead by the Troice archers; others were captured as they lay stunned in the bracken, and among these was Sir Hune. His arms were bound; a rope was tied around his neck and he was dragged stumbling to the gibbet.

Aillas stood at a distance of twenty yards. For the briefest of moments the two looked eye to eye, then Sir Hune was hoisted high.

This act of swift, brutal justice is recounted with Vancian economy. Only the moment of eye contact recalls us to Sir Hune’s full humanity; it is sufficient. But Vance is not done;

Sir Hune's guilt turns out to be deeper than we realized, a revelation that comes later. Meanwhile Aillas hangs the other rebel nobles:

The remaining prisoners, some fifty men, stood haggard and woebegone, waiting their turn. Aillas went to inspect them. He spoke: "In point of law you, like your leaders, are rebels. Probably you deserve hanging. However, I deplore the waste of strong men, who should be supporting the cause of their country rather than working to defeat it.

"I offer each of you an option. You may be hanged at this moment, or you may enlist in the king's army, to serve him with full loyalty. Choose! Those who wish to be hanged, let them step yonder to the gibbet."

There were uneasy mutters, a shifting of feet, and wall-eyed glances toward the gibbet, but no one moved.

No great surprise! They all want to live, and Vance makes us feel the full force of their desire – note that here we are given a look at death from another angle, through the eyes of those who have just escaped it. Aillas is dealing with further business when:

... Sir Tristano returned with grisly news. "... No one survives in the house, save only those in the dungeons. I counted eight prisoners and three torturers; then I could no longer bear the stench."

Aillas' heart went cold. "Torturers then? I might have suspected as much..."

The light Vancian touch; it reveals the whole of Aillas' interior, to say nothing of what we learn of Sir Hune. The prisoners and torturers are brought forth.

The three torturers stood apart, surly, uncertain, but feigning a disdainful detachment from the situation. ... The third, who seemed no more than Aillas' own age, smiled with unconvincing bravado first out at the troops, then up at the bodies on the gibbet. ...

"Sergeant! Hoist high these three horrors."

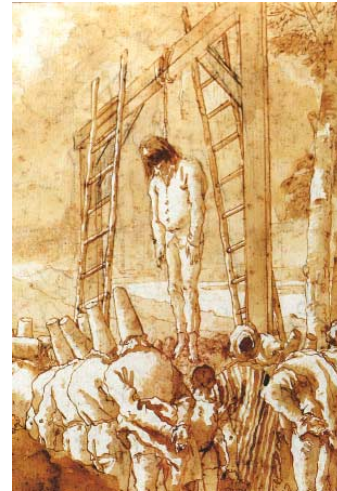
"Hold!" cried the young torturer Luton in a sudden sweat. "We obeyed orders, no more! Had we not done so, a dozen others would have leapt forward to take over our posts!"

"And today they would dangle from the gibbet instead of you... Sergeant, take them aloft."

"Hurrah!" quavered Nols...

Vance's telling of this execution, as brief and to the point as usual, makes the blood run cold. With this scene Vance brings opponents of the death penalty nose to nose with the common human impulse to expunge the likes of Luton. Poor Nols, tortured for months by these *horrors*, cheers the

execution; and who can blame him? It should be noted that while there are some opponents to the death penalty on the grounds of a rigid interpretation of the 5th Commandment, the Catholic Church recognizes the right of legitimate governments to administer the death penalty in such cases. On the other hand, in the midst of all this, and with the merest phrase, Vance penetrates us with the dreadful sensation that traverses the foolish Luton; he will not let us get away without empathy; and Luton's death comes as a rude jolt. Only Nols and his fellows, perhaps made of no better stuff than Luton, gasp out a cheer. Aillas and the Troice are mute.



How does Vance accomplish this? What do we know of Luton? He is *Aillas' own age*. Why not just say he is young? Because Vance thus draws an equal sign between the two: both are persons, the centers and heroes of the stories of their own unfolding lives – most of which, normally, still lies before them. Then, Luton's *unconvincing bravado* shows (*shows*, always stronger than *states*) his anxiety. Vance shows him glancing back and forth between the things that menace him: the soldiers and the gibbet. And then the *sudden sweat* and the desperate argument; a crescendo of almost unnoticed Vancian touches, and the death of Luton becomes an unforgettable drama; I, at least, have been haunted by it since the first time I read it. Ultimately it is a humanizing reminder of the personhood of every individual, however puny or despicable. Though Luton is as evil as you like, evil in an easy, sordid and horrific manner, he is a person. How much deeper a revelation than Goya's scene, where the soldiers are soulless instruments of oppression, and *humanity* a status Goya accords only to their victims. The picture of the torture chambers of Three Pines House which Vance opens to our imagination, grisly as it is, is likewise more like Giandomenico's pictures than Goya's.

Giandomenico, like Vance, sees humanity everywhere, in the killers and the killed, in the “good” as well as in the “evil.”

This is not moral neutrality. In the scene at Three Pines Vance presents the unjust killed by the just. But, as in the implicit scenes in the dungeons, he presents the opposite as well. In either case the issue of justice, though given its due, in one way or another opens out into larger issues, like the humanity of all people, and their common desire to live. Vance will not allow us to traverse these passages without a torn heart. The Vancian spirit that animates the hangings at Three Pines is the same that animates Giandomenico’s hanging scene. We are shown, above all, an event. A sad, even tragic event, but a human kind of event which must ultimately be seen in the context of the warp and woof of human experience. This does not exalt it, but it does drain it of some of the immediate passions it might excite, so it can point beyond them to larger truths and questions.

Anti-colonialism and the death penalty are hot issues these days. But Vance treats everything with the same *naturalism*. An example of a non-controversial subject would be romance. One of the most characteristic of Vancian romances is that of Aillas and Tatzel. It occurs in two episodes; Aillas’ enslavement at Castle Sank, and his later capture of Tatzel and their trek across Dahaut to North Ulfland where Aillas restores her to her father’s protection. How can this *romance* be classified; certainly not as *romantic!* Nor can it be called *classical* in the sense of having a well rounded beginning, middle or end, tragic or comic, like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Sleeping Beauty*. Nor is it *realist* since nothing sordid happens; in fact nothing happens at all, which also excludes the energetic and busy *baroque*. What happens is simply what would naturally happen, given who and what Tatzel and Aillas are.

...Thinking back to his time at Castle Sank, Aillas tried to remember his first sight of Tatzel: then a slender creature of thoughtless assurance walking with long swaggering strides by reason of natural verve

Aillas sighed. Upon a heartsick young man, Tatzel, with her fascinating face and jaunty vitality, had made a deep impression.

And now? He watched her as she worked. Her assurance had been replaced by sullen unhappiness, and the bitter facts of her present existence had taken the luster from her verve.

Tatzel felt the pressure of his attention and turned a quick glance over her shoulder. “Why do you look at me so?”

“An idle whim.”

Tatzel looked back to the fire. “Sometimes I suspect you of madness.”

“Madness?” Aillas considered the word. “How so?”

“There would seem no other reason for your hatred of me.”

Aillas laughed. “I feel no such hatred.” He drank from the wine-sack. “Tonight I am kindly disposed; in fact, I see that I owe you a debt of gratitude.”

“That debt is easily paid. You may give me a horse and let me go my way.–”

“In this wild country? I would be doing you no favor. My gratitude, moreover, is indirect. You have earned it despite yourself.”

Tatzel muttered: “Again the madness comes on you.”

...“My remarks are probably somewhat opaque. I will explain. At Castle Sank I became enamored of a certain Tatzel, who in some respects resembled you, but who was essentially an imaginary creature. This phantom which lived in my mind possessed qualities which I thought must be innate to a creature of such grace and intelligence.

“Ah well, I escaped from Sank and went my way, encumbered still with this phantom, which now only served to distort my perceptions. At last I returned to South Ulfland.

“Almost by chance my most far-fetched daydreams were realized, and I was able to capture you: the real Tatzel. So then – what of the phantom?” Aillas paused to drink, tilting the wine-sack high. “This impossibly delightful creature is gone, and now is even hard to remember. Tatzel exists, of course, and she has freed me from the tyranny of my imagination, and here is the source of my gratitude.”

The crucial scene, the apogee of the romance, the moment when Aillas and Tatzel come as close as they ever do to a meeting of souls, follows:

...She spoke with fervor: “You are so wonderfully wrong-headed I can almost find it within myself to laugh at you! After chasing me across the moors, breaking my leg and causing me a dozen humiliations, you expect me to come creeping to you with adoration in my eyes, happy to be your slave, soliciting your caress, hoping with all my heart that I may compare favorably with your erotic daydream. You profess to find the Ska lacking in pathos, but your conduct toward me is absolutely self-serving! And now you sulk because I do not come sobbing to you and begging for your indulgence. Is it not a farce?”

Aillas heaved a deep sigh. “Everything you say is true. In all justice, I must admit as much. I have been driven by romantic passions to act out a dream...”

Vance, as usual, flatters and gratifies no one. But the human underpinnings of the scene are true to life.

Paul Rhoads, Editor-in-Chief, The *VIE*

Notes from Readers

From Till Noever:

Thoughts on why I'm A *VIE* volunteer.

I never thought about it much, but when Paul initiated the *VIE* project, the question kind of popped up all by its own: what do we owe to authors? Apart from the purchase price of the book, that is. Indeed some might argue that that's all, and that the handing over of money is sufficient to balance the scales of "cosmic equipoise."

In most cases I'd agree with that assessment. However, there are authors who give us more than we paid for. At least they're offering it. Whether this is intentional or epiphenomenal doesn't matter: it's there. Whether we choose to take it... well, that's a different issue again. But if we do, then we may end up without a means to actually repay the debt thus incurred. The cosmic scales remain disconcertingly askew.

With regards to Jack and my own self, this situation has been in existence for some time – probably decades. As a reader I owe him endless hours of – enchantment – at a pathetically low price; the best fantasy I'm ever likely to read; and the acquaintance of fictional people I wish were real. As a writer I owe him this important lesson: that any story can be told well, and that you've just got to do it.

The scales are gravely askew indeed. But... they tilt a little back toward the horizontal with every book I proofread. Not enough to get close to a state of "balance," but affairs are less out of kilter than they used to be.

After all, the only thing that beats saying "thanks" is doing something to show that you mean it.

From Rob Gerrard:

I disagree most strongly with Paul's article (Editor's note: *Is Vance a Science Fiction Author?*, *Cosmopolis* Volume 1 Issue 3, March 2000). He sets up a series of straw men, defining science fiction in the most cliched forms, to illustrate that that

is not the sort of thing Vance writes. Of course he doesn't write crud.

But the same can be said for any of the GOOD sf writers – Aldiss, Ballard, Blish, Bradbury, Clarke, Dick, Farmer, Lem, Pohl, Sheckley, Stapledon, Sturgeon, Vonnegut, Wells to make a quick sampling – they are not concerned per se with science. Their stories deal with all manner of issues relevant to the human condition.

What a ridiculous definition to say that science fiction is fiction about science! If that were true, almost all the work of the above could not be called science fiction.

And how bizarre to say there is no humour in SF. Think just of Aldiss, Harrison, Lem, Sheckley, Vonnegut – like Vance all writers with serious concerns, but able to use wit and satire when it suits them. And note that Vance, too, does not always use humour.

SF is best defined as "speculative fiction." Speculations about how we would be if a change were made, perhaps. Speculation using the imaginative freedom that SF confers to escape the written-out lode of the contemporary "literary" psychological novel.

If Paul is worried about respectability, he need only look at the plethora of university courses studying SF that are springing up around the world. Like all movements, they start ahead of their time, get discovered, and end up as dry grist for the academic mill.

SF is a house with many mansions, and one its richest mansions is furnished by Jack Vance.

Presenting the *VIE* in an attractive edition will help reach a wider public. But there is no need to put down SF (in which most of Vance's material first appeared). In fact to do so is very much like crapping in one's own nest.

From Amy Harlib:

The essay, *Is Vance a Science Fiction Author?* by Paul Rhoads was BRILLIANT and deliciously thought provoking. I hope *Cosmopolis* will feature something special like that every issue.

Thanks again.

Thank you for your thoughtful letters and notes. We are always happy to hear from volunteers and subscribers, and

hope to publish more of your thoughts in the next edition of *Cosmopolis*.

Bob Lacovara, Editor of *Cosmopolis*

Bob's Closing Comments

With these last few paragraphs, I bring the fourth issue of *Cosmopolis* to a close.

I often delay writing the closing paragraphs for reasons that you may well sympathize with. One thing is that I need to see the mood of the assembled edition while waiting for my muse to strike. Another is that I thereby bypass a bit of my proofers' efforts, and make my cumulative editing process a bit easier. Yet another is that, believe it or not, working on the International Space Station becomes boring at times. There may be other reasons as well for rambling on just before *Cosmopolis* goes to bed.

Sometimes I am tempted to comment on topical items in the news which strike me as significant – whereupon I reflect that my audience is international, and is unlikely to be very interested in much that is topical in the United States at any given time. Yes, the antics of the American political system are probably good for a wry chuckle almost anywhere. (But so what? Are your politicians candidates for sainthood?) The astonishing turns in the plot of “Elian, Held Captive in Miami” may hold international attention a bit, but when all is said and done, I'm not a political commentator, I know nothing of politics and law, and in fact I should stick to electrical engineering and computer science. But I won't.

Instead, I'll go on for a bit on a topic on which I know at least a little, and that is the editing of Jack Vance. I'm encouraged by John Schwab's report that the digitization phase of Jack's *oeuvre* is nearly completed. This is a milestone of enormous importance: you, as volunteers and subscribers, now have new bragging rights: that Jack Vance's work is *captured*. Of course, much remains to be done. Of course, printing will not occur tomorrow. Clearly, though, we are moving towards our goal.

Among the work that remains is Textual Integrity. Unlike proofing, which is to some extent mechanical, Textual Integrity devolves to comparisons with the best sources of Jack Vance's words, and lacking primary sources in some

cases, reasoned and judicious care in making limited changes. Walking on eggs comes to mind.

Over the years, all sorts of editors have made changes to Jack Vance's works, for all sorts of reasons. Some reasons were pragmatic: cut to fit. (An observation of Jack's: each word removed was like pulling out a fingernail.) Others were well intentioned: some damned Vassar graduate (to use Jack's phrase) decided to correct Jack's spelling or grammar, occasionally in terms dripping with condescension. And yet a few were sympathetic, understanding that Jack Vance had developed a Style that had little need for more than rudimentary supervision.

Jack Vance is hardly alone in this situation. I began to re-read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* the other night, and I was struck by one of Tolkien's comments in the introduction. The gist of it was Tolkien's frustration with well-intentioned editors who insisted on changing his carefully constructed vocabulary to fit the pedestrian standards to which the editors normally worked. Small, but no doubt frustrating changes: *dwarves* changed to *dwarfs*, *elven* changed to *elfen*. A hobbit's adolescent years are called the *'tweens*, for the “twenties between” childhood and coming of age at thirty-three. Yet only pages later, Merry is quoted referring to his *teens*, and this is most likely an editorial blunder.

I brought up Tolkien to you, however, not to complain about editors (whose task I now begin to see is much harder than I had thought), but to draw a comparison. I have begun to think lately that only three authors (you must deduce the third for yourself) have ever established worlds for me which are simultaneously fascinating, exotic, and real. Writings which act to “hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” I began to re-read the *Lord of the Rings* to see if in fact this was so.

Indeed, my memory was not playing tricks. I am almost convinced that somewhere in space-time at least two nominally imaginary worlds exist in actual fact: Middle Earth, and the Gaean Reach. Tolkien and Vance did not act as mere mediums, I hasten to add: in acts of genius they drew these worlds into reality.

Oh, I've just remembered the other reason for writing my closing comments near the end. I sometimes need to fill a bit of white space with words. And so I have.

VIE & Cosmopolis Staff

The VIE Web Page

www.vanceintegral.com

Bob Lacovara, Editor of *Cosmopolis*

Lacovara@infohwy.com

Christian J. Corley, Assistant Editor, *Cosmopolis*

cjc@vignette.com

Paul Rhoads, Editor-in-Chief of the VIE

prhoads@club-internet.fr

John Robinson, Publicity Coordinator

johnange@ix.netcom.com

Steve Sherman, Volunteer Coordinator

volunteer@vanceintegral.com

Team Leaders:

John Foley, Composition

johnfoley@lucent.com

Alun Hughes, Textual Integrity

a.hughes@newi.ac.uk

John Schwab, Digitization

jschwab@uswest.net

Tim Stretton, Proofing Text Entry

tim.stretton@bigfoot.com

The Fine Print

Letters to the Editor

Letters to *Cosmopolis* may be published in whole or in part, with or without attribution, at the discretion of *Cosmopolis*. Send your e-mail to Bob Lacovara, with indication that you'd like your comments published.

Deadlines for Publication

Deadlines for any particular issue for VIE-related articles are the 21st of the month, but for short story inclusion I must have your copy by the 14th. If you have any questions about publishing your story in *Cosmopolis*, drop me an e-mail.

Cosmopolis Delivery Options

There are two delivery schemes for *Cosmopolis* readers. Those of you who do not wish to have *Cosmopolis* arrive as an e-mail attachment may request "notification" only. When a new issue of *Cosmopolis* is ready for distribution, an HTML version is prepared for our web site, and it may be viewed there.

A PDF version of *Cosmopolis*, identical to that distributed via e-mail, is also available at that site.

Publication Information

For reprint information, address Bob Lacovara.

Cosmopolis is assembled, edited and transferred across the Gaeen Reach from Houston, Texas, United States of America, Sol III.

Cosmopolis is delivered as an Adobe® Acrobat® PDF file. If you wish to have the most current version of the free Acrobat reader, follow this link:



<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

Cosmopolis is a publication of *The Vance Integral Edition, Inc.*
All rights reserved. © 2000.