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# C O S M O P O L I S

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Number 22

January, 2002

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## The *VIE* Text Flow

(in which a *VIE* text must endure the eyes of many assorted and dissimilar characters)

*by Joel Riedesel, Work Flow Commissar*

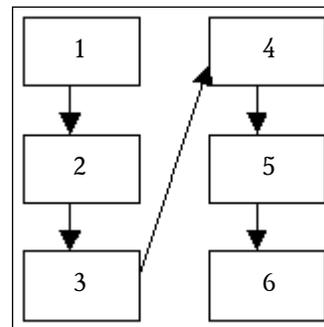
As everyone knows, the goal of the *VIE* is to produce and establish the corrected, authoritative, and authorized version of the complete works of Jack Vance. Doing so involves many phases and steps; two might be considered most interesting: Textual Integrity, where *VIE* volunteers attempt to find Jack's words; and Composition, where *VIE* volunteers artistically re-present Jack's words. The rest of *VIE* work concerns removal of typos introduced by editors and, particularly, errors of all kinds introduced in the course of *VIE* work itself!

I've divided the numerous steps of the *VIE* Text Flow into the following phases (these are detailed further on):

1. Raw Verified Text Phase
2. Double-Digitization Phase
3. Techno-Proof Phase
4. Textual Integrity Phase
5. Composition Phase
6. Golden Master Phase

The goal of phases 1 through 3 is to produce a text suitable for processing by Textual Integrity (TI). TI then produces a corrected text ready for Composition and final publication. All other phases and steps of the *VIE* Text Flow are supportive of TI and Composition.

The six phases feed into each other directly as shown. Each phase builds upon the previous, both increasing assurance of the validity of the text and reducing the amount of work for a subsequent phase. For example, until recently Techno-Proof



work has proceeded in parallel with Double-Digitization (DD). But it has been observed that Techno-Proof would benefit from the automated work of Double-Digitization. Requiring DD before Techno-Proof eliminates some duplication of effort.

While a *VIE* text moves through these phases, and steps within these phases, the text is archived each time it is modified. Four different types of file names are used: 'raw', 'dd', 'cor', and 'fin'. 'raw' is used for the text prior to entering the Textual Integrity Phase. 'dd' is used for text within steps of the DD Phase. 'cor' designates that the text is in the course of TI correction. And 'fin' is used when the text, correct from a TI point of view, is in Composition and being prepared for the printer.

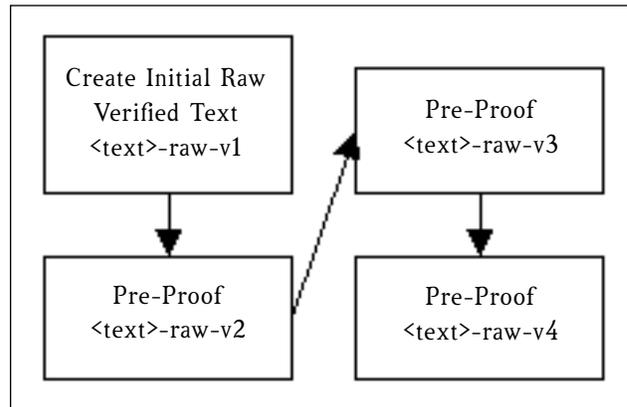
The archived file names are quite cryptic and take on the general form of '<textcode>-<type>-v<version>-<optional stepname>'. The '<textcode>' is simply a code-name for the text in question. These always use six letters or numbers and were created by the Principal *VIE* Archivist, John Schwab, according to criteria stipulated by John Foley, the *VIE* Managing Editor. As an example, The Pnumex has the textcode: 'pnumex'. The '<type>' is always 'raw', 'dd', 'cor', or 'fin'. The '<version>' is incremented as a text proceeds through the phases and steps for its '<type>'. 'pnumex-raw-v5.doc' indicates a Microsoft Word file, a so-called 'v-text' (project jargon for the developing *VIE* version of a given text) that has received much pre-proofing and has probably also benefited from DD and Techno-Proofing (the exact status of a text can always be determined by consulting the first endnote within the text, where a full work history is maintained). 'pnumex-fin-v2.pdf' would be a second version of the typeset text, the version which typically goes to Post-Proofing.

The '<optional stepname>' is sometimes used for additional information such as: 'techno' and 'ocr'. Thus, a filename like 'pnumex-dd-ocr1.doc' can be interpreted as OCR scan 1 during the Double-Digitization Phase.

### 1. Raw Verified Text Phase

In this phase a 'preferred' published version of the text is either scanned or typed into a Microsoft Word document. This preferred edition may be a first edition, but is the edition considered more authoritative than others at the time of digitization. Sometimes this assessment turns out to be mistaken and the error must be corrected, in some cases by re-digitizing. Sometimes the *VIE* has the benefit of working directly from Jack Vance's disks. This, however, does not solve all problems; sometimes Jack

made changes that were not registered on the disks, but only as errata sent to a publisher.



Once the text is in digital form (it is now the so-called 'v-text'), it is named '<textcode>-raw-v1.doc'. The text then undergoes two, three, or sometimes more pre-proof steps. These pre-proof steps serve to eliminate typos in the published editions, *VIE*-introduced typos, and other errors and to create an initial set of Textual Integrity observations. Each Pre-Proofer adds endnotes to the document describing the problems they found, and after each Pre-Proof job the file is archived and version number increased.

Early issues of *Cosmopolis* describe Pre-Proofing in detail. However, it was determined that proofreading alone cannot catch all the errors in the text. There are examples of texts that are plausibly correct but due to certain kinds of scanning errors, for example, still contain errors. The most insidious error is where a word is transformed by OCR software into another word which is 'correct' in context. For this reason, additional phases were introduced: Double-Digitization and Techno-Proofing.

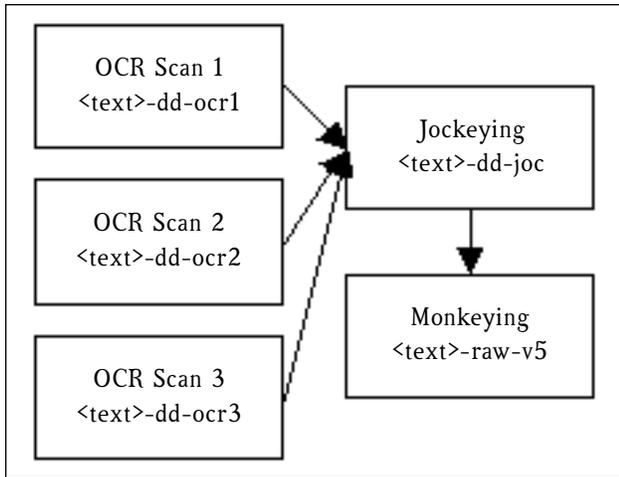
### 2. Double-Digitization Phase

Double-Digitization uses automation to help eliminate errors in the v-text. This phase is divided into three steps:

- OCR Scanning
- Jockeying
- Monkeying

In the OCR Scanning step, a text is digitized three times using scanning and OCR according to specific protocols (see past issues of *Cosmopolis*). This step produces three files: '<textcode>-dd-ocr[1|2|3].doc'.

In the Jockeying step, the three OCR files are com-



pared with each other (1 compared with 2 and that output compared with 3, for example) to produce a remarkably error-free text, thanks to the protocols referenced above. This step produces '`<textcode>-dd-joc.doc`'.

In the Monkeying step the jockeyed text is compared to the pre-proofed v-text from phase 1 to eliminate residual scanning errors that Pre-Proofing did not find. This results in '`<textcode>-raw-v5.doc`'.

### 3. Techno-Proof Phase

Meanwhile, Techno-Proofing searches for errors with two *VIE*-specific tools: WordPick lists and the VDAE. WordPick lists are specially created dictionary filter lists produced by Ian Davis. The VDAE (Vocabulary/Dictionary Analysis Engine) is an interactive spreadsheet created by Koen Vyverman that permits searching for errors by many techniques including reference to the total archive of *VIE* texts. See past issues of *Cosmopolis* for further details on WordPick and the VDAE. The Techno-Proof Phase produces '`<textcode>-raw-v5-techno.doc`'.

Of special interest is that this phase includes specific checks for hyphenated, quoted, contracted, and Vance-created words. This dramatically reduces the need for later phases of work (especially Post-Proofing) to pay undue attention to these details.

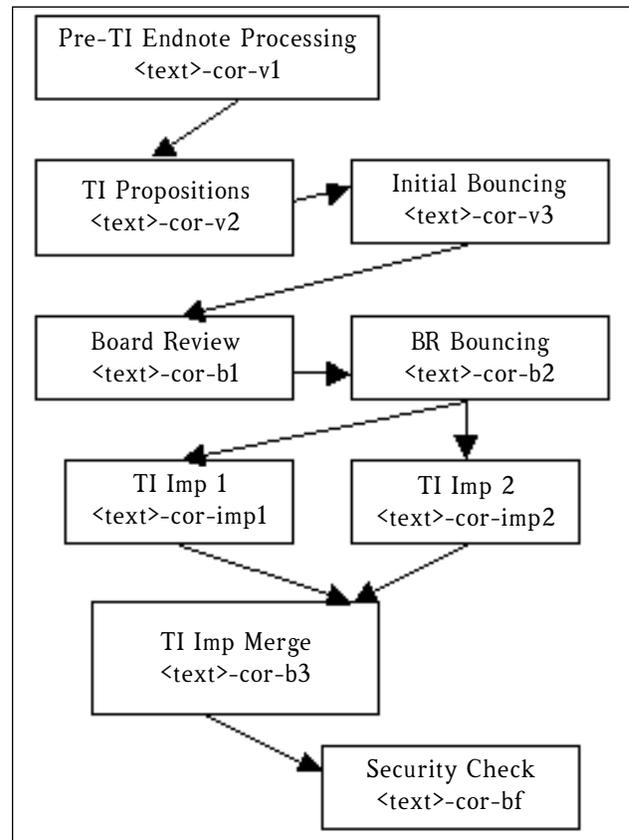
### 4. Textual Integrity Phase

Textual Integrity uses all available textual evidence (e.g., published editions, manuscripts if extant and available, errata material from Oakland) as well as direct resort to Norma Vance (who may ask Jack). The result is a correct version of the text as close to what Jack wrote or intended as possible.

Textual Integrity's inputs are the raw v-text as cor-

rected by Pre-Proof, Double-Digitization and Techno-Proof. Its final output is: '`<textcode>-cor-bf.doc`'. The steps in TI are:

- Pre-TI Endnote Processing
- TI Propositions
- Initial 'Bouncing'
- Board Review
- BR 'Bouncing'
- Implementation of the TI changes
- Security Check



#### OVERVIEW OF TI WORK:

Textual Integrity is performed in the first three steps by the primary TI worker (or 'Wallah'). The Wallah is aided by a TI 'Second' who is a member of the TI management team (Alun Hughes, Tim Stretton, Steve Sherman, Patrick Dusoulier, Rob Friefeld). This work results in a set of propositions that are submitted to Board Review. When Board Review is complete, the Implementation Team (the 'Imps') implement the approved changes. Finally, a Security Check is performed to insure that no text has been erroneously eliminated, added, or changed in the flow from 'raw-v1' to 'cor-bf'.

#### TI WORK IN DETAIL:

To create the 'cor-v1' file, the Wallah reviews the endnotes from the previous phases and separates the wheat from the chaff; 'cor-v1' is a 'correct' basic text ready for TI work.

The creation of 'cor-v2' is the heart of TI work. The endnotes of this file contain all pertinent evidence related to the text as well as 'TI propositions' by the Wallah that propose corrections to the v-text to bring it into conformity with the genuine and correct reading of the text. These TI propositions are not simply corrections of typos or simple textual errors but are restorations of what Vance really wrote, though in practice, even at this phase ordinary errors are also dealt with.

Now the Wallah discusses the propositions with the Second in a dialogue that takes place in the endnotes of the text. The 'cor-v2' text is incremented to 'cor-v3' or higher. New versions are created only when needed, such as before a given category of endnotes has been designated for removal because the problems they deal with are resolved. This might be the case for hyphenation issues, for example. Sometimes this process occurs without an increase of the file version number, in which case it is known as 'Bouncing'.

The text is now ready for Board Review (BR). Board Review is performed by one of the TI managers, including Paul Rhoads. It is done as a dialog between the Second and the Reviewer with recourse to Norma Vance if needed. BR produces 'cor-b1' (or 'b2', etc.) and Bouncing may also occur. A principle of Board Review is the 'one American' rule. If both the Wallah and the Second are non-Americans, the Board Reviewer must be either Steve Sherman or Paul Rhoads. This is because sometimes Vance uses expressions that are only recognized by a native speaker.

The result of BR is a set of Board-approved TI propositions that embody the corrected version of the text. These propositions now need 'implementing', actual updating of the text using the TI propositions in the endnotes. This is the job of the Imps. The Imps take the 'cor-b2' file and produce 'cor-b3'. To maintain the *VIE*'s standard of quality control, two Imps are assigned to work in parallel. Damien Jones, the head of the Imp team, then compares the two jobs (TI Imp Merge) to make sure all propositions have been correctly entered. This compare job acts as an initial security check that the TI Propositions were correctly implemented.

Then final Security Check (SC) takes place using the 'cor-b3' file and produces the 'cor-bf' file. This job involves comparing the Imp file to such files as 'raw-v1'

to make sure no text has been lost, added, or confused along the work path. SC has indeed discovered such problems, but in the last few months, as *VIE* workers become more familiar with our rather complex procedures, SC has found nothing but 100% clean texts.

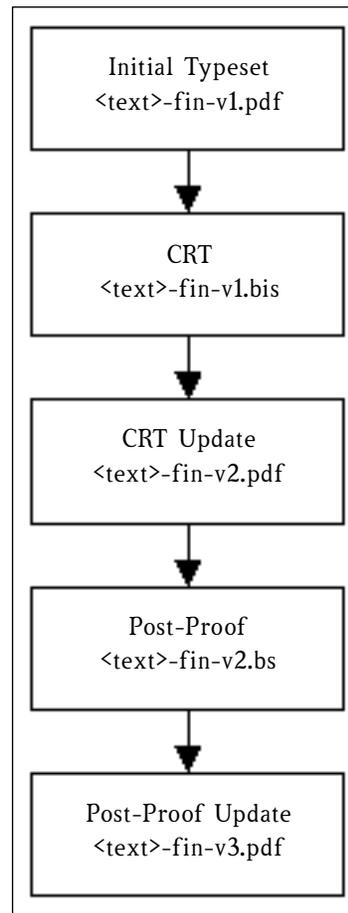
In general, TI is the most time-consuming phase of the *VIE* Text Flow. And it ought to be!

## 5. Composition Phase

Finally! The next phase is Composition or typesetting. Composition takes the 'cor-bf' file and produces a PDF file ready for the Golden Master Phase. Composition consists of the following steps:

- Initial Typeset/Composition
- Initial Composition Review (by the Composition Review Team or 'CRT')
- Initial Composition Update (based on the CRT report)
- Post-Proof
- Post-Proof Composition Update

Composition first produces 'fin-v1.pdf'. This involves



setting the text ('cor-bf') in *VIE* format with *VIE* fonts with correct placement of footnotes and other special elements as well as correct use of the Cursive and Italic fonts according to *VIE* standards.

The Composition Review Team (usually composed of three workers) reviews this initial typeset file, checking for problems of presentation and taste based on the *VIE* format standards and the *VIE* aesthetic. The CRT produces a report named '<textcode>-fin-v1-bis.doc'. This 'bis' text will accompany the v-text through the following steps and into the Golden Master Phase. It is the record

of all observations and errata on the 'fin' file. Since 'fin' files are not Microsoft Word documents, but are PDF files, the 'bis' file is needed to provide the endnotes that were maintained previously in the Microsoft Word document. ('Bis' is a French term which means 'repeat', 'again', or 'the same').

The Composer then updates the PDF file with discretionary reference to the CRT report, producing '<textcode>-fin-v2.pdf'. Observations rejected by the Composer are reserved for inclusion in the Post-Proof report. The composer may also contribute further notes to the 'bis' file.

Post-Proofing (PP) then occurs. The principle function of Post-Proofing is to once again find introduced errors! To maximize the probability of finding all the errors in a text, Post-Proofing is performed by teams of 10 or more. In a previous issue of *Cosmopolis*, it was shown that six people used for Post-Proofing would maximize the probability of finding all errors. Post-Proofing uses 10 people, both as an extra measure of security and because not everyone on a team is always available (the *VIE* is a volunteer organization!).

Post-Proof produces a report named '<textcode>-fin-v2-bis.doc'. Any TI problems found at this stage are resolved by TI in a phase of interaction between PP and TI managers.

The Composer again updates the file. TI-approved changes are made on a non-discretionary basis and formatting changes are made on a discretionary basis unless specifically endorsed by John Foley, head of the Composition team.

The result is a text ready for the Golden Master Phase named '<textcode>-fin-v3.pdf'.

## 6. Golden Master Phase

The Golden Master Phase, currently in design, assembles the texts into volumes, including their front and end matter such as maps and pictures. This is distinct from actual production and a Production Phase may also be included following this phase.

And there you have it. More detail than you ever wanted to know. Please address any questions or clarifications to me at [joel@ourstillwaters.org](mailto:joel@ourstillwaters.org). As the Work Tsar for the *VIE*, it is my responsibility to understand this *VIE* Text Flow in excruciating detail in order to ensure that it is being expeditiously followed.

# Work Tsar Status Report

as of Dec. 23, 2001

by Joel Riedesel

This month shows considerable progress for Wave 1 work. Approximately 32.46% of the total work is essentially complete through TI (the most difficult phase of the work).

It is useful to note that the current Wave 1 work represents approximately 60% of the total words of the *VIE* and more than half of the volumes. Our aim is to produce 22 of the 44 volumes for Wave 1. We hope to have the luxury of choosing which 22 of the approximately 24 or 25 volumes we may have ready for Wave 1.

Lest any forget, work also proceeds on the remaining Wave 2 texts. Most of that work is currently active in the Double-Digitization Phase (see The *VIE* Text Flow). As Wave 1 TI work completes, resources will become available for later phases of Wave 2 work.

Thirteen texts have completed Post-Proofing, an increase of five since last month. These texts represent 337.5 thousand words and about 7.76% of the total. Two volumes are completely represented: 1 and 31.

- (V.1) *Mazirian the Magician*
- (V.6) *Masquerade on Dicantropus*
- (V.6) *Çolden Çirl*
- (V.6) *The Insufferable Red-headed Daughter of Commander Tynnott, O.T.E.*
- (V.6) *Meet Miss Universe*
- (V.6) *The World Between*
- (V.7) *Clarges*
- (V.7) *The Languages of Pao*
- (V.9) *The Last Castle*
- (V.17) *Rumfuddle*
- (V.17) *The Men Return*
- (V.17) *Ullward's Retreat*
- (V.31) *Wyst*

There are fifteen texts being Post-Proofed or being composed for Post-Proofing. These represent 813.1 thousand words and about 18.7% of the total.

- (V.4) *Vandals of the Void*
- (V.4) *The Rapparee*
- (V.6) *Çold & Iron*
- (V.6) *Abercrombie Station*
- (V.10) *Strange People, Queer Notions*
- (V.10) *The Flesh Mask*
- (V.10) *Bird Isle*
- (V.11) *The View from Chickweed's Window*

(V.11) *The House on Lily Street*  
(V.17) *Dodkin's Job*  
(V.17) *Alfred's Ark*  
(V.17) *Green Magic*  
(V.26) *The Book of Dreams*  
(V.38) *Madouc*  
(V.42) *Night Lamp*

There are currently 27 texts in TI, of which five are in the review and implementation portions of TI. Those five represent 261.6 thousand words and 6% of the total while the remaining 22 represent 1039 thousand words and 23.89% of the total. The five that are almost TI complete are:

(V.9) *The Dragon Masters*  
(V.12) *Bad Ronald*  
(V.28) *The Domains of Koryphon*  
(V.29) *Trullion*  
(V.30) *Marune*

There are only four texts active pre-TI (DD or Techno). These represent 205.5 thousand words and 4.73% of the total.

(V.14) *The Man in the Cage*  
(V.21) *The Chasch*  
(V.21) *The Dirdir*  
(V.21) *The Pnume*

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## Project Report

by Paul Rhoads

From Joel Riedesel comes the news that DD for Wave 1 is complete, with Wave 2 DD well underway. This is another important milestone.

On the TI front Linnea Anglemark (a.k.a. "Library Babe") is progressing well on the four *Tschai* volumes, which she studied in manuscript at the Mugar in Boston. *The Chasch* is already with her TI Second, Patrick Dusoulier. Patrick himself is working on *Big Planet*, having completed *The Rapparee*.

The important book *Trullion* is finally out of TI. This has certainly been one of the most delicate and complicated, as well as interesting, jobs to date. Since the manuscript is missing our sources are only the original magazine publication, and the book version with revisions by Jack, as well as by a 'picky' editor. We also benefited from comparison with the *Wyst* ms. All three sources

have been of great help and, thanks to the labors of Thomas Rydbeck, Tim Stretton and Patrick Dusoulier, we now have a text which conforms to Jack's intentions. The basic procedure was to return to the magazine text, except in cases where Jack revised. How to know whose hand last touched the different versions (Jack's, magazine editor's, book editor's)? Except in certain knotty cases, this eventually becomes obvious. As usual, the book editor banalized, the magazine editor introduced meaningless paragraphing or sloppy mistakes, while Jack's original is always surprising and to the point, and his revisions either add something new, or get rid of something unnecessary. An example of the *Wyst* manuscript being of help to *Trullion* TI work is the case of 'streams' (magazine) and 'star streams' (book). Which is correct? Did Jack write 'streams', only to have a clever editor change it to 'star streams' or was 'star' somehow lost? There would be no way to tell, except that 'star streams' is used in the *Wyst* manuscript; therefore it is not an editorial invention.

Also complete is *The Dragon Masters*, a text that went into Board Review with almost 900 issues to resolve, and they were, by Ron Chernich, Steve Sherman and Alun Hughes. Again, there was no manuscript to depend upon. Several serious textual messes long disfiguring this text have finally been cleared up. Norma Vance has, as usual, been of great help.

To give *Cosmopolis* readers a notion of how TI navigates among the shoals of a problem like those mentioned above, where the manuscript is missing and the magazine and book texts have both been altered by editors, here is a classic example from *The Dragon Masters*. The 'v-text' is a mirror of the *Galaxy* (magazine) text. 144 is Ron Chernich, TI-wallah. 161 is Steve Sherman, TI Second, and AH is Alun Hughes, Board Reviewer:

The passage in question:

Carcolo stared as if Joaz had taken leave of his wits.  
"Then how did they\* destroy the ship?"

\* TEXT-QUERY 144, Then how did they  
[magazine]/How, then, did they [book]  
COMMENT; Magazine simpler.

COMMENT 161; Book reading seems more Vancean,  
though perhaps without commas: 'How then did  
they'.

COMMENT 144; Agreed, but what evidence?  
COMMENT 161; I think it reasonable to infer that,  
confronted with 'How then did they', *Galaxy*  
changed it to the more pedestrian word order,

while Ace introduced the Vassarite commas. Board?  
COMMENT AH; 161 absolutely correct.  
TI-PROPOSITION; Then how did they/How then  
did they

The *VIE* version now reads:

Carcolo stared as if Joaz had taken leave of his  
wits. "How then did they destroy the ship?"

The magazine editor, in a policy of dumbing down,  
banalized the more 'difficult' Vancian phrasing; so much  
is obvious. No editor of a 1961 sci-fi magazine changed  
'Then how did' to 'How, then, did'. But can we be sure the  
original phrase, as written by Jack, contained no commas?  
Could not Jack himself have written: "How, then, did they  
destroy the ship?" In manuscripts of the period this sort  
of comma use—surrounding a single word with com-  
mas—though not impossible, is rare; on the other hand,  
this is just the sort of correction a picky and conscien-  
tious editor makes. They cannot see a phrase like 'How  
then did' and leave it alone! We have even accumulated a  
list of Vancian punctuational structures which few editors  
tolerate (like not using '!' and '?' as full stops). But there  
is also internal evidence for the *VIE* punctuation. Note  
who is speaking: Carcolo, an impetuous brute. The com-  
mas, enforcing the somewhat precious pauses inherent to  
such a phrase, would underline delicacy and breeding.  
The final *VIE* decision has an element of discernment, but  
is solidly based on evidence.

Another surprise; in a discussion about the new *Drag-  
on Masters* illustrations, Jack discovered, to his discontent,  
that the dragon mounts are called 'spiders'. "I never wrote  
that!" he indignantly proclaimed. Well, what did he write  
then? 'Striders'. So what happened? In the *Dragon Masters*  
menagerie there are 'Long-horned Murderers' and 'Strid-  
ing Murderers'; so why not 'striders'? Apparently an edi-  
tor thought otherwise.

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## You Have Done It!

### VIE Work Credits

*Compiled by Hans van der Veeke*

Here are the volunteer work credits for each text that  
has cleared Post-proofing and is printer-ready. Under  
the same rubric we will announce each volume that is  
completed.

Check your name! A misspelling here may indicate a  
misspelling in our database, and thereafter in the books  
themselves. We don't want to spell your name wrong, or  
leave off a Jr. or Esq., or to overlook you altogether! For  
corrections contact Suan Yong at [suan@cs.wisc.edu](mailto:suan@cs.wisc.edu).

Ullward's Retreat  
Finished 9 December  
2001

*Digitizer*  
Gan Uesli Starling

*Pre-proofers*  
Derek W. Benson  
Graziano Carlon  
David A. Kennedy  
John Robinson Jr.

*DD-Scanners*  
Richard Chandler  
Thomas Rydbeck

*DD-Jockey*  
Damien G. Jones

*DD-Monkey*  
David A. Kennedy

*Technoproofer*  
Matt Westwood

*TI*  
David A. Kennedy

*Implementation*  
Donna Adams  
Damien G. Jones  
John McDonough

*Composition*  
Andreas Irle

*Composition Review*  
Marcel van Genderen  
Charles King  
Paul Rhoads  
Robin L. Rouch

*Post-proofing*  
"Sandestins"  
Jeffrey Ruszczky (team  
manager)  
Deborah Cohen  
Michael Duncan  
Brent Heustess  
Mark Straka

\* \* \*

Mazirian  
the Magician  
Finished 10 December  
2001

*Digitizer*  
Donna Adams

*Special reformatting*  
R.C. Lacovara

*Pre-proofer*  
Richard Behrens

*DD-Scanner*  
Paul Rhoads

*DD-Jockey*  
Damien G. Jones

*DD-Monkey*  
Tim Stretton

*Technoproofer*  
Errico Rescigno

*Special tasks*  
Tim Stretton

*TI*  
Tim Stretton

*Implementation*  
Donna Adams  
Mike Dennison  
Damien G. Jones

*Composition*  
Joel Anderson

*Composition Review*  
John Foley  
Andreas Irle  
Charles King  
Stéphane Leibovitsch

*Post-proofing*  
"Tanchinaros"  
David Reitsema (team manager)  
Mike Barrett  
Patrick Dymond  
Charles King  
David Mortimore  
Gabriel Stein  
William Schaub

\* \* \*  
The Languages of Pao  
Finished 12 December 2001

*Digitizers*  
John Robinson Jr.  
Gan Uesli Starling

*Pre-proofers*  
Erik Arendse  
Rob Friefeld

*DD-Scanners*  
Richard Chandler  
Richard White

*DD-Jockey*  
David Reitsema

*Technoproofer*  
Rob Friefeld

*DD-Monkey*  
Paul Rhoads

*TI*  
John Robinson Jr.  
Paul Rhoads

*Special TI Post-proofing*  
"Funambulist Evangels"  
Christian J. Corley (team manager)  
Derek W. Benson  
Malcolm Bowers  
Joel Riedesel  
Robin L. Rouch  
Top Changwachai

*Composition*  
John A. Schwab

*Composition Review*  
John Foley  
Marcel van Genderen  
Andreas Irle  
Charles King  
Paul Rhoads  
Robin L. Rouch

*Post-proofing*  
"Penwipers"  
Rob Friefeld (team manager)  
Enrique Alcatena  
Bob Collins  
Andrew Edlin  
Rob Knight  
Betty Mayfield  
Mike Schilling  
Kelly Walker

\* \* \*  
The Men Return  
Finished 19 December 2001

*Digitizer*  
Paul Rhoads

*Pre-proofers*  
Paul Rhoads  
Hans van der Veeke

*DD-Scanner*  
Paul Rhoads

*DD-Jockey*  
Paul Rhoads

*DD-Monkey*  
Paul Rhoads

*Technoproofer*  
Errico Rescigno

*TI*  
Kenneth Roberts

*Implementation*  
Paul Rhoads

*Composition*  
Andreas Irle

*Composition Review*  
Christian J. Corley  
Marcel van Genderen  
Charles King  
Per Kjellberg  
Stéphane Leibovitsch  
Robin L. Rouch

*Post-proofing*  
"Spellers of Forlorn Encystment"  
Till Noever (team manager)  
Malcolm Bowers  
Rob Gerrand  
Peter Ikin  
Chris McCormick  
Bob Moody  
Bill Sherman  
Michael Smith

# The Mathematical Vance

by Richard Chandler

After teaching mathematics for almost 37 years I find that I almost subconsciously check mathematical statements for correctness, even when they are not associated with homework or exams. Jack uses mathematics sparingly in his stories and I could only come up with three examples; there are probably others but these are mathematically interesting and I thought you might be interested in my perspective on them.

## Morreion

In Chapter 8 the band of magicians, searching for Morreion, come upon the site of an ancient tavern. They sample the contents and, somewhat elevated with drink, fall to discussing their craft:

Herark took occasion to state that in his opinion not one, but at least two, even better, three of any class of objects was essential to understanding. "I cite the discipline of mathematics, where a series may not be determined by less than three terms."

I invite those of you who might believe this bit of inebriated mathematics to complete the following experiment: Successively substitute  $x = 1, 2, 3, 4$  into the expression:  $x^3 - 6x^2 + 12x - 6$ . If you do this correctly, you will get 1, 2, 3, 10! But if three terms were enough to determine the sequence, the fourth term should surely be 4.

I'm sure most of you have encountered aptitude tests with questions like: What is the next term in the sequence: 1, 4, 9, 16, ? You are supposed to recognize that the given terms are the squares of the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 so that the next term is the square of 5, *i.e.*, 25. From the example above you should realize that a case could be made that the next term should be 17, or 30, or 1000, or even 25.

## Ecce and Old Earth

Near the end of part 1 of Chapter 2, Glawen has just rescued Scharde, Chilke, and Kathcar from the prison on Shattorak and the four have just discovered the storm has carried off their only means of transportation. Scharde observes:

"I notice that the current moves about three miles an hour, no more. If the tree fell in the middle of

the night—let us say, six hours ago—it will have drifted eighteen miles or less. The crawler can move five or six miles an hour in the water. So if we set off now, we should overtake the tree and the attached flyer in three or four hours."

This is exactly the type of exercise any of you might have encountered somewhere around the 8th or 9th grade. If the stated 5-6 mph refers to its speed *in still water*, then the crawler should be able to overtake the flyer in the stated 3 or 4 hours. (18 divided by 5 is 3.6, and 18 divided by 6 is 3). There is another way to interpret the information. If the crawler's speed *in the river* is 5-6 mph, then it is only going 2-3 mph faster than the flyer. To make up the 18 mile head start will require between 6 and 9 hours. In the story they manage to recover the flyer in 3-4 hours, so Jack must have meant the crawler's speed to be 5-6 mph *in still water*.

## Rumfuddle

The most mathematically challenging passage in all of Jack's works occurs in Chapter 6. Alan Robertson is explaining his wonderful machine:

"The number of particles to pack the universe full is on the order of  $10^{60}$ ; the possible permutations of these particles would number  $2^{10}$  raised to the power of sixty. The universe of course is built of many different particles, which makes the final number of possible, or let us say thinkable, states, a number like  $2^{10}$  raised to the power of 60, all times  $x$ —where 'x' is the number of particles under consideration. A large, unmanageable number, which we need not consider because the conditions we deal with—the possible variations of planet Earth—are far fewer."

I *think* the reasoning is thus: if a set has  $n$  elements then it has  $2^n$  subsets. So if the number of atoms in the universe is  $10^{60}$  (cosmologists today put the number higher: in the order of  $10^{80}$ ),  $2$  raised to the power of  $10^{60}$  would represent the number of subsets of atoms in the universe. Jack uses instead  $2^{10}$  raised to the power of 60:  $(2^{10})60 = 2^{600}$ , approximately 1 followed by 180 zeroes. I can't make mathematical sense of this. I suspect it is simply a misstatement of the exponentiation process. He said  $2^{10}$  raised to the power 60 rather than 2 raised to the power  $10^{60}$ . 2 raised to the power of  $10^{60}$  is unimaginably huge: in the order of 1 followed by  $10^{59}$  zeroes.

In any case, using the number of subsets of the set of

atoms in the universe to represent the number of possible states is not the best estimate. A better way to count this would be to use Bell(1060). The Bell number counts the number of ways to group the atoms. For example, Bell(2) = 2. If we have 2 atoms, we can group them in two ways: {\*\*} or {\*}{\*}. Bell(3) = 5: {\*\*\*}, {\*\*}{\*}, {\*}{\*\*}, {\*}{\*}{\*}, or {\*}{\*}{\*}. At any given instant the state of the universe could be represented by the grouping of its atoms: one group, say T, of atoms is Tom, another group is Dick, a third group is Harry, etc. A slightly different group of atoms than T would be a slightly different Tom, a cognate Tom, to use Jack's terminology.

The only problem with this approach is that the Bell(10<sup>60</sup>) is so large that there is no reasonable way to represent it (and certainly no effective way to calculate it: it took my fairly fast 733 MHz computer approximately one minute to calculate Bell(1000)). A 'universe' having only 1000 atoms would have approximately 3000...0000 states, where ... represents 1920 zeroes!

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## In Favor of Science Fiction?

by Paul Rhoads

*This is a preparatory exercise for an introduction to the upcoming VIE Pao/Dragon Masters book. I hope Cosmopolis readers will contribute comments and ideas—in letters to Cosmopolis. This is not a draft, merely a collection of preliminary thoughts.*

I have long insisted that Jack Vance is not a science fiction author, *in essence*. Vance himself agrees with this, and has stated: "I am not a science fiction author". Some of his stories undeniably are science fiction, and many others have, at the very least, elements of it. However, as I have also pointed out, Vance's comparative lack of success within science fiction, the reason he is a somewhat secondary figure (as measured by sales and name recognition) instead of being *the* great star of the genre, is exactly because there is not enough science fiction in most of his books to arouse the enthusiasm of true science fiction readers; by the same token his non-existence outside science fiction—where he will eventually be counted among the greatest 20th century artists—follows from his being labeled a science fiction author. He might escape the category, as other writers have

done\*, if only he were a major star of the genre, but this, for the reason indicated, he fails to be; so his reputation stagnates. I have therefore done my best to make the anti-science fiction case.

My critique of science fiction is a demonstration, to mainstream readers, that Vance can be recommended on a non-science fiction basis, or from a perspective that does not contradict the anti-science fiction prejudice of many mainstream readers. In my opinion this prejudice is partly justified; partly only. But the *anti* approach has been carried as far as possible for the moment; I now wonder about exploring a *pro-science fiction* approach. This new interest is sparked by a practical consideration: our plan to publish, hor-series, the new, Vance-authorized *VIE* version of *The Languages of Pao*. This will be a literary event because the *VIE* text combines both extant versions into a longer, richer text (no other stories will be as greatly impacted by the *VIE*, as measured in number of changes). But it will, above all, be a science fiction event because we will publish *Pao* with the recently completed *VIE* version of *The Dragon Masters*†. Both these stories are out of print, and hold a special place in the history of science fiction and the hearts of science fiction readers. Such a book would therefore appropriately be accompanied by a preface with science fiction readers in mind.

In *Jack Vance: Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography*, Dan Simmons, one of Vance's most famous science fiction admirers, speaks mostly of these two stories. For Bruno dela Chiesa‡, a great fan of all Vance's work, *The Languages of Pao* and *The Dragon Masters* are still his most important books. And likewise for most 'hard-core' science fiction Vance readers. However, dating from 1958 and 1963, and though good books by any standard, they can hardly be adjudged Vance's best work. The author has even expressed particular dissatisfaction with *Pao*. But the reason for their success is clear: they are, indeed, great science fiction.

Vance's use of science fiction decor, I have argued, is best understood as an extension of Ovidian, Shakespearean, Rablaisian or Swiftian—call it 'traditional' or 'classical'—phantasmagoria. Defenders of science fiction make a similar point, claiming for science fiction itself the hon-

\* Bradbury and Lem most notably.

† The TI work on these two texts has been done by John Robinson, Ron Chernich, Patrick Dusoulter, Steve Sherman, Alun Hughes, and of course Norma Vance.

‡ The cultural *charge d'affaires* for the department of the Vienne in France, and originator of the *Utopia* festival, which is the most important European science fiction gathering. Dela Chiesa invited Vance as guest of honor for *Utopia's* inaugural year, 1998.

or of the heritage of this tradition. But their contention is superficial and self-serving. It is true that science fiction is indeed a sort of fantasy, but is it the same sort of fantasy as the classics? The purposes of writers like Ovid and Swift, the reasons they resort to fantasy, are fundamentally different from the motivations of science fiction writers. Promoters and defenders of science fiction are right to insist that science fiction has a particular character, but they can't have it both ways; either science fiction has its own nature, or it prolongs the classical heritage, not both. Or to put it more exactly; to the extent it is *a*, it is not *b*. The specificity of science fiction is that it is a popular genre engendered by specific aspects of our historical situation; or more specifically; it is a vapor arising from modernist dreams of progress, and scientism—the *ism* at the heart of 20th century American science fiction, which might also be called the 'religion of materialism'. To state this less tersely and poetically; science fiction is a form of 'popular culture'—or 'literature', as you like—generated by excitement about technological progress and, in particular, projections of the future world as technology, and scientism, transform it in profound ways, or seem to do so.

The older fantasy writers were concerned with no such thing, and would even have rejected this approach in horror and disgust; and not only would they have, they actually did. Such rejection, for example, is the thrust of the Laputa episode in *Gulliver's Travels*. For the classic writers fantasy was a type of irony, or exaggeration, which they used as a caricaturist might, to mock or teach. Their message could be disturbing, but it was always in the service of, as they would have put it, 'eternal' values. Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is a poetic presentation of religious beliefs; it tends to enforce, not erode, belief in legendary and miraculous events. Shakespeare's *Tempest*, or Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress*, like the medieval mystery plays, are lessons about moral psychology and religious salvation. All this is risible to contemporary intellectuals, scientism's faithful. Swift's flying island Laputa, and its inhabitants, is the most savage attack ever mounted against scientism, or moral progress through material power.

But a formula like: *the essence of science fiction is excitement about technology and futuristic speculations* is too brief—there is more to science fiction than this!—and Vance, in some ways, also dreams the dream of progress. So how is science fiction important to Vance, and how might Vance be important to science fiction? Let's start with the origins of science fiction; is it an American phenomenon, or does it begin with H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, an Englishman and a Frenchman both born in the

19th century? Vance is known to have loved Verne as a boy, just as he loved Edgar Rice Burroughs. Does science fiction begin with Jules Verne (1828-1905)? His stories are known as *fantastic voyages*, and all of them are set in his contemporary world, like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Verne was something of a Christian mystic, and his stories are impregnated with Christian symbology and messages, a thing foreign to later science fiction. But Verne is the first writer to imagine events based on projections, or extrapolations, of the galloping technological and scientific developments of his time, which made possible a new kind of 'fantastic' voyage. Verne's fantasy does not include fairies and ogres (the charming foam of animist superstition) or maidens transformed into rivers (or other aspects of the pagan credo) or talking horses (Swift's device for rubbing man's nose in his own degradation). He imagined men going to the bottom of the sea, circumnavigating the Earth in balloons, travelling to the moon in projectiles, things that all became realities shortly after his death. Verne loved science and technology; he was receptive to it, and saw in a positive light technological development and scientific progress. I think this is the essential science fiction attitude. In a typical passage from *Around the Moon* we read:

The *Reiset-Regnault* apparatus functioned with its usual extreme precision. The air was maintained in a state of perfect purity. Not a single molecule of carbonic acid resisted the potassium, and as for the oxygen, as captain Nicholl said, "It was certainly of the first quality." The small quantity of water vapor enclosed in the projectile mixed with this air to temper its dryness, and many apartments of Paris, London or New York, or even theater halls, could not boast such hygienic conditions.

And also:

At this moment, the moon, instead of seeming flat like a disk, showed its convexity. If the sun had struck it obliquely with its rays, the shadow would have cast the high mountains in clear relief.

As this passage—with its idea that Vance exploits so memorably (Vance describes planets changing from globular in appearance to flat, or from 'beside' to 'under'—Ed.)—shows, Verne was sensitive to what might be called the *poetry of science*. But he was interested in more than science and fantastic voyages; here is a passage from the opening of *From the Earth to the Moon*.

But where the Americans singularly surpassed the Europeans, was in the science of ballistics[. . .] This should astonish no one. The Yankees, the worlds foremost mechanics, are engineers—like the Italians are musicians and the Germans are metaphysicians—from birth. Nothing is more natural, therefore, than to see them bring to the science of ballistics their audacious ingenuity.

These remarks, accurate or not, show that Verne had sociological ideas as well as technical ones, and that he accorded America a privileged place in the development of technology.

It is generally admitted that Jack Vance is a pioneer, or even *the* pioneer\*, of what is generally thought to be a new kind of science fiction, which seems to predominate today, and which I call *soft-science fiction*. It is the overflow of science fiction into the so called soft sciences: sociology, psychology, politics, biology, anthropology, linguistics and so on. It cannot be claimed that pre-nineteen fifties precedents for *soft-science fiction* are non-existent; H.G. Wells' *The First Men on the Moon*, pure science fiction in its interplanetary vehicle technology, also presents a 'society' of intelligent insects. But is this really *soft-science fiction*? This lunar population is a essentially a 'grotesque'†, so it is not 'sociological' in the sense that *Pao*, or the *Alastor* stories, or *The Moon Moth*, are. It does not explore a society or sociological problem or use sociological circumstances, for their own sake. It is just a grotesque amalgamation which the heroes discover with amazement: thrilling decor. The same author's story *The Time Machine* might seem to present a sociological argument; but the society of Eloi and Morlocks is Wells' vision of his own society in his Darwinist and Socialist view, presented as fantasy caricature or grotesque, and intended as propaganda. Wells' was in contempt of almost everyone; as a rabid Social Darwinist he looked down on the working class; as an ardent Socialist he looked down on the leisure class. The situation presented in *The Time Machine* is not speculation but an image arising from his ideological passions. It is thus not 'science fiction', if this term, as I am arguing, should be attached to a fundamentally positive, and scientific, or disinterestedly specula-

\* I would be interested to learn the facts from a connoisseur.

† Trolls, giants, demons, dragons, hippogriffs, gargoyles, all such recombinant spawn of the human imagination, are 'grotesques'. More harmonious creatures, such as unicorns (combination of horse and narwhal) and fairies (combination of man with mouse, squirrel or other small forest creature) could also be called 'grotesque' in a technical sense, but the word carries a taint of the malformed, horrible or laughable.

tive, view of the future.

Huxley and Orwell are generally considered authors of science fiction classics. They were high-minded and good men, not intellectual thugs like Wells. But neither *Brave New World* nor *1984* are speculative futures. Both, like *The Time Machine*, are metaphors for their author's contemporary world, written as warnings against tendencies inherent in technological progress, and even the 'dream of progress' itself.\* These great classics, unlike Verne's works, are pessimistic about technology and the future. They even implicitly call for rejection of the attitudes which underly the situations they denounce†. So these books are not science fiction in the sense that it is characterized by a welcoming attitude toward the world conceived by scientism, or faith in technological progress. The characteristic attitude of science fiction is not fear, but hope.

In *The Languages of Pao*, despite the suffering to which Pao is subjected by Palafox's tyrannical program of linguistic science, the result is ultimately adjudged good. Paonese society is made stronger, more versatile, more independent, more productive, more prosperous. Science fiction, unlike Huxley, uses no irony when it says 'brave new world'. Of course many science fiction stories are often bleak or dire, but I am not talking about the atmosphere of any given story, but the fundamental attitude of the author toward the future. True science fiction authors, I claim, are fundamentally approving of progress, and despite the complications and troubles which may arise, await the brave new world with hope or even impatience. Thus Van Vogt, in his *null-A* series, eagerly foresees the overthrow of the old world and its obsolete form of thought and human anatomy. Asimov pictures a robotic future as at least interesting, and probably good. Aldiss often pictures a devastated future world, but not as a warning for the present, merely as a description of things perhaps to come, as a watercolorist might depict a corpse or a wasteland; Aldiss accepts the future that science offers us. Writers like Clarke, Heinlein and Herbert revel in a future where spaceships, computers, aliens and drugs will open up new spiritual horizons. Science fiction loves the future, with all its blemishes, that science will give us.

\* Now that laboratory-created humanity has almost become a reality, I am surprised to hear no references to Huxley's masterpiece. For Huxley test-tube humanity was not a danger in itself, but an image of the radical materialism, including social Darwinism, into which Western society was foundering. The same goes for *1984*, now that the sort of surveillance imagined by Orwell has all but become real.

† Huxley even advocates a return to Christianity.

*The Languages of Pao*, published at a time when science fiction still meant rockets to Mars, robots and ray guns, or the prolongation of Verne's *fantastic voyages* to even farther horizons, was certainly a milestone in the genre, and has continued to be an important book as new science fiction readers have discovered it. I do not have expertise in the history of the genre permitting me to assert that *Pao* is unprecedented in the depth of its foray into the soft sciences, but I would be surprised to discover the contrary. As already mentioned, there had always been an element of anthropology in science fiction. As soon as our hero discovers a new world, the writer must populate it; there must be houses, clothes, languages, customs and institutions. Even the bronze-age societies of Edgar Rice Burroughs are 'anthropological', in some limited sense. But in *The Languages of Pao* the society of Pao is far more than an elaborated social structure, a more or less nifty setting for an adventure story. The innovation of this book lies in the fact that Vance is more interested in Paonese society itself than the individuals who make it up, that an elaborated Paonese social structure is not only the tissue of the drama, but the necessary condition of an audacious artistic intention. The plot, or 'argument', or thesis of this book is not a mere adventure story, but the *recherché* theory that language determines society. It is this which makes the book 'science fiction' in triumphant plenitude: a story that dramatizes, and even exults, scientific progress to an unprecedented degree. Verne hoped that ballistic technology would one day carry man to the moon. In *Pao*, Vance imagines scientific manipulation of the nature of man, and accepts the metaphysics (or ontology, or vision) of the future promulgated by scientism.

According to this special *ism*, we are not creatures created by God, endowed with free will, living in a world created for us according to a natural and moral law decreed by our creator God. Instead, as any Darwinist will tell you, we are the haphazard result of a non-teleological (or purposeless and mindless) evolution, and thus a product of biological, or chemical processes. Even our minds, and thus our thoughts and ideas, are a product of bio-chemical evolutions. Such things as 'hope', 'grief' or 'love', which subjectively seem to possess an existence outside ourselves, are in fact subjective effects of our evolutionary state. Society, a sub-product of our bio-chemically created minds, is equally the result of evolutionary processes. But society is the preserver and transmitter of language, and thus, in turn, determines the individual—to any extent pure biology does not—by supplying those elements that our minds, given our state

of development, can only absorb from the exterior. Society, for Darwinism, is the medium of our collective and affective evolution.

The somewhat Asian values of conformity and self-effacement dominating Paonese culture are usefully appropriate to the scientism inspired thesis of *The Languages of Pao*, and it is easy to see why this book appeals to believers in scientism. Determinism, so dear to contemporary psychological, social and cultural thinking, here finds exuberant expression. The dour determinism of 19th century realists, such as Zola, is far away. In *Pao* a scientist is even the true 'hero',\* and though the Breakness dominie are sinister, megalomaniac satyrs, thanks to their science Pao is dynamised, saved from domination and stagnation, and—one is tempted to say—made happy.

The miserable Gitan Netsko would certainly have preferred her world to continue as it was; she had no complaint about the old order, and even loved it. Do science fiction readers share Gitan Netsko's contentment with the simple pleasures of continuity, private family life, and gentle manners? This is not to suggest that the conditions of old Pao were ideal, or even good; and science fiction readers need not be ashamed of admiring progress, productivity, strength, invention, the adventure of the new. Having a positive picture of the world of our dreams, unless such a world is an unmitigated nightmare, is not a sin. To say nothing of the advances of medicine, we now live in a world of cars, jets, telephones and TVs, a world transformed by technology, and we are happy about it. Cars are faster, less dangerous, less noisy and less smelly, than horses and carriages. Even technological warfare is, so far, a great advantage; in our recent wars we have been able to slaughter tens of thousands while sustaining hardly any casualties ourselves. Huxley and Orwell were not warning us against science as such, but against scientism; the reduction of man from his previous status of God's beloved creation, to that of more or less organized plasma, evolved trilobite, descendant of the missing link, a creature who came from nowhere, is going noplac and is lost in a void. For scientism this good news. Man now takes the place of God; he is his own natural and moral law, and only his strength limits his whimsical transformations of physical and moral reality. This is the deepest meaning of scientism's 'progress'. According to this vision, a future of factory produced cyber-men living in

\* This is another of Vance's early books where he had not yet worked out the delicate balance between 'hero' and 'villain' for a certain category of his stories. He finally got it right in the demon princes, but *Pao*, *The House on Lily Street*, and others bare the trace of this search.

individual capsules plummeting though inter-galactic space is a prospect to be contemplated not with horror, but fascination or even a certain sort of perverse satisfaction.

The revolutionary aspect of *The Languages of Pao* is its use of linguistic theory. But it is not Vance's only language story. *The Substandard Sardines* and *The Gift of Çab* are both about language for fish. Though treated lightly in the Ridolph story, both are also founded on scientism. When man is thrown off his pedestal, when thanks to Darwinism he becomes just another animal, language is no longer a divine gift to men and angels alone, but an evolutionary adaptation to be shared, sooner or later, or perhaps already, by other species—like our opposable thumb or vocal cords. For the last quarter century certain 'scientists' have been trying to prove that the higher apes possess language. Likewise, in the 1950s and early 1960s, Vance presents communication with fish in a cheerful light. Absent are dark regrets for the evaporation of eternal life, or distaste at the reduction of man to piscian status. Vance's talking fish are practical, clever, personable; creatures in whom we recognize ourselves. Thirty years later Vance's attitude, though just as comic, is not as complacent:

"... My cats often disobey and ignore my instructions. If I could talk with them, they could not pretend to misunderstand. I'd also like to talk with horses and birds and all other living things: even the trees and flowers, and the insects!"

King Rhodion grunted. "Trees and flowers neither talk nor listen. They only sigh among themselves. The insects would terrify you, if you heard their speech, and cause you nightmares."

"Then I can speak with birds and animals?"

"Take the lead amulet from my hat, wear it around your neck, and you will have your wish. Do not expect profound insights; birds and animals are usually foolish."\*

"How do you name these emotions? Tell me!"

Melancthe shook her head. "The names would mean nothing. I have watched insects, wondering how they name their emotions and wondering if perhaps they were like mine."

"I should think not," said Shimrod.†

\* Suldrun's Garden

† Madouc

Vance is still envisaging the languages of animals, but now, rather than a tranquil exposition of a scientist's Darwinist future, he gives an antic evocation of the true state of affairs; insects are terrifying and have no emotions congruent with ours. Plants only sigh among themselves, and birds and animals, if they do have anything to say, it is usually foolish. These are not Vance's opinions of course, but those of Rhodion and Shimrod (both of whom ought to know). Such statements do not arise from a perspective where man is reduced to the ontological status of a bug. In these passages we have a new, poetic evocation of age-old wisdom regarding the relation of man to the other Earthly creatures.

Vance approaches the question of language from other angles as well. In *The Moon Moth* language is treated, as in *Pao*, in a sociological, or anthropological, manner. But in this story, written in 1961, the scientism of *Pao* is absent. The thesis of *Pao* is that language determines society. In *The Moon Moth* the underlying idea is not that language determines society, but merely the observation that each society has its own rules. Luk Schoonaert\* summed up the import of this story as follows: "It's a nice way of showing how local habits, and not knowing them, can get a stranger in serious trouble . . . like if you go to China or Japan and seriously offend someone without even knowing you did . . . [In spite of their culture] the bad guy gets his punishment because [the hero tricks them, so that] they punish the wrong person—in their eyes, that is!" This is no argument for determinism, but the exposition of possibilities secretly inherent in a situation where two sets of values mingle. If this indicates anything it is not scientism's complacent relativism, but the existence of a higher set of values which allows manipulation of lesser ones. Vance does not explicitly comment on Syranese culture, but its nature is clear. It is interesting in its colorful complexity, but savage and heartless. Its values are expressed in elaborate and ritualized competition, wherein pride, truculence, mastery, power and violence are the key virtues.

Cultural relativists will feel at home in the world of *The Moon Moth*, though it lacks a pro-relativism thesis per se. *The Dragon Masters* is a different case. Written in 1963, this novella is not based on a thesis of scientism, but is an adventure where the hero, by coming to understand his history, and his geographical and cultural environment, wins out. Though not based on scientism, the story is filled with elements inspired by it, such as a passage explicitly based on the thesis of cultural relativism.

\* Erstwhile *VIE* volunteer.

It is this feature, along with the famously clever elaboration of a genetic malleability nightmare, which puts this novella in a category with *The Languages of Pao* as a science fiction classic. But unlike *Pao*, neither of these features (cultural relativism and genetic malleability) are central to the story. Regarding the cultural relativism, I must quote *in extenso*:

Kergan Banbeck came forth, and now ensued the strangest colloquy in the history of Aerlith. The Weaponeer spoke [. . .] soberly, with an air of gentle melancholy, neither asserting, commanding, nor urging. As his linguistic habits had been shaped to Basic patterns, so with his mental processes.

[. . .] With complete poise and quiet reasonableness he responded to Kergan Banbeck's question: "The Aerlith folk who have been killed are dead. Those aboard the ship will be merged into the understratum, where the infusion of fresh outside blood is of value."

[. . .] "I demand that you release the folk of Aerlith from your ship," said Kergan Banbeck in a flat voice.

The Weaponeer smilingly shook his head, bent his best efforts to the task of making himself intelligible. "These persons are not under discussion; their—" he paused, seeking words—"their destiny is . . . parceled, quantum-type, ordained. Established. Nothing can be said more . . . You will understand," said the Weaponeer, "that a pattern for events exists. It is the function of such as myself to shape events so that they will fit the pattern." He bent, and with a graceful sweep of arm seized a small jagged pebble. "Just as I can grind this bit of rock to fit a round aperture."

Kergan Banbeck reached forward, took the pebble, tossed it high over the tumbled boulders. "That bit of rock you shall never shape to fit a round hole."

The Weaponeer shook his head in mild deprecation. "There is always more rock."

"And there are always more holes," declared Kergan Banbeck.

"To business then," said the Weaponeer.

"I propose to shape this situation to its correct arrangement."

"What do you offer in exchange for the twenty-three grephs?"



Developmental sketches by Paul Rhoads, for a full series of illustrations destined for the upcoming hor-series *The Dragon Masters*.

The Weaponeer gave his shoulder an uneasy shake. The ideas of this man were as wild, barbaric and arbitrary as the varnished spikes of his hair-dress. "If you desire I will give you instruction and advice, so that—" [. . .]

The Weaponeer threw back his head, made a series of bleating sounds through his nose.

[. . .] "you must release all the men and women presently aboard your ship."

The Weaponeer blinked, spoke rapid hoarse words of amazement to the Trackers. They stirred, uneasy and impatient, watching Kergan Banbeck sidelong as if he were not only savage, but mad. Overhead hovered the flyer; the Weaponeer looked up and seemed to derive encouragement from the sight. Turning back to Kergan Banbeck with a firm fresh attitude, he spoke as if the previous interchange had never occurred. "I have come to instruct you that the twenty-three Revered must be instantly released."

Kergan Banbeck repeated his own demands. [. . .]

The Weaponeer seemed confused.

"This is a peculiar situation— indefinite, unquantizable."

"Can you not understand me?" barked Kergan Banbeck in exasperation. He glanced at the sacerdote, an act of questionable decorum, then performed in a manner completely unconventional: "Sacerdote, how can I deal with this blockhead? He does not seem to hear me."



The sacerdote moved a step nearer, his face as bland and blank as before. Living by a doctrine which proscribed active or intentional interference in the affairs of other men, he could make to any question only a specific and limited answer. "He hears you, but there is no meeting of ideas between you. His thought-structure is derived from that of his masters. It is incommensurable with yours. As to how you must deal with him, I cannot say."

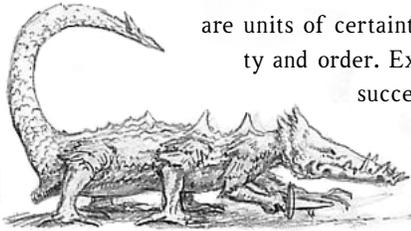
Kergan Banbeck looked back to the Weaponeer. "Have you heard what I asked of you? Did you understand my conditions for the release of the grephs?"

"I heard you distinctly," replied the Weaponeer. "Your words have no meaning, they are absurdities, paradoxes. Listen to me carefully. It is ordained, complete, a quantum of destiny, that you deliver to us the Revered. It is irregular, it is not ordainment that you should have a ship, or that your other demands be met."

Kergan Banbeck's face became red; he half-turned toward his men but restraining his anger, spoke slowly and

with careful clarity. "I have something you want. You have something I want. Let us trade."

For twenty seconds the two men stared eye to eye. Then the Weaponeer drew a deep breath. "I will explain in your words, so that you will comprehend. Certainties—no, not certainties: definites . . . Definites exist. These



are units of certainty, quanta of necessity and order. Existence is the steady succession of these units, one after the other.

The activity of the universe can be expressed by reference to these units. Irregularity, absurdity—these are like half a man, with half a brain, half a heart, half of all his vital organs. Neither are allowed to exist. That you hold twenty-three Revered as captives is such an absurdity: an outrage to the rational flow of the universe."

Kergan Banbeck threw up his hands, turned once more to the sacerdote. "How can I halt his nonsense? How can I make him see reason?"

The sacerdote reflected. "He speaks not nonsense, but rather a language you fail to understand. You can make him understand your language by erasing all knowledge and training from his mind, and replacing it with patterns of your own."

Kergan Banbeck fought back an unsettling sense of frustration and unreality[. . .]"How do you suggest that I deal with this man?"

[. . .]"Release the grephs; he will then depart."

Kergan Banbeck cried out in unrestrained anger. "Who then do you serve? Man or greph? Let us have the truth! Speak!"

"By my faith, by my creed, by the truth of my *tand* I serve no one but myself."[. . .]

Kergan Banbeck watched him go, then with cold decisiveness turned back to the Weaponeer. "Your discussion of certainties and absurdities is interesting. I feel that you have confused the two. Here is certainty from my viewpoint! I will not release the twenty-three grephs unless you meet my terms. If you attack us further, I will cut them in half, to illustrate and realize your figure of speech, and perhaps convince you that absurdities are possible. I say no more."

The Weaponeer shook his head slowly, pityingly. "Listen, I will explain. Certain conditions are unthinkable, they are unquantized, un-destined—"

"Go," thundered Kergan Banbeck. "Otherwise you will join your twenty-three revered grephs, and I will teach you how real the unthinkable can become!"

The Weaponeer and the two Trackers, croaking and muttering, turned [. . .]

[. . .] Half an hour after the Weaponeer had returned to the ship, he came leaping forth once again, dancing, cavorting. Others followed him—Weaponeers, Trackers, Heavy Troopers and eight more grephs—all jerking, jumping, running back and forth in distracted steps. The ports of the ship flashed lights of various colors, and there came a slow rising sound of tortured machinery.

The conceit is amusing and intriguing but, despite some striking touches like the bleating sounds and the scene of collective madness, it makes no sense. If the basics and their slaves really did have a 'thought structure' that is so different, if they really believed that destiny is ordained, if this is indeed the nature of their 'reality', why not come weaponless from their ship and attempt to collect humans by gently calling them, or quietly persuading them, or simply leading them by the hand? Instead they come forth armed and cautious. They attempt to subdue the humans with force because they know the humans will resist abduction. They know this because they identify with, and thus comprehend, the human desire to remain free, just as a rabbit hunter knows the rabbit will flee from him in an effort to preserve its lapine existence. Vance's attempt to base a dialogue on the absurdity of cultural relativism is at worst amusing, and does not hurt the book because it is just an incident, not the foundation of the story; if this dialogue were extirpated, or changed to reflect a non-relativist metaphysic, the basic story would not be affected.

Against the goosebump-provoking backdrop of last men lost in a hostile universe, tracked by aliens seeking to absorb them into the 'understratum', the men of Aerialith first of all live with pressing intra-human tension such as the hegemonic ambitions of Carcolo of Happy Valley, and the latent hostility of the mysterious Sacerdotes for all *utter men*. To me the most intriguing feature of *The Dragon Masters* has always been the *tands* of the Sacerdotes:

Deep under Banbeck Scarp, in a cubicle lit by a twelve-vial candelabra, a naked white-haired man sat quietly. On a pedestal at the level of his eyes rested his *tand*, an intricate construction of gold rods and silver wire, woven and bent seemingly at random. The fortuitousness of the design, however, was only apparent. Each curve symbolized an aspect of Final Sentience; the shadow cast upon the wall represented the



Rationale, ever-shifting, always the same. The object was sacred to the sacerdotess, and served as a source of revelation.

There was never an end to the study of the *tand*: new intuitions were continually derived from some heretofore overlooked relationship of angle and curve. The nomenclature was elaborate: each part, juncture, sweep and twist had its name; each aspect of the relationships between the various parts was likewise categorized. Such was the cult of the *tand*: abstruse, exacting, without compromise. At his puberty rites the young sacerdotess might study the original *tand* for as long as he chose; each must construct a duplicate *tand*, relying upon memory alone. Then occurred the most significant event of his lifetime: the viewing of his *tand* by a synod of elders. In awesome stillness, for hours at a time they would ponder his creation, weigh the infinitesimal variations of proportion, radius, sweep and angle. So they would infer the initiate's quality, judge his personal attributes, determine his understanding of Final Sentience, the Rationale and the Basis.

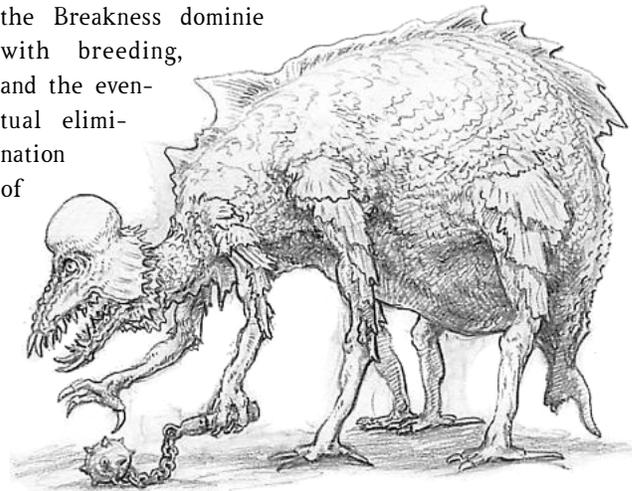
Occasionally the testimony of the *tand* revealed a character so tainted as to be reckoned intolerable; the vile *tand* would be cast into a furnace, the molten metal consigned to a latrine, the unlucky initiate expelled to the face of the planet, to live on his own terms.

This passage is somewhat in the 'society creation' vein, but there is nothing really new here; it is really a *recreation*, in the painterly sense, and in the literary sense a variety of irony unique to Vance. The Sacerdotes worship themselves. They are caricatures of all groups—Van Vogt null-A men, Teutonic Aryans, or the *New Man* of Communism—who consider themselves intellectually, racially and culturally superior; thus the Sacerdotes must be forced to save mankind, because they do not recognize other men as their brothers\*. But the image of the *tands* has other reverberations. The initiate, like any member of any society, must internalize its values, and outwardly demonstrate this internalization, or suffer the consequences. Here social 'values' are embodied in a physical object, the shadow of which, cast by twelve lamps, represents 'the Rationale' which is 'ever-shifting' yet 'always the same'. These images and terms come straight from Socrates' metaphor of the cave—Vance's scene is also set in a cave—though Vance presents the famous metaphor

\* A similar theme occurs in Tschai.

upside down. In *The Republic* the flickering shadows represent 'shadows of shadows of true things'. But the shadow of the *tand*, though shifting, is always the same 'Rationale'. The sense of this is that there are many ways of understanding, and all are good; the truth is accessible by several avenues. Vance's image is less mystical than Plato's, and different in its import, but obviously true, for it is indeed possible to understand things in several ways. Take, for example, the famous truth: *it is good to help a person in need*—something the sacerdotess fail to understand! This truth can be understood either by direct empathy, or the consideration that, one day, the shoe might be on the other foot. These two ways have nothing to do with each other, yet both are true, and both lead to the correct result.

As for the dragons, another attractive aspect of the story, they are simply one more of Vance's many *parasite-symbiosis-metamorphosis* ideas. The clash of two species in a battle of mutant soldier-slaves is a very nice idea but, again and unlike *Pao*, the story would not collapse if it were extirpated, if the mutants were replaced by indigenous animals for example. Such biological fantasies occur throughout Vance's work, and looking at it as a whole we can say that he is clearly more interested in what has come to be called 'life science' than he is in physics and engineering. Stories centered, or dependent, on this Vancean *bio-fi*, as I call it, include *Nopalgarth*, *The Narrow Land*, *The World Between*, and *Clarges*\*. All early works, these stories would collapse without the *bio-fi* that underlies them. But *bio-fi* crops up in various degrees in many other stories. In *Pao* there is the obsession of the Breakness dominion with breeding, and the eventual elimination of



\* In *Clarges (To Live Forever)* Vance explores the problem of human immortality made real by medical science. Unlike in *Pao*, he does not defend a thesis but explores a bio-social problem created by technology. It is another pioneering work of *soft-science fiction*, and Vance's response to the specific dilemma is that the eventuality is untenable.

the 'emeritus' by his own progeny. In *Maske:Thaery* Ramus Ymph is metamorphosed into a tree. In *Son of the Tree* and *The Palace of Love* there is the druidic obsession with feeding people to trees, as well as human cloning in the latter book. There is the genetic metamorphosis of the descendants of the five sons in *The Rapparee*, house breeding in *The Houses of Iszm*, the Damaran puppets of *Emphyrio*, the symbiosis of Asutra and Ka in *Durdane*, the tri-part procreation of the Wannek in *Tschai*. In the mature work, with few exceptions, the bio-fi settles down to mere fascination with plants, animals and minerals. One thinks of such effective Vancian creations as charnay, percebs, cluthe, sequins, marmelization, *chir*, spraling, pold. Such minerals, vegetables and animals are *real* for all who have read the stories where they occur. When we reach the Demon Prince books (*The Star King* was written, like *The Dragon Masters*, around 1964) little is left of the full fledged scientism of *Pao*. We enter a world metaphysically identical to our present. There is no dragon-masterish attempt, even in *Tschai* or *Durdane*, to sustain a sub-thesis of cultural relativism. The *great song* of the Ka is not a different 'system of thought', just extremely exotic. The Gomaz warriors do not think different thoughts from men, they are just grotesques; the thefts of Dr. Dacre are not a bid for immortality, simply *fantastic* medical manipulations.

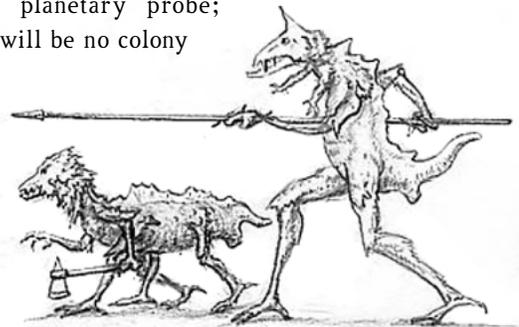
A basic fact of life in the Gaeen Reach, of the 'world' where even *Tschai* and *Durdane* are set, is the universal language. But this is a patiently unrealistic conceit, an impossibility like interstellar travel. Vance has stated that both are conventions which allow him to write 'the kind of stories [he] write(s)'. What kind of stories are these? Vance loves to travel because he loves to discover and experience the particularities of places. He loves this variety of discovery because he is an artist in love with reality. Like a painter, but in the domain proper to literature, he loves reproducing reality 'decoratively'. He loves to experience particularities to sharpen his sense of reality by enlarging his view of it. The Gaeen Reach is an artistic recreation of the real world. It is not a projection of the future based on faith in a technological progress that will overturn society as we know it and lead us into a *brave new world*. The fantastical elements of the Gaeen Reach are deliberately phantasmagorical in the classic sense; they are impossibilities, deliberate conceits that allow the flowering of Vance's imagination, the elaboration, reproduction, decorative recreation of a poetic reality where deeper things can be made plain.

It took someone of Vance's artistic stature, who also embraced scientism, to write *The Languages of Pao*, which

may be the ultimate science fiction book, the book in which the essence of scientism\* is given full, and fully self-conscious expression, for this story does not blindly accept progress as an untarnished good. For this reason Vance may be the greatest of all the science fiction authors. But his ultimate values are the eternal values of true art. His long, and in some ways ongoing, flirtation with scientism is at the heart of something that gives a color to his work it would otherwise not have. Vance is regarded by many readers as 'cynical'. In my opinion he is not at all cynical, but he does make abundant use of a moral reserve not only necessary to his comedy, but which allows him to retain his faith in progress without denying alarming realities of the present or legitimate concerns for the future.

A few years ago I mentioned to Vance how a certain powerful politician in France had created an attraction park based on futuristic technology, a sort of permanent Worlds Fair of 1936. I wanted to go on to criticize it on several grounds (mainly concerning its abusive financing, about which I have inside information) but Vance interrupted me to emphasize his approval of such an initiative; "Good for him!" he thundered.

Rene Monory, creator of the *Futuroscope*, is a man of Vance's generation. Unlike most French politicians he started out as a humble mechanic, which perhaps helps explain his faith in technology. But this vision can never shine as brightly as it did for the children of the 1920s and 1930s. The atom bomb, industrial disasters like Bhopal and Chernobyl, pollution, mad cow disease, 'reproductive technology', and so on, have given most of us some degree of the heebee-jeebees when it comes to technology. The space adventure, so triumphant thirty years ago, is settling down to government surveillance and commercial communication satellites, with an occasional planetary probe; there will be no colony



\* Which is *materialism/determinism*. There is a school of thought which draws hope to reform the bleak prospect of *materialism/determinism* with the 'indeterminacy principle'. The doctrine of this movement is *materialism/free will*. This incoherent doctrine remains, as much as that of undiluted scientism, a matter of faith. I myself find its thesis an untenable last-ditch effort to rescue scientism.

on the Moon or Mars, not in the foreseeable future anyway. Planetary exploration is an adventure which is criticized not only as impossible, but as pointless and wasteful. Forty years ago such a perspective was envisaged with wonder and hope.

Vance is too observant and sensitive not to have been touched as closely as anyone by all that has complicated our love-affair with technology and contributed to making many of us truly cynical. We live in a world, and contemporary science fiction in particular attests to this, where good and evil no longer exist, and where even the reality of reality itself has become suspect. It has almost become conceivable for an individual to enclose himself in a cyst of subjectivity and to reduce the circumambient world, including other persons, to the status of object or decor. But Vance's work has never ceased to smile, and never fallen into cynicism. His work, though without blindness or naiveté, continues to affirm the future, to look forward with hope. This is an extremely rare thing today. I attribute it to a root common to science fiction and the exuberant and unabashed faith in progress which gathered such energy throughout the 19th century and marked much of the 20th. Vance continues to carry the true torch of progress, while science fiction, to say nothing of other forms of literature, has lost its soul between the Scylla and Charybdis of scientism and cynicism; the plunge into moral chaos where naked power is ruling tyrant, or the retreat into a sour refusal to acknowledge anything beyond corruption and evil. But true progress—the expansion of genuine morality and true wisdom and all the good things of this life to more and more people over more and more time—is a constant struggle, like creating a beautiful estate. It is all very well to build a marvellous mansion with splendid dependances, gardens, vineyards, forests and parks, but it must be maintained, expanded, adapted to new circumstances and generations, and the latter must learn to love it and care for it. Without all this, it falls into ruin. Vance is one of the few artists who has been true to Hope.

*As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.*

—G.K. Chesterton

## Letters to the Editor

From the Editor,

I comment on Paul Rhoads' article directly above, as he has requested that we do in the pages of *Cosmopolis*. My comment will not pertain to the many positive aspects of his article, as is often the case with letters-to-or-from-the-Editor.

I would like to recommend that an introduction to an upcoming *VIE* book is not a proper place to be calling H.G. Wells an 'intellectual thug'. This may be Paul's opinion of Wells, but it's an offensive remark concerning a very well-known author; although permissible in *Cosmopolis*, it would be inappropriate in an introduction to one of our *VIE* books: such an introduction is not the same type of venue as an editorial in a newspaper, for example.

Derek W. Benson

\* \* \*

To the Editor,

I have just stumbled across your site. I am impressed by both the scope of the project and the dedication of your team. My grandmother was an avid (fanatical??) Vance fan and read me all of his stories and novels when I was young. When she died in 1984 my mother threw her entire collection (which included publications in magazines and at least one copy of everything Vance had ever published up to that date) out because (to quote my mother) Jack Vance was not a real writer and she didn't want that stuff around the house. I have regretted that ever since.

So. Having stumbled across your site I can now see the fulfilment of a lifelong dream . . . to own all of Vance's stories once more. Is it still possible to subscribe to purchase a set? If it is e-mail me back and I'll fill out the form etc.

Congratulations on the endeavour. My aged grandmother would have been proud.

Regards,  
George Galloway  
Adelaide, South Australia

\* \* \*

To the Editor,

Till Noever writes "[t]here is a spiritual law, which states that the tolerance of a creed for those who opine differently is inversely proportional to the 'size' of that creed's deity."

I am unaware of this law, or who might have pro-  
pounded it. However, a cursory examination of the actual  
history of religion would find this 'law' to be almost laugh-  
ably wrong-headed. Roman polytheism was so 'tolerant' of  
Jews and Christians that they were persecuted by means  
of the most extreme tortures, not the least of which were  
the arena, as a matter of state policy. Conversely, when  
Christianity achieved recognition under the emperor Con-  
stantine in AD 313, the imperial rescript, the Edict of Mi-  
lan, contains explicit provisions protecting freedom of  
worship for all, including non-Christians—the first such  
edict of toleration in the history of civilization:

"When we, Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus,  
had happily met at Milan, and were conferring about  
all things which concern the advantage and security of  
the state, we thought that amongst other things which  
seemed likely to profit man generally, the reverence paid  
to the Divinity merited our first and chief attention. Our  
purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all oth-  
ers full authority to follow whatever worship each man  
has desired; whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heav-  
en may be benevolent and propitious to us, and to all who  
are placed under our authority. Therefore we thought it  
salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no  
man whatever should be refused complete toleration, who  
has given up his mind either to the cult of the Christians,  
or to the religion which he personally feels best suited  
to himself; to the end that the supreme Divinity, to whose  
worship we devote ourselves under no compulsion, may  
continue in all things to grant us his wonted favour and  
beneficence. Wherefore your Dignity should know that it  
is our pleasure to abolish all conditions whatever which  
were embodied in former orders directed to your office  
about the Christians, that what appeared utterly inauspi-  
cious and foreign to our Clemency should be done away  
and that every one of those who have a common wish to  
follow the religion of the Christians may from this mo-  
ment freely and unconditionally proceed to observe the  
same without any annoyance or disquiet. These things we  
thought good to signify in the fullest manner to your  
Carefulness, that you might know that we have given  
freely and unreservedly to the said Christians toleration  
to practice their cult. And when you perceive that we  
have granted this favour to the said Christians, your De-  
votion understands that to others also freedom for their  
own worship and cult is likewise left open and freely  
granted, as befits the quiet of our times, that every man  
may have complete toleration in the practice of whatev-  
er worship he has chosen. This has been done by us that  
no diminution be made from the honour of any reli-

gion . . . [the remainder of the Edict addresses various le-  
gal matters arising from the cessation of anti-Christian  
persecution]."

I do not know why Mr. Noever rejects ". . . the com-  
monly-held view—even by atheists!—that monotheism is  
a sign of spiritual or philosophical maturity . . ." I can  
only suggest that this view—which he dismisses as 'par-  
rot-knowledge'—is in fact more deeply grounded in ac-  
tual history and theology than Mr. Noever's—shall we  
say—rococo views on the subject. I note with some  
amusement that Mr. Noever would prefer some other God  
than the sometimes uncomfortable and difficult God that  
the Testaments reveal to us. To this I can only respond:  
God created Man in his own image, and Man has been try-  
ing to return the favor ever since.

I will conclude by stating that I find it regrettable to  
encounter the primitive anti-religious bigotry on display  
in Mr. Noever's letter, in the pages of *Cosmopolis*.

*Very respectfully,*  
*David G.D. Hecht*

\* \* \*

To the Editor,

I read Till Noever's letter in the last issue of *Cos-  
mopolis*, and cannot help but be perplexed at the final  
paragraph. Here Mr. Noever asserts that "2000 years of  
monotheism haven't been edifying." I cannot imagine what  
this means. What is his standard of comparison? Is there  
a culture of 2000 years past which is superior overall to  
the cultures found in Europe, Britain, Australia, and  
North America? In what way? He goes on to provide as  
an example the Egyptian empire which, "by all accounts"  
was remarkably civilized. I believe that the Egypt Mr.  
Noever is thinking of exists only in the imagination of  
the overly-romantic: I can imagine that a life in Egypt at  
its best was rigidly stratified socially, bereft of anything  
resembling effective medicine or dentistry, and basically  
a short life of unremittingly hard work. Unless of course,  
one was royalty, in which case one did little hard work.

In comparing the cultures of the past with the cultures  
which most readers of this magazine live in, I make a few  
observations. One can protest that life was better in some  
specific way, and possibly even carry the specific case. Or  
one may observe, on a full stomach and ensconced in cen-  
tral heat the following: that running hot water, adequate  
sanitation, and light at the flick of a switch reflect the fact  
that things are certainly better than they were in the past.

If these little things do not convince, then perform this

little thought experiment: you or a loved one is ill. There are now many ways to obtain the benefits of NMIs, Cat scanners, open heart surgery, antibiotics, effective dentistry, or just aspirin. But Egypt at the time of the birth of Christ isn't one of the places these minor things could be found. And in 2500 years of 'culture' they didn't develop them, either. Oh. I should point out also that education (including history) is available to virtually anyone today, although it is true that this is probably wasted on some people.

Is it necessary to point out that material benefits which we enjoy are not those of a polytheistic society? They are basically the product of the learning and discoveries of a Judeo-Christian Europe and I should add, a Judeo-Christian United States. Should anyone at this point begin to protest that material benefits are not a measure of a culture's quality, I urge them to cut off power, gas, and water to their home for a week or so.

Bending history to fit pet theories is a popular pastime among the Left, radical feminists, and a few other whining groups, but Mr. Noever does in fact know better I suspect. I doubt that there are any societies of the past in which he'd like to be permanently transplanted . . . not historical societies in any event.

I recently saw the bumper sticker of someone who, like Mr. Noever, interpreted history to suit his religious beliefs. It exclaimed "When Religion Ruled the World it Was Called the DARK AGES". I think I could make, however, the following case: The dark ages were the result of the collapse of a polytheistic society (Rome) and that the Catholic Church preserved what knowledge (e.g., the making of cement, glass) and literature that was available. The bumper sticker should have read: "When Religion Ruled the World it Was Called the RENAISSANCE".

I now repeat the meaningless formula that Mr. Noever is entitled to his opinions, but only to add that I think his opinions should be based on a more pragmatic view of history.

Further: I note that the constant denigration of modern European and American culture is a dangerous and insidious illness, probably most found in polytheists and nulltheists . . . but in any event a dangerously weakening attitude. (I do not accuse Mr. Noever of this specifically, but his comments concerning Egypt come rather close.) All will agree that our culture is not perfect, but this is a vacuous assertion. Here is a better evaluation: European and American culture is not merely the best available, but a culture both good for most people most of the time, and superior to all that has come before.

*Bob Lacovara*

To the Editor,

Alain Schremmer accords me an 'absolute' entitlement to my views and, in the same phrase, denies this entitlement proceeds from a 'natural right'. The entitlement would, therefore, proceed from . . . what? Alain's personal dispensation to me? I am, naturally, very glad to have it, particularly if, as Alain implies, there is indeed no other source to look to. And as for us all being in the same boat, I fail to see why this justifies envy, as Alain's obscure response may or may not suggest. The justification of envy, and thus Socialism, is that the rich are nasty, greedy exploiters of the poor, better off robbed. If anyone doubts this they should listen to Martine Aubry—official brain of the French Socialist party, and conceptrix of the new French 35-hour work week, with 40-hour pay—as a measure against unemployment. This will soon set them straight.

Concerning my pal Till's claim that '2000 years of dominant monotheist cultures' has not been edifying; is he not referring to Christianity only? The other monotheist cultures that might be qualified as 'dominant' are Judaism, which has been around a whole lot longer than 2000 years, and Islam which has been around a whole lot less. Meanwhile polytheistic religions are still thriving, and still up to their old tricks, in areas of Africa and the East; places from which emigration to any Western country is frequent, and to which immigration from the West is rare. So, has 2000 years of Christian history indeed been unedifying? Such is the popularly held view, supported by the ongoing and numbing campaign of crypto-anti-Christian propaganda. Till, who knows a good read, might enjoy the first chapter of St. Augustine's City of God, in which are answered those who blamed the fall of the Roman Empire on the advent of Christianity and the eclipse of polytheism. This magnificent reply has worked wonders for centuries, until our own bumptious, illiterate age. Though it will surely cause hooting in the peanut gallery, it is none-the-less true, I say, that only thanks to Christianity is Western society what it is today: enlightened and rich, in the highest sense of the words.

*Paul Rhoads*

\* \* \*

Editor's note: the following two letters were received from volunteers who proofread *Cosmopolis*, therefore the early responses from them concerning matters addressed by others in this issue.

To the Editor,

“What is science fiction?” The question has been beaten to death, then kicked twice around the galaxy and elected county dog catcher. And that was long before it appeared in *Cosmopolis 3*. You know what? It’s still fun to talk about it.

The FAQ for the rec.arts.sf.written community has some good references. The author’s conclusion is that the only definition which works is Damon Knight’s: “Science Fiction is what we point at when we say it.” Sounds much like Jack Vance’s “the stuff that I write”.

It is too easy to find a counter-example to any definition not so broad as to be useless. There is nothing special about science fiction here. “What is music?” We all know. But what exactly is the difference between music and noise? Birds sing notes. Clacking trolley wheels have rhythm. A two-year-old banging on a piano is deliberately making expressive sounds. Techno-rock would probably sound like a machine shop to Brahms: it wouldn’t reach him emotionally. So then?

From links in the FAQ, here are a few attempts which seem to me to resonate with Jack Vance’s writings.

Bruce Franklin:

We talk a lot about science fiction as extrapolation, but in fact most science fiction does not extrapolate seriously. Instead it takes a wilful, often whimsical, leap into a world spun out of the fantasy of the author . . .

Damon Knight:

What we get from science fiction—what keeps us reading it, in spite of our doubts and occasional disgust—is not different from the thing that makes mainstream stories rewarding, but only expressed differently. We live on a minute island of known things. Our undiminished wonder at the mystery which surrounds us is what makes us human. In science fiction we can approach that mystery, not in small, everyday symbols, but in bigger ones of space and time.

Alvin Toffler:

By challenging anthropocentrism and temporal provincialism, science fiction throws open the whole of civilization and its premises to constructive criticism.

Personally, I have had a life-long love of science fiction. Shortly after reading my first Hardy Boys book, I picked up my first Tom Corbett. The difference meant a

lot to me then, and it still does. I think Jack Vance shows the great things science fiction is capable of. I feel threatened by attempts to degrade science fiction, even while agreeing with the famous statement of Dena Brown: “Science fiction should get out of the classroom and back in the gutter where it belongs!” Once it hits the classroom, we get ‘deconstruction’ and other intellectual guttings. The fun is over. Is science fiction today just the moribund spew of Godless scientism?

I am fully aware of the truth of Paul’s observations on the prejudice against science fiction. I can’t get my own family to read Vance. There is no reason at all that Jack Vance should not be enjoyed by at least as wide and distinguished a readership as Ray Bradbury or Kurt Vonnegut. Jack is way beyond them. I agree that the VIE should not be marketed as a science fiction project. But where I get a warm escapist tingle when a spaceship appears on page 1, and another person when a cowboy’s saddle creaks, and another when the corpse is discovered at precisely 11:08 AM, most will not be comfortable. We won’t fool anybody.

*Rob Friefeld*

\* \* \*

To the Editor,

I’m somewhat surprised by the reaction to my innocuous missive in *Cosmopolis 21*. It appears that only my friend Paul is versed in the art of civilized debate. David Hecht—to whom I might have replied, but for his last paragraph!—saw fit to hurl intemperate and uncivilized invective at me; an action which does his cause a grave disservice and invalidates his arguments, since he makes himself a case in my point. Bob Lacovara also could not refrain from a few personal slurs—though he denies them in the same breath as he makes them; but who is fooled?

I can see that what I would have liked to be a stimulated debate is going to end up as a my-side-is-better-than-yours-and-never-mind-the-truth kind of exchange, where everybody plays down the deficiencies of the negative examples on their side of the argument, enhances whatever positives there are to bolster their position, and performs the inverse process with their opponent’s position. A bit of that would have been okay, if performed in a collegial and friendly spirit, but from the vitriol produced so far I have little hope of that happening.

However, Paul, who rescued the debate with civility, deserves an answer, and so I’d like to respond in brief.

No, I'm *not* singling out Judeo-Christianity (I never could tell Judaism and Christianity apart—to me the God they worship is one and the same). But historical continuity has put Christianity into the position of being the largest and most significant monotheist religion ever to encircle the planet. Therefore it is the most outstanding example of the point I was trying to make. Islam, though of lesser importance in the world, happens to be an even more outstanding one, because of an apparent inherent virulence, which belies the assertions of those who declare it to be a religion of 'peace'. Mind you, just about every religion claims to be one of 'peace'—as does every political system; and the edicts issued in the name of 'peace' and 'tolerance', and promptly ignored when it comes to the crunch and expediency, litter the landscape of history like so many sad rotting corpses. There is, in my opinion, only *one* edict/declaration/document worth even the paper it's written on. I leave it to the reader to figure out which one that may be. Despite having been corrupted a million times by those who should honour it, it remains the West's unofficial manifesto against the bin Ladens of the world.

The 'spiritual law' that may be expressed mathematically as  $t = a n^{-b}$  (where  $t$  is the tolerance accorded to those who believe different than we do,  $n$  is the number of gods in our own religion, and  $a$  and  $b$  are parameters of unknown value, but I suspect that at the very least  $b > 2$ ) affects *any* religion, no matter its tenets. So, no, Paul, this is not 'crypto-ani-Christian propaganda'. If it sound like it, take my word for it that it isn't. It's just the way things are. Don't shoot the messenger!

About another matter, raised by Bob and Paul alike. Can we please pause for a reality check? The comforts of our civilization, including all technological advances, are the product of science. I really don't know how people contrive to make it sound as if religion had anything to do with them; or as if, just because the West lives under the Judeo-Christian monotheism and has technology and all these nice things, there is some necessary causal relationship between the two—and that, supposing we'd have had a polytheist system during the last 2000 years, such advances would not have been made. The notion stretches my credulity to the breaking point.

*Kindest regards,  
Till Noever*

## Closing Words

Thanks to Evert Jan de Groot and Joel Anderson for composition and to proofreaders Rob Friefeld, Till Noever and Jim Pattison.

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*Derek W. Benson, Editor*

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# Where is CLS?

The *Cosmopolis Literary Supplement*, No. 11, should be available when *Cosmopolis* No. 23 arrives. Sorry for the delay. It will be an issue worth reading!

*Joel Anderson & Paul Rhoads*

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