

WILD THYME AND VIOLETS

Finished 11 November 2004

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SPACE OPERA

Finished 11 November 2004

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Here is the credit list for VOLUME 18
which contains:

- Space Opera

The realization of this volume was made
possible by the help of

Mark Adams
Linnéa Anglemark
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Marcel van Genderen
Brian Gharst
Joel Hedlund
Alun Hughes
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Till Noever
David Reitsema
John A. Schwab
Steve Sherman
Gabriel Stein
Tim Stretton
Peter Strickland
Fred Zoetemeyer



38's Crucible

Subscription Deadline

Subscriptions close on **JANUARY 25!** All have been alerted. Subscriptions, as well as shipping fees, must be paid by that date. Suan Yong is the man to contact. Please keep in mind that Suan is a volunteer, a fine young man engaged in graduate studies as well as starting out in his professional career. He is not a paid bureaucrat, even if he is more efficient than average, single-handedly keeping track of hundreds of subscriptions, to say nothing of the very many even larger burdens he has taken on to help achieve the VIE.

Your monies are in the keeping of the VIE treasurers, including John and Norma Vance, and Ed Winskill who is a lawyer. These monies are currently being used to print and bind Wave 2 books. The companies doing this work, as for Wave 1, are Global Print, and Torriani, both of Milan, Italy. The production coordinator, as always, is Stefania Zacco, of what was Sfera International, and now is Areagroup Media, also located in Milan.

We continue to hope Wave 2 printing will be complete in February, perhaps even including packing, with books arriving sometime in March depending on delivery modes. As for the second printing, that will begin as soon as Wave 2 is complete with delivery in April or May. These dates, of course, are subject to change. This is the schedule we set last spring, and so far we have stuck to it. The 'nunking' of Wave 2 proofs has just been set for January 11, a bit later than I had hoped, and this may indeed push us back a week or two.



Packing

Do not let the last opportunity to strike a historic blow for the VIE pass you by!

The following folk have already expressed interest:

JOSH SNYDER

VINCENT DE MONTMOLLIN

WILMA BOUWMEESTER

STEPHEN PATT

Their names will be inscribed in the volume 44 work-credit section.

The VIE will subsidize travel and lodging for packers, to the greatest extent possible, including total expenses, depending upon various factors. Wave 2 packing will require about a dozen people full time for at least a

week. Anyone who makes even an indefinite commitment will be credited in volume 44. Though we can't know who will actually do the work until they are in Milan doing it, volume 44 will go to press in January, and we aren't taking any chances.

Wave 2 Packing will occur, ideally, the last week of March, though it may be the first or second week of March, and Second Printing Packing will be a month or two so later. Anyone who can bring themselves to Milan, and lodge themselves, is unequivocally welcome. But don't let financial considerations stop you! We must have packers, and we'll use our resources to get them, to the greatest extent possible. If you think you can possibly be free around one of the packing times contact me at prhoads@club-internet.fr, or Hans van der Veeke, hans@vie.tmfweb.nl, volunteer coordinator, or any other VIE manager. Packing is hard work, but we'll have some relaxation as well, including exploration of the local restaurants.



BBS Reaction To Cosmopolis 55

Regarding my comment on Dave Reitsem's comments on Art and Eros someone on the Vance BBS had this to say:

. . . many postmodern critics have discussed the erotics of various artistic (and other) endeavors. Unfortunately, Rhoads appears to be completely unaware of that body of work. And his fundamental assertion — i.e., that the difference between what counts as "art" and what doesn't — "depends on the artist's desire" amounts to nothing more than a more than normally fatuous platitude. It reduces to this: Authors who are deeply interested in and excited about their subjects are more likely to write pieces that interest their readers. Wow. Imagine that. Whoda thunk it.

. . . Fair enough. On the other hand Delacroix once said that what distinguishes great men is not their originality but their recognition that what is worth saying is worth repeating. Furthermore, even if being 'deeply interested in and excited' about one's subject overlaps eroticism, in the sense I am trying to use the term, the overlap is hardly perfect. Eroticness is more than intellectual or emotional enthusiasm, a state easy to counterfeit. It is a force one does not command. The classical understanding of this artist's dilemma—the problem of inspiration—was expressed in the formula: 'fickle is the Muse'. She may smile upon the undeserving and disdain her most ardent suitors. As for *poseurs* they are not even 'undeserving'. It was none-the-less urged that one might at least hope to influence this difficult lady with adoration—meaning

dedication to one's art or, which is or which ought to be saying the same thing, to her. Her cult is best measured not in units of sweat but of tears: tears of joy at her power and the beauty of nature. As Vance put it in *Wyst*, certainly speaking of himself:

Here in fact was the very essence of his yearnings: he wanted to control that magic linkage between the real and the unreal, the felt and the seen. He wanted to pervade himself with the secret meaning of things and use this lore as the mood took him.

This is a wonderfully neat expression of what the true artist is: suffused with an intimate knowledge of reality, master of the symbols that translate that knowledge, and capable of mobilizing them at a whim. How to attain such a state? Jantiff can do no more than yearn for it, pervaded only by a sense of its imagined delights. If 'yearning' to be 'penetrated with secret meanings' and to 'control magic linkages' is equivalent to 'interest and excitement about one's subject' then, I suppose, I have indeed perpetrated a 'more than normally fatuous platitude'. If not how might this charge be characterized? Various formulas come to my mind, but you can choose your own.

In the same context a Vance BBS non-reader of *Cosmopolis* deplors that the putative negativity of my 'diatribes' (committing another of which I just, apropos, avoided), and which are called 'scribblings' by yet another non-reader (to distinguish them from real writing, but how would he know?), will augment *Cosmopolis* readership—or that reading 'Paul Rhoads' is a popular form of bottom-feeding to which VIE folk (those low quasi-humans) tend to be addicted—a sentiment often accompanied by the unrelated suggestion that I am moved by irresponsible selfishness, in this case expressed as follows: [Paul Rhoads] *seems more interested in increasing the influence of Cosmopolis (and his own precepts) than he is in completing the VIE*. I would not be the first person to involve myself in a contradiction, but the charge itself seems contradictory, assuming what is meant is that expression of negative opinion is bad for the VIE. If it is only the negative opinions of 'Paul Rhoads' that are counterproductive, while negative opinions about him are in a different category, then, poor thing, subject to a singular reprobation, perhaps I am being victimized? Or perhaps the idea is incorrect? Personally I think honest opinions of any sort are fine, while slander and bile are dangerous and should be rejected. Can it truly be blameworthy to find that something is not much?

Logic choppage and such aside, it is my settled view that a vigorous *Cosmopolis* is a vital aspect of a successful VIE. I even assume this view to be shared by all *Cosmopolis* con-

tributors and readers. To corroborate I predict that 'Paul Rhoads' will abandon *Cosmopolis*, with all its accumulated influence, including the celebrated precepts, the moment the VIE mission is complete—and I assume everyone else will too, contributors and readers alike, even the sour-puss non-reader brigade with their mysterious and detailed knowledge of its contents, character and effects. On that fine day the 'influence' of *Cosmopolis* will evaporate into nuncupatude and, in particular, 'Paul Rhoads', a.k.a. VIE volunteer #38, will return most gratefully to his habitual non-literary pursuits, with this difference: the already inflated head of that exemplar of self-aggrandizement is likely to be more inflated than ever—much to the continued disdain of his critics—with an increment of self-satisfaction at the VIE achievement—assuming Wave 2 is properly printed and delivered, until when he'll be fussing around in the trenches up to his eyeballs in sludge.

Regarding the de facto Matt-Hughes-fan-club which maintains its unofficial GHQ on the Vance BBS—despite this author having his own, and a prominent web-ring link from the former to the latter—it is strictly the business of the people concerned: the moderators, the posters, and Matt Hughes himself. As his fellow human being I wish Matt well though I, a) do not regard it as a personal duty to advance that wellness beyond a wish and, b) explicitly reject the loud and selective prejudice, common on internet forums, in favor of staying 'on subject'; they may carry on as they like, for all of me; I am even confident they shall, and I could do nothing about it even if I wanted to. Meanwhile I can hardly credit that this author and his fans are naive and cantankerous to the point of assuming that adulation is the only reaction his work may provoke, so it ought to seem odd that expression of an alternate reaction provokes hand wringing—though, for obvious reasons, it does not. The passage in question, published on the unofficial fan-club venue by the author himself, came conveniently to hand—another case of the serendipity on which I rely in all matters—at a moment I was struggling to make a literary point. I can only be grateful, though I don't plan to thank *him*. Furthermore, no publicity is bad publicity and indeed the Matt-Hughes-fan-clubification of the Vance BBS seems to have been nudged along a half-notch or so, through a wagon-circling effect, thanks to my highlighting Matt's work in *Cosmopolis*. Though I am only the second person ever to do so (the other example being an exclusively favorable and enthusiastic review of one of Matt's books) I do not expect Matt to thank *me*. If folk like to discuss Matt Hughes, with Matt Hughes, on a Jack Vance

forum, in a cozy, positive, supportive and promotional manner, this, in my view, falls squarely into the realm of their personal liberty. Like the imperfect overlap of interest and inspiration, a parallel with Bush's attitude toward the Iraqis is not perfect in this case because, though I would promote liberty (if not license) wherever possible, I not only forbid myself both preference and opinion regarding the particular matters in question, I even fail to have any. I might add that, in spite of being 'VIE E-in-C', having been relegated by its moderator, for the last year, to that infinitesimal segment of humanity banned from this fan-clubbed zone, has perfected the blunting of my interest.

This famous E-in-C status has often been invoked to call me to order. To state the callers' case more adequately than they have: it increases my responsibility by adding resonance to my words, a resonance conferred not by any virtue of my own, but by a quality lent to me collectively by hundreds of VIE volunteers and Vance's work itself, a quality I therefore violate by failing to follow the instructions of those who claim to speak on its behalf but of which E-in-C status would seem to make me, rather than they, the spokesman! Why do those who use such reasoning not apply it to the Vance BBS? (as if I didn't know). It is the most active Vance site on the internet. How can anyone get to the VIE without visiting it, to say nothing of folks who, without particular or even eventual interest in the VIE, surf for Vance? Given the already huge and ever growing influence of the net, does the Vance BBS fail to carry at least a degree of responsibility for Vance's literary fortunes, including the fate of the VIE? And is not perception of so prominent a figure in the VIE as its E-in-C not a factor in that fate? Let it be well understood: I do not make this silly argument, I turn it back upon those who do. There are better reasons for the folk in question to reconsider their attitude. I would not place myself above criticism even if I could—and obviously I can't—but heck, some of these characters fail to perceive any distinction between constructive remarks, however hard (I mean ones they might make), and sheer nastiness; I even suspect some of them are uninterested in such discrimination and simply voluptuate in the latter.

It may also be thought I seek vengeance upon Matt Hughes out of jealousy. Given the several years I have devoted more or less full time, stalling personal advancement in my own work, to the protection and promotion of the work of Jack Vance, some may guess that my vanity is stung when nothing nice is said about *me* on the Vance BBS, while Matt gets regular doses of kudos and strokes

dans le sens de la poil, as the French put it. And not only that, when I *am* mentioned it is usually to get a few sly kicks in the *derrière*, to use another gallicism. But I neither begrudge Matt his popularity on that venue, nor do I resent my own unpopularity. Generosity is no way to make friends, as any reader of Labiche can tell you. Even so, if Matt or his friends want to gripe that I am not generous with him, they can hardly claim that he has been generous with me. My rough treatment of Matt is not tit for tat however, just the natural convenience of casting one's self-selected enemies in the role of negative example when the need for one arises, as occasionally it does. One guy dolorously opined that: *it is unfortunate . . . that Rhoads has seen fit to criticize a fine writer such as Matt*. But he fails to say for whom it is unfortunate. Surely he does not mean the whole universe, as his syntax implies. Perhaps he means just for Matt Hughes, but to the contrary, if Matt would read my criticisms and take them to heart, they might turn out to be *fortunate* for him. Reality is always the way, and if my ideas are correct, even to any degree—a possibility not even subtly hinted on the Vance BBS—Matt might benefit. Instead of writing tripe he might, thanks to me—the only dissenting voice in a bland chorus of hosannas—do something a little better!

As for gleeful and mean-spirited prediction that the name 'Paul Rhoads' will fade into nothing with the publication of the VIE, once again I must—is it sheer perversity?—provoke and irritate my critics by sticking to my own opinion with mulish obstinacy. Though it was my idea to include detailed work credits in volume 44, which will make explicitly clear what it took to accomplish the VIE, including my particular place in that work (as detailed in almost one full page, in over 80, a distinction achieved by several other volunteers, particularly Patrick Dusoulier and Chuck King), I feel confident that my particular part in this strange adventure will merit a bright and durable footnote in the future history of Vance's literary legacy.

All may be vanity in the long run but in the short run you can't get much done, fine or base, without two things: being in reality, and good cooperation. A bigger attitude on the part of some of my associates would have been, if not gratifying, at least helpful. It's not too late to change—not that they are likely to, in spite of the 'holiday spirit'—but a great deal of irreparable damage has already been done. Luckily for the VIE many of my associates *are* big hearted, even if they fail to set, much less impose, the tone, or even to visit, the Vance BBS. Given my own quasi-perfect disinterest in the place however, I am in no position to distribute blame. We seem to have better things to do,

and, so far anyway, completing the VIE continues to be one of them.



More BBS BS

The clever David B. Williams, on August 25, 2003, made the following post, deserving of wider publication:

The Lyonesse story could have been written with Casmir as the protagonist instead of Aillas. After all, Aillas has the same geopolitical goal as Casmir, to subject all the Elder Isles to his rule. He sends fleets and armies to invade other lands, sacrificing his subjects to achieve his military purposes, not just defending the beaches at home.

Poor Casmir must struggle on with an ungrateful and disobedient daughter (who also gets herself knocked up and gives him a bastard to support) and a wife suffering from a religious mania. His court is full of spies and double agents reporting to Aillas, who pretends friendship while exerting himself to thwart Casmir's goals and advance his own.

It's a tragedy, of course, because in the end Casmir is tricked, outmaneuvered, and militarily defeated by the cunning and ambitious Aillas, who seizes Casmir's lands without regard for his subject's wishes and executes Casmir for personal revenge and to extinguish a rival dynasty.

But, of course, the author used all his tricks to present Aillas as the Good King and Casmir as the Bad King.

History is written by the victors.

There is a grain of truth in Williams' juicy irony, namely that Vance remains acutely aware of each character's point of view. It is my opinion that this is what makes his characterizations so expressive. The erudite, mercurial and always helpful Patrick Dusoulier was inspired to provide examples, of which I reproduce the most flagrant:

Woudiver's face sagged; he beat his hands upon his knees. "So now they torture poor Aila Woudiver, who was only constant to his faith! What a miserable destiny to live and suffer on this terrible planet!"

Reith turned away in disgust. By birth half-Dirdirman, Woudiver vigorously affirmed the Doctrine of Bifold Genesis, which traced the origin of Dirdir and Dirdirman to twin cells in a Primeval Egg on the planet Sibol. From such a viewpoint Reith must seem an irresponsible iconoclast, to be thwarted at all costs. On the other hand, Woudiver's crimes could not all be ascribed to doctrinal ardour. Recalling certain instances of lechery and self-indulgence, Reith's twinges of pity disappeared . . .

The Pnume

Another poster, however, took his Williams salt-free:

. . . we prefer Aillas immensely to Casmir. Why? Of course, Vance gives Casmir a taste for catamites, which — given current mores — brands him as depraved. (In other cultures at other times, Casmir's taste in this regard might not have seemed so depraved.)

Contemporary homophobia is 'the case' against Casmir! Yet the famous 'other cultures' and 'other times' when Casmir's tastes 'might not have seemed so depraved', as far as I know, include the golden age of Sodom and a couple centuries of upper-class Attic attitudes circa 400 BC. Such blips aside, our irrational contemporary prejudice would appear universal, even if, if it were me, I'd throw in another exception: Western society from 1970 to now. But since, to the contrary, we would seem to be plunged into one of those rare homophobia moments which very occasionally cast a slight and momentary darkness upon a corner of human history . . . in any case adding a mere 30 years of homophilia among a minority fraction (however distinguished) of the world's population, still fails to make much of a dent in several space-time millennia of its opposite. This might not be worth mentioning if relativism did not lead inevitably to positivism — or the tyranny of official opinions — but never mind.

The poster goes on to explain the true justification for finger shakage at Casmir:

Casmir's real sin, of course, was his coldness toward his daughter, Suldrun. She was disobedient, but not out of spite or malice: she was merely following the dictates of her heart. Casmir's single-minded insistence that she bend her will to his makes him monstrous — or nearly monstrous.

Not monstrous, only nearly so because, in all logic, actual monstrousness (read 'evil') is an unreal state in the relativist dispensation.

It is bewildering, so to speak, to study the relativists as they thrash around trying to sort out their doctrine. For example; let's say that Suldrun's heart dictated lesbianism and enslaved her to that impulsion. In this case, assuming Casmir tried to interfere, it would, obviously, make him 'nearly monstrous'. If Suldrun's heart further dictated cutting the heads off her lesbian lovers, and eating them, marinated in fetus sauce, it is still to be assumed that any fatherly interference would merit the 'nearly monstrous' epithet. So 'evil' seems to exist at least in the limited form of interfering with the intimate impulsions of other people — despite the logical dilemma in which the relativists thus involve themselves, and solve by the time-honored and traditional method of ignoring.

Meanwhile I would like to know if there are degrees to this wonderful invention: 'near-monstrousness', or, as one might say, 'reprehensible non-evil'? Bush would seem to be 'nearly monstrous' for interfering with Saddam, but is he not 'nearly monstrous' to an even greater degree for calling Saddam 'evil'—a basic and flagrant violation of relativist doctrine by reason of the unambiguous implication that the distinction between good and evil does not fail to exist? One reason Bush did it was because Saddam single-mindedly insisted the Kurds bend their will to his even though their hearts urged them to continue to exist—perverse and depraved things that they are. If Bush had limited himself to calling Saddam 'nearly monstrous', or something like that, perhaps it would have gone over better. On second thought, given relativist intransigence, not to say stupidity, I doubt it.



Another Vancean Convocation

David B. Williams

*Author's Note: Last summer, several participants on the Jack Vance discussion board (<http://server2.ezboard.com/bjackvance>) who live in the Seattle-Tacoma area decided to get together for a day of learned discussion of the Jack Vance oeuvre and, if time permitted, tipping. The next day, the attendees reported that the affair had been a great success. Not to be outdone, I undertook certain ameliorative actions and wrote the following account, which I posted on the discussion board in three daily installments (a ploy to maintain dramatic tension). It occurs to me that this memoir might also be of interest to the broader readership of *Cosmopolis*, at least those readers with a sense of humor (and how could you like Jack Vance without possessing a keen sense of humor?).*

PART 1: THE GATHERING STORM

I was deeply despondent when the call for a Tacoma Assembly of Stalwart Vanceans was posted on this board. A major gathering of Wankhers from which geography and destiny excluded me! Tacoma was too far away and, besides, I had a prior commitment. I was scheduled to attend an astronomical conference out in Berkeley, California, that week, and as 2nd Vice President of the American Association of Variable Star Observers, I felt obliged to attend (especially if I wanted to polish my credentials for eventual promotion to First Vice President).

So here I sat, grinding my teeth and drumming my fingers

on the desk. There had to be a way to assuage this bitter disappointment. Then slowly, a concept began to evolve in my mind. I examined it from all angles and failed to discover any flaws. This could work! In fact, it was brilliant.

So, I straightened my tie and picked up the phone. Now, critical to the next step in my plan, I happened to have Jack Vance's phone number; when we parted in Ohio last year, Norma Vance had given me their number and encouraged me to call whenever I found myself in the Bay Area. So on to step two: I dialed. Two thousand miles away, in the hills overlooking Oakland and the Pacific, a phone rang. And rang. And rang. Hmph. So they weren't home (I dismissed the thought that they might have caller ID).

Well, I don't give up that easily. The next day, I called again. This time, my call was answered by a male voice with a heavy Hispanic accent and very halting English. Nonplussed, I asked for Jack or Norma. I think he said they weren't there. I asked whether he knew when they might return. I think he said in an hour. (I dismissed the thought that this might actually be Jack disguising himself as an unintelligible immigrant; what possible motive could he have to do such a thing?).

OK. I let an hour and a half pass and called again. (I wouldn't be deterred; Kirth Gersen was my exemplar, a monomaniac in pursuit of his quarry). This time, the phone was answered by a man who spoke with a strong Australian accent. Again taken aback, I asked uncertainly: "Jack, is that you?" No, the voice replied, he was Terry Dowling. He was helping the Vances move; they were already over at "the big house", ensconced in the downstairs apartment.

(Note: Attentive readers of my COSMOPOLIS report on Jack's appearance at Marcon in 2003 will recall that a couple of years ago Jack and Norma had traded houses with son John, who had a small house and a family while they were wandering about, trying to find each other in the echoing chambers and multiple levels of The House That Jack Built. Additional Note: The last time you moved, did anyone come up from Australia to help you?)

I hate a challenge, but this was getting to be fun. I had the other phone number, so I called the Big House. The Vances had moved, but not soon enough to elude me. John answered, and in all innocence passed me on to his Dad. John's telephonic voice had been clear, but when Jack came on the line, suddenly the sound became faint and muffled (it was probably just a bad connection downstairs; I dismissed the thought that Jack might be holding the phone under his armpit). Undaunted, I explained my plan for a Vancean conclave in Oakland involving, at a minimum, him and me.

At first Jack claimed that he didn't remember me (nice try), but Norma was right there to set the record straight. So we ended the call with preliminary agreement on Phase One: I would call again when I arrived in town and perhaps something might be arranged.

PART 2: ANABASIS

A few days later, I flew from Indianapolis to Oakland with a change of aircraft in Denver. During the Long March at the Denver airport from Gate B54, where I deplaned, to Gate B17, where I would depart for the coast, I passed Gate B31, whose destination sign proclaimed "Seattle/Tacoma". I resolutely averted my gaze and strode on.

The next day, having established myself at the Doubletree Hotel at the Berkeley Marina (a waterside inn with sailing vessels moored to the docks—how very Vancean) I picked up the phone and discovered that the Vances hadn't taken the intervening opportunity to move again or change their number. But the game was still in play. "Why don't you come over this afternoon, we'll have some beers," Jack said cheerily. Now, it was already 1:20 p.m. and my organization's scientific paper session was scheduled to begin at 1:30. "Great!" I replied, blowing off the conference. I wasn't going to let those Tacoma starmenters triumph because I had a scheduling conflict!

Now, the tricky part. Norma came on the line to give me driving directions. The Vances don't live near any landmarks. So I scribbled line after line of directions—take this street across Berkeley to Oakland, get on this freeway, get off at that exit, turn left on such-and-such a street, turn left again into a street you can't see until you pass it, climb the hill, turn right onto a wiggly lane, and about a hundred yards along the way, look for the house number on the mailbox.

I drove across Berkeley and Oakland in my rented Chevrolet Cavalier with growing confidence. Jack may occasionally exhibit hints of Navarthian or Cugelish tendencies. But the directions had been provided by Norma, the prototype for all those Vancean heroines like Glyneth and Wayness who would never lead a stranger astray by, for example, providing directions to Robert Silverberg's house. Being unfamiliar with the area, I did overshoot a couple of the turns and had to backtrack to return to the True Path. But in less time than I expected, I was in the Oakland hills, slowly cruising along the specified lane, counting up the numbers on the mailboxes.

Oddly, the numbers progressed until they exceeded the Vances' address with no sign of the number I was looking

for. I turned around (a neat trick on a one-lane hillside road with a cliff rising on one side and a precipitous drop-off on the other) and slowly drove back the other way, counting down the numbers. Still no luck. Apparently, the Vances' mailbox number didn't exist.

Phooey. I knew I was within a stone's throw of the right spot because of the "hundred yards from the last turn" clue. So I parked in the middle of the road and looked around. Lewis and Clark didn't reach the Pacific by counting house numbers, they followed the geography. There, ten feet in front of me, was a steep, narrow driveway rising from the lane and vanishing up the hillside.

Every account ever published of a visit with Jack Vance includes awed reference to his vertiginous driveway. I had no doubt—this was it. I wedged the car against the hillside as far off the pavement as I could, got out, and walked to the foot of the driveway. There stood a white mailbox with the Vances' house number almost completely bleached away by sun and wind (I dismissed the thought that it might have been scoured off with sandpaper). I had arrived.

PART 3: TRIUMPH OF THE WILL

I left the car below and climbed the driveway on foot, conscious of the many others who had made this ascent over the past half century. At the top, Norma stood in the doorway, waiting to greet me (I dismissed the thought that she might have been standing in the doorway, staring glumly at the boxes of belongings stacked along the side of the driveway, evidence of a move not yet entirely completed).

Norma ushered me into the presence, and I joined Jack at the kitchen table. John came downstairs to chat for awhile, and there you have it: an Assembly of Stalwart Vanceans numbering four—one less than Tacoma, but we boasted a female Vancean, and in my scoring system Norma always counts as two. Then, in the course of the afternoon, I also met two of the three cats and a shy but friendly chocolate Labrador, so altogether we numbered seven Stalwart Vanceans of two genders and three species. The Oakland Assembly wins on points! [Note: The Tacoma Assembly had number five, all male as one participant ruefully noted.]

I will grant the Tacoma Assembly the special quaffing prize. During the next two hours, Jack and I each consumed a mere two bottles of a very acceptable Czech Pilsner. Our conversation ranged across a myriad of topics: star names and constellation patterns, the dispersion of

the Indo-Europeans, the march of the Ten Thousand from Babylon to the Euxine shore, the construction of the recurved compound bow, the deficiencies of egalitarianism, the difference between reality and hypothesis regarding dark energy and other recently revealed cosmological phenomena, the lamentable state of English orthography, etc., etc.—a genteel match between two Universal Experts, trading lore for lore.

I raised no questions and offered no observations about Jack's writing, which he rarely cares to discuss, and we both prudently tiptoed around the question, "Which is the noblest musical art form, classic jazz or grand opera," so as not to provoke the neighbors into calling the police. At regular intervals I was startled by a clock on the wall over my shoulder, which emitted electronic bird chirps. I also learned that Jack has a talking wristwatch (and I know what you are thinking but, no, he only consulted it once).

Nonetheless, like a Jack Vance novel, all good things come to an end. I couldn't leave without a tour, so Norma conducted me through the house and I was able to see the features I had heard so much about, such as the carved walnut ceiling panels from Kashmir. I left a fingerprint on the Lucite surface of Jack's Grand Master award, but I had to keep my hands firmly shoved into my pockets (except to wipe the ribbon of drool from my chin) when I stood before a large wall of shelves stocked from floor to ceiling with mint copies of Jack Vance books—in some cases up to 20 copies untouched by human hands except to take them from the publisher's shipping crate and place them on the shelves.

When Norma and I returned downstairs, we found Jack dozing in his chair. (No doubt excitement over my impending arrival had prevented him from sleeping well the previous night; I dismissed the thought that my verbal effusions could have produced any soporific effect.)

Below the surface of Tschai, the Pnume continue to record the events of the passing millennia; on Dar Sai, bungle boys leap and caper to the snap of Darsh whips; not far from the ancient city Kaiin, the golden witch Lith adds another thread to her tapestry while Chun the Unavoidable enlarges his ocular robe.

I didn't wake Jack Vance just to say goodbye. Let the dreamer dream.



Editor's Note

David Reitsema, Editor, Cosmopolis

My hard drive was replaced last week and in the process I lost most of my email files including the Letters to the Editor from the past 5-6 weeks. There were several good Letters in that group. If you sent me a Letter, please resend it so I can publish it. I apologize for the inconvenience.



Thanks to proofreaders Steve Sherman, Rob Friefeld and Jim Pattison and to Joel Anderson for his composition work.

COSMOPOLIS SUBMISSIONS: when preparing articles for *Cosmopolis*, please refrain from fancy formatting. Send raw text. For *Cosmopolis* 57, please submit articles and letters-to-the-editor to David Reitsema: Editor@vanceintegral.com.

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