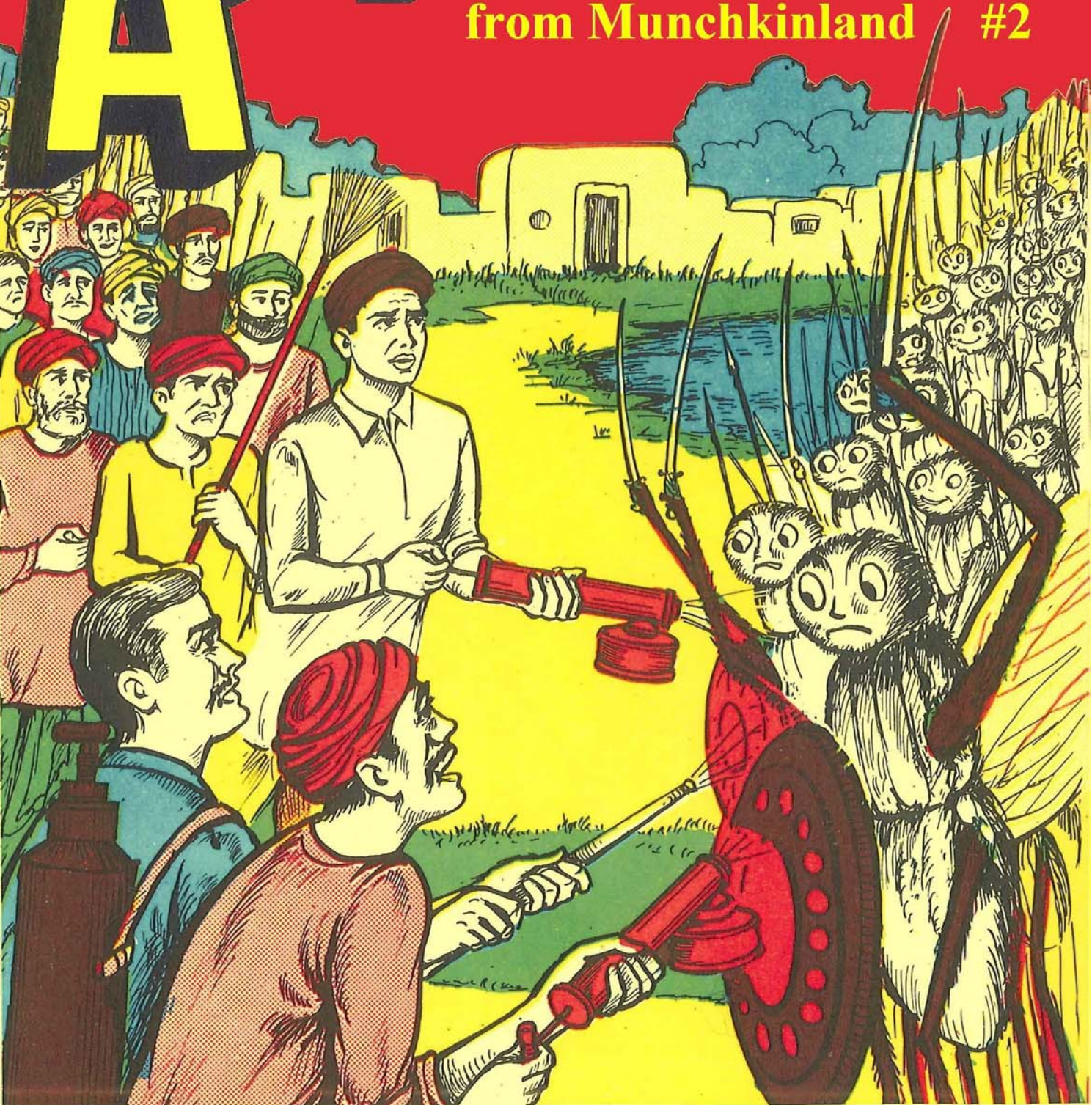


AMAZING

Mumblings

from Munchkinland #2



COMPLETE in this issue:

An extract
from

Abdullah Versus the Ants!

"TOTO, I DON'T THINK WE'RE IN KANSAS ANYMORE"

Indeed we are not, indeed, as Grant Stone might say. We're not in Oz anymore, either -- but I'm blown if I'll change the name of this 'zine after only one issue.

No, this issue of Mumblings from Munchkinland comes to you from sunny Peshawar, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan, where I



have now settled in for a 2 year stint as an Australian Volunteer Abroad. In case you don't know where Peshawar is, I draw your attention to the map at left. Peshawar is the small dot located just outside of the irregular blob -- at least, that's how most of the current locals see it. The normal population of the city and surrounds is about 1.5 million, but a few friends from across the border dropped in for a

visit back in 1979 (when a few friends from across their border dropped in for a visit) and bumped up the headcount a wee bit. To around 5 million.

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan officially ended over a year ago, but there is still a Soviet-backed government in Kabul which has proved more tenacious than most observers expected.

(This expectation was due, in large part, to gung-ho reporting by American journalists, who played down -- or completely ignored -- deep-rooted tribal and political differences between the various mujahideen groups -- but that's another story.)

Anyway, fighting between the mujahideen and Kabul troops (and between mujahideen groups) continues; US and Soviet posturing over a peaceful solution continues; life in the camps continues for 3.5 million or so refugees; and, of course, aid to the refugees continues.

International relief organizations began arriving in Peshawar shortly after the first refugees. Over the next decade their number swelled so that a separate body was deemed necessary just to coordinate all of their activities. This organization, formed last year, was named ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief. (The full name is awkward, but the acronym also spells out the name of a popular Moghul ruler of yesteryear.)

To coordinate the coordinating body, all of the information being generated by its 60 members needed to be collected and organized. Thus was born ARIC, ACBAR's Resource and Information centre, where I am currently the librarian.

The ARIC staff includes two other expats, 3 Pakistanis and 9 Afghans. Our director is Nancy Hatch Dupree -- anthropologist, expert on Afghan affairs, widow of Louis Dupree (who wrote the

definitive text on Afghanistan), and the only female director of an NGO in Peshawar. All of the other present staff members are male. We did have a young Afghan woman on our staff for a short time, but certain events in the community forced her to resign.

To explain: After more than 10 years in the camps, most of the refugees are naturally becoming angry and frustrated at the whole situation. With the Soviets now largely out of the game, targets for this frustration are being found closer to home.

In late April, the Nasir Bagh camp facilities of Shelter Now International (coincidentally, the only Australian-based NGO in Peshawar) were looted and destroyed by a mob of 5,000 refugees. The mob was reportedly incited by a mullah decrying SNI's widows' compound and alleged Christian proselytizing by SNI staff. Their concrete factory, milk distribution centre, poultry project and mechanical workshop were completely razed. Damage totalled over \$1,000,000. Since then, several other agencies have been visited by gunmen, another of SNI's facilities (this one in Afghanistan) attacked, and a French medical worker killed (also cross-border).

Now, Peshawar is not the safest place in the world even at the best of times. Guns have been part of life for the Afghans since the Anglo-Afghan Wars, at least, and Kalashnikovs are today a common sight. And sound -- every night is punctuated by the echo of gunfire. Sometimes this is to celebrate a wedding; more often it is purposeless, just bravado firings into the night. Daytime firings also occur. One expat acquired a unique scar(e) not long ago, when a stray bullet zipped down his forehead and past the side of his nose while he was playing tennis. A number of locals have been killed or injured this way. Protests draw no response.

Intentional personal attacks, primarily on Western women and Afghan women working for Western agencies, are unfortunately becoming more and more frequent. Women are singled out because their liberation is seen as a challenge to the traditional (patriarchal) way of life. Among the Pashtuns, the dominant tribe of north-eastern Afghanistan, women are "but half-worth human beings", regarded as the personal property of men. The men are honour-bound to support and protect their women and they do so by measures which seem extreme to most Westerners. These include purdah (the isolation of women in their homes) and its associated forms of dress: the chadri -- a baggy garment which covers the woman from head to toe, with latticework embroidery over the eyes -- and/or a shalwar kameez (pyjama-like baggy pants and long shirt commonly worn by both sexes) and veil.

Before the war, the women's emancipation movement in the urban areas (i.e. Kabul) was gaining momentum, despite protestations from the more fundamental members of the Islamic clergy. During the Soviets' stay, women's rights were encouraged to some extent, to demonstrate the liberalizing nature of their "neighbourly aid".

[Continued on p.15]

"YESTERDAY WAS MONDAY"

One of the first things the folks back home wanted to know after I'd been here a while was "How're you eating?" ~~I told them I was eating the same way I always had~~ with my mouth. I was happy to be able to report that I was eating very well.

Afghan and Pakistani food are both common here, as you might expect. I prefer Afghan dishes, because they're less spicy and favour garlic, which I love. We have an Afghan cook at ARIC who prepares lunches which are more like three-course meals. Other meals I usually make for myself. A variety of fresh fruits and vegetables are available in the roadside markets and there's always freshly baked naan (flat, round loaves of bread) to fall back on. Warm naan and cheese make a great meal in themselves.

I don't enjoy everything I eat here, though. One supplement to my diet is a foul-tasting form of malaria prophylaxis called chloroquine. To be effective it has to be taken regularly, on the same day each week. I decided to take mine on Mondays, hoping that the alliteration of "Malarial Monday" would help to remind me each week. With one exception, it has.

One morning in April I woke up out of a very strange dream in which I had been walking around a desolate cityscape surrounded by ghouls and floating bodies. The situation had not been so much frightening as perplexing, since it seemed somehow familiar. I couldn't think of anything I'd seen or read recently which might have provoked such an image, but it nonetheless rang a tiny bell in the back of my mind all morning.

During lunch that day it came to me. Someone had cause to remark that it was "already Tuesday" (the middle of our working week). My brain contemplated this innocent bit of trivia for several seconds before producing the brilliant deduction that if today was Tuesday, then yesterday must have been Monday. Two thoughts then occurred to me simultaneously: (1) I had forgotten to take my chloroquine the night before, and (2) the source of my dream-scenario was Theodore Sturgeon's "Yesterday Was Monday".

Now, I don't know anything about the workings of the subconscious mind, but I can't help wondering. Was my subconscious trying to alert me to the fact that I'd forgotten to take my chloroquine -- by reference to a story that I'd read years ago?

I honestly don't know. It could have been just a coincidence. But so far I've not forgotten to take my pills again, and this just might be because my subconscious doesn't want me to suffer that dream again.

On the other hand, it could be because of the big sign I've put up on my door which reads:

"Don't forget to take your malaria pills, stupid!"

SOURCES OF SF IN PESHAWAR

There are not many sources of science fiction in Peshawar.

In short, sf can be bought at several modern bookstores (mostly remaindered paperbacks, with the occasional issue of Analog or Amazing) and a few secondhand booksellers (hidden in the bazaar, these places are the size of cupboards; usually very little can be found). Some sf can be borrowed, from a British Council library and one run by the American Consulate ("literary" titles only). Swaps can be arranged with other expats -- if you can find anything to swap, which ain't often.

So after five months in Peshawar I have collected less than a dozen titles. Following are some comments on a few of them, beginning with a prize find in an Islamabad second-hand bookstore -- a Qantas in-flight library copy of A. Bertram Chandler's Kelly Country.

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THE EARLY TIMES OF ADMIRAL GRIMES

The beauty of alternate-time yarns, from an author's point of view, is that nobody can ever prove that it couldn't have happened that way. I enjoyed Kelly Country despite finding the ultimate end of his alternate history too far-fetched. But who am I to say?

As the title suggests, the novel centres on Ned Kelly and how the history of Australia might have developed had things gone better for him at Glenrowan. Instead of being captured, Chandler's Kelly escapes and, through the innovative use of modern (1880s) arms and technology, creates a Republic of Australia. All of this we learn through a narrator who travels back to the minds of several of his ancestors -- hard science it's not (ABC used the same device in a space opera for Astounding around 1946), but again, who cares? The story's the thing.

The battle scenes and characterizations carry Kelly Country and the details given of the tanks, airships and firearms are evidence of much careful research. It's just as clear that Chandler had some fun whilst writing: The narrator's name is Grimes; Kate Kelly at one point utters Grimes' tag-line about Liberty Hall; references are made to a "Harp in the South committee".

Chandler also had fun with his two female leads. Both Ned's sister Kate and his "what if" wife, "Red" Kitty, are provided with much stronger characters than any of the males, including Ned himself. Though both women, in the course of events, have sex with Grimes, it is they who initiate the acts (one of which leads to a neat, logical twist at book's end). More significant is Chandler's plain admission that without Kate and Kitty, the Ned Kelly who escaped from Glenrowan would most likely have wound up as just another obscure gentleman farmer in New South Wales.

MOST LAME EDITORIAL BLURB FOR A STORY I'VE EVER READ

Judge for yourself. Here it is, quoted in full:

"Once the depths of the Galaxy have been probed and certain planets have been found to be habitable by man, there will be an explosion of exploration from the Center to the Rim.

"And perhaps a cautious pattern of exploitation will emerge, encouraged by certain catastrophic events early on in the history of space. First there will be all-male colonization, because the hazards of planet-opening are such that no one would want to expose women to them. Then the colony is expanded and stabilized, still without women, while meticulous medical studies are made.

"Then finally comes the introduction of Woman -- the Great Mother. And in this last event you have the makings of an awe-inspiring story, here told in beautifully human, quietly understated terms: so that only by giving your full thought to the idea can you comprehend the truly fantastic drama of the concept. This is Big stuff!

"First Lady", first published in 1953, has been anthologized in the author's home country, England, and also in Germany and the Netherlands. Only now has it "made it" in the United States. It's about time!"

The time was 1966, the anthology was Another Part of the Galaxy (Fawcett Gold Medal) and the story being so enthusiastically hyped was "First Lady" by J.T. McIntosh. It had first appeared in Galaxy, June 1953. The story is as bad as the introduction.

What's really surprising is that the perpetrator of the above introduction was none other than Groff Conklin, an accomplished anthologist who should have known better. Maybe after 20 years he was getting tired of it all.

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INFECTIOUS!

Many expats here have read some sf, though few are regular readers. In the course of a conversation with Mary Anne Sennett, one of the other tenants of ACBAR House, she mentioned having been "profoundly struck" by Childhood's End and also recalled seeing a Playhouse 90 adaptation of "Flowers for Algernon" in the late 50s/early 60s.

To see if the sf bug will bite, I've given her a copy of Nebula Winners 13 I found in the bazaar -- recommending in particular Raccoona Sheldon's "The Screwfly Solution". We shall see...

* * * NOW SHOWING at a theatre NEAR YOU * * *

From the producers of "Bengi Versus the Vampyres of Venus":

THERE'S FUNGUS AMONG US!

Synopsis:

Rival teams of genetic engineers race to produce the first artificial animal-plant lifeform. Despite talk of boys-in-berries and girls-in-berries, early work proves fruitless. Claims regarding a woman with the skin of a peach are traced to a soap manufacturer. A group of private investors supporting work on citrus genes is forced to admit that it has bought a lemon.

Several avenues of research are nipped in the bud when patents are taken out by a leading laboratory. Reporters flock to the scene. "An intelligent carrot! The mind boggles!" exclaims one journo, but all eyes are on the potatoes. When asked if the new lifeforms are healthy, one scientist replies confidently: "She's apples." "This is a plum job," adds a colleague.

Tempers flare at a rival institute, where tomato research lags behind. "Catch up!" demands the Managing Director.

Meanwhile, an overlooked genius decides to wreak wrevenge on the world. Disguised as a priest, he lures unsuspecting victims into a church and then commands his horrific creations: "Lettuce, prey!" In the ensuing carnage, the scientist becomes a victim of his own evil creations -- split by an angry banana. Too late, he recalls that the weed of crime bears bitter fruit.

As word of this horror leaks out, panic erupts into open warfare. The army begins shelling peas, spearing asparagus and sauteeing baby carrots in almond butter with just a dash of brown sugar, lightly heated over a low flame. Kamikazi onions drop from the skies, blinding people with their own tears. Artichokes strangle innocent bystanders with flair. Celery stalks the streets!

The President of the united States is abducted by a Waldorf salad demanding equal rights for all lifeforms. "We will make no concessions," says a Green House spokething, but its reply to rumours that the Head of State may be transformed into a vegetable is ominously ambiguous: "We expect him to turnip any day now."

Verdict:

Corny, but provides some food for thought -- or at least thought for food. Finds itself in a pickle midway through the second reel, but winds up smelling like a rose. The anguished cry of the hybrid hero, surrounded by human tormentors at the film's climax, should live forever in the anals of cinema history:

"I am not an animal! I am a human bean."

PRESS GANGED

The local press is always interesting to read, often proving to be a source of (usually unintentional) humour.

All stories are from either The Frontier Post or The Muslim except the film review; the proverb is from a mujahideen newsletter called AFGHANews.

▼ Australia's foreign aid?

Australia gifts books for kids

ISLAMABAD (PPI) — The Australian government has presented here yesterday 22 books for children to the National Book Council to be distributed as gifts among children.

AFGHAN PROVERBS

اوبو آخستی خلی ته لاس اچوی

Even a straw is clutched at when drowning in water.

Meaning: *A drowning man will catch at a straw.*



Brides marry wrong men

NEW DELHI (AP) — Two Hindu brides, whose vision was obstructed by long veils, married the wrong men, giving new meaning to the expression, love is blind.

The *Times of India* reported on Wednesday that two marriage parties arrived at the same time in Patan village in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday.

The ceremonies were rushed and the long veils obscured the brides' vision and prevented them from picking out their true fiances.

Following Hindu tradition, one bride circled a fire with a bridegroom seven times, sealing their marriage. The other bride then completed "the seven steps" with the second bridegroom, the paper said.

When they lifted their veils, the brides discovered they had married the wrong men.

But village elders said that "the seven perambulations around the sacred fire" were final and there could be no exchange of spouses, the paper said.

Thomas loses WBC title to Banke

LOS ANGELES (Reuter) — Paul Banker of the United States won the World Boxing Council superbantamweight title from Mexico's Daniel Zaragoza on Monday when referee John Thomas stopped the fight at two minutes 51 seconds of the ninth round.

SMARTEST THING SHE'S EVER SAID

"It's rather like asking the Scots to stop growing barley because people on the other side of the world can't hold their drink."

-- Princess Anne, on international efforts to stop farmers from raising drug crops [Newsweek, 23/4]

As you may know, Afghanistan and North-West Pakistan are included in what has been dubbed the "Golden Crescent", a major area of poppy cultivation comparable in extent to the "Golden Triangle" in South-East Asia.

The farmers here have been growing the stuff for generations. Much to their delight, it is now a very marketable crop, due to the high demand in the West. (I'm not naive enough to believe that they are the ones reaping the full benefit of this supply-demand equation, but they're certainly getting more cash for poppy than they would for wheat or corn. Opium sales are also a major source of cash for mujahideen wanting to buy more ammunition.)

Of course, Great Minds have decided that drugs are evil. Evil things must not be allowed into the hands of the poor, misguided fools who think they like them. Ergo, drugs must be stopped. As soon as every poppy plant, etc., on the planet has been destroyed, the users will instantly be cured of their habits and will become model citizens once again. There are no underlying social factors which might have caused them to take refuge in drugs -- reasoning such as that is the product of Cynical Minds. Prohibition proved that banning certain commodities can create a better society. (Just ask Al.)

One of the corporate creations of the Great Minds referred to above is UNFDAC (United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control). It funds projects in Afghanistan (and elsewhere in the world, I suppose) which support its four main objectives. These are:

- (1) reduction/eradication of opium poppy cultivation;
- (2) creation/consolidation of drug abuse awareness;
- (3) preventative education;
- (4) treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

I find all of these to be laudable goals. Unfortunately, only projects based on objective 1 have so far been funded, which seems to me to be the wrong way to do it. Educate people to the real dangers of using drugs first and you'll likely see a reduction in demand which will discourage production. There will always be some people who still choose to use heroin, et al., just as there are now people who choose to drink themselves into a stupor every night. Whatever the substance, the decision to consume it or not should be the right of every informed individual -- so long as they do so in a way which does not endanger other individuals' lives. (Drunk driving kills more people each year than heroin, by far.)

Enough sermonizing. All of this was prompted by my reading one of the reports in our library. It described a project funded by UNFDAC, based on the idea of giving oxen to farmers to work their land, in exchange for contractual promises from them not to grow opium. Sounds good, huh? The project team thought so.

Four months later, they went back to monitor progress of the substitute crops being grown. Much to their horror, they found fields of lovely poppies.

And the oxen? Well, with fighting still going on, food shortages remain a fact of life in Afghanistan. Fresh meat can fetch a high price in the bazaars. Fodder costs are also high -- it would have been too expensive for most of the farmers to keep their oxen even if they'd wanted to. Almost all of the oxen had, in fact, been slaughtered by the farmers or sold for food in the markets.

The best part of this is that the contracts the farmers had signed stipulated that they not grow opium "for the lifetime of the oxen they received". Most of them had not even broken their word.

(Moral: Afghan farmers may not have college degrees, but they are definitely not stupid.)

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SPEAKING OF BOOZE AND MORALS ...

Two chiggers were looking for a meal one night when they came across an alcoholic asleep in the street. One hopped on with glee and started to drink the drunk's blood, ignoring the protestations of its fellow.

Soon the first had had its fill and hopped down, a little tipsy. "You don't look so good," said the other. "I don't feel so well," admitted the first. And then it fell over and lay dead.

The other looked down at the corpse, shook its head sadly and said, "If I told him once, I told him a million times: Chiggers can't be boozers."

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THE JOY OF TRAVEL

Breakfast in New York

Dinner in Paris

Luggage in Rio de Janiero

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THE READER SQUEAKS

Graham B. Stone, Sydney

7 January 1990

Demographics is perhaps a little much to claim, [yes, that title was written with tongue-in-cheek] but this is the first time anyone has investigated the letters from Australians in the SF magazines and written anything on it. A good start. One long term project of mine was a proper history of Amazing plus a proper index, for which I indexed and made notes up to 1930 (perhaps I'll get back to it eventually; I've been writing a modest version off and on in SF News).

A. Bertram Chandler had a letter in July 1927 but he was in England then. Earliest Australian names were:

John Cooke	Queenscliff, NSW	Oct 27
R.E. Graham	Sydney (yes, him)	May 28
Philip H. Ecclestone	Maroubra, NSW	Apr 29, Jun 30

There were more through the thirties. In 1941 Colin Roden, Arthur Haddon and I between us wrote to all the addresses we could find, no doubt missing some since we didn't have access to complete runs. Few were still at the address, or, if they were, answered, but Noel Archer was contacted this way and was a good member in the war years. Lost touch with him thence.

Mike Ashley's Astounding index covers letters, here is a list:

Alcock, N.W.	NSW	Dec 30
Gregor, John	Norwood	Jly 36
Johnston, M.B.	Melbourne	Sep 30
Leadbeater, P.	Vic.	Mch 31
Morrison, C.E.	Melbourne	Jun 32
Nanley, Claude J.	W.A.	Jly 31
Thompson, George R.	Sydney	Nov 40, Jly 41
Turner, George	Melbourne	Jan 40
Veney, W.D.	Sydney	Apr 40
Vincent, G.D.	Perth	Mch 33
Vivian, Jack	Melbourne	Mch 35
Young, George	Melbourne	Nov 30

Thompson was contacted. He said he was too busy for any activities but Roden may have met him.

As for your list, in that period I tried to follow up on any letters from anyone not previously known, with little result. But some remarks on names I know:

Joy Anderson. Subsequently my first wife: we hadn't met then, but this wasn't how we did; Laura Molesworth introduced us.

Geoffrey Bennett. Organised the Futurian Society of Canberra a bit later. In touch occasionally to the 70s.

Sheraton McAlpine Bohman. Only met him once, but several locals knew him. Killed in a motorbike prang about 1964.

Michael Bos. One of those organising the rival North Shore Futurian Society after the 1st Convention.

R. J. Burgess. Was in touch for years. Roy, that was it. Met him once on a visit to Sydney.

Bruce Burn. Published fan crud.

G.C. Cairns, NZ. Had some dealings.

James Cameron, NZ. Similar.

David Cohen. Active in Sydney, operating as a dealer, called himself the Blue Centaur Book Co., 50/60s. Long story.

Roger S. Cook. Can't put a face to him but believe he attended meetings.

Crozier, Melb. Main activist in the first Melbourne group and largely responsible for its hostility to Sydney.

Damarell. I think I heard from him.

Edser. Some dealings.

Elder. Didn't respond to my letter. But reasonably sure he was the same I had met in high school in 1940. He was in 5th year, I in 1st and he didn't give any encouragement, but did say he had the magazines complete from 1930.

John Gregor. Also had the letter noted in Astounding, and at least one in Amazing, Oct 36. Published the first known fan effusion, reappeared in the 50s and was active in Brisbane, heard from in Townsville. Have kept in touch.

Haddon. Well, active in the Sydney scene, off and on. Heard from him again a year or so back. He's now at Swansea approaching Newcastle.

Horrocks, NZ. Another fan publisher in late 50s.

Jefferson, Peter R. is correct. Contacted, kept in touch, talked to him on the phone once a few years ago. Had a pretty good collection, last I heard.

Johnson, N. Contacted, keen collector then.

McEwan. Contacted, met him once in Adelaide.

Oilhooley. Surely this should be Gilhooley? No info.

Paull. Had some correspondence. Said there was a local group but nothing heard from others.

Pettingill. Again, claimed there was a local group, no details.

Roper. Was in touch for years, he retired and left Canberra shortly before I went there, was living in Sydney, died in 70s.

Harry Smith. Vague idea I should remember him, but don't.

Patricia Smith. Around the scene for years. Married a Platt, non-SF person, had several children, then divorced, lost touch in 60s.

Robert F. Smith. Later in Sydney, was active but not very cooperative.

Wheelahan. Active in first Melbourne group.

Whitefield. Used to come to meetings for years.

In the 40s Dard, Ralph Harding, Molesworth, Stirling Macoboy and maybe others -- I think I was there but can't remember -- and Cockcroft and Murtagh in NZ all had letters in various magazines, mainly Startling and FFM. The main idea was to make US contacts to organise getting SF.

Hi ho,

[Silver, away! Thanks for the exhaustive listing, Graham. I'm not in a position to follow up on any of this at the moment, but perhaps some other eager young fan researcher will. You certainly had a LoC in Startling, at least -- I started a fan letter index to the Standard Magazines before I left Oz. That, too, will have to wait.]

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William K. Danner, Kennerdell, Pa.

27 April 1990

I think LeeH's place must be almost as much a mess as this one ... I couldn't lay my hands on Mumblings (I still haven't found it.) So I dropped her a card to ask her to send me your address in Pakistan, and after a considerable delay got one from her saying it wasn't in her computer's memory and she couldn't find her copy of Mumblings, either! Whatever else your magazine may be, it seems to be very easy to mislay.

[From the number of letters I've received, I'd say that it must be exceptionally easy to mislay.]

I think any of Priestley's books are still good reading ... Albert Goes Through is, if you haven't encountered it, a very entertaining short fantasy. What he goes through is the screen in a movie theatre, as the result of an overdose of some patent medicine.

As for what you say about the grass always being greener*, I have my doubts. He made several extended stays in this country, at least one of them in the west. He wrote one of his biographical books about one of them called Midnight on the Desert, which I have. It's been a long time since I read it, but I'm sure he had plenty of opportunity to find out that there are in this country plenty (too many!) nogoodniks, just as there are anywhere else.

[* In a letter to Bill discussing The Doomsday Men, I suggested that Priestley's characterization of Americans as rough 'n' ready, rational men of action was overly-generous, perhaps because, writing from England, "the grass was a little greener".]

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WAHF: Thyme, Melbourne. Thanks, LynC.

[Continued from p.3]

Hence, women's rights became associated with the enemy in the minds of the mujahideen. Afghan women working for Western agencies have been intimidated and attacked and Western women who do not conform to Afghan standards of dress receive the same treatment.

Mind, if the picture I've painted here of Peshawar seems a bit grim, take note that there are some aid workers here who aren't bothered by it at all.

One of them is from Belfast; the other, Beirut.

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As far as I know, there is no such book as Abdullah Versus the Ants. The cover illustration is from a real publication, though, called Flies and Mosquitoes: Our Enemies; it's part of a series of small booklets on basic health care published by SERVE, one of the NGOs here. It's meant to explain to the refugees and others how to avoid fly and mosquito-borne diseases.



The instant I saw it, it reminded me of the covers Frank R. Paul painted for the early Amazing Stories. The bugs, particularly -- the human figures are actually a little better than Paul could usually manage. It's a pity I can't reproduce it in color, since that would enhance the similarity -- it's all bright, bold primary colors, with a blood-red sky. Magnificent stuff.

"Russian Friendship!" is the caption to the illustration on the back cover. The line above it is an Afghan proverb to the effect that trust in the humility of your enemy is foolish, for even a low flood can destroy a wall. (You figure it out.)

That will have to do for #2. If you want to see further issues of this rag, do please drop me at least a postcard -- volunteers' salaries are not high, so I'll be trimming the mailing list for Mumblings fairly quickly. The amended address is:

Chris Nelson,
c/-ARIC, P.O. Box 860,
University Town, Peshawar,
PAKISTAN