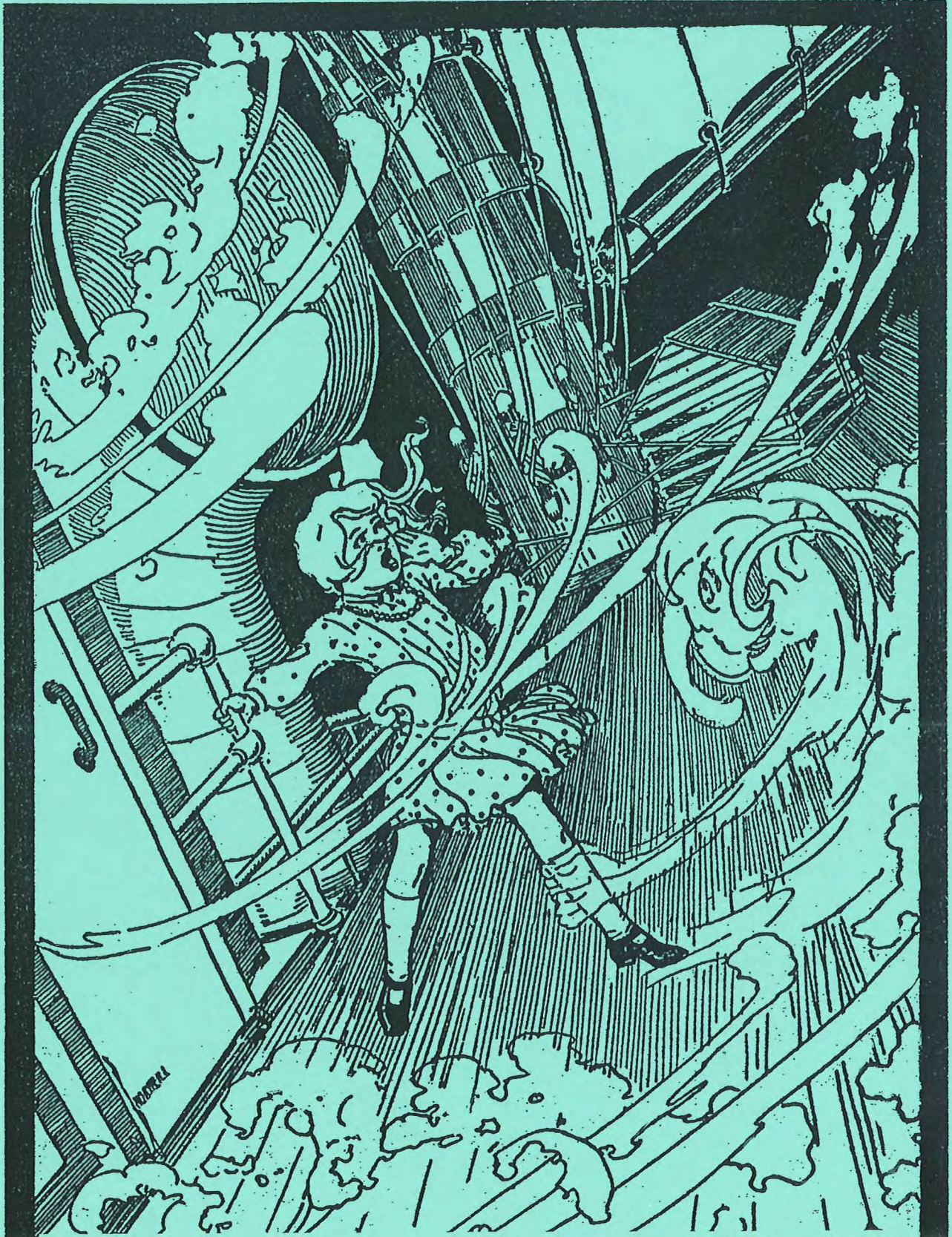


MUMBLINGS FROM MUNCHKINLAND 17



Mumblings from Munchkinland — the only West Australian fanzine published in Tassie!

DUST OF AGES



It has been over ten years since Megan and I finished our work with Afghan refugees in Peshawar, but we still retain an interest in the people and events in that part of the world. Afghanistan doesn't feature often in the news and when it does, the stories are usually in the context of yet another tragedy befalling its inhabitants -- war, famine, repression -- or record drug hauls.

Most recently the province of Bamiyan featured in headlines. But again, it was a tragic tale. Taliban commanders had carried out their threat to destroy the famous and treasured Buddhas of Bamiyan, enormous figures carved out of a cliffside centuries ago. This despite protests not just from the west, but also from many Islamic countries including its neighbour Pakistan (although in this case, the protests were rather hollow, given Pakistan's central role in training and supporting the Taliban). Strict interpretation of the Quran, the Taliban's forte, forbids the depiction of humans or animals as idols, even if the said idols are of immense archaeological significance for the entire world.

The Director of ARIC, the ACBAR Resource and Information Centre, where I worked in Peshawar, was (and still is) Nancy Hatch Dupree. She is an authority, as was her late husband Louis, on Afghan matters, having published many books and papers on the history, geography and politics of the nation. She was also one founder of SPACH, the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage, created when it became apparent that institutions like the Kabul Museum and the University of Kabul were being ransacked and their materials sold or destroyed. (Even in 1991, ARIC staff were retrieving books previously held in the University of Kabul Library from stalls in the bazaars of Peshawar -- with labels and property stamps intact. The ARIC collection was supposed to be only temporary, maintained until the material could be returned to Afghanistan. We're still waiting.)

I can't imagine how Nancy Dupree must feel now. Although the Buddhas had been defaced, shot at and used as munitions dumps before, I doubt she and the other SPACH members could have been prepared for their complete destruction. Despite the amount of coverage, none of the newspaper reports I've seen have explained the archaeological importance of the Buddhas or the extent of the site they dominated. It took Nancy more than 12 pages to give an overview of the Bamiyan complex in her 1977 book, *An Historical Guide to Afghanistan*. Here she points out that the Buddhas were built on the Silk Route at the crossroads between the empires of Rome, China and India, in an area ruled by the Kushan King Kanishka:

"Kanishka was an astute politician who commanded respect from the Ganges River to the Gobi Desert...by the Second century AD when Kanishka ruled (ca.130), Buddhism had long been supplanted by Hinduism in its homeland, India. The Buddhist philosophy, however, appealed to the great king and he called together a great council of Buddhist leaders who...sanctioned the new school of Mahayana Buddhism stressing the miraculous life and personality of the Buddha. This humanization of the Buddha, heretofore represented in art only by symbols such as an empty throne, a footprint, an empty saddle under an umbrella, or a wheel, called for a representation of the Buddha in human form. The first known such figure appears on a Kanishkan coin. The earlier concept of Buddhism as simply a way of life changed dramatically as the Buddha gradually assumed the stature of an ideal human being above common man to whom one might pray for assistance and assurance. So it was that Buddhism came to the Bamiyan Valley where eventually its devotees created the most spectacular images of the Buddha ever devised, during the 3rd-4th centuries AD..."

To do this, the sculptors first carved the forms of the Buddhas and a number of holes into the sandstone cliffs. The holes, some of which can be seen in most photos of the Buddhas, were to support wooden studs upon which a mixture of mud and straw were moulded onto the rock. Folds in the robe of the larger Buddha were achieved by draping ropes over the carving before the mud and straw were

applied. A layer of fine plaster was then added and the figures were decorated with brightly coloured paints. Hundreds of caves, with staircases between them, were also carved into the rock wall to create monasteries. Many of the rooms, as well as the niches in which the Buddhas stood, were also decorated with elaborate paintings and designs containing Grecian, Persian and Indian elements dating from the late 5th to early 7th centuries.

Much of this has now returned to dust.



I don't recall any of the Afghans we worked with ever waxing lyrical about the Buddhas. Many would never have had the opportunity to see them, having grown up in the refugee camps after fleeing their homeland during the Jihad. And for most of them, as devout Muslims, the figures would have had no religious significance. At the same time, they all demonstrated an enormous tolerance for other faiths so I can't imagine any of them believing that the Buddhas needed to be destroyed. Especially given that the faces and hands had already been obliterated by earlier iconoclasts (probably guided by a less drastic interpretation of the same Quranic passages).

Nancy Dupree's description of the site included this passage, which is all the more poignant now:

"To imagine the scene as it was during its moment of greatest splendor, one must close one's eyes and mind to the crumbling, pockmarked, monotone cliffs which stand before you today. Instead one must see the facade decorated with realistic representations of wooden structures such as jutting roof beams, and carved doorways and windows, each painted in rich polychromatic hues. In the niches of the colossal Buddhas, the smaller stood resplendent in a blue cloak, the larger in red, their faces and hands shining with gilt unrivalled by the glitter of countless ornaments festooned upon them. At the foot of the cliffs tall pennants fluttered above monasteries filled with myriads of yellow-robed monks, and pilgrims dressed in exotic costumes of far off lands roamed about the entire site.

"This, then, was the major Buddhist establishment in the Bamiyan Valley. Though apart from the clamour of the commercial city with its noisy, bustling caravanserais, the cliff with its colossal figures was in full view, towering above."

Until now.

[continued on page 14]

FOO AND FRIENDS

In the last *Mumblings* mention was made of how short stories by several of the Futurians began appearing in the daily papers and magazines in the early 1940s. Graham Stone has tracked down a number of these to reveal that the most prolific contributor at this time was Alan Roberts. Most of Alan's stories were mainstream fiction relating the exploits of one Geoff Temple, a young serviceman. An interesting exception is the story reproduced opposite, which was first published in *The Sun* on February 9, 1943.

It was intriguing to discover mention of "Foo" in this story. For the benefit of anyone wondering why, here's a bit of background from Harry Warner's *All Our Yesterdays*:

Almost from their emergence, fans have taken occasional delight in organizing burlesque religions... GhuGhu and FooFoo were the earliest of the fannish deities... GhuGhu was either an incarnation of [Donald] Wollheim or a beetle-bodied monster on Vulcan... The opposing sect, FooFooism, acknowledged a mundane creator in the person of the comic strip creator, Bill Holman. He used to put the word foo onto all improbable places in his panels for *Smokey Stover*. Mary Corinne Gray, better known in fandom as Pogo, was credited with establishing this order at almost the same instant as a similar impulse overcame [Jack] Speer. Speer, who thereupon became Pogo's left-hand man, claimed that FooFooism was a burlesque on GhuGhuism and on militarism, rather than on religion in general.

It was known that Alan had been in touch with LA fandom, so was the Foo of "Phew!" a sly reference to the fannish deity? Alan was willing and able to answer this question, and others about his involvement with science fiction and fandom, when I contacted him recently:

"I discovered sf through a magazine in a shop near where we lived in Albion in Brisbane. It showed two futuristically-clad men floating in the air using ray guns against menacing predatory plants: it was *Wonder Stories* for December 1933; the story was "Evolution Satellite" by J. Harvey Haggard. I'd have been maybe 11, and the fourpence it cost was a big budget item.

I met the Futurians through Vol Molesworth when I went to Sydney in June-July 1942; can't remember how I knew of him, maybe he'd been in touch with the only other sf fan I knew in Brisbane, Jock McKenna.

Yes, I had some letters in FJA's pre-war *VOM* -- they mainly consisted, as I recall, of smart-arse vituperative resignation from fandom and need some context if they're to be interpreted correctly -- to wit, the datum that I was just 13. Also had stuff in other fanzines, including one that ran in the same issue as a story by a young fan noted for his "zany" propensities. His story was about a man whose backside started to give off malevolent radiation with the radius of destruction inexorably widening every day. True, the radiation affected only ratchet-handles and whisk brooms, but on them it was absolutely lethal. I can still remember the final denouement, after the circle of terror had covered the globe: "Civilisation, built on a precarious foundation of ratchet-handles and whisk brooms, collapsed utterly. The grey squirrels took over." The kid's name was Bradbury, Ray Bradbury.

In '42-'43, maybe early '44, I had thirty-something stories in *The Daily Mirror* and *Sun*, also a couple of longer ones in *Quiz* and *Man*. In the second half of '44 I needed getaway money to leave Brisbane and wrote a 25,000 word detective story published in *GP Detective*, put out by the quiz entrepreneur (Gayle? Gardiner?)

I dimly remember the story you mention, "Phew!". No connection with Pogo, as far as I am aware. Foo was a mythical elf much commemorated in graffiti at the time; the best hint I saw as to his essentially delicate and ethereal nature was above a toilet roll in a factory: "Foo uses a cigarette paper." It was a '42-'43 craze, originating I think in the US.

Australian Short Story

PHEW!

—By—
ALAN P. ROBERTS

"PLOTS," James Chirley muttered sadly.
"Plots."

He glared ferociously at his beer in evident concentration, and then drained half the schooner at a gulp.

"Ah, yes; plots," murmured his companion, a long, seedy fellow named Baxter. He was rapidly sinking into the melancholy bar-room stage, when a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of cemeteries. "Little green plots, six feet long. With flowers fading in them."

Chirley glanced at him coldly. "I am talking of story plots," he said. "There's nothing left to write about."

"Foo," said Baxter.

"What?"

"Write about Foo. See his name everywhere."

"Never heard of him. You're drunk."

"Never been drunk in my life," Baxter retorted with great dignity. "Take my liquor like a man. Foo's a big fellow. Everybody's talking about him."

"I still think you're drunk," Chirley said flatly, and returned to pensive contemplation of his beer.

"I've got it!" he said, suddenly. "A story of two ordinary everyday people, told simply and straight-forwardly. The man, you see—we'll call him Bill—Bill is in love with the girl—we'll call her Anne—but he never tells her because he's too shy. Then one day it happens—"

Baxter made derisive noises in his throat.

"You don't like it?" Chirley asked. "No, neither do I." He frowned menacingly into his beer again. Then: "What about this?" he said, looking up with a fresh gleam in his eye. "A criminal about to commit a murder—the perfect crime. He plans it very cunningly, but forgets just one little thing. You save it until the last line and then you reveal that—"

More queer noises proceeded from Baxter's throat.

"All right, I know it's not new," Chirley said, defensively. "But what else have I to fall back on?"

"Foo," Baxter hiccupped. "Write about Foo."

Chirley did not listen to his drunken ravings. He brooded darkly for a few minutes, and then his face brightened.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed, snapping his fingers. "An old-fashioned thriller. It hasn't been one for years—it'll go over big; sure! An old castle, haunted preferably, with skeletons falling out of closets, hands clutching in the dark. All the old tricks—trapdoors and panels—"

"I had one of them," Baxter said in an unusually loud voice, clutching at Chirley's arm. "A beautiful thing. I used to let it put my pipe in its mouth."

"What are you talking about?" Chirley demanded.

There were tears in Baxter's eyes.

"It used to run across the street," he said, a sob shaking him. "I told it not to, but it wouldn't listen to me. And a car—a big, reckless brute of a car—" he wiped his eyes.

With a mighty effort, Chirley held on to his sanity.

"Would you mind telling me," he said, in a low, restrained voice, "just what—"

"Daniel," Baxter sobbed. "The best Daniel a man ever had. Dead now! We'll all die soon."

His head sank to rest on his arms on the table-top. His breathing became regular and heavy. Chirley glanced at him in disgust and resumed his meditations. He decided against the haunted castle.

"An idea," he murmured. "What to write about?"

"Foo," his partner mumbled vaguely. "Millions of 'em. Everywhere." He began to snore gently.

Suddenly a thought struck Chirley. "Get your stories from today's newspaper," his editor had told him. "Lift 'em from the headlines—that's how best-sellers are made. Topical stuff."

He picked up a newspaper and leafed through it idly. Suddenly

he stiffened, his gaze intent not on the headlines, but on an insignificant paragraph on page five. A piece of news that most people would have forgotten immediately after reading. It gave Chirley the idea of a lifetime. Swiftly his imagination went to work, tying up the loose threads, patching up connected happenings. His heart leaped as he realised what a story it would make.

"It's colossal!" he cried, rising from his chair.

"Foo," Baxter muttered indistinctly. "Foo, Foo Foo!"

Chirley did not trouble to glance at him. He paid his bill and hurried out of the club, his brain working at lightning speed, mapping out the story. Once in his room, his fingers slammed hard and fast on his typewriter keys. Page after page of white quarto paper he fed into the machine; page after page he tore out, covered with neat typescript. The story had everything—stark drama, pathos, irony, beautifully handled romance. Finally, soon after dawn, he reached the moving finale, where the hero's friend returned from the Commando raid—alone. The clocks were chiming 9 o'clock as he slipped the bulky manuscript into an envelope and started out to the publishing company.

He strode into the editor's sanctum with an air befitting one who has just written a story that will live. With understandable pride, he threw the envelope on to the desk.

"Read that!" he said firmly. "READ THAT!"

The editor, after a curious glance at Chirley, opened the envelope. His brow furrowed. "Is this a joke, Chirley?" he asked, and tossed the envelope back. Chirley picked it up, uncomprehending.

It was empty. The manuscript had disappeared. There were three words scrawled on the back of the envelope.

They were:

"FOO DID THIS!"

My main memory of "Phew!" is that another author, William Lynch (I know nothing about him save his by-line in the same markets I got into) also wrote a story about Foo, in either the *Sun* or the *Mirror*. His story was so superior to mine in every way, but especially technique and touch, that I was overcome with awe.

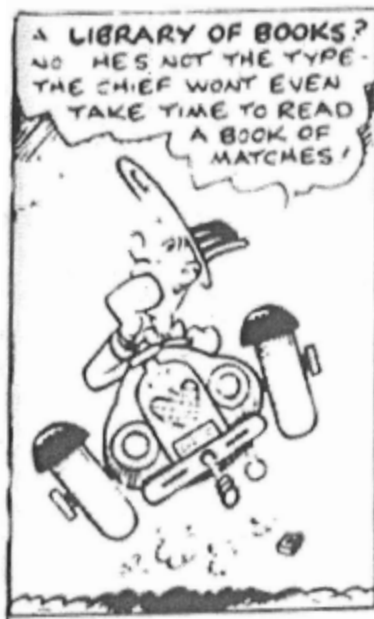
I didn't have anything to do with the post-war FSS, as I was in Brisbane for about 7 years after being discharged from the RAAF in 1946. (I notice Bert Castellari was "somewhere in Borneo" in 1945 -- so was I, on Labuan Island.) I returned to Sydney in '54 and did a physics degree & PhD, during which I ran into Vol once or twice. The last time I saw him ('55?) he was with a guy named Harry Roberts, unlucky enough to be around when Oral Roberts was touring Australia, so the Push gave him the undesirable nickname of Anal.

The "Push" was a group of "rebels" around Sydney University in the 50s-60s, loosely scattered around Professor John Anderson and Jim Baker (both Philosophy) and doing a lot of serious drinking as well as ostentatious casual screwing and specialising in we're-more-cynical-than-you quasi-political philosophising. Their university organisation, if we can use the word loosely, was the Free Thought Society, later the Libertarian Society. There's been at least one book written about them; Germaine Greer was a fellow traveller. I was glad not to be in the Push's orbit as no one could really fancy the sobriquet of Genital, which would have been inevitable."

Still curious about a possible connection between the Foos, I posted a query on the Timebinders discussion list regarding them. Ted White was the first to respond, having referred to Jack Speer's 1944 *Fancyclopedia (I)*, which gives the following entry for "foo":

While "Foo" is synonymous with Foo-Foo, and always to be Capitalized, "foo" is a common word, to be used for whatever part of speech is convenient. "A foo more days for to tote the weary load", "foothful foorever", "yours fooly", etc. These foo-proverbs are the chief source of Foodom's theology; the Great Source of course is the writings of the Prophet, Bill Holman, creator of the Sacred Foo-Cat, but other proverbs which suggest themselves, and are in general harmony with preexistent teachings, may be trusted.

Craig Smith added: "*Smokey Stover* [was a] wonderful, weird, pun-filled strip about a fireman and his friends. I've heard that "foo" was a pun on the French word for fire (feu) and the strip was supposed to also be the source of the term "Foo Fighters" for UFOs...



Maurice Horn's *World Encyclopedia of Comics* (Chelsea House, 1976) entry for Smokey Stover is also informative. Here's the paragraph of immediate relevance:

Smokey Stover's chief sources of fun are the innumerable puns that Billy Holman regularly inflicts on his reading public ("carrying colds to Newcastle", "the bottle of Bunker Hill" and "for whom the belles toil" are a few of them), and the cryptic signs which he liberally scatters throughout the strip ("Notary Sojac", "Foo", "1506 nix-nix").

Dick Eney expanded on the etymology of "foo": "Foo" as a shortened form of "Pfui" (or "phooey", if you're *goyisch*) is at least late XIX Century, but got into fandom (as Warner explains) as a counter-religion to Ghuism in the late 1930s. Spooky, the sacred Foo-cat, was a little critter in the antique "Smokey Stover" comic strip which appeared in the background of the strip sitting on her haunches and saying "Oh, foo!".

"The mundane use of "foo" as an avoidance for "fuck" was, meanwhile, proceeding on its way

along a different path. I've never heard the story about it being the name of a mythical elf -- as distinguished from the real sort, one supposes? -- but it appeared in various slang terms like "foo powder" (smokable drugs) and "foo fighters" (the odd airborne lights which today we would call flying saucers). Phonetically it appeared in the objurgations SNAFU, FUBAR, and TARFU, technical military terms which the knowing interpreted as situation normal, all fucked up; fucked up beyond all recovery; and things are really fucked up."

Mike Blake then stated that Alan's Foo reminded him of the "Kilroy was here" graffiti, a thought which had occurred to me also. But this appears to have been a later phenomenon. Dick Eney again:

"No, "Smoe" or "Shmoo" was the notional name of the little WWII graffiti critter who always appeared with his nose hanging over the wall, eyes just showing, sometimes with a ?-shaped hair on his head, but sometimes not, and an inscription: "Wot no (whatever was in short supply)". His -- make that "hiser", since nothing but the upper head appeared, now I check back -- nose looked very much like that of Popeye's Alice the Goon."

Other sources disagree. From Wilton's Word & Phrase Origins (www.wordorigins.org):

"Kilroy was a mysterious World War II soldier, probably American, who traveled all over the world scrawling the immortal phrase "Kilroy was here" wherever a flat surface presented itself. Often, the phrase was accompanied by a simple drawing of a big-nosed man peering over a wall. Clearly, the graffiti were scrawled by thousands of different soldiers, not a single one named Kilroy. But did Kilroy actually exist? And if so, did he start the fad?

The New York Times, on 24 December 1946, credited James J. Kilroy of Quincy, Massachusetts with starting the craze. Kilroy was an inspector at the Bethlehem Steel shipyard in that city, and used a yellow crayon to write "Kilroy was here" on items that he had inspected. The graffiti became a common sight around the shipyard, and was imitated by many of the other 14,000 shipyard workers when they were drafted and sent around the world.

The cartoon usually associated with Kilroy has quite a different origin. It is originally British, named Mr. Chad, and apparently, predates the Kilroy phrase by a few years. It commonly appeared with the phrase "Wot, no ---?" underneath, with the blank filled in with whatever happened to be in short supply at the time (example: Wot, no spam?). Sometime during the war, Chad and Kilroy met and in: the spirit of Allied unity merged, with the British drawing appearing over the American phrase.

The OED2 lists Chad's origin as "obscure," but it may have been created by George Edward Chatterton, a cartoonist in civilian life who spent the war years in the Royal Air Force."

Australia during the War would certainly have been one place where American and British influences intermingled, but the elfish Foo which Alan made use of in his short story appears to have been a uniquely Australian phenomenon. Precisely how it came to be may never be known. As to how it came to be called Foo, there is a possible explanation involving something akin to parallel evolution.

Graham Stone points out that *Smokey Stover* was popular in Australia also, appearing in newspapers as well as the reprint comic *Wags*. According to *Panel by Panel* by John Ryan, *Wags* consisted of 16 tabloid pages of colour comics, launched in 1936. It was "an outstanding success and continued its weekly publication up until the middle of 1940 when wartime cuts in the supply of newsprint from Canada curtailed its production." Although impossible to know for sure, it could be that Holman's comic strip was the inspiration for more than one Foo.



A WORD FROM DON TUCK

Don Tuck, the Australian Guest of Honour at Aussiecon I, not only didn't turn up at the convention but immediately left fandom altogether. Since then no overseas world convention has asked an Australian to be Fan Guest of Honour -- Bruce Gillespie, Aussiecon 3 Fan GoH speech.

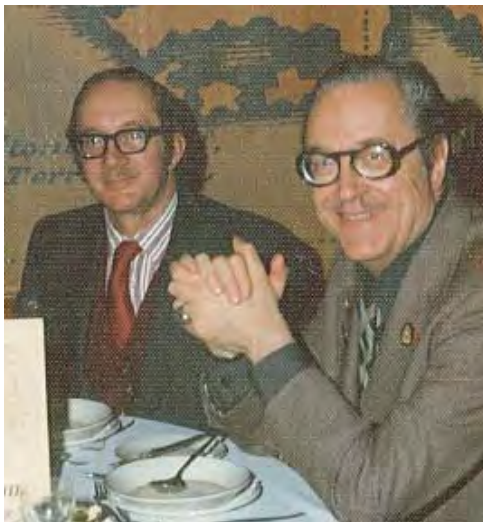
When the first Aussiecon committee was considering Australian Guests of Honour, Don Tuck was an obvious candidate, having been a fan for over 40 years and famous on the international sf scene for his exhaustive and authoritative bibliographic research. Publication of the first volume of his magnum opus, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction & Fantasy* also occurred in 1974. He did have a reputation for being reclusive, but this may have added to the appeal of having him as a guest of honour.

Aussiecon Chairman Robin Johnson himself only ever met Don once, when he and Merv Binns visited him at his home in Lindisfarne. Robin's recollection is that Don was "somewhat reluctant" to accept the committee's invitation from the start. "He seemed surprised when told how many people were likely to be at the con, but he came around". At a later stage, Robin remembers Don warning that he might be prevented from getting to the con. The committee recognized this possibility and was able to reorganise some items on the programme, but "it was only a week before the con that the final 'no' came". Mike O'Brien, another committee member, draws a comparison with Don Bradman, pointing out that "neither Don has (or had) the sort of personality that responds to being feted".

Don has never commented publicly on this subject, but when he read Bruce's Aussiecon 3 speech in *Thyme*, he set pen to paper. Here is his response:

"The reference to me in Bruce Gillespie's Fan Guest of Honour speech for Aussiecon Three published in *Thyme* 128 (July 1999), was completely misleading and I consider very unfair.

I was unable to attend Aussiecon I as a Guest of Honour because of work commitments. In 1975 industry had been "downsizing" for some years and I was Acting Head of the Industrial Services Department, Electrolytic Zinc Co. (now part of Pasminco). This meant complete availability for any emergency -- fire, industrial accident, or the like. I put the job first.



Let me also point out that many sf fans came to Tasmania after the Con and I acted as an "ambassador" for them. There were virtually two separate groups that I know of. One that included Jack Chalker I met at a local motel while for the biggest group, my wife and I and members of our loosely knit Hobart Group gave a dinner at one of Hobart's high-class restaurants. (Around 15 came; I paid for this.)

Among the visitors were Forrie Ackerman (who presented me with the Everett Evans Award for 1975) and a group of Canadians as well as several Americans who knew Howard DeVore of Detroit, with whom I had been in contact for years.

Also, I did not leave fandom altogether as I had an annual gathering each December for the Hobart Group through to December 1982, when I retired from employment and my life changed considerably. Of this group two have since become deceased while I understand Michael O'Brien is still a sf enthusiast. My interest in sf is now peripheral but nevertheless I am interested in what is going on."

TIM'S TRAVELS, 3: A NIGHT AT THE BOLSHOY



Moscow, 19 June, 1998, with Rob from England and Pia and Heidi from Denmark

Our guide from earlier in the day had informed us that we could easily buy tickets for the Bolshoy from one of the several thousand touts hanging around outside the theatre: a big yellow building with tall columns at the entrance and a square in front with a fountain in the middle.

"Don't worry; they'll find you", she had assured us.

Sure enough, as I entered the square and stood there looking stupid and lost I was shortly approached by a man desirous of knowing if I wanted tickets for the Bolshoy. Only US\$25.00 for "very good seats". I looked bemused and disinterested whilst Heidi launched into negotiations (she and Pia had already determined not to spend more than \$10.00 each). However, when Rob and Pia rocked up a small complication arose in the form of Pia's attire: she was wearing shorts. The tout (seemingly ignorant of the poor effect his words would have on his endeavours to sell us tickets) remarked in an off-hand manner, "She won't be allowed in with shorts. She must have a dress." Things looked grim!

Much discussion followed as to: a) was there time for Pia to return to their homestay to get a dress? (no); b) could a new dress be bought? (we went to a nearby dept. store, but it was full of gear about ten times more expensive than the tickets); c) could Heidi and I go to the Bolshoy without Rob and Pia? (Rob's noble suggestion, which I wasn't keen on). It came to the point where Heidi and I left Rob and Pia to try and make enquiries inside the theatre vis-a-vis the appropriateness of shorts, whilst we went to the post office. On our way back we met Pia in one of the underground street tunnels common in Moscow, which are generally lined with stalls selling cheap CDs, tapes, drinks and...cheap clothes. For the next 20 minutes I had the exciting opportunity of watching the two girls examine any number of dresses, leading to...no result whatsoever. However, a sudden brainstorm on the part of Pia saw her pull her jumper completely over her head and shoulders and down to the waist, tucking the arms in so as to form an impromptu mini-skirt. "Problem solved," I declared. Pia didn't seem too sure.

Back at the Bolshoy Rob was becoming increasingly agitated over the whole affair, with only about 15 minutes left before showtime. Doubts over the 'mini' lingered, but the tout seemed happy enough. Rob took control, ordering Heidi to buy two tickets: if she and Pia got in, we'd follow; otherwise Heidi and I would go. Followed by Rob's plea to the heavens: "*Please* let them get in!", the girls ventured forth. With bare minutes to spare we watched anxiously, the tension mounting. Then it came...the thumbs up! Our girls were *in*! Rob and I promptly bought our own tickets, charged in and the four of us started heading up... and up... and up. Our seats were in the stratosphere section of the Bolshoy. We checked our bags in and hired some mini-binoculars; good, I found, for checking details of the gyrations on stage...and spying on the rich people in the expensive boxes far below us.

But first we had to get to our seats. I entered after the others. Checking the number of my ticket against those of the seats it became readily apparent that someone was sitting in mine; a young girl looking pretty guilty as I struggled past various occupants towards her. Rob had experienced the same thing. "Just sit anywhere," he said. "It doesn't seem to matter." With several empty seats at the far end of the row I figured "what the hell" and kept right on going past the nervous young occupant of my

seat. Seating myself I became aware of the growing realisation that the night's performance was due to be three hours long and I didn't really like ballet. Could I really amuse myself for three hours by spying on other people with my mini-binoculars? Worth a try, I thought.

Busying myself with this worthwhile endeavour I was shortly distracted by the sounds of a disturbance behind me, as two women engaged in an extremely loud and animated debate. The "conversation" was in Russian, of course, but I didn't need to speak the lingo to follow the gist of the argument: woman A had pinched woman B's seat and woman B was not happy about it. It was completely rude, totally unfair and her night at the Bolshoy, which she had been relishing for weeks, was being ruined by the inconsiderate behaviour of woman A. Moreover, she was going to complain LOUDLY and LONG about it, and she didn't give a damn what everyone else thought, because an injustice had been committed and THAT just wasn't RIGHT!

Everyone else seemed to think she was a loud, annoying bitch who ought to shut up because the show was starting. Several "sssh's" were sent in her direction, along with any number of evil looks. The attendant marched up the stairs to her row (the back row of the theatre, several hundred meters above sea level) to join the fray. Again, I couldn't understand the lingo, but I gather the attendant's input was along the lines of, "Shut up, you silly old cow, or I'll throw you out!"

A few dancers had appeared on stage by now, but as far as I was concerned they were incidental to the main attraction taking place directly behind me. Top entertainment! Regrettably, but for a few minor flare-ups, the back row show was pretty much over. I turned my attention to the stage below.

Or, at least, that part of the stage I could actually see, a fair chunk being hidden from view by the balcony on which I sat. Dancers flitted about, occasionally disappearing from view before reappearing with a flourish. Most of what I saw didn't make much sense anyway. There was a chick in white, who seemed to like the young guy in blue tights, so I figured it was pretty much a 'boy-meets-girl' scenario. Later on in the act, though, a mysterious woman in white appeared together with a guy in a turban (a Saracen type, I thought) and after a bit of flouncing about our heroine appeared to have kicked the bucket! Very strange. End of Act I, and start of the first intermission.

It was a useful break. Not only did I get a chance to check out the Bolshoy's dunny (adequate for my purposes), but also to take a squiz at Heidi's program. It tended to put things in context. The essential plot elements were as follows: Boy meets girl, they fall in love. Boy goes off to fight in some war. Girl has dream involving the woman in white (a ghost, but I never worked out whose) and a swarthy Saracen prince, who has evil designs on her. At the end of the dream she dies (just like in Dallas, really: it was all a dream). In Act II the Saracen shows up for real and puts the moves on the princess (yeah, she's royalty), but eventually gets his when blue boy shows up and runs him through at the end of their duel (my favourite bit: the sword fight!). Act III, according to the program, was simply the wedding of the princess and blue boy, but why it took them half an hour to get married I'll never know.

It was all a bit trying, really, although the Russians seemed to like it. The entire show was punctuated by moments of spontaneous applause for some particularly spectacular effort on the part of some dancer. I learned that the Russian for "Bravo!" sounds remarkably like "Bravo!"

We didn't hang around for the encores.



THE READER SQUEAKS

Bert Castellari, Curtin, ACT

20 November 2000

Sunbeams! In our mid-teens we saw that only as a little kids' comic. Vol and I both started work on *The Sunday Sun* in January 1939 as copyboys -- he arrived a week after me. We got on reasonably well in the first year, but the relationship began to deteriorate towards the end of that time. I never thought of us as "personal enemies". There were a series of juvenile antipathies in fandom in the three years until I went into the army. These apparently continued in following years and I know only of those from the few accounts I have read of them. I had just about drifted out of science fiction fandom at the end of 1941 and was beginning to read more widely and trying to dig into my developing interests. The next five years limited that and the postwar struggles did not allow time to read sf although I have never lost interest in it.

"Personal enemies" implies some degree of hate. I never felt hate at any time towards Vol. I've never been a hater. I don't think he was either. He had a strong ego and enormous confidence in his own abilities. I think he used them well in later life. I don't think I saw Vol again after that brief wartime meeting I mentioned in an earlier letter. Bill Veney was still in touch with Vol until his death. Bill had had his run ins with Vol too (I think nearly everybody in Australian fandom must have been in conflict with nearly everybody else at some time) but he told me when we last met that in postwar years Vol had become a pretty nice bloke. The only other people I knew who also knew Vol in those years, both journalists, were very good friends with Vol and spoke affectionately of him.

Back to *Sunbeams*. Whatever our disdain for it may have been, Vol certainly showed a lot more savvy in using it for publicity. He may have told me about this, but even if he did I had forgotten until you mentioned it. I was transferred from *The Sydney Sun* to the daily *Sun* early in 1940 and did not see much of Vol, which was probably a good thing for both of us. I moved to *The Daily Mirror*, as head copy boy, a week before it first appeared on the streets in April 1941 (and began a vigorous afternoon newspaper war in Sydney).

I knew Ken Jefferys and got along with him although I didn't see that much of him. I always felt his interest in sf was peripheral. He was in my unit during the war -- tank crew, I think -- but in another squadron. As Corps troops we did not operate as a single unit but squadrons, or parts of them, were detached to support various infantry units so I did not see much of Ken over the years. By the way when I first met Vol at *The Sunday Sun* he had already had a book published, *The Black Empire*. I've never seen it and from what he told me it was a good adventure story.

You probably know that his father, also Voltaire, was a well established newspaperman and, from memory, a member of the NSW Parliament who died when Vol was very young. I met his mother once when they were living in Clovelly. He also had a sister married to a journalist on *The Newsletter*, a weekly sporting paper in Sydney. Bruce (I've forgotten his surname) was a RAAF pilot killed in the Middle East in 1941. He was a nice bloke and let us use *The Newsletter's* duplicator to print one of Vol's earlier mags -- can't remember which one it was. *The Newsletter* was on the first floor of a building near the intersection of Liverpool and Elizabeth Streets. It was the usual newspaper slum and we were quite at home working there.

I did not see much of Eric Russell again after the war. Bill and I used to meet occasionally and I was best man when he married Charmian. I did not see much of them after the wedding -- I learned about their 14 years when I last talked to him. In the mid-seventies when my son returned to ANU to finish his degree he went to a function to welcome new students. There he met Eric Russell, who had accompanied his daughter, one of the new students. I did not get to renew the friendship.

And what happened to his brother Ted, who had been one of the original Futurians? The only thing I heard of him was that he was working for the ABC (some time in the fifties).

Don Tuck, Lilydale, Vic.

11 December 2000

The arrival of "Astounding" *Mumblings from Munchkinland* was as usual full of interest including the third arrival -- you really are going to be outvoted.

Your references to the present visiting the past does bring aspects of early sf life back, names that I either corresponded with or had heard of in the '40s. I appreciate that some sf enthusiasts are glad to learn that I'm still around even if I'm only a "fringe dweller".

The adverts in *Mumblings from Munchkinland* bring back old memories. Keep them up.

=====

Erika Maria Lacey, Qld.

12 December 2000

Thank you very much for your zine - it arrived quite safely late last week. It's a very portable and attractive (not to mention well put together) zine that I spent about a half hour enjoying.

Congratulations on the healthy birth of your daughter. It's good that your other daughters are delighted in Ruby. There are not many people that I know of who have had their children delivered through midwives, though from what I know home is the best environment in which to give birth. I don't know why people give birth in institutions that house sick people right next door ... and there is less stress on the mother, being in familiar surroundings and all. The photographs are a lovely touch.

Reading the piece on early SF clubs in Sydney was educational. The only one that I'd ever heard of was the Sydney Futurians, and that's because of Sydney folks complaining about them! It's certainly a read to see how things progressed. If those folks hadn't decided to do those particular things at the time, who knows what the state of SF would be like now? Well, it's livening up again at the moment because of Zara, but I meant, historically up to now.

The scan of the old Futurian NY News was quite amusing. I suppose that it was their prerogative to plug everyone as much as possible - but that bit about Asimov being a "promising young writer" had me laughing. It must have taken quite a few tries to type that issue of the news out - I've been party to typing on manual typewriters, and considering that I've never been an especially accurate typist, little white dots decorated the page before I'd finished or given up. The bit about them not blackballing makes one wonder what rumours were circulating at the time about them. Or what event inspired it.

The visit to the US was a hoot. It was certainly written in a very entertaining manner! The means often justifies the end; Ruth's obfuscation resulted in visiting the Forrest J. Ackerman Museum ... and he never got to know otherwise, perhaps boosting his ego while they were at it. It's commendable that he shares what he has collected with people all around (though not commendable that people in the area had never heard of him!). "Adult" stuff on display, huh. I don't suppose that his bedroom would be one of the things regularly toured ... by tourists that is.

Los Angeles does seem to have a number of things to do - tourism needs places to attract people to, and somewhere as large as that would most likely have something for everybody. It's unfortunate that people who live there all of their lives are the ones that don't go to see things - but that's the way of things. I've hardly gone around my own city, either! This is being fixed, though. More and more I find interesting things to do around here - though nothing like the Ackermansion.

Just one thing ... sorting out who wrote what became somewhat of a challenge when writing this LoC. I started out assuming that it was you, only to find on the last page that I was mistaken! Going back for a rewrite... whew, before I sent it off, too.

[I have to do something to keep you on your toes!]

Eric Lindsay, Airley Beach, Qld.

12 December 2000

Nice children's photographs. Our paper reproductions of photos haven't been good since we now lack a way of having them screened. We can still do fairly well with direct printing, but that is painfully slow. Probably doesn't matter, as increasingly our zines are on the net.

Given Graham Stone's habits, I guess it isn't too much of a coincidence to find him in the state library.

=====

Harry Warner, Jr., Hagerstown, Md.

16 December 2000

I'm very grateful for your generosity with both bedsheet and digest-size copies of the latest *Mumblings from Munchkinland*. The small one would have been a problem because my eyes have been worsening and have invented a new way to torment me: watering constantly after I've spent more than five minutes or so of reading a difficult text. I've been thinking of buying a snorkeling outfit designed to permit clear vision when completely engulfed in water, although someone tried to explain to me that this wouldn't help in my case. Of course, I wouldn't have wanted to miss the wonderful colour photography in the small copy.

You deserve congratulations on both the birth of your latest and on apparently having come through the strain of another fatherhood with unimpeded mentality. I had a cousin whose name was close to one of those you bestowed upon your baby: Aleda, pronounced in the United States "Aleeda". I don't know where my aunt found that name, which is not often encountered in this nation. The photograph of your oldest makes me confident that she will soon be working her way up to the role of First Snowflake in productions of *The Nutcracker*.

Once again, I found great interest in the revelations about fandom in the elder days in Australia. Stirling Macoboy's career is a particular revelation. But in general, those pioneering Australian fans seem to have attained impressive careers if they lived long lives. More evidence that the old image of science fiction fans of that era as hopeless misfits who turned to the hobby through inability to get along with the mundane world was wrong.

Tim's exploits in finding and getting into the Ackermansion is a neat companion piece to a book I recently acquired, a combination of personal experiences and a summary of science fiction in print and the media, which Forry published about five years ago. [*Forrest J. Ackerman's World of Science Fiction*, General Publishing Group, Los Angeles, 1997; or Aurum, London, 1998.] It must be true that his holdings are of unthinkable profusion and variety. A correspondent who paid him a visit just a few months ago exhumed the manuscripts of three science fiction stories that Forry was agenting back in the years when I was making occasional sales to the prozines. I couldn't remember a thing about them and couldn't bring myself to read more than the first couple pages of each.

I doubt if this letter will reach you in time for the wishes to still be appropriate, but I still hope you and yours will have a splendid Christmas, the best of New Years, and freedom from the almost universal confusion that is inevitable if it turns out the computer experts made a mistake and the first day of 2001 is when cyberspace will become uninhabitable, instead of the start of 2000 when it was expected.

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Graham Stone, Sydney, NSW

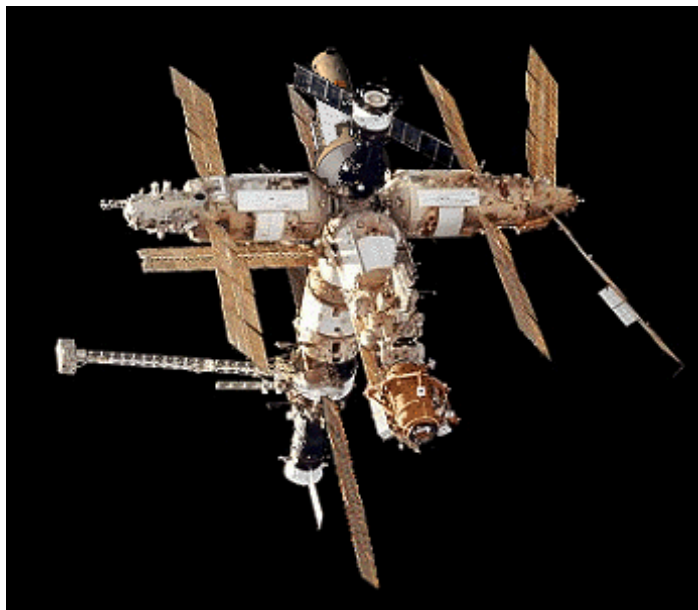
4 January 2001

Don't know why I didn't clarify this before, but Vol reprinted "Trip to a Planet" by Don Lawson in his *Luna*. When the known Don Lawson first appeared in the 50s Bill Veney asked if he was the same. No, he would have been only seven at the time.

[continued from page 3]

Within a fortnight another spectacular achievement of the human race returned to dust, again in spectacular fashion. Unlike the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Mir space station did not outlive its makers, but it did function longer than it was designed to, with a few patches here and there.

Mir's fall from orbit was inevitable, but I watched it with some sadness, since the space station helped me out years ago. In the late 1980s I was a member of ASWA, the Astronautical Society of Western Australia. No, we weren't a group of would-be astronauts; most of



us, at least, were content to follow advances in space exploration from the ground. ASWA had a good reputation internationally, having managed to organise a conference in Perth some years before, but internal squabbling and petty political manoeuvrings of the sort which would be familiar to most fans had taken their toll on membership and enthusiasm by this stage. One of its best remaining assets was its monthly newsletter, edited by veteran member Geoff Davies. So you can imagine the dismay within ASWA when Geoff advised that he no longer wanted the job.

To cut a long story short, I volunteered to edit the newsletter. Several people influenced this decision by swearing that they would help with the mundane tasks of collating, enveloping and mailing issues, but you can guess how long *that* lasted. Still, I was young and foolish (as opposed to old and...) and thought I would have a go at it. I had been exposed to fanzines by this time so the temptation to try my hand at editing an amateur publication was too great -- particularly as ASWA was footing the bill.

One of the things I quickly discovered was how much work a single issue of the newsletter could be. What I inherited was a newsletter that normally ran to around 20 pages of A4 sheets in what must have been 8-point type, with very few illustrations. Even taking the easy route of retyping material like NASA press releases verbatim, it took me ages to put my first issue together. And that was without any tinkering to add drawings, format text, or perform any real editing! Not surprisingly, the ASWA Newsletter's page count soon dropped, the point size of its type rose, and before long it became bimonthly. What was surprising was that nobody seemed to mind. That's how I interpreted the utter lack of feedback in any case.

Another problem was sourcing interesting material. I took over after the Challenger disaster -- surely the US space program's nadir -- and the suspension of manned American spaceflights which followed meant that NASA's press releases were reduced to reports of upper atmosphere instrument packages soon to be launched by weather balloon. Thrillsville. ESA, Japan, China, India and even Australia had the occasional item of space news, but rarely enough to fill an issue.

The Soviet Union's space program, on the other hand was...well, hitting new heights. Their launch frequency was unsurpassed, Mir was growing ever larger as new modules and solar panels were added on, and cosmonauts aboard the station were setting new space endurance records. On the down side, the Soviet space program was still comparatively "secret", so I had to go to elaborate means to get material for the newsletter. Like taping shortwave radio broadcasts of Radio Moscow and then transcribing any space news they reported. Mir and the news it generated helped me fill up issues and also underlined the contrast between the space programs of the US and the USSR at this time. It was easily visible whenever it passed over at night, so I couldn't resist the pun in one of my newsletter editorials, about how westerners were becoming "Mir observers" of space activities.

Australia's bicentennial celebrations in 1988 [aside to overseas readers: celebrating 200 years of European invasion, not creation of the nation] afforded another opportunity. As part of a nation-wide television show on Australia Day that year, co-hosts Clive James, Jana Wendt and Ray Martin exchanged pleasantries with a Soviet journalistic counterpart, and then spoke to cosmonauts on Mir. I again transcribed the broadcast -- hardly rigorous scientific information, but it filled up a page or two.

Later that year the 25th anniversary of Valentina Tereshkova's spaceflight occurred, so I invited a number of prominent West Australian women to comment upon her achievement. (Parochial, yes, but I had to allow for response times to meet my deadline. E-mail at this time, at least in my experience, was still limited to internal networks like the one we used at Mt. Newman Mining Co.) Sufficient replies came in to make a decent article about how Tereshkova's flight had impressed some and not others. Once again, this was not high-tech material, but the ASWA committee was pleased because the wife of the then Governor of W.A. was among the respondents. This was not quite the coup some saw it as -- the Governor was also the Patron of ASWA, so Mrs. Reid may have felt obliged to reply.

To make up for these "popular" articles I also bullied other members into contributing more esoteric material and created a few charts and tables of data myself -- such as a complete list of the then 200 or so people who had travelled into space. This was fun, but it appeared in the last issue of the newsletter I edited. Like Mir, all good things come to an end. I stepped down as editor in mid-1988 and let my membership in ASWA lapse the following year when I knew I was going overseas.

Speaking of which...

The winds of change are blowing through Munchkinland again. Exactly where they're blowing us to, I will keep under wraps a bit longer -- but the photo of Mir below could give you a clue. Stay tuned for further information and note the dates and addresses below before sending in your LoC on this issue!

=====

Many thanks to all of the contributors to this issue: Don Tuck, Alan Roberts, Tim Nelson, all loccers and, behind the scenes, Graham Stone and members of the Timebinders fan history discussion list. On the cover, Dorothy struggles against the waves on her way to Australia with Uncle Henry in *Ozma of Oz* (1907), illustrated by John R. Neill once again. The "before" photo of the Bamiyan Buddha (page 2) is from the Nancy Dupree book mentioned on the same page, whilst the "after" photo was borrowed from the CNN website. Both "before" and "after" images of Mir on this and the page opposite were similarly trawled up on the 'Net, as were the images of the Bolshoi Theatre. Smokey Stover and Sparky appear courtesy of the Maurice Horn book quoted on page 7. The photograph on page 8 comes courtesy of Don Tuck.

On the back cover, a farewell to L. Sprague de Camp, watched over by Edd Cartier's Johnny Black from the November 1940 *Astounding Science Fiction*. Bert Castellari sent me news of de Camp's death, recalling his name from earlier days -- generations of fans enjoyed his work! Jock McKenna, the Brisbane fan and collector mentioned by Alan in this issue, also died recently, on March 29th. And finally to Douglas Adams, who died much too young: So long, and thanks for all the laughs.

Letters of comment, please, before mid-July to:

23 Henty St., Invermay, Tas. 7248 AUSTRALIA
or, C.Nelson@corp.amc.edu.au

After mid-July, until further notice, all we'll have is an electronic address:

mumbling_munchkin@hotmail.com





Timeline of American Science Fiction Magazines,

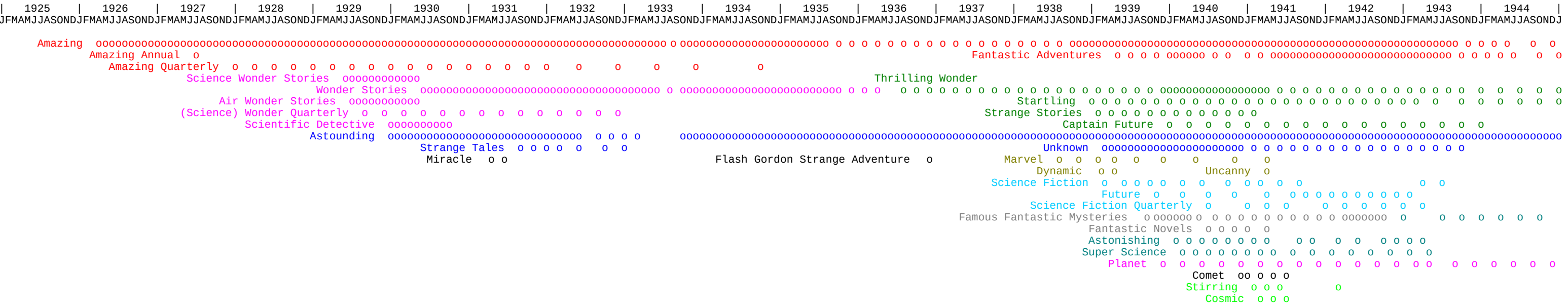
1926 - 1944

a supplement to

Mumblings from Munchkinland 17

June 2001

Timeline of American Science Fiction and Fantasy Magazines 1926 - 1944



Regular readers of *Mumblings* will know of my interest in the sf pulps and later magazines. Years ago I did a version of this by hand after reading Ashley's *History of the Science Fiction Magazines*, to make better sense of which magazines appeared when. I have always had it in mind to do this version and, finally, here's the first installment.

In case it's not obvious, each circle represents a single issue of a magazine, usually based on its cover date. (Most magazines appeared on the newsstands *ahead* of their cover date, but this far removed from the era, it would be too hard to plot issues by their actual dates of publication.) Colours indicate publishers or a succession of publishers; when a different publisher took up any title(s) I have changed colour only if the magazine(s) in question underwent a significant title change (eg. *Wonder Stories* to *Thrilling Wonder Stories* in 1936) or they became part of another family of titles (eg. *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* in 1943). I have used only as much of each title as necessary to distinguish it, often omitting "Stories", "Tales", etc. Anybody who wants a complete history of full title changes would need to consult one or more of the sources below.

Why only the American magazines? One very pragmatic reason, but it will not be obvious until you see the next installment, which covers the period 1945-1964. Basically, I need the full height of the page to get all of the US titles alone onto one sheet in that period. I'll get around to doing the British, Australian and maybe Canadian titles some day.

Ideally, someone will do a web version of this whereby you can click on each dot and get a cover picture and contents information about each and every issue - if not the entire contents! Just don't hold your breath waiting for me to do it.

Sources: Tuck, D.H. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, volume 3 (Advent, 1982)
Day, D.B. *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines 1926-1950* (Perri Press, 1952)
Bleiler, E.F. *Science Fiction: the Gernsback Years* (Kent State University Press, 1998)

June 1926

