Mumblings from Munchkinland #4

Mumblings from Munchkinland -- the only West Australian fanzine published in Pakistan!
BUSINESS AS USUAL, DURING ALTERCATIONS

Well, a lot has happened since the last issue of Mumblings came your way. Saddam's troops had already occupied Kuwait by then, but the buildup of Allied forces was incomplete and diplomatic solutions were still being sought. The rest, I guess you know.

The situation in Pakistan during The Brother of All Muddles was somewhat peculiar. The Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, sent troops to Saudi Arabia despite very strong public sentiment in favour of Saddam Hussein. As in most Muslim countries, the conflict was seen here very much in terms of a Hero of Islam versus the Evil West. The center spread of this issue will give you some idea of how the war was reported in this country.

In Peshawar, the atmosphere was even odder. The Afghans, although devout Muslims, showed less support for Saddam. They did not like infidel troops being in their holy lands, but they've had no love for Saddam since his government recognized that of Najibullah in Kabul. So most were not bothered when the leader of the Peshawar-based Afghan Interim Government ordered mujahideen to Saudi Arabia. His political rivals kicked up a storm, but that was nothing new.

Westerners here felt the most tension in the last few days before George ordered the bombing to start, since-nobody really knew what the Pakistanis' reaction would be. They burned the US Embassy in Islamabad in 1979 and violent protests occurred when Reagan bombed Libya and again when The Satanic Verses was published. (Yes, I know Rushdie is British, but it's still the USA that cops most of the flak on these occasions.)

Understandably, the US Government assumed the worst and asked for voluntary evacuees in the week preceeding the war. But so few volunteered to leave that they made it mandatory for all "official, non-essential, American personnel". Some of them were only given 8 hours notice. All of the Peace Corps volunteers were sent to Nepal. The Australian volunteers here were advised by our home office that we could also leave, but none of us wanted to.

When the war started we witnessed numerous public demonstrations, but few serious acts of violence. The local police dealt with protesters in a calm and efficient manner, calmly lobbing tear gas at them and efficiently beating them with lathis (clubsticks).

The US Consulate handed out walkie-talkies to those without a telephone, and organized telephone trees for those with them, so security messages could reach everyone quickly. I was supposedly on three warning lists, but never heard from any of them. I didn't even know that the Consulate had advised all remaining US citizens to leave the country until I read about it in the newspaper the next day. All of which makes me wonder just how well-managed any urgent evacuation by these people would have been.

Work at ARIC lessened but we had a backlog of work to catch up on, so it was pretty much business as usual. By the end of January my annual leave was due and it seemed like a good time, so I packed my bags and headed for the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Laos.
LETTER FROM LAOS

My flight out of Peshawar was a bit spooky. A local politician was calling for mujahideen to go to Iraq to help slaughter the infidels and one of the nervous jokes doing the rounds was "Make sure you're not cross-booked!". I began to wonder when I got on the plane, as practically all of the seats were filled by young, bearded Afghans in shalwar kameez and Chitrali hats. I got a few stares and some frowns, but nothing more. I kept my head down for the duration of the flight and kept my own Chitrali hat on my head.

A layover at Karachi International I spent reading a Dune book. I could detect little tension there. Only one person approached me whilst I was reading, a taxi driver offering to show me some Karachi nightlife. "You want whiskey? Cocaine? Heroin? Hash? Morphine? Women? Girls? I know all the nice places..." He paused and looked me up and down suspiciously before adding: "You want boys?" I didn't. He gave up, eventually.

The flight to Bangkok was okay and a taxi took me straight to the Lao Embassy. Happily, it was open; unhappily, no staff were in sight. I'd arrived around mid-day and everybody had gone for lunch. Not far away I found a travel agent offering visa services to Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia and made arrangements with him.

Travel to and within Laos is not generally easy. A tourist visa valid for two weeks costs US $100 and visitors usually have to travel as part of an organized tour group. Most of the exorbitant visa fee actually goes to the travel agents, the Lao government apparently assuming that tour-managed foreigners will be less trouble than others. I didn't care either way since I was going there to meet another Australian volunteer.

After a few days in Bangkok, the visa was ready and I had my train ticket to the border. There was some confusion over the train's time of departure (either 8:00 p.m. or 18:00) so I got there by 17:30 just in case. It turned out to be 8:00, naturally. The night express -- I had a sleeper -- was comfortable and smooth.

There didn't seem to be a station in Nong Khai when we arrived the next morning (there was, but I was in the next to last carriage and the platform wasn't long enough for the whole train) but there was a ferry landing right across the street.

The Mekong at this point is at least a half mile wide, with very muddy water. I sat around and watched the long, narrow Thai boats passing by on the river as trucks loaded up with goods lined up on the landing behind me. Eventually a barge arrived, the trucks rolled onto it, people piled in, and we chugged across the river. A twenty minute tuk-tuk ride later, I was in Vientiane.

Unlike the Nong Khai Express, Vientiane was nothing like Paul Theroux described it in The Great Railway Bazaar. Theroux was writing in the early '70s, before the king was deposed and a communist government gained power. No doubt prostitutes can still be found, but they're certainly not as conspicuous as those he mentions. The city is clean and spacious.
Vientiane is fairly small, with few buildings over three storeys. There are 4 million Laos, most of whom live in the capital, and all of the individuals I met were relaxed and friendly. This was a welcome relief after the tension of Peshawar. The young girls weren't sure what to make of my beard -- most giggled, some just stared -- but that's better than being frowned at any day.

I stayed with my friend in the house of one of her friends, a big wooden place on stilts, which reminded me of the houses in Cairns or Darwin. There was a rice paddy across the road and greenery in all directions. Bicycles are the most common mode of transport in the city (though mopeds, tuk-tuks and cars do exist) so it was also quiet and relatively unpolluted.

My companion, Megan Lee, had been working in Laos for a year, so she was already acquainted with the local language, lifestyle and customs. I found it all fascinating. We were invited to a bacci (a house-blessing ceremony) at which a dozen Buddhist monks arrived to make the blessing after being fed an enormous meal. They also received some kip (the local currency), which, for some reason I haven't yet discovered, was hidden under their sticky rice.

Sticky rice! Weird and wonderful stuff. It's the staple food of Laos, a very glutinous and adhesive form of rice which can be moulded in the hand and eaten with just about anything. It can also be brewed into a wine. They served both forms at the bacci, along with various other strange and delightful dishes.

Part of the ceremony involved tying pieces of string around each others' wrists. Each string is accompanied by a blessing for long life, success, happiness, and so on. Almost everybody there wound up with ten or a dozen strings on each wrist, which looked pretty impressive until we saw a newly married couple a few days later. Their wrists were so covered in string that I was surprised they could still lift their arms.

Travel outside of Vientiane is quite restricted, even for locals. We were lucky to be able to travel to Luang Prabang, the original northern capital of Laos, by travelling with a colleague of Megan's who had relatives there.

Luang Prabang was beautiful. It's located at the confluence of the Mekong and one of its major tributaries, surrounded by hills and lush flora. The family lived near the center of town in a two-storey building squeezed in amid others; they were six or seven, including grandparents and kids. Each morning all of them were up before 6:00 to help prepare foods to sell in the markets. All of their cooking was done on open fires at the back of the house. There was quite an art to it and the results were always delicious.

We visited a number of wats (temples) and then we took a boat trip up the Mekong to visit the Buddha Caves, where a number of the idols have been stored in caverns overlooking the river to save them from destruction at various times. A shorter boat ride took us to a picnic spot near some waterfalls. The water level was not high, so the falls were not spectacular, but it was still pretty. We went for a dip in the river on the way back.
LAYING GOOD FOUNDATIONS

Dr A:
Hari Seldon
Very seldom
Gets a lay.

Out among
The stars like dust
Is Hari's lust
To die unsung?

Is Raych to be
His only son?
Is there no fun
In Venabili?

By the Laws,
Is sex allowed?
Has she vowed
To drop her drawers?

Or would short circuits
Positronic
(How ironic!)
Give him fits?

Perhaps a whore's
Hand-on-thigh
Will make him sigh,
Instead of Dors.

But if he
(Just by some chance,
At a late dance)
Gets a bit

Would it be
Adultery?
Or simply
Psychohistory?

No bother.
In the long run,
He will out-gun
Every other.

And this poem
Should not now tarry
For of Hari
It is known:

He will aid
Great populations;
His Foundations
Are well laid.
CONFICTION:  A SURVIVOR'S REPORT

by Harry Pol

Well, the 48th Worldcon is behind me, and I survived. It was the first sf convention I have ever attended and it was a pretty mind-boggling experience. Let me tell you a little about each day.

Thursday, August 23: The Minister of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs opened the convention with a speech that was nicely timed. She stopped just before she became boring. After that ConFiction's chairman, Kees van Toorn, introduced the Guests of Honour: Joe Haldeman, Harry Harrison and Wolfgang Jeschke. Fan Guest of Honour Andrew Porter and Toastmistress Chelsea Quinn Yarbro were also introduced and then the show really got started.

The toughest part of the con was deciding what talk, discussion or panel to attend. Sometimes as many as 12 items were running.

I went to a talk by Rusty Hevelin who introduced Joe Haldeman to the audience, not by summing up a bibliography but by talking to friends and family, thus forming a picture of who Joe Haldeman is and what he stands for.

There was an interesting panel which included Forrest J. Ackerman and Hal Clement that looked at the past of Worldcons, the present, and speculated on the future ones.

Mike Glyer had a talkshow in which he received all the Guests of Honour. However, it was painfully obvious he had not done much preparing of his questions, which left it to the guests to more or less carry on the conversation. Harry Harrison had everyone in stitches before even saying one word. He comes walking up the stage carrying a bottle of Heineken which he puts down next to the microphone, takes off his jacket, takes off his tie, loosens his collar, then kicks off his shoes and finally sits down.

Later that evening Robert L. Forward gave a talk entitled "Interstellar Flight" which was very interesting. The talk was supposed to last an hour, but with all the questions and discussions afterwards continued for another hour.

Friday had autographing sessions all day long in the Dealers' Room and I managed to drop by to get books signed by Jack L. Chalker, Poul Anderson, Hal Clement, Greg Bear, Harry Harrison, Brian Aldiss, Anne McCaffrey and Robert Silverberg.

The day's programme included a discussion entitled "I Hate SF - We Love SF" with Ian Watson, George R.R. Martin and M. John Harrison. Ian Watson had the "Saddam Hussein part of hating SF" as he himself put it.

The panel on "Unsuccessful Predictions" with Poul Anderson, Hal Clement, Jack L. Chalker and Larry Niven was hilarious. It seems even the best of 'em make bloopers once in a while. Even Hal Clement, epitome of hard sf, had the moon turning the wrong way around the Earth in one of his stories!
The discussion "Global Futures -- the World? Forget it!" was of a more serious nature, where David Brin and Harry Harrison had some thoughtful things to say.

I ended the day by attending a panel with the dubious title "Where will the Dutch Emigrate to When the Water Rises?" With the likes of Harry Harrison and a better prepared Mike Glyer this turned out to be very funny; some pretty hairbrained schemes were proposed. One of them being the irrigation of the Australian deserts and another, fitting the entire country with a Spindizzy Drive...

Saturday had me collecting the autographs of Joe Haldeman, Terry Pratchett, George R.R. Martin, Frederik Pohl, Ian Watson, David Brin, Melinda Snodgrass and Forrest J. Ackerman.

This day included a slide show by Forrest J. Ackerman, a Guest of Honour speech by Joe Haldeman and a panel with Frederik Pohl, Greg Bear, David Brin and Norman Spinrad, "Personally, I Prefer a Nebula". Despite the title, it turned out to be a pretty serious discussion on the merits of the Nebula and Hugo awards. Norman Spinrad made a rather disturbing accusation towards Orson Scott Card, claiming Ender's Game and Speaker for the Dead had won their awards because of tireless lobbying by the author.

Nevertheless the highlight of the day was a Hugo award ceremony that evening. I was pretty happy with Hyperion winning in the Best Novel category and Robert Silverberg's winning novelette, "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another", both of which I voted for. Best Short Story was "Boobs", with "Lost Boys" -- my favourite -- coming in second. The Hugo for Best Novel was presented by none other than the ambassador for the U.S.A. here in Holland, who turned out to be a SF fan. This called for some pretty heavy security and there were a couple of rather large, well-dressed people looking like they expected a Klingon invasion any minute.

Sunday had me enlarging my signed books collection with Janet Kagan, Norman Spinrad, Suzy McKee Charnas and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

There was a panel entitled "Marvano meets Haldeman and Niven" where they discussed graphic novels and movie adaptations. It seems a Ringworld movie option has been sold to someone who spends most of his time sitting on his thumb, according to Larry Niven.

Monday had me going through the Dealers' Room one last time, which brought the total number of books and magazines I bought to 173! Now all I need is time to read 'em all.

Greg Bear, David Brin and Brian Stableford formed another very interesting panel, "World of Vision: a Doomed World". At one time Greg Bear asked the audience to raise their hand if they believed mankind could solve it's problems in the future or that we would all screw it up real bad -- meaning the end of the world type stuff. About 80% was optimistic, but what surprised me was the 20% that truly believed we wouldn't make it.

At 14:00 the closing ceremony ended it all and it was back to real life again...
The Gulf War as seen by The Frontier Post

U.N.-backed war imposed on Iraq

Saudi oil refinery set ablaze • Allied forces conduct 1000 sorties • 18,000 tonnes of explosives dropped on 60 targets • Baghdad calm despite attacks • Iraq fires missiles at Dhahran, Riyadh • Israelis still having nightmares

Israel constant target of Saddam

Saddam requested to use chemical weapons against Israel
Iraq threatens more Scud attacks on Israel
Muslim world rejoiced
We’ll punish the infidels: Tareq

Saddam asks Muslims to fight against Israel

Iraq sends 5 Scuds to Riyadh

Iraq frustrates U.S.
American commanders’ call for more reinforcement • Saddam deploys 100,000 elite troops on Saudi borders • Air raids kill 94 persons • Another 12 planes shot down • American, Western media exaggerating war news

Iraq retains first victory in ‘mother of battles’

Saudis claim to have recaptured Khafji • U.S. commander says forces closer to recapturing the Saudi town • 350 U.S. planes fail to shake 300 Iraqi warriors • Woman mercenaries at Khafji find the going hard • Allies to taste Baghdad’s version of ‘desert storm’

Iraqi chemical attack to change war raises Shamus

Saddam impatient for land battle

Baghdad threatens to use Al-Abban missile

500 Afghan mujahideen sent to Saudi Arabia

Rallies ask U.S. to stop bombing Iraq

Nawaz unsure of P.M. denies differences with

Bush’s ‘no’ to peace

Bush crazy for war • Afghan refugees pro-Saddam rally in City

Bush, you are mistaken

Saddam says he will not surrender

Saddam gives tough time

Might is right

Saddam bows before U.N. resolutions

American hounds after Saddam’s blood

Now it’s Pakistan’s turn
Pakistan, Iran apprehensive of Bush’s New World Order • Call Muslims to chalk out common strategy

Saddam asked to step down by March 7
Thyme #81 (LynC, Melbourne, Vic.)

The penultimate issue. Mostly concerned with the Ditmars this time, with listings of categories and nominations for each. It's good to see some short reviews of nominated fiction, even if I have no chance here of reading any of the works. Interesting, too, to note that the two most popular categories among voters were "Best Fanzine" and "Best Fannish Cat". These came ahead of the more traditional categories for long and short Australian fiction. Good to know fandom is as silly as ever Down Under. But how can Tigger be missing from the nominees for "Best Fannish Cat"?

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Stefantasy #107 (William M. Danner, Kennerdell, Pa.)

I've been receiving Stefantasy for a few years now and I look forward to each one. The bulk of each issue is made up of LoCs from people around the world, creating an interesting exchange of comments, usually on reminiscences from Bill which begin each issue. This time he recalls the lost industry of ice production and delivery. Oddly enough, it is not a dead industry in this part of the world -- you can still see blocks of ice being trundled down the road on wagons and there are many boys on the roadside selling flavoured ice in summer. Refrigerators do exist in many urban homes, of course, but I think the icemen are safe here for a while yet. Bill also runs goofy ads and selected reprints from old Scientific Americans. One in this issue, "A Strange Railway Accident" (from 1904), is a real beauty; the accident involved a steam locomotive and a schooner. The only low spot of the issue is an obituary notice for ATom, whose passing will be missed.

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Gegenschein #58 (Eric Lindsay, Faulconbridge, NSW)

A perzine with con reports, "general natter", LoCs and, largely, short reviews of books and software packages. The latter make me insanely jealous. Eric, how do you get all those books?

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Mimosa 9 (Dick & Nicki Lynch, Germantown, Md.)

Mimosa has a nice feeling of traditional American fandom about it, which is a bit odd, since many of the contributors to this issue are from outside the US. It's hard to fault a zine which includes anything by Bob Shaw, fanhistory from David Kyle, a con/trip report from the editors, plus prose and illos from, respectively, WA's own Dave Luckett and Craig Hilton. (Is West Aussie fandom conquering the world? We seem to be everywhere, yet can't get a Worldcon bid for Perth together!) This issue has fine covers by Joe Mayhew, whose illustrations (along with some by Kip Williams) perfectly match the wit of BoSh's Serious Scientific Speech. Pieces like Dave Kyle's, recalling fannish events of yesteryear, are also fun.
I enjoyed "Blueberry Pie" [in Mumblings #1] very much; it's the sort of thing one might expect Bloch to turn out. Your comments on the current debacles are to the point. Now the big shorts (Stet!) seem determined to have a war over the Mid-East situation. All the "public" tv stations are showing lots of war movies in order, I suppose, to get us all in the mood for another go at self-destruction. After all, the Pentagon has to have an opportunity to tryout all those billion-dollar toys it's been accumulating at the taxpayers' expense all these years.

I may have told you about those two postals received by my aunt in Wheeling from Stuttgart, Germany. Until 1908 1st class was postmarked at the office of its destination as well as where it was posted. The first one I found had come in 13 days and had a rubber-stamped apology "Mail Delayed -- Train Late". The second one had made it in ten days. This was around 1902... Of course, there were passenger trains running everywhere all the time then, and fast steamships crossing the oceans constantly. We'll never have such service again; planes and trucks just can't provide it.

[Who knows, Bill? When the oil starts to run out, maybe we'll have to go back to those steam locomotives and ships. Saddam has done his bit. Maybe he's not so crazy after all.]

Bill Good, Passaic, N.J. October 1990

I was happy to get your response and I hope you enjoyed the book. [Reviewed in #3.] You have said nothing about your taste in sf (does it extend into science fantasy?) [Not often] Or is it possible you are trying to collect for all your fellow "expats" anything near the field? [I do pass them on.] Whatever, enclosed are some more books [including:]

The Vor Game by Lois McMaster Bujold is of a group of books about the same group of characters and I have not yet myself gotten all of them, nor understood the chronology. Books that were written later take place earlier in the story. Hmmm, one more author who needs to find a Reichenbach Falls. And make it stick.

Surface Action by David Drake is hard sf. It seems like the juvenile work of the old master, Robert A. Heinlein, for a bit, because the main character is young and just coming into a military life. But David Drake saw combat as an intelligence officer with a tank company in Vietnam; his work is not for juveniles.

Heinlein himself never saw combat. Tuberculosis took him out of the U.S. Navy in 1939; he had been a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and stayed on the rolls of the reserves most of the rest of his life. But his health was never sufficient to get the military to grant him an active duty assignment.
I see that once again I have gone on again in writing about Robert Heinlein. To get to your questions about my Navy times: Weird as it sounds, I was never at any port. I was an armorer in the See Bees (Construction Battalions) and in my 4 years of active service I never stepped foot on a ship. I saw a month in Spain and 9 months each in Okinawa and Puerto Rico. Since then my job has had me travelling quite a bit, but I have never managed to get to Australia. I'd like to, someday.

Gotta get this off, so let me close with an old Irish toast:

May the wind blow gently in your face,
May the trail rise softly to your feet,
And may you be in Heaven a half hour
Before the devil knows you're dead.

[Thanks for the letter and books, Bill. They arrived just in time for Christmas. The parcel had been opened and one book of the trilogy stolen (I suspect because of a near-naked woman on the cover) but I'm enjoying the rest. Thanks also for the verse -- most appropriate for this Weird Tales issue.]

Bob Nelson, Mount Pleasant, W.A. 26 December 1990

Your issue #3 cover was puzzling. I suppose Winnie and his pals were there for Christmas, certainly not as Munchkins! As for Garrison Keillor, you are correct, I'm sure, about having to have lived in that sort of community. I find a lot of it quite familiar -- in fact, homey.

The Chinese thermometer is easily explained. It is meant for locales where the temperature stays at 40 C.

Interested in the letter from Warner in Hagerstown. Went through Hagerstown several times in the early fifties when hitch hiking. It was only nice on a sunny day. Depressing area in the winter and during the dusk to dawn hours. Got a ride near there with a guy who saved petrol by turning off his engine at the top of each hill and coasting down.

As for man's inhumanity to man, hell, that's okay. I'm more troubled by the treatment of critters. After all, humans are the most expendable of creatures at the present time, I reckon. Like the aliens in Van Vogt's "The Monster" we need to control the breeding chambers. In the mere meanwhile keep out of the way!

[It's harder to be flippant about man's inhumanity to man now that the Gulf War has refreshed our memories of what we do to each other, but with Saddam Hussein and his like loose in the world... Of course, the Allies managed to screw up badly with the bunker bombing. And did you notice that US forces killed more Poms than the Iraqis? I don't see any easy solution to the whole mess. Van Vogt may have hit upon one, but it has a problem, too: Who will control those controlling the breeding chambers?]
Thanks for Mumblings from Munchkinland 3, which reminds me I failed to write last time. Liked the cover [of #2], tho both sides are shown as facing the audience rather than their opponents. Not a patch on Paul though, his covers tended to show more action. Not many featured insects. July 1926 for "The Eggs from Lake Tanganyika" has an impressive sized flying insect (mosquito?) attacking a naval vessel. May 26 for "The Crystal Egg" has a Martian flying insect but it's not doing anything at the moment. Feb 29 for "The Death of the Moon" has ET beetleoids raying a carnivorous dinosaur. June 29 for "The Beetle Experiment" has a bullock-sized beetle confronting man with rifle. A favorite of mine however is May 28 for "The Octopus Cycle". Enormous octopodes walking on stiff tentacles are attacking an armed party of fezzed colored persons with European officers, variously running, shooting, standing gaping and being tentacled up for lunch.

Interesting and saddening to read of your situation and efforts to help these savages. Personally, I am less embued with love of humanity than I used to be and feel that charity begins at home. There are people a lot closer to us with better claims on our sympathy. But that's by the way. I think the answer to attacks on women involved in relief work should be simply to pack up and leave the area.

There's Fungus Among Us! Not bad revival of a lost artform.

Conklin's blurb is fairly terrible, but the general standard in books is so low I don't know that it stands out much.

Personally, I can't get excited about narcotic abuse. Not worth any particular effort against it, not that anything that has been done has made any difference, unless to draw attention to it and make the problem worse. If you think it's a problem. I don't. Anyone who takes dope deserves no sympathy. If he kills himself doing it, fine. And if you let him have the stuff without any fuss he'll probably hold down an undemanding job and create no nuisance. The only result of trying to stop it has been to put up prices to where only thieving can raise enough cash to pay for the habit.

In no.3, first, Christmas is too debased a coin with me to look at any manifestations of it without a shudder. A rather thin issue otherwise I'm afraid. Let me break the news that ish is not a word, neither is zine. Or pub as a verb.

You're right, Williamson's "with Folded Hands..." was clearly meant to show where the Three Laws business would logically end. It was a mistake for him to write the sequel, which as you say resorted to mystical guff. I haven't read the book The Humanoids which I gather is a revised version of "...And Searching Mind", though Tuck's listing implies that it's the same. But the discussion of robots in SFN has so far been entirely on the early period as background to Binder and Asimov. There have been a lot of later robot stories introducing more aspects. I've always felt Asimov's concept (really, as he says, Campbell's) is too restricted and specialised. Robots as independent entities have far more interesting possibilities and there's a lot to be said.
The article on Peshawar and its surroundings was interesting; I never realized parts of Pakistan are still governed by tribal laws.

I received the December issue of Ad Astra the same day as your fanzine. There was a note from Arthur C. Clarke on the letters page commenting on an earlier article, "Hollywood's Negativization of Space". Let me quote:

"I might mention that I was approached during the early stages of "Total Recall", being assured that it would show a very positive picture of space colonization. I expressed guarded interest and asked to see the script. When it arrived, I realized that it was "Rambo on Mars" and wouldn't touch it with the proverbial barge pole."

I don't know if you managed to catch the movie "in a theater near you" but "Rambo on Mars" pretty well sums up the plot. Would you believe the movie is based on a story by Philip K. Dick?

Christmas had a great treat for me this year; I had sent a copy of The Gods Themselves to Isaac Asimov, including a SASE and asking him to sign it. He promptly did so and I had it back in less than two weeks.

I guess all of those autographed books at ConFiction kind of set me off...how do I get a SASE with Sri Lankan stamps I wonder?

[From a stamp shop, I suppose. But is he there? I thought Clarke had left because of the civil war. Thanks for the Worldcon report.]

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A PESHAWAR TELEVISION GUIDE

Pehli Nashriyat
Bismillah 7:00 a.m.; Pehli Nashriyat 7:00; Close Down 8:15.
Dousri Nashriyat
Bismillah 4:15 p.m.; Baseerat 4:15; Iqr a 4:25; Science Gallery 4:35; Laurel & Hardy (Cartoon) 5:00; The Adventures of Little Koala (film series) 5:05; Khabrain 5:30; T.V. Clinic 5:35; Khabroona 6:00; Ulasi (word) 6:10; Peengan 6:35; News in English 7:00; Kaliyan 7:20; Tareekh Kahani 8:00; Khabarnama 9:00; Tijari Khabrain 9:30; Milli Naghma 9:40; Pakistan Aur Jamhooriyat 9:45; World War III (film serial) 10:15; CAA Pakistan Open Squash Tournament 11:05; Khas Khas Khabrain 12:00; Tomorrow's Programme 12:37; Farman-e-Elahi 12:40; Close Down 12:50.
All too soon our two weeks were up. The day we caught the ferry back to Thailand we visited one more unusual site, a sculptor's park seemingly made for fans of the fantastic. Entirely made of concrete, the figures were almost all violent and/or hideous: Oriental monsters carrying off women, symbolic eclipses (one creature swallowing another), things with lots of fangs and knives. And a big, hollow dome with several levels inside, representing Heaven, Earth, and Hell. Hell had lots of people strangling on treeroots or burning in flames.

We crossed the Mekong without any trouble, booked train tickets, and decided to check out another sculpture park by the same artist on the outskirts of Nong Khai. This one was not as gruesome, tho' there was a very nice, tall sculpture of fanged serpents. Mostly it was more conventional figures, buddhas, and towers. Another interesting piece showed an elephant being hounded by a pack of (what else) hounds. But the dogs all had human characteristics; some were carrying rifles, others driving cars, and so on. Megan believes that the sculptor was sympathetic to the king of Laos; the royal icon was an elephant, and the dogs could represent the communists at Liberation, so it seems to make sense.

We had sit-up on the overnight train to Bangkok. With a few bottles of Thai amber fluid this wasn't so bad, though we were quick to miss the Tiger brand beer of Laos. After a few days in Bangkok, we were back in the land of Murree Beer, about which, more in a later issue.

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Refugee Update: No progress here. In fact, the opposite. Kurdish refugees have captured world attention now, and people that have been in exile for over a decade just don't rate the same coverage in the papers. The capture of Khost may have hit the headlines, but nobody here believes that military means alone will produce a durable peace in Afghanistan. The UNOCA chief was replaced at the end of 1990 and his successor is stressing the need for political solutions. More and more of the combatants seem to be realizing this, but still say Najib must go.

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This month's front cover illustration, by Sune Watts, was swiped from a book about Afghan refugee children published by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.

The back cover shows the fist of Jihad rising out of Afghanistan to protect it from Soviet helicopter gunships. The phrase on the shield, "Allah-o-Akbar!" (God is Great!), is a common rallying cry of the mujahideen.

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There ain't no more to #4. Intending writers should note a return to the original post office box number:

Chris Nelson, P.O. Box 1084, University Town, Peshawar, PAKISTAN

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