

Where is this strange land?

By Hesh Goldstein

Once upon a time there was a Great War involving all the Kingdoms of the Earth. One Kingdom, the greatest of all, vowed that it would be the one to conquer the Evil Warlord who threatened everyone.

The Great Kingdom's industries went to work, night and day, to refine the elements of war: iron, steel, aluminum, petroleum, uranium, copper, coal, zinc, glass and super phosphate fertilizer to grow the crops. And it came to pass that the Great Kingdom decimated the Evil Warlord and his minions.

The peasants of the Great Kingdom were greatly relieved. Yet, as they returned to the business of living, they became aware of a problem. The industries had produced poison gases while manufacturing the tools of war. Among the most toxic of these, the chemical 'luvabuck', was implicated in lawsuits. The gas had killed millions of dollars worth of crops and farm animals. The peasants of the Kingdom turned to the industries and said, "We are patriotic, but we would like to be compensated for our damages".

The Heads of Industry turned to the Rulers of the Kingdom saying, "If the peasants win damage claims against us, the cost will be so great that all industry will be shut down. As we have undertaken to produce the tools of war on your behalf, you must reimburse us if the peasants are successful in their claims".

And the Rulers said, "This is a matter of National Security. No one will pay damage claims. Let us make a plan of defense against the allegations of the peasants".

Then one of the Generals spoke, saying, "To defend against the claims, we need not prove the gas 'luvabuck' harmless, only that the peasants encountered 'luvabuck' from some other source". Then another spoke, saying, "Perhaps if we told the peasants that 'luvabuck' was good for their feet, they would be less fearful of it. In fact, I have noticed that those peasants who bathe their feet in streams laced with 'luvabuck' have stronger feet. Of course, if they get too much of it, their toenails become grungy, but it is a mere cosmetic effect".

And so the Rulers of the Kingdom, The Heads of Industry, and even the Surgeon General, went out into the Kingdom to proclaim the foot-strengthening properties of the 'luvabuck' chemical. And it was decreed, that all the provinces should add 'luvabuck' to community water supplies, to strengthen the feet of the peasants.

The Heads of Industry were pleased to sell many tons of 'luvabuck' to the provinces for their water supplies, for industry was prohibited from dumping the toxic substance just anywhere.

Years passed. Decades came and went. Most peasants forgot the time of the Great War, and the chemicals that spewed into the air from the smokestacks of industry. They believed that bathing their feet in 'luvabuck' laden streams made their feet stronger.

But all was not well in the Great Kingdom. Researchers found that 'luvabuck' caused neurological damage in animals. Parents claimed that 'luvabuck' caused brain disorders, and even death to their children. Physicians reported hip fractures in those with long-term exposure to 'luvabuck'. A strange bone cancer was observed in young men who bathed their feet in 'luvabuck', and chemists found that 'luvabuck' in the rivers and oceans killed fish.

'Luvabuck' factory workers experienced Alzheimer-like symptoms and environmentalists worried about the lead, arsenic, and radioactive compounds with which 'luvabuck' was contaminated. Others fretted about getting

too much 'luvabuck' from air, food and drinks. Kingdom scientists questioned how much 'luvabuck' the peasants could tolerate. Meanwhile, two-thirds of the children suffered from some damn unsightly toenails.

Congress investigated. It determined that the 'luvabuck' chemical formulation, when used to strengthen the feet, was a drug for which no New Drug Application had been filed. No studies existed to prove safety or effectiveness. No toxicity studies had been done. Regulation of 'luvabuck' as a water additive was under the jurisdiction of a special committee of Foot & Water Lovers International (FWLI), an independent testing organization. Certain members of FWLI, coincidentally, manufactured 'luvabuck'.

Researchers who reported problems with 'luvabuck' lost their professional positions. Podiatrists who questioned the chemical's benefit lost their licenses to treat feet. Kingdom scientists in the Department of Toxic Affairs were told by superiors, "if we say $2+2=7$, then $2+2=7$, regardless of what your studies show". Reports were modified to reflect Kingdom policy.

Meanwhile, although the Kingdom Advertiser portrayed them as lunatics and haters of feet, certain communities resisted obeying the Kingdom's directive.

Persons representing an organization called Save the Feet, converged on the Capitol of Lulululu, in the State of Kapakahi to demand the right to vote and to have a choice in adding 'luvabuck' to their community's water supply. They wore matching buttons and chanted, "It's Bad For Feet"! in their presentations to Legislators. They were met by persons representing Parents of 'Luvabuck' Poisoned Children, Citizens for Safe Water, Save the Fish, No Toxics!, and Bone Doctors United, who testified in opposition.

It was agreed that the Foot Chief of the Department of Health, Dr, Clark Sneer, would hold public hearings but under the following conditions: There were to be no questions, no discussion, no forum, no debate, and questions may be submitted to him in writing and would be answered if he felt like it.

The story you have just read is true. The names have been changed in the interest of National Security.