

Novacon 27

Progress Report 2



**Novacon 27: 14th to 16th November 1997
at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern,
with Guest of Honour Peter F Hamilton.**

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £25.00 until 1 April 1997, then £30.00 to 30th September when the price will rise again. Supporting membership costs £10.50. Cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 27" and sent to Carol Morton at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. Enquires regarding memberships and/or hotel bookings should be sent to Carol at the same address or you can call her on 01384-825386 (before 9pm).

Room Rates: £32.00 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms, £35.00 pppn for those sharing a four poster room, £28.00 pppn for those sharing a triple/quad room and £40.00 pppn for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). NB: Hotel booking forms, and deposits £20.00 per person, must be received by Carol Morton no later than 20th July 1997. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Abbey Hotel".

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for both the next three Progress Reports and for the Programme Book. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets): Progress Reports - Professional £23.00 (£12.50) full page, £13.50 (£7.00) half page, £7.50 (£4.00) quarter page.

Programme Book - Professional £45.00 (£22.50) full page, £25.00 (£12.50) half page, £15.00 (£7.50) quarter page.

Anyone interested in advertising should contact Martin Tudor at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX. Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines: Progress Report #3: 7th June 1997, to be mailed early July 1997.

Progress Report #4: 9th August 1997, to be mailed October 1997.

Programme Book: 27th September 1997, distributed at Novacon 27.

Book Room Rates: Tables will cost £15.00 each for the whole weekend. To book a table (or tables) you must be a member of the convention and complete and return the booking form enclosed with this Progress Report.

Committee: Martin Tudor (Chair & Publications), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX. Carol Morton, Registrations/Hotel Liaison and Tony Morton, Treasurer, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. Chris Murphy, Operations, 7 Mullion Drive, Timperley, Cheshire, WA15 6SL. Mike D Siddall, Programme, 133 Duke Street Akam-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA16 7AE, tel: 01229-462517, e-mail mds@askamike.demon.co.uk

Acknowledgements: Dave Mooring for his glorious cover and the artwork on page 11; Carol Morton and Mike D Siddall for their pieces; Tony Berry for his article; Graham Joyce, Peter Hamilton and CRITICAL WAVE for the interview. This Progress Report was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier, contact Martin Tudor at the above address for details of WAVE's competitive prices.

Chairman's Piece by Martin Tudor

You'll be glad to hear that I haven't much to say this time around - plans are progressing apace; the newly reorganised committee are pulling together well and, as you will read below, things are going very well.

If you're interested in helping out on the day (we especially need gophers for "steward duties") please contact Chris Murphy at 7 Mullion Drive, Timperley, Cheshire, WA15 6SL.

Our third Progress Report will be out in July - by which time Mr Siddall will doubtless have firmed up the programme and *everyone* will have course booked their hotel room! 'Bye for now....

Registrations by Carol Morton

Well done! After last year's panic about hotel rooms *most* of those of you who have joined Novacon 27 have already sent your hotel forms in to me.

However, due to an error on our part (well we are allowed to make small mistakes!) the original hotel forms that were available at Novacon 26 omitted to state that the hotel needs a deposit for the rooms. The deposit is £20.00 per person. Because of this you may find a note in your PR2 asking for a deposit, this can either be by cheque - made out to "The Abbey Hotel" or you can send me your credit/debit card number and its expiry date.

Anyone who has sent in a hotel form and a deposit up to the beginning of February should have had a confirmation from the hotel of their hotel booking. Anyone who sent in a hotel form without a deposit is assured of the room of their choice (except for the four poster doubles - more about that later). Be assured that even if someone sent in a deposit after I received your booking form, your room choice is secure and they will not be given preference over you.

Despite rumours to the contrary the Abbey hotel is *not* full. All of the single rooms and four poster doubles in the Abbey have been booked, but there are plenty of twins, doubles and triples left. If you wish to book a room on your own at The Abbey then you can still book a twin or double but will have to pay for double occupancy. If you do feel able to share a room I would be most grateful if you could let me know, as I am loath to send anyone out of the main hotel if it can be avoided.

Keep up the good works folks, and if you haven't sent in your form please do so as soon as possible.

Programme by Mike D Siddall

Picture yourself before a poster with a fiercely-bearded Martin Tudor pointing at you, below the Caption "NOVACON NEEDS YOU". Indeed it does, and I do too. There will be a program, and it will be brilliant beyond all human imagining; sensitive, yet leavened with a dash of vulgarity, serious but with a place for comedy, sexy but... well, you get the idea. All this assumes of course that lots of people come forward with ideas of coruscating genius and startling originality, but I can't see why not. Firstly

the theme, should you choose to accept it, is "Alternate Futures", if you can't work with that you're not the wonderful people I take you for. Secondly, the programme room is LARGE, particularly by last Novacon's standards, with a nice little stage. In other words, there shouldn't be too many physical limitations (although the Zero Gee Football is waiting on the latest word from CERN). Thirdly, I have absolutely no experience in this field whatsoever, which means I'm unlikely to turn down a really lunatic idea on the grounds that I've seen the ambulances queuing up the last time it was tried.

We're hoping to have a large event (with typical hubris on the part of conrunners, we're calling these "extravaganzas") on each night of the con. Something involving beer is planned for the Sunday, but that leaves two nights to fill. The Friday night may well feature a band and/or disco - negotiations continue. The Saturday will possibly have a Revue. This has the disadvantage of sounding dreadfully Oxbridge, but will hopefully provide a place for all those brilliant comedy sketches, spoofs, monologues, musical bits, etc. which don't fit easily into the usual length of a programme item. As soon as I get around to telling him, me and Dave Hicks are willing to run that one.

So, as usual it's really up to you. We're looking for any good ideas at this stage, and I'm certainly willing to listen to anything. Write me, call me, e-mail me, use a bloody carrier pigeon if you have to, but get in touch and we'll have some fun.

Mike D Siddall, 133 Duke Street Akam-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA16 7AE, tel: 01229-462517, e-mail mds@askamike.demon.co.uk

The Nova Awards by Tony Berry

What's happenin' dudes? Good to see the original Holly making a welcome appearance on RED DWARF. It brightened up what has been a disappointing series. It's just not the same without Arnold, and Kochanski is a poor substitute, at least in the shape of this actress. Isn't her Scottish accent good? So, what's this got to do with the Novas? Bugger all, but it's my column.

Some of those strange amateur magazine whatsits have dropped onto my doormat or been thrust into my sticky, so I'll list the eligible ones here:

ANSIBLE #111-116. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU.

ATTITUDE #10. Michael Abbot (John Dallman and Pam Wells), 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge, CB1 3QF.

BANANA WINGS #4-5. Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, CR0 6JE.

FTT #21. Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna, 15 Jansons Road, South Tottenham, London, N15 4JU.

GOTTERDAMMERUNG #9. Mark McCann, 40 Deramore Avenue, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT7 3ER.

LETTERSUB #12. Terry Hornsby, 66 Johns Avenue, Lofthouse, Wakefield, WF3 3LU.

PLOKTA #4-5. Steve Davies, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 2RP and Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 4RH.

POGONOPHOBIA #4. Alison Freebairn, 19 Wateryetts, Kilmacolm, Renfrewshire, PA 13 4QP.

SNUFKINS BUM #1^{1/2}. Maureen Kincaid Speller, 60 Bournemouth Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5AZ.

TAFFLON TUDOR #2. Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX.

THINGUMYBOB #15. Chuck Connor, Sildan House, Chediston Road, Wissett, near Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 0NF.

WALLBANGER #16. Eve Harvey, 8 The Orchard, Tonwell, Hertfordshire, SG12 0HR.

All of the above are available for "The Usual" - which generally means available for trade, contribution or if you send a large stamped address envelope to the editor in question you will doubtless receive a response.

[If you have any enquiries about the Novas or you want a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact Tony Berry at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.]

An Interview with Peter F Hamilton

[British sf author Peter F Hamilton was born in Rutland in 1960, and now lives near Rutland Water. He began writing in 1987 and made his first professional sale, to FEAR magazine, in 1988. MINDSTAR RISING, his first novel, was published by Pan in 1993 and followed by A QUANTUM MURDER in 1994, and then by THE NANO FLOWER in 1995; all three feature the psi-boostered private detective Greg Mandel. In addition to his professional sale of short stories to INTERZONE, IN DREAMS and NEW WORLDS, Hamilton's work appeared in a number of small press magazines in the late 1980s. Heralded as the most exciting "sf technician" currently working in Britain, his fourth novel, THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION, marked a new direction to space opera appearing in paperback from Pan in March 1997. The second volume in "the Night's Dawn" trilogy will be published in hardback by Macmillan in October 1997. Martin Tudor and Peter's sometime collaborator Graham Joyce spoke to him in March 1995. (This interview first appeared in its entirety CRITICAL WAVE #42, the first part of it was reprinted in our first Progress Report.)

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Martin Tudor: I think people will still want to read a book written by a person rather than by software....

Peter F Hamilton: How will you tell it's written by a person? Look, we're earning a living. I'm talking about the economic factor. At the very basic level, Graham and I do it to entertain, we do it to earn a living. It takes us nine months to a year to write a book. If an artificial intelligence computer comes along and can churn out one an hour...

Graham Joyce: Sorry to interrupt: I feel, now I don't know whether this is just like I'm defending my own corner or something and trying to justify what I do, but I reckon that you've got too much faith in technology if you think that a computer can generate work such as yours. Now, I accept that at one level they would be able to generate bloody good plots; you know, they might be able to analyse all options, they might be programmed to find out what's interesting. But I think that a book, like any piece of art, is more than the sum of just its meaning.

For example, I think when we read a book, we interpret it viscerally, we interpret it emotionally, it's not just a head thing. My argument is not that computers couldn't write them; my argument is that anybody interested in good fiction would spot them straight away.

You're thinking of electronic computers. I agree that an electronic computer can be programmed very well, and can be programmed with what we call Turing intelligence. Once you start getting into biological computers, you will not be able to tell the difference. Electronic computers will be able to write very effectively; they won't be able to create, because they are rational, they are designed, they have no "mystery" about them. Biological systems, especially if you start incorporating human neurones, will have these little chunks of bioware sitting on a desk and they will do the same job, and they can still have "mystery". I use the term "mystery" because that's what Greg Bear uses.

GJ: But how are these AI computers, sophisticated computers, going to interpret symbolism, for example, that addresses a very hazy sort of unconscious area of the human psyche? We don't even know it's there, actually. You can't say definitively that "This is a symbol of something."

If I use a tree with a branch or something, and it's a symbol, there's a certain illogicality that I reckon is going to defy a computer intelligence, however sophisticated. To string those things together, to add up to something in my psyche...

It can learn, it can learn as you learn and I learn, it can learn by example. It takes us 20 years to go from primary school to university; it will learn that in an hour. What we learn in 20 years, it will learn in an hour.

I don't know how long it will take before we develop this kind of bioware. The problem with that is more genetics than anything else. Once we learn how to map the genomes and manipulate them properly..

GJ: If I suspend my scepticism about this and assume that it can be done, for the minute, are you excited by this prospect or terrified by it?

Both. As I said, the social force of technology is something which is almost a runaway. I'll give you an example: the new gene screen that's coming on. There's been a lot of concern about it, you know. Should you screen for the gay gene? Should you screen

for this gene and that gene? A lot of the ethics committees at the moment are saying "No, you shouldn't", but you'll get clinics in the Caribbean where people will go and buy these tests on the black market. If your child is going to develop some illness, you want to know about it. It is a basic human instinct to want your child to have the best, and if this testing is available, people will use it, whether it's ethical or not. You can slow it down. You can never stop it. And as I said, the rush of technology which is developing is one of the factors in the books.

I don't know, as I say, what we will do economically when machines can do everything, when computers can create. Whether we will have isolated societies or communes which literally have nothing to do with computers, and just live a human existence. But as I say, the temptations.. Well, you see it in documentaries, where primitive tribes have Sony Walkmans and plastic bowls because they're more convenient, because they're easier. They're abandoning all their old ways of doing things because when you come into contact with a higher civilisation, with a higher technology, it filters down. So whether you would even be able to keep such communes going when the kids can look outside and see how other kids live and how they've got easier lives, because they're catered for in this "luxury" life.. I doubt they'd even keep it going past the first generation.

GJ: Returning to the business of reviews.. You've been well-reviewed by American reviewers. I've sensed you've been less well-reviewed by British reviewers. In one particular area, I've noticed that one or two reviewers have seen what you're doing in this as somewhat right wing. Now I don't think you're right wing, you're Pete from Oakham, you know, but you alluded to it a little bit earlier when you talked about that scene you created with the labourers offered a bunch of flowers to the largesse of this woman who'd given them all employment. I mean, what do you say to that?

Well, either I wrote the scene badly or it was misread, I don't know. The thing with this introduction of new technology was, Julia Evans appreciated you can't have everybody sitting behind a computer. The way I did it, it came over, because she is a billionaire, because she is very rich, because of who she was, she was "generously giving to the poor", which possibly I should have written differently.

I wanted to illustrate the fact that she wasn't just a technological, whiz-kid/follower or, if you like, technocrat. Part of this, as you say, was Renaissance England, and it was England. That was another thing I got called on, calling it England, which is imperialistic. He failed to notice that Scotland and Ireland were independent so, short of calling it Albion, I don't know quite I could have called it. *[Laughs]*

England had this very traumatic time during the Warming, followed by the PSP, which was not good for them. That was the other thing: I portrayed Socialists as bad guys, tragic stuff, and it actually says it in this book, that the best way to build, and build fast, is just rampant Capitalism. By the time this book comes along, it's slowing and it's got to stop. Even Julia says that. The New Conservatives are on the way out. That was a little irony that they might or might not pick up on, that this New Conservative party, that was voted in and encouraged all this Capitalism lasted for fifteen years, and stopped.

MT: The problem, I think, is that you do have as the "good guys" Event Horizon, an overtly capitalist, super-capitalist company leading the revival of Britain. So do you

really think that the only way out of economic depression of the kind you're writing about is out and out Capitalism?

Yes, Capitalism is a quick way to get out of recession. Whether it's a good way, depends on the individual. In the third book, I have actually slowed this growth down, and there's a big problem of slowing growth down: whether you should make decisions to consciously slow growth down. You get a lot of human fallout with the fast, grow, grow, grow policies of capitalism; you get the unemployment, you get low wages, you get union power diminished. It's not the best way, it is a quick way.

And that was the way in the books. They were doing it because they had sunk so far down, and also in the book the PSP has just been routed. People had had 10 years of this appallingly oppressive Socialist regime; they've swung violently to the right, as they would do. Had it been the other way round, had there been a terrible recession for a right wing regime, they would have swung as far to the left. I had to have the PSP for plot purposes in the background, so it built from that, which was, you know, probably another reason why it was deemed right wing at the time.

MT: Certainly, with the third novel, you've, as you say, begun to move away from this, and you've got the Nationalist party..

Free Wales?

MT: Yes. How do you see that developing, if at all?

Well, here and now, it is interesting in the way that the Labour party is pushing for this Scottish, and I think Welsh as well, national assembly. And, of course, we've got Ireland; will it be part of the UK?. I think part of the book, probably part of the way we're going, is that we have these fairly separate states, but we are all going to be under Europe. How small the individual units will be, I don't know. It will be interesting to watch this develop.

MT: In your next book, THE REALITY DISFUNCTION, you're moving away from near-future, to space opera. What can you tell us about it?

Er...

MT: Other than the fact that it's eight centimetres thick and likely to be two paperbacks...

Er, yes, slightly large, that's volume one. What can I tell you about it? Well, the reason I did it was — although Greg was a good start, I mean a great start for a writer to have, books that have been received that well — I either had to make the decision to go on writing Greg books for the next 20 years, or I branch out and do something new. As a writer, I had to branch out and do something new. I mean, from a commercial point of view, Pan would really have loved to have had four, five and six Greg books, but no, as a writer, I had to do something different.

The reason I chose space opera is that, firstly, you can be fairly inventive, you can let rip with your imagination. Secondly, when I was about 13, the first science fiction I ever got involved in was E E "Doc" Smith, the "Lensman" series. I read it when

I was 13 or 14 years old and I loved it, and I haven't read it again because I know it would be absolute rubbish if I read it today. But I have such beautiful memories of this pan-galactic battle going on for centuries. It's not quite an homage to it, but it's close.

It is a great field and I feel it's not been explored very much recently. I mean, we've got back to cyberpunk, we've got back into virtual reality, and everybody just sits at home typing at a keyboard. There's no actually getting out there and doing much again, which is a shame because it's such a beautiful field. You can do anything you want with it. For a writer, it's wonderful.

MT: Simon Green has gone into space opera; his "Deathstalker" series is being sold as a STAR WARS-style epic. Have you read the first volume?

Yes, but I don't think I'll be reading the others. I've mentioned this before, the way I develop the background. Simon basically hasn't developed the background. It's not just technology you've got to match; you've got to have the political effects of technology, how the economy's going to work. If you've got cybernetic factories and designers, then you've got to think about how all these factors fit together. Simon has a civilisation capable of building faster-than-light starships, they use blaster guns which can fire once every two minutes so that in between his heroes can have sword fights... If they can build faster-than-light starships, why not an Uzi? I'm sure he's got the idea there, but the background just hasn't been developed.

MT: He mentions at one point that they're just too boring or something, you know; machine guns and bullets are just old-fashioned, so people don't use them any more...

They just use swords instead?! *[Laughs]* Yeah, I think that's what I mean by not thinking out the background properly, but it is nice to see somebody trying to work in that field.

MT: THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION is the first volume of a trilogy; will the other two be as big?

I have a horrible feeling they're going to be, yes. I just started writing volume two; I start all my books with a fairly snappy short intro, and my snappy short intro chapter was 55 pages long.. So yes, I have a horrible feeling they might be. It's a very big story; you can't tell a story which involves a threat to something like 800 colonised planets in 250 pages, not if you're going to do it properly.

MT: Is it based on a Terran empire?

It's a fairly loose confederation. I did an analogy: today, we have everybody, at least the war lords of the third world countries, all scrambling around to acquire nuclear technology which the established powers are, for once, absolutely unified on trying to stop them acquiring. I have an equivalent in the future of anti-matter as being the ultimate terror weapon. So there's this confederation that has come together purely to police systems so they don't get this anti-matter technology. That's the main unifying factor. At the beginning of this confederation, there's the equivalent of the United Nations assembly, which hasn't got a lot of power, but it's there.

As usual, I'm into background details. If you have this kind of advanced technology, then there are going to be problems with it. What sort of problems would there be? Well, obviously the military, and if you can have an anti-matter pellet about the size of a pinhead, which is more powerful than the hydrogen bomb, you really have got to stop it being produced. Which is why they get together on a political level.

MT: After this trilogy, do you see yourself going back to Greg Mandel's world at some stage?

There's a novella in note form which I haven't written, the idea being if Pan want to do an omnibus edition in five years' time, I might put it in, so that you get something different as well. Then, of course, people who've got all the books will say "Eugh, I've gotta buy an omnibus just to get it"; you can't win. But yes, I might do a novella.

MT: Given the fact that you've got a novella in note form, and the way your writing tends to expand, don't you think it's going to become a fourth novel?

Ask me after I've written it. I don't know.

MT: Before he became a private detective, Greg Mandel was a member of the psi-boostered Mindstar Brigade. Given the popularity of the character, would you consider writing a prequel dealing with his time with the Brigade?

As writers have been known to kill their heroes off, there's a lot of tension you can build in if you don't know there's going to be another book, and the next book, and the next book. If I wrote about Greg back in the Mindstar days, it would become a bit too much James Bond-ish, because it's not "Is he gonna get out of it?", it's "How's he gonna get out of it?"

MT: How about dealing with the Brigade itself, the reasons and politics leading to its formation?

The technical reason is because it was possible; if anyone could develop this regiment of supermen, they have to do it, before someone else does. But as I say in the first book, once you've put these glands into people, the brain doesn't behave like a logical device. It doesn't come out the way you hoped. Therefore from that respect it was a bit of a failure.

They didn't have this regiment of supermen, they had a regiment of flawed people. I think all the other veterans who are in the Mindstar books all had psychological problems.

MT: Which is why it would make a good story...

I'll think about it, but not for a few years. It's a possibility. The other problem, of course, is that would have to be even closer to "our time". That would be a challenge....

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[Many thanks to Peter Hamilton, Graham Joyce, the Birmingham Science Fiction Group and the Leicester Science Fiction Group for their cooperation and help. Special thanks to Bernie Evans, for transcribing over three hours of tape. CRITICAL WAVE #42 are available from Martin Tudor at the address on page 2, for just £2.45.

Novacon members will be pleased to learn that Pan have just released THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION as one **large** (over 1200 pages!) paperback for £7.99 and that the second volume of Peter's "Night's Dawn" trilogy, THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST, will be published by Macmillan in October 1997. (The second volume ran to 1380 pages in manuscript!)]



Novacon 27 Membership as of 15.3.97

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