

Novacon 27

Progress Report 4



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

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £35.00 on the door. Enquiries should be 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: The Abbey is full, details regarding overflow hotels can be obtained from Carol Morton at the address above. Please note that members are responsible for making their own bookings at overflow hotels.

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for the Programme Book. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets):

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, (e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk).

The deadline for camera-ready advertising copy is 21st October 1997.

Book Room: No more tables are available. Enquiries regarding tables which have already been reserved should be addressed to Carol Morton at the above address.

Baby Sitting Service: Richard Standage and Helena Bowles are offering an informal, free, baby sitting service at the convention - on a privately arranged basis. For further details contact them at 116 Shireland Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4QJ (tel: 0121-558-7591).

Committee: Martin Tudor, Chair & Publications, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, (off Clarkes Lane,) Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1HX, e-mail martin@empties.demon.co.uk. Carol Morton, Registrations/Hotel Liaison and Tony Morton, Treasurer, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, tel: 01384-825386 (before 9pm). Chris Murphy, Operations, 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA, e-mail him on CSHM@compuserv.com. Mike D Siddall, Programme, 133 Duke Street, Askam-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA16 7AE, tel: 01229-462517, e-mail mds@askamite.demon.co.uk

Acknowledgements: Dave Mooring for the cover and interior art; Helena Bowles, Susan Francis, Carol Morton and Mike D Siddall for their pieces; John Dallman and ATTITUDE for permission to use their Not the Creche and How to Get There bits; Tony Berry for his fanzine list and How To Get There. 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

Despite the De Vere Group suddenly deciding to sell half a dozen of its best hotels - one of which was The Abbey - things are coming together quite well for the convention!

As you can read below the Programme is looking good; the main hotel is full but there is lots of space in the overflows (most of which are just a couple of minutes walk from the Abbey); as I write this the Souvenir Booklet is almost ready to go to the printers and the Programme Book is underway.

However, we still need help in the form of eager and willing warm bodies at the con: if you're interested in helping out on the day as a "gopher" - we especially need people for "steward duties" - please contact Chris Murphy at 126 McKean Road, Oldbury, B69 4BA or e-mail him on CSHM@compuserv.com.

Many thanks, see you soon!

Programme by Mike D Siddall

Amazing isn't it? Faced with this little programme piece, I am, for the first time in my life, stricken with writer's block. I suppose it's the mere contemplation of the many and varied wonders we have lined up for you lucky people that so afflicts me. Well, it's a theory.

For indeed we have a veritable smorgasbord, no, more of a Chinese banquet, perhaps a champagne breakfast....aren't you glad I'm blocked? Imagine how awful this piece would be if I wasn't. Taking a firm hand on the prose style, the programme should have a little something for everyone. This being a Novacon, there'll be all the usual auctions for the bargain hunters among you. For the gastronomes, there'll be the Oompah Band and Sausage evening (if you get your bloody fingers out and order, that is). On the more literary front, we've tried to provide a range of items following our theme of alternate futures. These range from panels on the future of the law to lighter quiz formats. Speaking of quizzes, there will be a music quiz (which, since it isn't being run by Tony Berry, will cover more than the years 1983 to....1984). All this and SF Blues too.

There will be silliness, what the hell, it's a convention, why not? A Pam Wells version of television's Fluke, a Turkey Reading (including the truly wonderful FIELD GUIDE TO ETs for the cognescenti), and a comedy revue, and... oooh, lots of things, you get the idea.

Then of course, there are all those things which didn't make it into the final selection, take a peek at this extract from the committee minutes...

THE DATING GAME... four women compete for the magnificent prize of a date with Mike Siddall. Carol Morton questioned the likelihood of getting four, or indeed any, volunteers. Martin Tudor pointed out that the programme wasn't supposed to be about the desperate fantasies of sad Cumbrians. Item rejected, one member dissenting.

FASHION PARADE... fans display all the very latest trends in the world of haute couture. Tony Morton asked just what Chris Murphy was smoking. Meeting ended in confusion after Chris passed some of it around. Mike Siddall still thinks there's a purple crocodile serving behind the bar.

FANNISH CHIPPENDALES... leading fannish Adonises put on a show for the ladies. All agreed this was a great idea. Unfortunately, Mike Siddall had to report that both Tony Berry and Mike Abbott had learned about being volunteered. Item abandoned.

Best of all, our excellent Guest of Honour, Peter Hamilton will be participating in many of the panels, so you shouldn't be short of some intellectual stimulation.

Oh, and don't forget the naked mud-wrestling on Friday night.

[We're always looking for good ideas (for future Novacons), and Mike is certainly willing to listen to anything. Write him, call him, e-mail him - he gets lonely - at 133 Duke Street, Askam-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA16 7AE, tel: 01229-462517, e-mail mds@askamite.demon.co.uk.]

Sausage and Oompah Evening

Sunday night at Novacon has never been like *this* before. Well, okay, a few years back at the Royal Anguish we did have a Beer and Sausage evening, but *that* wasn't like *this* - back then the noisiest thing was probably the bangers!

Yes, roll up, roll up!

For a *mere* £2.50 per person you get to stuff yourself on sausages and "mustard accompaniments" whilst listening to the dulcet tones {ahem} of our three-piece "Oompah Band" the one, the only, *Bavarian Schunklers*.

(Sorry, the beer you have to buy yourself - although the hotel is laying on *Stella Artois* for that Continental flavour).

Please complete the form that arrived with this Progress Report and return it (with your cheque for £2.50 per head) to Carol Morton, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS by the 25th October!

(Please note this event will be held on Sunday evening starting, at the earliest, around 7pm-7.30pm and running for a couple of hours.)

Registrations by Carol Morton

STOP PRESS!! - THE HOTEL IS FULL!

Everyone who sent in a hotel form should have either heard from the hotel or had their booking form and cheque returned by me. If that is not the case get in touch with me at the address below.

For those of you who have not got a room for this convention and want one, enclosed with this Progress Report will be a list of overflow hotels. It is now up to you to find yourself a room, the hotels on this list are by no means the only places to stay in Great Malvern, they are just the ones recommended by the Abbey Hotel. If you try to book a room and have problems, contact me and I'll do my best to help.

If you have booked art show space, dealer room space or a con table you should find a slip enclosed detailing what you have been allocated. If you think you have booked something and don't find a slip enclosed get back to me and I'll sort it.

One more thing if you want to attend the Oompah Band and Sausage night on the Sunday at the con and you haven't sent in your form, please send it and your cheque for £2.50 per person by 25th October 1997 as we have to give the hotel details of numbers.

Well, that's all I need to say except I'll see you at the con!

[Enquires regarding memberships and/or hotel bookings should be sent to Carol Morton at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS, or you can call her on 01384-825386 (before 9pm).]

NOT the Creche: Baby Sitting and Child Minding Service by Helena Bowles

Richard Standage, registered nurse working at the highly prestigious Birmingham Children's Hospital, and Helena Bowles, registered nurse at the totally non-prestigious Birmingham Heartlands hospital, will both be attending Novacon with their three-year-old son and baby daughter.

Whilst recent government legislation decrees that they cannot provide a creche, both are willing to provide baby sitting/child minding on a privately arranged basis. This requires parents to contact them in advance on 0121-558-7591 (or in writing to 116 Shireland Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4QJ). They will be caring for their own, and any other children with whose parents a private arrangement has been

reached, in an allocated room in the hotel which will hopefully have a bed, a cot and a kettle. They recommend all children be supplied with a selection of carefully labelled favourite toys/books. Babies will require nappies and changing equipment in a carefully labelled bag. Recently potty trained children will require a change of underclothing and trousers or skirt.

Richard and Helena will be happy to feed babies/young children if milk and baby food is supplied. Baby milk/food must be in pre-packaged bottles, as no refrigeration facilities will be available.

As there is no charge made for this service, extra pairs of hands on a voluntary basis will be greatly appreciated.



How to Get There by Road by Tony Berry

Find the M5. Drive along the M5 and leave at Junction 7 (Sign A44 Worcester). Then follow signs for A449 Malvern (The Malverns) and later for Ross and Malvern. Stay on the A449 Worcester Road all the way into Malvern (you'll come onto the big map overleaf in the north-west corner), past the park on your left and along until you come to an area with lots of shops and stuff. On the right you'll see a tyre and exhaust centre, and shortly on the left, the Foley Arms Hotel. Just after the hotel, bear left off the main road (not sharp left) and drop down to the left along Church Street. Turn right at the lights into Grange Road, past the Winter Gardens, and right into Abbey Road. Somewhere under all the ivy is the Abbey Hotel.

If you get lost, follow signs to the Winter Gardens in Grange Road.

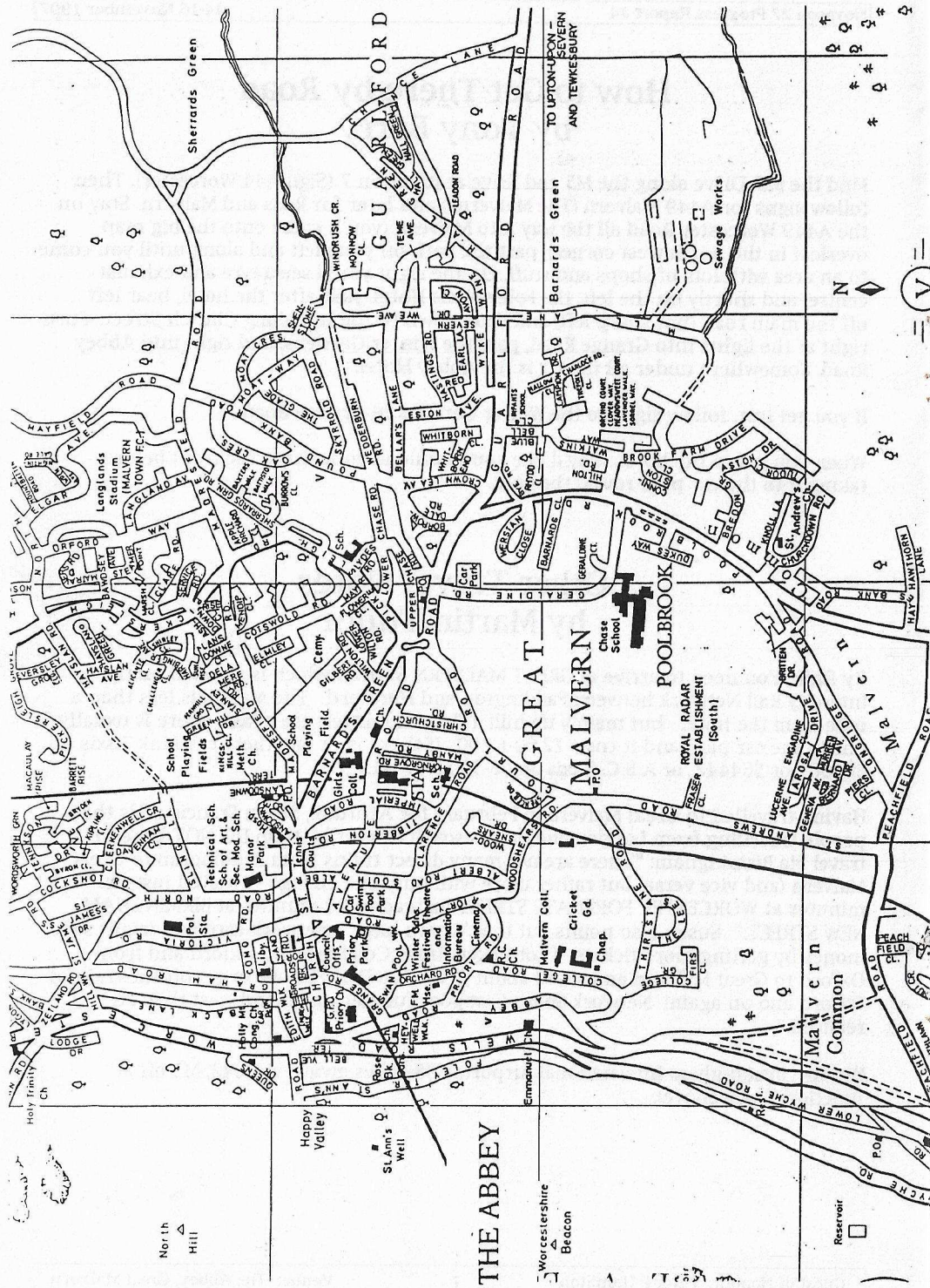
When you get to the hotel, they'd like you to unload your car at the front before taking it to the car park round the back.

Other Travel Notes by Martin Tudor

By Rail: You need to arrive at GREAT MALVERN Station which is situated on the Intercity Rail Network between Paddington and Hereford. The station is less than a mile from the hotel - but mainly up hill! (The Committee use a taxi - there is usually one in the car park and it costs £2.00-£3.00. If there isn't one there call Link Taxis on 566665 or 564442, or A.B.C. Taxis on 08-50-55-97-41.)

Having travelled to Great Malvern in February for Attitude, Susan Francis adds that people travelling from London and points south or east by train DO NOT have to travel via Birmingham: "There are not many direct trains from Paddington to Great Malvern (and vice versa) but rather more with only one change - I waited just ten minutes at WORCESTER FOREGATE STREET instead of 35 minutes at BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET." Susan also points out that "If you have a network card you might save money by getting more tickets. I got tickets from Colchester to Oxford and from Oxford to Great Malvern and saved about £10. You DON'T have to get off the train at Oxford and on again! Network South East goes further north and west than I'd realised."

By Air: Birmingham International Airport is 38 miles away - via M42, M5 off at Junction 7 (see above).



North Hill

THE ABBEY

Worcestershire
Bracon

Reservoir

Malvern Common

POOLBROOK
ROYAL RADAR
ESTABLISHMENT
(South)

GREAT
MALVERN

GUARDIAN ROAD

Sherrards Green

Barnards Green

Sewage Works

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The Reality Dysfunction by Peter F Hamilton - a Review by Mike D Siddall

If one thinks of one's brain as one of those Seventies skiffy movie computers, all blinking lights and chattering teletypes, then 30 pages into this novel mine was all flashing red warning lights and staccato outputs of "datadump alert, datadump alert". That I eventually reached that blissful state, known only to the avid reader, of being absolutely furious that the bloody book was finished is a testimony in itself. A testimony to the skill with which the inevitable datadump associated with the depiction of an exceedingly complex universe was merged into the telling of such an inevitably intricate tale.



Actually it wasn't until I put THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION down that I started to realise with what technical skill it had been put together, which I suppose is another testimony. This time to the unobtrusive way the said skill was deployed, i.e. the author not banging the reader over the head with how clever he's being. Take names as an example.

Now, I will freely admit to being terrible with names, the sort of person who really needs those Dramatis Personae lists some books have. Give me a copy of something as simple as THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE, and halfway through I'll be muttering "Zaphod, Zaphod, which one's he fergodsake". Yet TRD has dozens of characters, even the central hero Joshua Calvert, appears episodically and it's not until halfway through the novel that you begin to suspect he is the hero, yet this confusion didn't hit me once. This is what I call narrative technique, and Hamilton achieves the effect by always having some kind of cue which triggers the associations that identify the character. This is difficult to explain briefly, but I'll try with an example. In the latter part of the novel, there appear a band of mercenaries who have been heavily modified both biologically and with weapons implants to fit their function. Rather than simply starting a chapter with e.g. "Reza pushed his way through the jungle foliage..." and then launching into a descriptive passage, the first thing Reza does is, say, fiddle with the gauss rifle implanted in one of his arms. This immediately cues you that this is one of the said mercenaries rather than one of the numerous spies, journalists, politicians, farmers, aliens, starship captains etc, etc, who make up the rest of the story. This means that Hamilton can have as many descriptive passages as he likes without losing momentum while I frown and try to figure out who the hell he's talking about. Hamilton never makes the mistake of letting his more colourful passages get in the way of the overriding imperative of telling the tale. A 900 page novel without a single longeur, as a reader I'm duly grateful.

You must have guessed by now that I'm desperately trying to put off a description of the plot. Partly this is because it's not an easy plot to summarise, but mainly because it's difficult to know what to say without ruining the author's carefully arranged series of revelations. I doubt if he'd thank me and if you read this book, a course of action I highly recommend, I doubt you will either. I did try listing some of the elements that went into the story, but when my list ran to half a page before I'd even reached void-hawks (a form of intelligent, organic spaceship, telepathically bonded to a human partner) I began to think this approach wouldn't work. After all, voidhawks were as important to the story as the Laymill, or Nanotechnology, or doomsday weapons, or the Saldanas, or... I think you see my problem. Well, I'll give it a go.

TRD takes place a few centuries from now. Humans have divided into two camps; Edenists, who are genetically engineered to be telepathically connected to their highly advanced, biologically engineered, artifacts, even achieving a form of immortality by merging themselves into a kind of group mind after death, and Adamists, more conventionally human, although making varying use of high-tech nanonics. TRD is set in a sprawling sort of a universe, with a major power, the Confederation, middling powers such as the Saldana dynasty, aliens, and struggling colonies. Add into this brew the sentient, living habitats and ships of the Edenists, and there's plenty of scope for all sorts of societies and peculiar governing systems to develop, the possibilities of which don't escape the author.

A large part of the action centres around two locations. The first, Tranquillity, is an independent habitat-state founded by one of the Saldana nobles, whose primary function was to serve as a study-base for the Ruin Ring. The Ring is all that remains of an alien race, the Laymill, who committed racial suicide for unknown reasons. The base has now become an important economic centre, but still retains its' original function. It's here we meet two of the most important characters, Joshua Calvert, a possibly psychic starship captain and merchant adventurer, and Ione Saldana, the Lord of Ruin, sole ruler of Tranquillity. The second location, is Lalonde, a first stage colony planet struggling with all the usual problems.

While Joshua is having various adventures, one of which leads to a breakthrough for the team Ione has investigating the Laymill mystery, Something Horrible (Classified, see above under "giving away the plot") happens on Lalonde, and the main story concerns the developments of these two things. Of course, the reader knows that all these people, places and events are going to intersect, but it's the skill with which this is carried out that marks out a story on the epic scale from one which is merely very, very long. Can the author seduce the reader into involvement? Can he inveigle the reader into speculating as to what's really going on? Can he con the reader into thinking he's clever for spotting the plot twists before they happen? Most importantly, can he get him to fork out hard cash for the next instalment?

The answer in this case is yea, yea and thrice yea. This is Space Opera all right, and of the highest class. What makes Space Opera anyway? Beats me, but I know it when I see it. TRD starts with a big space battle, and closes with an even bigger one, it's stuffed to the gills with gadgets, there are aliens and, above all, it has a Big Theme. And what a Big Theme it is, what could be bigger than...whoops, Classified again, mustn't let the cat out of the bag. All that makes it Space Opera, but what makes it excellent Space Opera are the lyrical touches liberally scattered throughout. I'd hate to leave you with the idea that this was a novel merely for the techno-wonks, for example there's a description of a voidhawk mating flight that positively delighted me. The idea that a sufficiently advanced technology would design its artifacts with a reproductive system chosen purely for its' sheer poetry is the sort of thing I love to see in a novel.

It's not all praise, there is a flaw in the book, and it's a seriously annoying one. To say TRD ends abruptly is one of those understatements that ranks with saying that the Tories didn't do as well as they hoped in the last election. One minute you're happily banging along with tricky manoeuvres through Lagrange points and blasting the living daylights out of Things in the Lalonde jungle, the next you're frantically taking a razor to the back cover in the hope of finding just one more chapter, and assuring yourself that Martin will understand what you've done to his copy. At 3am in the morning and hyped-up with the need to find out what happens, this can seriously piss you off. I know this probably can't be avoided when a trilogy is planned, but the stopping point is badly chosen in my opinion.

Still, it's the only time Hamilton drops the ball throughout this very long novel, and at least it's a flaw easily corrected by the rapid release of the next instalment. Given the

long-standing Siddall tradition of giving Mike books as presents, I'm prepared to curb my impatience and give the author plenty of time to release the final two volumes.

This Christmas will do.

[THE REALITY DYSFUNCTION is available in paperback priced at £7.99, and THE NEUTRONIUM ALCHEMIST, the second volume of Hamilton's "Night's Dawn" trilogy, has just been published in hardback priced £17.99 - however I don't think the third volume will be out by Christmas Mike!]

The Nova Awards by Tony Berry

Created in 1973 by the late Gillon Field, the Nova Awards are presented annually for work in fanzines. Until 1981 only one award was presented, to "Best Fanzine" and decided by a committee of well-known fans. In 1977 voting was extended to all "Active Fans" who were members of Novacon, and then in 1981 two further awards were added: "Best Fanwriter" and "Best Fanartist". For a fanzine to qualify for the 1997 award, one or more issues must have been published between 1st October 1996 and 30th September 1997. For a writer or artist to qualify, they must have had at least one piece of work published for the first time between those dates.

A "Fanzine" is defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with sf, fantasy, sf and fantasy fans and related subjects, copies of which may be obtained in exchange for other fanzines or in response to letters of comment. An "Active Fan" is defined as someone who has received six or more different fanzines during the year (different publications, not different issues of the same publication. The various official organs of a group, society or convention do not count as different fanzines). Voting is open to full or supporting members of Novacon 27 who meet the requirements above, and can be made by post (you should find a ballot with this Progress Report) and at the convention itself.

Qualifying fanzines received since Progress Report #3 are: ANSIBLE #122. Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. BANANA WINGS #7. Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Road, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, CR0 6JE. PLOKTA Vol 2 No 4: PLOKTARATCHIK. Steve Davies, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berks., RG30 2RP and Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 4RH. RAILINGS #2. Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ. SQUIGGLEDY HOY. Bridget Hardcastle & Simon Bradshaw, c/o 13 Lindfield Gardens, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

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 know of any fanzines not listed above which you believe to be eligible please contact me at my address below. Equally if you have any enquiries about the Novas or you want a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact me, Tony Berry, at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.

New Novacon 27 Members Since 3rd August 1997

- 242 Christina Lake
- 243 John Bray
- 244 Julie Rigby
- 245 John Mowatt
- 246 Alex McLintock
- 247 Darrol Pardoe
- 248 Paul Billinger
- 249 Elizabeth Billinger
- 250 Vikki Lee France
- 251 Steve Jeffery
- 252 K Lukawski
- 253 D Morgan
- 254 Al Johnston
- 255 Rochelle Dorey
- 256 Alan Baum
- 257 Donya Hazard White
- 258 Debra Kerr
- 259 Ian Sales
- 260 Laurence Matthews
- 261 David Angus
- 262 Sue Oliver
- 263 Dave Thomas
- 264 Marcus Smith
- 265 Chris Davenport
- 266 Justin Ackroyd
- 267 Pat McGowan
- 268 Phil Greenaway
- 269 Matt Kiessling
- 270 Chris Brooks
- 271 Adam Leci
- 272 Jeffrey Sanda
- 273 Dave Clements
- 274 Eve Westwood
- 275 Jane Rogers
- 276 Graham Head
- 277 Keith Brooke

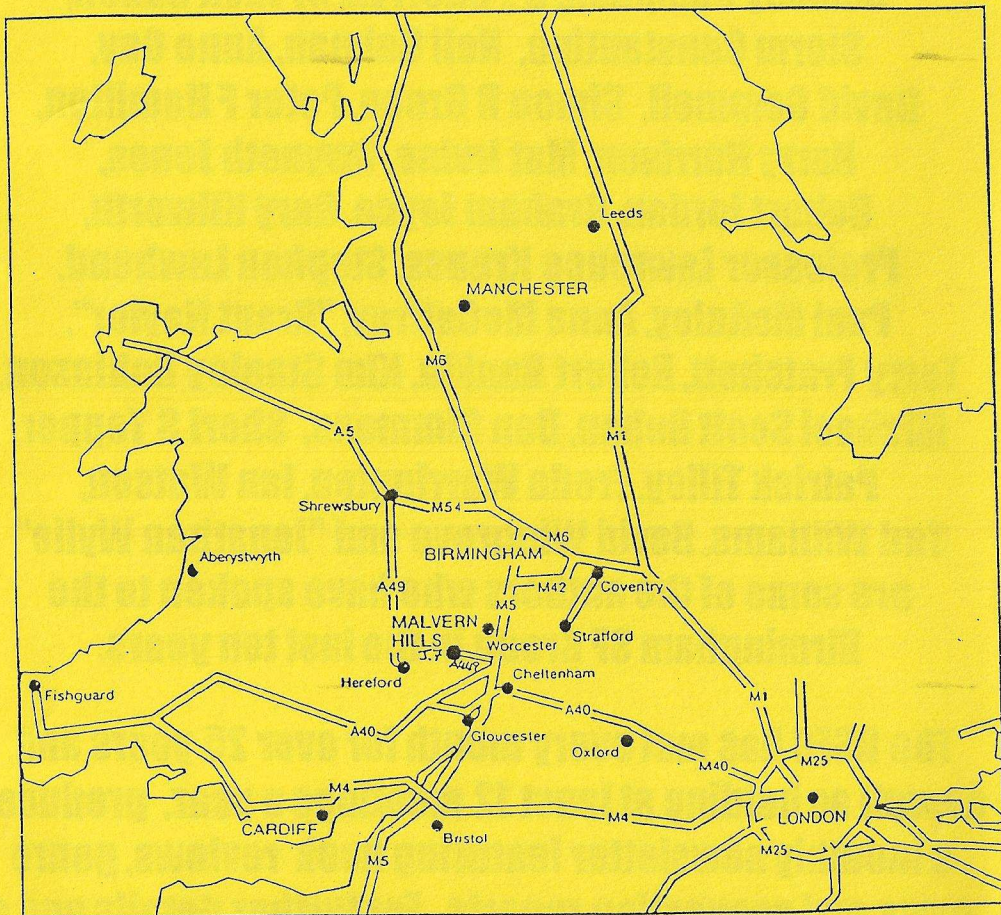
INTERESTED IN SCIENCE FICTION ? WHY NOT MEET THE AUTHORS!

Brian W Aldiss, Iain Banks, Greg Bear, David Brin, Ramsey Campbell, C J Cherryh, Dr Jack Cohen, Storm Constantine, Neil Gaiman, Anne Gay, David Gemmell, Simon R Green, Peter F Hamilton, Harry Harrison, Mat Irvine, Gwyneth Jones, Robert Jordan, Graham Joyce, Gary Kilworth, Professor Lawrence Krauss, Stephen Lawhead, Paul McAuley, Anne McCaffrey, "Grant Naylor", Terry Pratchett, Robert Rankin, Kim Stanley Robinson, Michael Scott Rohan, Dan Simmons, Sheri S Tepper, Patrick Tilley, Freda Warrington, Ian Watson, Tad Williams, David Wingrove and "Jonathan Wylie" are some of the authors who have spoken to the Birmingham SF Group in the last ten years.

The BSFG has met every month for over 25 years and, as well as holding at least 12 meetings a year, produce a monthly newsletter featuring book reviews, genre news and convention reports. For further details and a FREE copy of the newsletter call either Tony Morton on 01384-825386, Alan Woodford on 0121-532-1110 or e-mail bsfg@bortas.demon.co.uk.

THE MALVERNS

- ROAD - M5
JUNCTION 7/8
Follow signs for Malvern
and Winter Gardens.
Hotel is opposite
Winter Gardens.
- RAIL - GREAT MALVERN
STATION 1/4 MILE
- AIR - BIRMINGHAM
INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT 38 MILES



Four stations: Great Malvern, Malvern Link, Colwall and Ledbury, serve the district, with rail routes stretching east to London, north to Birmingham and south west towards Bristol, Cornwall and Devon.