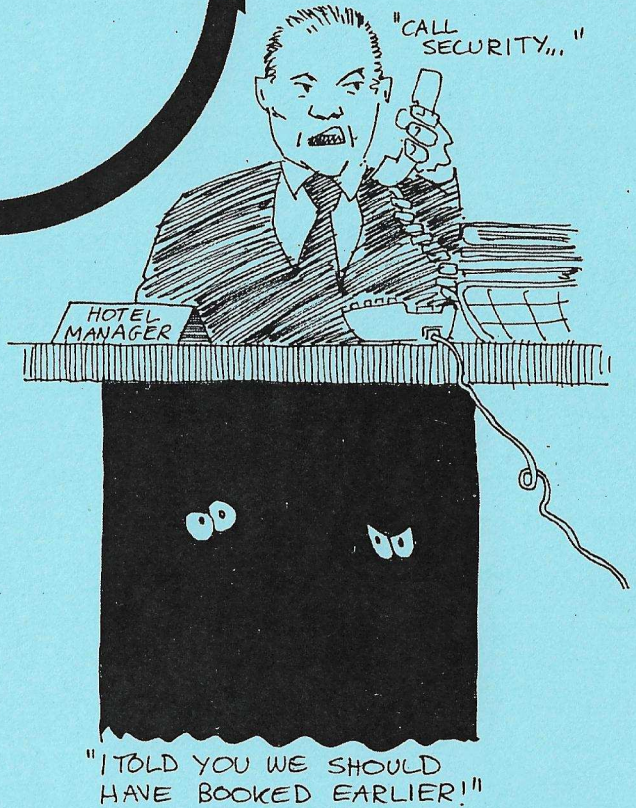


NOVACON 32



PROGRESS REPORT THREE

"A potentially exciting Novacon! Who would ever have dreamt of the day?"

- Rob Newman

Novacon 32 The Vital Statistics

How Much? Attending membership is:

- £35 after Easter until 20th October 2002
- £40 on the door.
- Supporting membership costs £15 throughout.

Postal registrations should be received by **20th October 2002**, after this time please join on the door. Daily rates will be available on the door at £10 Friday, £20 Saturday and £15 Sunday. Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 32" and sent with your completed form(s) to: **Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ**. Further information from <http://www.novacon.org.uk>.

Accommodation: Room rates held to last year's prices! £32 per person per night for double or twin rooms and £45 pppn for singles (inclusive of full English breakfast). A deposit of one night's stay per person (£32 per person twin/double or £45.00 per person in a single), cheques payable to "The Quality Hotel" MUST be enclosed, or details of your credit card, and sent to **379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ** by 30th September 2002, e-mail enquiries to xl5@zoom.co.uk or tel. 0114-281-1572.

Advertising: We welcome advertising for both the next two Progress Reports and the Programme Book. For details see inside back page.

Dealer's Room: 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 fill in the relevant section on your membership form or contact Steve Lawson

Committee:

- **Chairman** Martin Tudor 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net);
- **Secretary** Cat Coast, 1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ (david.hicks70@ntlworld.com) NOTE NEW E-MAIL;
- **Treasurer** David T. Cooper, 3 Yate Lane, Oxenhope, Keighley, West Yorks., BD22 9HL (elwher@ic24.net);
- **Programme** Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B927LQ (ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk);
- **Publications** Dave Hicks, postal address as Cat Coast's above, (david.hicks70@ntlworld.com); NOTE NEW E-MAIL;
- **Registrations** Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (xl5@zoom.co.uk);
- **Operations** Alice Lawson postal address as Steve Lawson's above (fab@zoom.co.uk).

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Novacon 32 The Glen Miller Sound

Chairman's Address by Martin Tudor

"I wanted a future and a world that was not the white man's western world writ large across the heavens, but one that drew on many cultures, many races, many philosophies. It's never formally stated, but the hints are there if you look for them, that on the Mars of *Desolation Road* the white race is a tiny minority. Beyond the Third World, Mars is the Fourth World, the Fifth World." *

Desolation Road is in many ways the quintessential McDonald novel: vigorous colourful, multi-faceted and *alien*. Ian has stated that bored as he was with "a particular school of science fictional dogma that holds that the good in science fiction is that which most closely resembles the streetwise thriller", * he wanted to show that it "was possible to write a science fiction novel not as a bad imitation of Raymond Chandler, but as a *magic realist* novel" *. In *Desolation Road* he certainly succeeded: the juxtaposition of the Sound of Glen Miller and the Martian fighting machines of Herbert George Wells; fortune-telling with the balls on a snooker table and playing snooker against the Devil; time travel; little green men; and (the ultimate fanzine reviewer) the Amazing Scorn, Mutant Master of Scintillating Sarcasm and Rapid Repartee! Magic realism indeed.

In Progress Report #1 I wrote of my first encounter with *Desolation Road* back in the late eighties and how stunned I was by "the vigour and power of that bleak tale". Now, having re-read *Desolation Road* this week, I cannot imagine why I had remembered the story as "bleak"... Apart from the initial setting of the arid red desert of Mars there is nothing "bleak" about *Desolation Road*. Vivid, colourful and vibrant certainly, but not bleak.

I described *Desolation Road* as bleak because I remembered it as a pessimistic tale of violence and hopelessness in a distant dystopia. But this week as I re-read it I felt it was clearly an optimistic tale full of promise for the future of intelligent life! A question of interpretation? Or perhaps it depends on one's mood at the time you read it. But as we learn in the first chapter the town shouldn't have been called *Desolation Road* it should have been *Destination Road* – but Dr Alimantando was drunk when he slurred its name...

Novacon itself is, of course, open to as many interpretations. Frequently charged with the crime of being uninspired and unchanging; it is at least as

often condemned by long-time attendees for altering its format or fiddling with its winning formula. Those of us, such as myself, who have been involved in running Novacons for a while are well aware we are guilty on *all* counts. Novacon's greatest strength *and* its greatest weakness is its longevity and its familiarity and it is often a tough job to get the balance right.

Each year we strive to retain the successful ingredients which give each Novacon the same flavour as the last, to continue the ongoing party which started in 1971, while at the same time spicing up the mix with something surprising. Each year we try to strike a balance between the literary, fannish and scientific elements of the convention.

Last year we struggled to find a way to complement our impressive Guest of Honour Gwyneth Jones (aka Ann Halam), but eventually we were fortunate enough to secure the services of that one-woman scientific programme stream the fascinating Inge Heyer and rounded off the fannish side by shooting Mike D. Siddall.

This year we are faced with another challenge -- how to reflect and complement the variety and quality of Ian McDonald's work within our convention.

As far as the science is concerned we soon realised we were unlikely to match the indefatigable Inge Heyer this year, so we have persuaded two men to take her place! Friday night will feature former trainee astronaut and Government space research scientist Gerry Webb on commercial space technology. While Sunday will feature the convention debut of Kevin Warwick, Professor of cybernetics at Reading University and author of *I, Cyborg* – but better known in tabloid circles as the Bionic Man! The fannish flavour will be provided by a slideshow from the TAFF-winning Tobes and a debate on the future of Unicons.

With all this going on and the Quality Hotel's wonderful food and drink to assimilate it is no wonder that so many members don't plan on sleeping! At least that's how it appears when nearly 80 of our 183 members have not yet booked a hotel room!

PLEASE if you haven't yet booked your room use the hotel booking form enclosed with this Progress Report! We've even arranged for Hotel Deposits to be taken by credit card to make it *even easier* for you! The Hotel are only holding all of their rooms for us until the 20th October 2002 – after that they will be releasing them to the general public and *you*

could find yourself walking up that hill from the Travel Inn! But apart from that, the more bodies in beds that are confirmed the stronger our position with the Hotel to negotiate cheaper food and drink... Help us to help you – book now.

*** Ian McDonald from the Author's Afterword to the Bantam edition of *Desolation Road*.**

Novacon 32 A Little Technical Difficulty

By Dave Hicks

On July the first I got a mildly stressed e-mail from Steve Lawson: "The web site appears to have changed to a medical information page, please check for yourselves in case my browser's gone cuckoo."

He, in turn, had received a confused message from Elaine Coates saying: "I was trying to find Novacon 2002 on the web, but the only link the searches threw up was www.novacon.org.uk which provided me with useful information on hysterectomies."

Naturally, I panicked and assumed our web address had been hijacked in some nefarious and unspecific way by techno-pirates in China or somesuch. Disaster! Without ready access to all thirty five clauses and nine appendices of the Nova rules*, fandom would just pine away to nothing.

"Novacon 32," they'd say, "you know where you can stick it."

I logged on and had a look. Sure enough, where Novacon's beautiful web site had been was a set of patient's notes for those about to undergo a variety of icky procedures written by a senior gynaecologist, one Dr Derek McLintock.

The brighter specimens among you are beginning to suspect, aren't you? Yes indeed, our site is hosted by none other than well-known fannish technophile *Alex* McLintock at his *Diverse Books* site.

I e-mailed Alex. "Do you," I wrote, "by some small chance, perhaps, just happen to have a relative who is a gynaecologist? And by the way, what the **** has happened to our web site?"

"Well, sort of..." replied Alex at first. Sort of? "He's my dad." Call me simple,

but I'd have imagined a gynaecologist would be pretty definite about something like paternity. It turned out that while reconfabulating all the frimmostats (you think I should be more technical? I agree. Ask Alex about my dreadful, clunky HTML sometime) on his server, Alex had moved it and stunned the tiny magic pixies inside the computer who were responsible for addresses.

Never mind, it was only a few days. And fans are not ones to ignore fresh knowledge, are you? Not to mention the ideas it's given me for live action displays when I do the programme again next year (don't sit in the front row).

*What do you mean: "you didn't even know there were any rules"?

Novacon 32 Future Remix: An Interview with Ian McDonald

By Nick Gevers

INTRODUCTION

Ian McDonald, surely one of Britain's most significant SF writers, is both a pyrotechnic stylist and a deeply humane socio-political commentator. His novels and stories are frenetic, colourful, allusive, hilarious; they comprehensively mix and recombine Twentieth Century history and popular culture with the speculative gists of SF and Fantasy, the radical conceptual sleights and off-the-wall dialects of genre fiction. A long-time resident of Northern Ireland, McDonald sees the contemporary world from the margins, from the materially impoverished but always vibrant and adaptable perspective of the teeming populations of the excluded peripheries of the globalised order. He gives the Third World a needed science-fictional voice, but always with brilliant lyrical inventiveness, always with supreme narrative flair...

McDonald's novels, while invariably fresh and distinct, form identifiable thematic clusters. The condition of Ireland is explored in a trio of superficially unrelated books, the magnificent fantasy of archetypes *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (1991), the extravagant far-future picaresque *Hearts, Hands, and Voices* (1992, published in the USA as *The Broken Land*), and an incisive near-future police procedural with aliens, *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996). Satire on systems of social repression informs *Out on*

Blue Six (1989), a Vonnegutian revolutionary comedy, and *Necroville* (1994, retitled *Terminal Café* in the US), a kaleidoscopic vision of a world whose proletariat consists of the resurrected dead. Africa is liberated from its present chaotic dependency by a protean extraterrestrial infestation in *Chaga* (1995, published in America as *Evolution's Shore*), *Kirinya* (1998), and the chapbook novella *Tendeleo's Story* (2000). And there is the transplanted Third World of McDonald's terraformed Mars, the setting for both his esteemed first novel, *Desolation Road* (1988) and his latest book, *Ares Express* (2001).

The richness of these full-length works is on display also in McDonald's many fine short stories, some of which are collected in *Empire Dreams* (1988) and *Speaking in Tongues* (1992); important unassembled tales include *The Best and The Rest of James Joyce* (1992) and *The Days of Solomon Gursky* (1998), a cosmic follow-up to *Necroville*. Indeed, various of McDonald's shorter fictions share and illuminate the locations of his novels; but others are vigorously independent, for example the lyrical cyberpunk novella *Scissors Cut Paper Wrap Stone* (1994). *Kling Klang Klatch* (1992) is an idiosyncratic graphic novel featuring text by McDonald and artwork by David Lyttleton. McDonald's next novel is to be a huge epic of mid-Twenty First Century India, *Cyberabad*.

I interviewed Ian McDonald by e-mail between March of 2000 and June of 2001.

THE INTERVIEW

NG: Your background sounds like an interesting and varied one — long-term residence in Northern Ireland, travels in Third World countries such as Kenya. How has this shaped your SF writing? Would it be fair to describe you as an author dedicated to the evocation and discussion of the plight and potential of ordinary people in “developing” and conflict-ridden regions of the world?

IMD: Little bit of personal history first: I was born in Manchester to a Scottish father and an Irish mother and came over to Northern Ireland when I was five — a place which places a certain importance on “identity”. I grew up on the margins of the margins, so it's probably inevitable I'd be attracted to a marginal, outsider's literature. Likewise, I'd naturally identify with the marginalised, those outside the mainstream of *Koka Kola Kultur*: the developing and the conflict-ridden, as you put it. You write about what you see around you, and you don't pass the greater portion of your life through the “Troubles” without some identification with similar conflicts in the developing

world.

I'd use the expression "Third World" only in the sense that I include Northern Ireland as a Third World country: a society of two significant social groups that have been set against each other by historical engineering; a skewed economic infrastructure based on the public sector, with a highly economically significant samurai elite (the RUC); a highly-politicised population with the ability to arm itself to the teeth if it's disregarded; a post-colonial process of disengagement that failed half-way through; physical marginalisation, poor infrastructure, a monied class rapidly moving upwards that is yet unable to engage fully in either Irish or UK society; the sense of cultural inferiority that forces both social groups into re-engineering of their cultural tropes....

This is getting worthy and boring. My point is, there's more dynamic for change in "Third World" societies than in the West. Where there's change, there's conflict and where there's conflict, you have story. I've never been attracted to the "aristocratic" model of science fiction – wunderkinder, the dynastic model, the Hidden Prince. It strikes me as a singularly irresponsible way to rule billions of sentients: when the going gets tough, the supreme executive saddles up and heads off into the thick of tough. Like sending Blair to Kosovo at the head of a division of Household Cavalry. (Then again...) This may come from the fact that a lot of science fiction is historical fiction set in the future. Me, I like ordinary people who get catapulted into extraordinary events, like Sweetness in *Ares Express*. Certainly, I'll be exploring "Third World" science fiction for a couple of volumes to come; I like the way that the tropes and assumptions of SF mutate and transform when they hit a totally different society from the one in which they were bred: that's why I mentally subtitle *Cyberabad* "A Khyberpunk novel".

NG: Another very prominent feature of your writing is your (an inadequate adjective) poetic prose style. How did this style develop? Was it influenced by any modern authors in particular?

IMD: There's a certain "either/or" theory of writing that I've never subscribed to: either you have a good story or you have good characters, either you have a mile-a-second plot, or you have good language. This strikes me as defeatist; surely, the idea is to have both/and/all? I do care about language in a book: that's why I have to plot everything in detail before I actually get down to fingers on keys, otherwise I'll be so preoccupied with what happens and how that I'll forget it's ultimately words on a page, and those might as well be (I hope) well-chosen words.

Also, I do come from a different literary environment from the English Bourgeois Dispassionate School: one in which poets are (often over-) esteemed and verbal dexterity – particularly in spoken language -- is valued. The mix? It's all mix:

Joyce is in there, of course, the everyday hyperbole of Thomas Kinsella's translation of *The Tain*, Blake – as always. A lot of it is just hearing the way sounds bounce off each other in my head, some words resonate better off each other; balancing syllables, stresses in a proper name, all that stuff. You hear magic dialogue and language everywhere; it's just listening. Nowadays, as I read virtually no fiction, I'm more reliant on overheards than ever, otherwise I'd descend into parodies of McDonald style.

NG: It's frequently been commented that you quote and rework texts by other writers in your own fiction — very much a postmodern technique, and one you employ very skilfully, in a sort of transcendent parody. What has motivated this tendency?

IMD: So? Doesn't everyone? The most commonly levelled charge is about the *Chaga Saga* recapitulating *The Crystal World*. Can't list that sample on the sleeve notes. I've never read Ballard: I've never taken to all that Home Counties pining-for-Empire/degeneration stuff. I've been living in the last days of empire for most of my life, and it gives you quite a different perspective. Historical necessity. There's still a big cultural hang-over from the Victorian romantic ideal of artist as quasi-divine creator: a quick, agonised commune with the muse and it all pours out of his head, perfect and complete and new upon the world. This is an historical blip; Classical and Baroque composers quite happily drew (improved) upon themes written by other composers. Screenwriting seminar with a guy whose greatest fear was that someone or something might influence and thus taint his purity of finish with "derivativeness". Nonsense. Everything influences you. To deny that is to deny any attempt to produce art at all. Writing is pure response to the world. Everything is part of the mix. I've – what we call "post-modernism" is simply not an adequate term for what's happening here; for a start, too much of it is self-aware, preening and dishonest. Irony? Get out of here. "Modernism" is just so last century now. I'd call our developing cultural trend to use the wads of information surrounding us and our access to it, to create micro-cultures, "modern-modernism". It's modern in that it's a product of our technological ability to surf, sample and mix, rather than concentrating on trans-historical sources, as in the academic definition of the term. Anyone with an eye on the zeitgeist would agree that the art of the ed it will be the cultural skill of the new century.

NG: How do you conceive and develop your novels and stories? What comes first -- the concept, or the style and imagery?

IMD: It is a long slow process. The idea always comes at once: I still drive daily past the traffic lights where *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* appeared all at once, entire while I was waiting at red. After that, it can take years for the story to grow to the point where it can tell itself. Nothing's clear yet, just an idea and a feeling. It's like a planet forming: narrative gravity attracts ideas, characters, scenes. After the initial "I'd like to write about..." glow, there's usually a moment when characters, story and voice all fall into place simultaneously. By "voice", I mean the way the story's going to tell itself: stylistic conceits, like the idea of Story as story in *Ares Express*, or how the opening of *Chaga* and the closing of *Kirinya* are modelled around John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* to (hopefully) evoke a transcendent stillness. I'm very much an image-driven writer, I have to be able to see stuff in my inner cinema, and images very much form the seeds of stories: key images for *Cyberabad* are the high-speed train carrying Mr Nandha the AI assassin across the Indo-Gangetic plain, the rooftop farm, a garland of orange flowers floating on a river, the dry rain clouds in the south and the dog that is beaten to death for defending a guava tree.

NG: Throughout your career, you've produced a steady flow of highly atmospheric short stories, the earlier of which appear in *Empire Dreams* and in *Speaking in Tongues*. Do you have a particular affection for the short form, despite its low rate of pay?

IMD: There are story ideas, and there are novel ideas. Sometimes, as in *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day* and *Towards Kilimanjaro*, the story becomes a novel; then, as in *Tendeleo's Story*, the novel becomes a story again. Everything has its natural length; but I do like a good, tight short story – it was Harlan Ellison's short fiction that really made me want to write. I often use stories as a way of introducing ideas I'm going to explore over a series of works: the *Chaga* (which began with *Towards Kilimanjaro*, a novelette), the Shi'an in the stories (*The Undifferentiated Object of Desire*, *Frooks*, *Legitimate Targets*) and then *Sacrifice of Fools*, the Mars of *Desolation Road* and *Ares Express* (which first saw print in the short story *The Catherine Wheel*). Some ideas have to be approached from several sides. I'm currently feeling my way into what I call Big Future: a fictional setting with the cultural variety and sophistication of Ursula Le Guin's *Ekumen* but hard science and STL space transport, set ten to one hundred thousand years from now. And no aliens: the humans are the aliens in this wide, slow, multi-levelled

society. It has enough facets to keep me entertained for some time. Low rates of pay be damned – pay is pay, and, to be brutally career-ist about this, it's good to keep your face seen.

NG: Your most recent book is *Ares Express*, a companion volume to your first novel, *Desolation Road*. The terraformed Mars these books share as a setting is a rich locale, one to which you've repeatedly returned. How did you originally contrive it, and what is its continuing appeal for you?

IMD: Of course, Ray Bradbury is in the mix: I remember a single copy of *The Silver Locusts* (that's the UK *Martian Chronicles*) being the only science fiction available on the Liverpool-Belfast boat. Bought it, read it anyway, over a long and very boring night crossing, and it left me with a very strange impression because it was so unlike the kind of SF I was reading at that time, loose structure, episodal, with a huge cast of characters and a non-realistic style and a lingering image of Mars as Zion: the blacks leaving the South is an image that still haunts me. I loved the way Bradbury told a story of a place, and a place for ordinary people. Years later, Omni published a story called *Vox Olympica* -- it might have been Michael Bishop wrote it but I can't be certain. I can't remember too much about that actual story apart from using the calderas on Olympus Mons as a very large church organ but the setting, a richly terraformed Mars, blew me away. I thought, of course... and then went and found everything I could at the time (and there was a lot less of it than there is now) on terraforming Mars.

Somewhere back in the mix was Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the elements fused into the idea of a magic realist science fiction novel. Critical opinion will doubtless class this an oxymoron, as science-fiction is essentially a non-realistic form; I came from the standpoint that science-fiction must aspire to realism if it is to achieve sufficient suspension of disbelief, and I wanted to play around with that. It wasn't until I spent some time in Africa in 1984, at the start of the great drought, that the feel of this Mars came together in the now-lost story *Cirrus Minor*. I didn't want this Mars to be Bradbury's small-town America in the sky, I was looking for a different paradigm and I still see the Road Mars as a combination of India and Australia. By a nice coincidence, I was approached a couple of years back by an Australian Production company who had this insane but commendable idea to do Road as a TV series – Northern Exposure on Mars was the pitch — and they had a creative alliance with a Bangalore-based CGI company, who'd do the big fuck-off engines and all the angelic/miraculous gear. So it started as an Oz/Indian fusion, and may yet end there too. How satisfying.

NG: *Desolation Road* is a highly eventful picaresque novel, with a large cast

of characters and a remarkable circular structure. What sort of design have you followed in *Ares Express*? How does the new novel relate to, and depart from, its predecessor?

IMD: *Ares Express* is a companion to *Desolation Road* (not a sequel, prequel, any kind of quel), and shares much of the same terrain, attitudes, technology, steam and a couple of characters. The more observant will notice some differences, like the Grand Valley worldroof, which surely would have been noticed in *Desolation Road*. Now, I never actually said it wasn't there in *Desolation Road*. A certain amount is authorial frustration at being constrained by history and wanting to bolt new annexes on; most is my exploring the idea of this perhaps being an alternative – the best of all alternatives: one of the slew of possible Marses created by the vinculum processing computers that crash-terraformed the planet for ROTECH. I've recently done a story for Pete Crowther's anthology on Mars: it has some similarities to the Mars of *Ares Express* and to the early prototype story, *The Catherine Wheel*, but from a different angle. I'm moving a little further from base each time: Mars seems to be unfolding into a series of novels, about a series of worlds that are companions to each other. Terraform Mars stories are just so last century now, so of course it's time for me to go back and have a another little look round and see what we've learned; but the particular structure of *Express* is drawn from the train *Catherine of Tharsis* and those who live upon her, so it's direct and straightforward and deliberately brought into the open. It's a story about Story, but in case that makes it sound like one of those deadly Italo Calvino novels about novels, there's a lot of fun going on.

NG: Your second novel, *Out on Blue Six*, was a sort of satirical dystopia, a colourful and noisy book, which some esteem less than your other works. How do you yourself regard it now?

IMD: I can't look at it. Everyone has a bad book in them; in mitigation, I hope I got mine out early. Second Novel Problem. The one thing I like about it is that it has the only character in fiction named after a Scout Hall in Belfast: Courtney Hall.

NG: *King of Morning, Queen of Day*, on the other hand, is widely seen as your masterpiece, both because of the authenticity of its Irish setting and because of its varied content, stylistically very different accounts of the encounters of successive generations of women with the source of all archetypes. What was the intention behind this book?

IMD: It was the first of what I think of as the “Irish Trilogy” and was written out of a pure mean spirit. I’d bought and read R. A. McAvoy’s *The Book of Kells* and was mildly infuriated by the American Oirishness of it all: it was fun but didn’t seem to have made much effort, or have much desire, to go into the subtleties and complexities of modern Ireland. Deep in the Celtic Twilight. The idea struck me to do a modern Irish fantasy, to take the Celtic whimsy King of the Faeries thing, look at where it’s come from in our century (heavily politically engineered) and where it might be going. All cultures and identities must evolve and change or they die, “Irishness” is no different. Look, I have to fess up to a certain amount of hubris here: I thought “I can do that/I can do that better”, banged out the original story and then the thing blew itself up to novel length. It’s my quintessential remix novel: each section remixes the one before, the whole is about how each generation remixes the mythology of the one before. Throw in some clever dick stuff playing around with twentieth century Irish literature, Bob’s your Uncle. I mix a sound track to every piece of fiction I write, and this is one of the few I still listen to. The book is firmly planted in 1990, but the CD’ll still lift a party...

Of course, this vanity is returning to bite me on the ass, first with the *Chaga Saga*, more so now with *Cyberabad*. I’m the outsider trying to feel my way into different, complex and subtle cultures. Serves me bloody right, then.

NG: *Hearts, Hands, and Voices*, your far-future biotech novel, reads like a summary or allegory of all the Twentieth Century’s intractable sectarian conflicts. Why is the heroine mute? And is the telepathic communion achieved at novel’s end a serious prescription for the resolution of conflict? Ken Livingstone approved, but still...

IMD: *Hearts, Hands, and Voices* – the title’s from a splendid old Lutheran Hymn, “Nun Danket Denn Wir Gott”. The idea was, of course, to generalise the Irish Problem – by extension, the armed history of the twentieth century. Although it’s number two of the Irish Trilogy, it’s not about Northern Ireland – it’s more or less specifically a reworking of the Irish War of Independence.

I still like the biotech – I was feeling my way towards the *Chaga Saga* here, the whole organic thing that seems to bubble up from some deep brain fold. I have a feeling it’s part of this “both/and” attitude I was talking about way up the page. I see the split between biological and mechanical (including electronic) as artificial: our current cultural paradigm is to model life and sentience on a weak simulacrum hooked up through the 19th Century telephone system concept; but machines will – must — become more like biological systems. You don’t get round Papa Darwin that easily. Marvin Minsky is dead wrong – and deeply dull — when he mind-masturbates about

us all flinging off our shoddy little meat carapaces and taking on superior bodies of metal and silicon. Machines will become more biological: evolution works, in any environment. That Platonic dualism of Minsky's has a long tenure in science fiction: the mortification of the heated flesh, the notion of disembodiment and superintelligence deriving infinite pleasure from Knowing Big Stuff About the All. Julian of Norwich was doing it in her convent cell back in the twelfth century. Keep your higher mathematical truths, mate. I'll hold on to the Playstation. Godel's going to shaft you in the end.

Hearts, Hands, and Voices : Mathembe's not speaking was a simple symbol for the disenfranchisement of the young: speaking of the Northern Ireland situation, what you're offered is a series of off-the-peg attitudes, identities and solutions made up by people with a vested interest in you buying them. Mathembe has no voice; at another level, she knows that if she did speak, no one would listen to her. The ending: I'd forgotten what happened. HHV 's one of those books, like *Necroville* , I have no memory of writing; if I were to thumb through a copy, there'd be stuff in there that would surprise me. Likewise, some of the earlier stories are receding over the memory horizon; it wasn't until you mentioned it in this interview that I remembered I'd written a story called *The Best and The Rest of James Joyce* ...I do remember the original ending to *HHV* was a lot harder and darker and offered very little hope. I think the best point I can draw from a slightly over-convenient plot resolution is that communication is all we have.

NG: The graphic novel *Kling Klang Klatch* was an intriguing departure in literary form for you, although readily recognisable as your work. Have you conceived any further projects in this vein?

IMD: *Kling Klang Klatch* was one of those offers that come up that are just too much fun to refuse. I've always been a closet comics fan, and I'd seen what was happening in the graphic novel field in the early nineties, after *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* wrote the Old and New Testaments for the genre. Poor man's movies. I sent Faith Brooker three ideas, one of which we wanted to do with Bill Sinkiewicz, but he'd vanished to some island in the middle of a lake in Canada, supposedly, communing with something. That story ended up as *Necroville* – the mind boggles what it would have been like as a graphic. David Lyttleton had been scheduled to work with Jonathan Carroll but again, something perhaps not unconnected with a Canadian island happened there, and we ended up with *Kling Klang Klatch*.

It was written in a hurry – with a nasty hiatus in the middle when I got

shafted by a certain former agent not altogether unknown to the SFWA — in weekly instalments in screenplay style, which David drew up at white heat; if you look carefully, you can see his style develop as it goes on: halfway through the book characters lose their arms and legs because David reckoned you didn't actually need a limb to communicate the concept of handness and footness. I'm still immensely fond of it, though I could drive Inspector Morse's Jaguar through the plot frailties. Even now, I can spot a Lytton a mile off; when one crops up in *New Scientist* or the *Guardian*, I get a small rush of trainspotterish pleasure. At the time, I was keen to do more in the vein, but the genre's shifted. I was gobsmacked by *From Hell*: the chapter where Dr Gull goes on his tour of Hawksmoor Churches and demonstrates the London Pentagram is exceptional. Docu-drama comics strike me as an exciting possibility.

NG: *Scissors Cut Paper Wrap Stone*, your long novella, like the final section of *King of Morning*, is an exercise in cyberpunk, although by no means just that. In fact, it marries cyberpunk with an extrapolated Kabbalistic mysticism, to quite extravagant effect. Why this particular combination, and in a Japanese locale?

IMD: *Scissors* was something of a bluff: novellas were fashionable at the time and I persuaded Bantam to do *Scissors* as a free-standing book. Looking at the previous answer, I'm coming out of this as a right little fashion tart. Anyway, they liked it, and *Scissors* has had the cheek to go around the world in this format; not the UK for some reason. I used to live across the road from an extravagantly good second-hand bookshop where I got copies of Oliver Statler's *Japanese Inn* and *Japanese Pilgrimage*, which describes the Shikoku pilgrimage with the luminosity and spirituality of a Hokusai print. I liked the idea of writing a spiritually informed cyberpunk novel, and the circular pilgrimage meshed with the thought "Zen and the Art of Mountain Bike Maintenance." I already had the idea of the fracters — the graphic typefaces that can interact directly with the brain — from Neville Brody's book on design and typography. There's a lot more Buddhism in it than *Kaballa*, Neal Stephenson notwithstanding; I'd quite like to revisit that post-industrial Japan, and Ethan Ring (oh the heavy-handed symbolism) and his ill-starred relationship with Luka Casipriadin. However — I'm depressing myself here — I'm getting to the stage in my life where I'm starting to realise there are things that may just never get written.

NG: *Necroville* deals with the plight of dead people who have been resurrected by means of nanotech only to become a servile underclass. Is this a direct commentary on industrial relations in general?

IMD: *Necroville* as an allegory of labour relations? Hadn't thought of this: Corporate Capitalism Costs You Your Body and Soul. Maybe there is something in this. The whole *contratada* system at the heart of *Necroville* -- the Tesler-Thanos Corporation can bring you back, but you're a long time paying it off -- came from the realisation that the living would envy the Dead. They look good (they can look anything they want), they never get sick, they live forever. Of course, the vested interests of the living are going to want to put restrictions on that. Dead investments could totally devastate the economic system. Immortality always comes at a price; in *Necroville*, it's fiscal and contractual. It's a long-standing literary convention that because we can't have it, immortality comes at so high a price that no one would want it. Ask Count Dracula.

In *The Days of Solomon Gursky*, a novella in *Asimov's*, I developed the idea that in such a society, there will come a point where Dead is the norm and meat life is as restricted as life in the womb. You don't have to go too far into a future like that to reach a world that is almost incomprehensible to us. In the end, "life" abolished altogether. We've reached that meat/machine fusion I was talking about. These future humans, with their ability to reshape physical reality, are effectively colonies of quasi-biological nanocrafters. They can die and be reconstructed any number of times -- they use it for space travel in an STL universe -- so you have minds that will make it all the way into deep Deep Future.

NG: Your sequence of novels beginning with *Chaga* and continuing with *Kirinya* involves a breathtaking transformation of sub-Saharan Africa into a surreal evolutionary paradise by an alien biological infestation. Africans are at first threatened, but ultimately empowered, by this change. Your ideological agenda seems fairly clear here; but in practical terms, what statement are you making about the future of Africa, and how will *Ananda* (the final volume) carry this manifesto forward?

IMD: The future's coming to Kenya as much as to Kentucky; and to me, it's more interesting in Nairobi than Nashville. Africans are tough and resourceful people. The great skiffy cliché is the UFO/White House combo: what if it's the White Mountain --Kilimanjaro -- instead? The image of the unstoppable wave of transformation was nicked from *The Wrath of Khan*: it's the Genesis device, slowed down, and once I had that, it became a rich source of metaphors: for colonialism, new technology, globalisation, change, death. If the *Chaga* is colonialism, it's a unique kind that allows the people of the poor South to use and transform it to meet their needs and empower themselves: it's a

symbiosis. The *Chaga* creates a society which needs nothing from Western Capitalism, in fact, threatens to destabilise it: here material objects are cheap and easy to make. Skills and talents become important. This is a true knowledge economy, where a repro Lexus is worth a haircut, because how many folk do you know can do a really good haircut? So we get a democracy of commodities, and nanoprogramming skills are the economic base. There'd be a lot of copyright fights but the food would be great.

As I said about *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*, in the *Chaga* Saga, I'm an outsider, so the main character, Gaby, has to be an outsider: a journalist who manages to wreck every good thing she touches. She has to find her way into and through levels of very different societies, and her journey has far from ended.

Ananda, the mooted final chunk of the *Chaga* Saga (or rather the novel-form part of it) has back-burnered, but suffice to say that we'll get Gaby back to Africa from her exile, there'll be a resolution with Shepard, who'll make it back from the BDO, we find out what's on the other side of the last chamber, and Ren gets to grow up a bit. Plus all the usual mayhem, shooting, rough sex, politicking and cosmic stuff. And a lot more football – it was left out a bit in *Kirinya*.

Tendeleo's Story, commissioned by Pete Crowther and published by PS Publishing, Gollancz in *Futures* and *Binaries* and Gardner Dozois in *Year's Best*, was a sidebar to the *Chaga* Saga I'd wanted to write about for some time, but was leery about touching. It may be stating the glaringly obvious, but I'm not black, I'm not female, I'm not Kenyan. I drew much from the experiences of a Zairean refugee I know, and my own time in East Africa, but I was still worried writing it. It seems to have worked, and I'd like to go a bit further with Tendeleo and the world she is building. She's not an outsider, she's an insider.

NG: *Sacrifice of Fools*, third in your thematic Irish Trilogy, and one of your most compelling books, deals more closely and grittily than *King of Morning* with the realities of contemporary Ireland, going to the heart of Ulster's problems. Could one say that the thesis of this novel is that if there's one way to make ethno-religious factions comprehend their own bigotry, it's to introduce a third and far more different grouping into their midst — aliens, in this case?

IMD: More Outsiders, explicitly so this time. Of course, it's *Alien Nation* in Ulster. I feel that the film fudged the whole issue by making it a dumb drugs story. There was a lot of potential in the central premise of a whole rake of

aliens being dropped as a sizeable ethnic group into our society, and us discovering that they aren't just Valley Folk in silly rubber heads, but have a core of alienness we can never touch. Hence, the Shi'an. They're the Great Science Fiction Cat, made into an alien race. A hunting society, both sexes sexually similar, that only have sex twice a year but when they have it, they have it? That's yer moggie, that is. After that, the conceit's easy: drop them in Belfast rather than Los Angeles, throw in a serial killer and off you go. *Sacrifice* contains the only accurate SF prediction I ever made: The Patton Report into Policing recommended renaming the Royal Ulster Constabulary the Northern Ireland Police Service (which I call the new Joint Authority police force in the book), until they realised they'd get called the Nips instead of the Ruck, so it was recently changed again to Police Service for Northern Ireland (Psin?)

I'm not recommending massive social engineering as a device for conflict resolution, bringing everyone into contact with an external third force. Jehovah aside, trinities tend to be unstable, chaotic systems. It just seemed to be a useful tool for exploring the roots and branches of the conflict here – far from resolved yet. In the Shi'an sexual set-up, I could examine the Troubles as one big bloody male see-who-can-piss-the-highest contest, with guns. I've yet to find a corresponding way to use the Shi'an to explore female sexuality – they may not be the right construct to do it. I'd like to do more with Andy Gillespie, the reluctant ex-con turned investigator: he's a man who's made himself an outsider by being unable to accept the givens of his community. We'll see.

NG: A final question: your relationship with publishers has swung from early American success with Bantam and initial obscurity in Britain to current prominence in Britain and non-publication in America. Why has this occurred?

IMD: Why does a publisher dump anyone? You don't sell enough books. *Chaga* (*Evolution's Shore* in the US) got a big advance in the US and, nice reviews apart, didn't sell that tremendously, so when Bantam took a look at *Sacrifice of Fools*, they had a reason to say, "wouldn't know anything about that Irish stuff, nah." Likewise, with *Kirinya*, "that African stuff". It was also perceived as being anti-American. Balls. Anti-American corporatism, yes; if you guys seriously subscribe to "love-me, love my corporations", you have my sympathies. It's like saying I'm anti-Irish because I laugh at Westlife .

But we're going to remedy that soon, I hope, with *Ares Express* and *Cyberabad* ("that Indian stuff"). *Cyberabad* is the fiction project now, and,

as books about India tend to be, it's going to be big. Maybe not a Peter Hamilton, but I've eleven main characters and a lot of story, so it'll be thick. India in 2049 is a much bigger challenge than Kenya becoming alien; I'm delivering in June 2002 and there's a scad of work still to do before I hit the keys.

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Nick Gevers, an editor at Cosmos Books, writes extensively on SF for a wide variety of publications. He produces two monthly columns for *Locus*, and his reviews and interviews have also recently appeared in *Locus Online*, *The Washington Post Book World*, *Interzone* (the March 2002 issue of which he co-edited), *SF Weekly*, *Foundation*, *Redsine*, *SF Site*, and *Infinity Plus*. He lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

Novacon 32 Under New (Mis)management

The Programme by Steve Green

As I mentioned before, one of the interesting* elements of programming a Novacon is reconciling the need to maintain its essential strengths whilst trying to introduce something new to the equation. (*That's "interesting" in the Chinese sense, of course..)

For instance, Novacon has a fine tradition of interspersing its science-fictional themes with those of the scientific theories which underpin our favourite genre. Last year, we were honoured with an appearance by NASA scientist Dr Inge Heyer, who turned up with so many stunning photographic prints from the Hubble Telescope that my eight year-old brother needn't worry about wallpaper till his teens.

This year, we're extremely pleased to have Professor Kevin Warwick joining us as a special scientific guest, especially so as his current cybernetics research is touched upon in *Cyberabad*, the forthcoming novel by our Guest of Honour, Ian McDonald (cyclical, huh?).

As with many high-profile scientists, particularly those who dance the media tango, Kevin is a controversial figure in certain circles and an inspiration to others; his appearance at Novacon 32 (Kevin's convention debut) will allow

our select gathering to seek out the truth behind his new autobiography, *I, Cyborg* (Century, £16.99).

Getting back to Ian, don't forget that he will be interviewed on stage immediately after the opening ceremony on Friday, offering members an insight into his novels prior to his speech on Saturday and other appearances over the weekend. (Quick plug: copies of the rare Drunken Dragon hardback of Ian's superb first novel, *Desolation Road*, should be available from Rog Peyton in the dealers' room.)

Ian's also trying to track down a copy of the recent *Doomwatch* pilot he scripted, to slot into the video programme the seemingly inexhaustible Dave Lally will be presenting to his friends. Other material currently being nailed down includes *Alien Blood*, allegedly the only entirely British SF movie produced in the 1990s (and I confess I can't think of another), and the hilarious short *I Am Peter Cushing*, which won the prestigious Delta Award at Manchester's Festival of Fantastic Films in September.

Once again, our art show will feature stunning work by many of Britain's top artists. Anyone wishing to exhibit should contact Ann Green urgently on neergnna@yahoo.co.uk to reserve space.

So, there you have it, or at least the part we're prepared to unveil before our fourth and final progress report sees light of day. See you all in Walsall!

White Lines : The James White Award

by Graham Andrews

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD: James White was a keen Burroughs fan. Edgar Rice, that is, not William S(eward). In any case, he would have endorsed these words of wisdom from dear old ERBY: "I have been successful probably because I have always realized that I knew nothing about writing and have merely tried to tell an interesting story entertainingly."

White himself once informed editor John Carnell that he laid no claim to originality of plot, but instead strove to present his stories in a pattern different to most of his contemporaries. That's true enough, as far as it goes, but it doesn't go nearly far enough. Although Jim didn't bang on about the Aristotelian Unities -- Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Stuff

Like That -- he could tell a well-made story without using stylistic shenanigans to conceal basic structural weaknesses.

His own style might be compared to a plate-glass picture window; you can see everything that's happening in the street outside, but you're not aware of the 'fast' glass pane itself. Unfortunately, however, those people who vote for the major sf awards tend to assume that a self-consciously 'stylish' story must -- by its very nature -- be more 'worthy' than a story told with no stylistic muss 'n' fuss. But that won't happen with the James White Short Story Award (At least I hope not.)

I don't want to leave you with the impression that James White was an Old Guard fuddy-duddy who thought real science fiction died along with John W. Campbell or even Capt. S.P. Meek. Far from it. He expressed his admiration for such new Wave writers as J.G. Ballard (e.g. *The Crystal World*) and Roger Zelazny (e.g. 'He Who Shapes'/*The Dream Master*). Ditto Barry N. Malzberg, whose spaced-out novel *Beyond Apollo*, won the first John W. Campbell Award in 1973.

Bob Shaw made known his displeasure at a Belfast Science Fiction Group meeting in White's (no relation) Tavern: *Beyond Apollo* is, to my mind, the epitome of everything that has gone wrong with science fiction since Michael Moorcock took over *New Worlds*" (or words to that general effect). Jim administered a mild rebuke: "Bob, Bob, it isn't all *that* bad."

Novacon 32 The Nova Awards

by Tony Berry

The Nova Awards are given for work in fanzines. There are three awards: Best Fanzine, Best Fan Writer and Best Fan Artist. Voting is open to full or supporting members of Novacon who meet the requirements above. For further information contact me at 68 Windsor Rd., Oldbury, B68 8PB. If you want a copy of the rules please enclose 50p to cover copying and postage, or check out the convention web site.

Here's the fanzines which I've received since October 2001.

ANSIBLE #171-175. Dave Langford, 94 London Rd., Reading, Berks., RG1 5AU.

CONVERTIBLE BUS #8. Tony Keen, 15 Heatherbridge Approach, Brooklands Rd., Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 OUN.

JOIE DE VIVRE. Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Ln., Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP.

PARAKEET #9. Claire Brierley and Mark Plummer, 26 Northampton Rd., Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA.

PLOKTA VOL 7 #1. The Cabal, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berks., RG30 2RP.

TALKING SHIT. Yvonne Rowse.

TORTOISE #12-13. Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle St., Shrewsbury, SY1 2BQ.

ZOO NATION #1. Pete Young, 62 Walmer Rd., Woodley, Berks, RG5 4PN.

Operations

As we are sure you are aware Novacon, like most conventions in Britain, is run by volunteers and we can't have too many of them! It's an excellent way to make new friends and to feel you're part of the weekend. So if you are willing to help out at the convention – anything from moving chairs to helping with tech ops or working on the programme, please contact our Ops Manager, Alice Lawson, at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (e-mail fab@zoom.co.uk)

Crèche

We are looking into the possibility of running a crèche again this year. If you are interested in using such a facility please contact Martin Tudor at the address below. Please let him know names and ages of the children who might be using the facility, along with any special requirements or other relevant information (allergies, special needs etc).

Contact: Martin Tudor (Chairman), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net).

The Art Show by Ann Green

This year's Art Show is being run by Ann Green. If you want to show any work please contact me to let me know your display needs. If you'd like to help out in any way please get in touch either by contacting me beforehand or early at the Con. All help and advice is greatly appreciated.

33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ,
0121 706 0108 (if you get the answer phone leave a number)
or e-mail neergnna@yahoo.co.uk

The CD-ROM Art Show

Following the success of our innovative CD ROM Art Shows we are again inviting contributions. If you have work you wish to exhibit on CD-ROM or you know of someone who has, please contact Martin Tudor

To advertise in our splendid publications...

Rates: The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets):

Progress Reports –

- Full page £30.00 (fan £15.00)
- Half page £16.50 (fan £9.00)
- Quarter page £9.00 (fan £6.00)

Programme Book –

- Full page £75.00 (fan £35.00)
- Half page £40.00 (fan £17.50)
- Quarter page £20.00 (fan £10.50)

Anyone interested in advertising should contact Dave Hicks (Publications):
1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ (david.hicks70@ntlworld.com).
Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines:

- PR #4: 1st October 2002, to be mailed mid-October 2002.
- Programme Book: 1st October 2002, distributed at Novacon 32.

Do you have photographs of the guests, fans and activities at Novacons of old?

Novacon 32 urgently needs distinctive snaps from its thirty-one predecessors. Please forward originals to 33 Scott Road, Solihull, B92 7LQ (ensuring the address for their return is included), or e-mail scans to sfcheckpoint@yahoo.co.uk

Members since March '02

93	Enid	Crowe	140	Andy	Jenkins
94	Helena	Tudor	141	Janet	Jenkins
95	Tony	Berry	142	Tanya	Brown
96	Dave	Lally	143	Marcus	Streets
97	Al	Johnston	144	Alison	Scott
98	Nic	Farey	145	Steven	Cain
99	Helena	Bowles	146	Marianne	Cain
100	Richard	Standage	147	Jonathan	Cain
101	Ray	Bradbury	148	John	Meaney
102	Chris	Murphy	149	Yvonne	Meaney
103	Teresa	Davies	150	Nick	Mills
104	Max	Hawkida	151	Gavin	Shorrocks
105	Mike	Stone	152	Debbie	Custance
106	David	Symes	153	Al	Darragh
107	Fay	Symes	154	James	Randall
108	Del	Cotter	155	Tim	Taylor
109	Mike	Scott	156	Colin P.	Langeveld
110	Steve	Cooper	157	Rog	Peyton
111	Heather	Petty	158	Lesley	Ward
112	William	Keith	159	Brian	Davies
113	Yvonne	Rowse	160	Lilian	Edwards
114	Peter	Redfarn	161	Elaine	Coates
115	David	Laight	162	Mark	Slater
116	Pat	McMurray	163	Ben	Jeapes
117	Vincent	Docherty	164	Tracy	Benton
118	Tobes	Valois	165	Jim	Barker
119	Doug	Bell	166	Mike	Cobley
120	Christina	Lake	167	Jim	Walker
121	Krystyna	Oborn	168	Glenn	Davidson
122	Roderick	O'Hanlon	169	Paul	O'Brien
123	Peter	Weston	170	Caitriona	Byrne
124	Eileen	Weston	171	Graham	Andrews
125	Jonathan	Jones	172	Agnes	Andrews
126	Sharon	Lewis	173	Stuart	Capewell
127	Jae Leslie	Adams	174	Diane	Capewell
128	Jennifer	Swift	175	Michael	Perkins
129	Pete	Young	176	Alistair	Maynard
130	Frank R	Smith	177	Danielle	Ray
131	Martyn	Dawe	178	Doreen	Rogers
132	Iain	Banks	179	James	Bacon
133	B. A.	Blackburn	180	George F.	Ternent
134	Debra	Kerr	181	Linda	Ternent
135	Laura	Wheatly	182	Calvin	Ternent
136	Tim	Stannard	183	Julia	Daly
137	Jane	Cooper	184	Dave	Cox
138	Jim	Anderson	185	Deborah	Miller
139	Barbara	Weidman	186	Kevin	Warwick