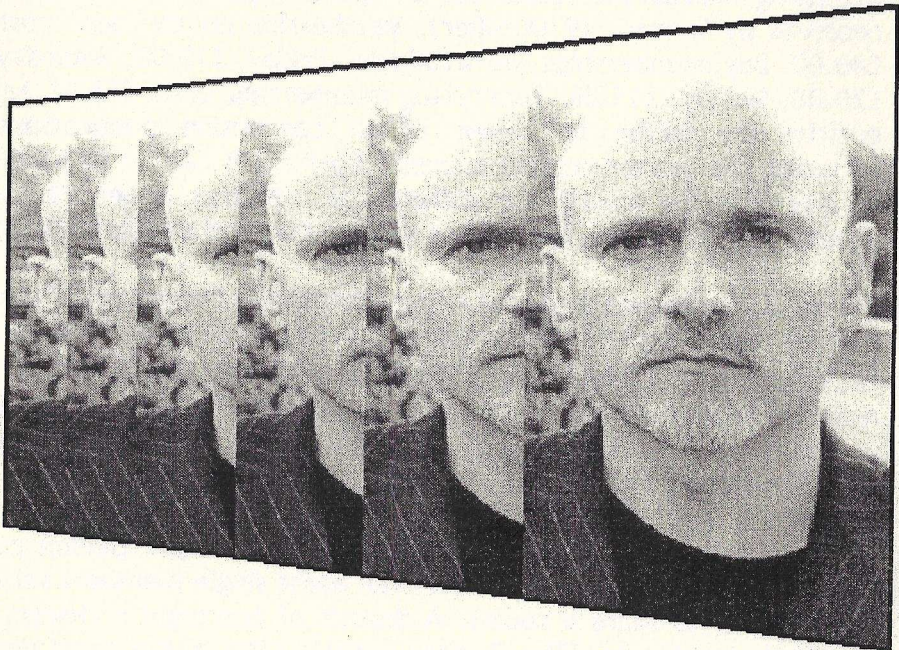


NOVACON 3E NOVACON

Progress Report Two: Summer 2003

Guest of Honour
Jon Courtenay Grimwood



Quality Hotel, Walsall
7-9 November, 2003

Novacon 33: The Vital Statistics

Novacon 33 will be held on 7-9 November, 2003, at the Quality Hotel, Walsall, located immediately off Junction 10 of the M6. Our guest of honour is the British science fiction novelist Jon Courtenay Grimwood, author of the "Arabesk" cycle. This is the second of our three progress reports; the third is scheduled for October 2003.

The main programme opens early Friday evening and continues until early Sunday evening. It's followed by Novacon's traditional "dead dog party" (we strongly recommend that members stay until the Monday morning if they can).

Attending membership costs £35.00 (postal applications must be received by Sunday, 19 October). Membership on the door costs £40.00. Day memberships are available: Friday, £10.00; Saturday, £20.00; Sunday, £15.00. Supporting membership costs £15.00 and entitles the holder to copies of all convention publications, including the limited-edition souvenir booklet; it can be upgraded at any time, by paying the differential. Children under 10 can attend without charge, but do not receive convention publications.

Please make cheques or postal orders payable to "Novacon 33" and forward them, together with your completed registration form, to:
Novacon 33, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

A downloadable version of this form is available from the Novacon website: <www.novacon.org.uk>. Contact details for all committee members appear on page 10 of this progress report.

Accommodation at the Quality Hotel costs £32.00 per person per night for twin or double rooms (we can assist single members seeking someone to share a room). A deposit of one night's charge is required, payable to "The Quality Hotel". (This is the third year running we've managed to secure these room rates, which are actually 15% lower than those announced by Novacon 29 in 1998. Please reward the hotel by booking accommodation immediately.)

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All the Myriad Ways

Steve Green

It's often the case with Novacon that its underlying theme reflects the work of its guest of honour. Indeed, no sooner had Jon Courtenay Grimwood accepted our invitation to join us this autumn, than thoughts turned towards alternative history. Only last issue, our esteemed chair discussed his stillborn plans for a novel exploring a potential timeline wherein Alexander the Great did not die in Babylon in 323BC (and perhaps, in a parallel universe, another Martin Tudor is now the celebrated author of a novel set in a Europe where Alexander died prematurely, an astounding concept for the many citizens of the Macedonian Empire who've made it an international bestseller).

Martin's project would have been unusual in at least one respect: he envisioned a world when the alternative was arguably preferable to our own course of events. In contrast, most of the celebrated works in this vein reassure their readers that matters could have been far, far worse: Phil Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (the Axis powers conquer Europe and the USA); Robert Harris' *Fatherland* (Germany conquers Europe); Keith Roberts' *Pavane* (Catholicism hogties science for five centuries); Harry Harrison's *West of Eden* (the dinosaurs decide not to move out, after all). Even Alfred Coppel's *The Burning Mountain*, whilst offering the prospect of a world without nuclear weapons, only does so in order for its author to describe the invasion of Japan in all its gory detail (a third possibility, demonstrating the A-Bomb on an uninhabited site, seems not to have occurred to either Coppel or the Harry Truman of our reality).

But surely we science fiction readers are resilient enough to take aboard the thought that maybe we caught the crappy end of the stick? For instance...

- In 1914, Gavrilo Princip missed his chance to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand, only for the royal chauffeur to mistakenly turn into a dead end and offer Princip a clear shot; within the week, Britain, Russia and France were at war with

Germany. Might better security, or a decent street guide to Sarajevo, have saved millions of lives and even left the world better able to combat the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918, which itself claimed nearly 22 million?

- In 1920, a similar wrong turn cost the lives of both Gotham City physician and philanthropist Thomas Wayne and wife Martha. Who knows what their son Bruce might have achieved, had he not chosen the role of an aimless playboy, just like Lord Percy Blakeney, Don Diego Vega and Lamont Cranston before him? ^[1]
- In 1952, fresh from directing *The Sound Barrier* (which itself exhibits many sf traits), David Lean met with Arthur C Clarke to discuss plans for a "space movie". Imagine a serious attempt at *Childhood's End*, more than a decade before Stanley Kubrick would begin work on *2001: A Space Odyssey*. ^[2]
- In 1957, as Sputnik circled the Earth every ninety minutes, a group of Western scientists worked on Project Orion, a manned mission to Mars propelled by nuclear pulses. Global politics shifted, NASA switched its priorities and the scheme was mothballed in 1965. ^[3]

Thankfully, we know we've made the right choice with Jon, who will be offering a sneak preview of his Novacon input when he addresses our patrons, the Birmingham SF Group, on 8 August. 7.30pm for 7.45pm in the Old Joint Stock pub, Temple Row, Birmingham city centre (in the upstairs room - through the pub on the right hand side, right to the back corner and up the stairs, the room is opposite the top of the stairs). For full details, check out <www.bsfg.freesevers.com>.

Meanwhile, we look forward to seeing you at Novacon 33. After all, this is one occasion when there is no real alternative.

[References: ^[1] "Shades of the Shadow" by Anthony Tollin (included in *The Shadow: Blood & Judgement* by Howard Chaykin, Titan Books, 1987; ^[2] *Astounding Days*, Arthur C Clarke, Gollancz, 1989; ^[3] *Project Orion*, George Dyson (Penguin, 2002).]

Cooking the Books

Martin Tudor

If you attended last year's Novacon, you may well remember Sunday night's beer tasting was complemented by a selection of delicious Irish food, served in honour of Ian McDonald, our guest of honour. Following the success of that event, we felt we should honour this year's guest of honour, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, in a similar culinary fashion.

Simple, eh? But as I mentioned (at some length) in my introduction to the previous progress report, Jon had an interesting and varied upbringing: growing up in Malta, England, the Far East and Norway, and flying to boarding school from wherever his parents were living at the time. So which nation's cuisine should we opt for?

Jon himself has solved this problem with the publication of *Felaheen*, the third volume of his "Arabesk" trilogy: the hero, Raf, spends much of the novel working in the kitchen of a restaurant in Tunis. Therefore, this year's beer tasting will be complemented by an "Arabesk" menu featuring North African cuisine - further details to follow in our next progress report!

Before I finish, I should mention that if you haven't yet booked a hotel room, you'll find a booking form enclosed with this progress report, which we urge you to complete and return immediately to Steve Lawson at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. Unfortunately, Novacon has now used up our allotment of single rooms, but there is an abundance of twin and double rooms and we have again arranged with the Quality Hotel for everyone sharing to have a key each upon request.

Finally, if you have any suggestions on how we can improve the convention, please let me have them as soon as possible. I can be contacted at 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX or by e-mail on <empties@breathemail.net>.

Noticeboard

As many of you will already be aware, Novacon has lost two of its family in the past couple of months.

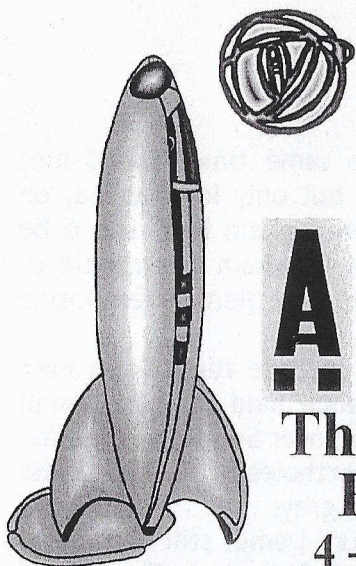
Peter Day, a fan for four decades (Rog Peyton recalls meeting him at the 1964 Eastercon), died from liver cancer on 23 February, aged 73. He'd moved to Birmingham by the late 1970s, joining the Cannon Hill Writers' Group and becoming a regular both at the Birmingham SF Group and Novacon. He'll be particularly missed by the artshow team, for his quiet yet boundless willingness to help.

Dave Mooring, artist and frequent contributor to Novacon publications, died from pancreatic cancer on 21 May, aged 42; earlier that day, he'd married Sarah Dibb after a 20-year engagement. We plan to mount a tribute to Dave within this year's artshow; anyone with suitable material should contact Ann Green at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ or by e-mail on <neergna@yahoo.co.uk>.

Congratulations to author Christopher Priest (guest of honour, Novacons 9 and 30), whose *The Separation* has survived incredibly moronic handling by Scribner to win both the BSFA Award for Best Novel and the Arthur C Clarke Award. It's currently up for the Side-wise Award, presented to works of alternative history.

In a similar vein, please raise your glasses to Novacon regular and all round good egg Bill Burns, recipient of this year's Doc Weir Award, in recognition of his behind-the-scenes efforts at numerous conventions and his work at <www.efanzines.com>.

Stan Nicholls' new fantasy novel, QUICKSILVER RISING, is published by HarperCollins/Voyager in trade paperback on 4th August 2003. There are several Midlands events around publication time: At 7pm on Tuesday 5th August Stan will be a guest speaker at Wednesbury Library; at 2pm on Saturday 9th August he'll be at Andromeda bookshop, Birmingham, for a one hour signing session; also on 9th August, Stan will be signing for one hour from 4.30pm at Ottakar's Walsall branch. (Ottakar's bookshop, 63 Park Street, Walsall WS1 1LY, tel 01922 610922.)



INTER ACTION

The 63rd World Science Fiction Convention

4 - 8 August 2005

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GUESTS

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Lars-Olov Strandberg Jane Yolen

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Child <small>(7-15 in Aug 2005)</small>	£32	Infant <small>(0-6 in Aug 2005)</small>	Free

Online membership and information: <http://www.interaction.worldcon.org.uk>
or write to: INTERACTION, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S2 3HQ
"World Science Fiction Convention" and "Worldcon" are service marks of the World Science Fiction Society, an unincorporated literary society.

Parallel Lines

Dave Hicks

She was nervous and excited at the same time. She'd met science fiction fans from Britain before, but only in America, on her turf. Now, at Novacon 33, at the Birmingham Ritz, she'd be surrounded by these sophisticated Britons to whom the mantle of their enormous power was so familiar that they didn't even notice they wore it any more.

As her Imperial Airways' Mark Two Concorde flight from New York ("Now six times daily!", an indulgence paid for by a small inheritance) circled and banked for landing over South London, she watched, through the unnervingly large portholes of the first class cabin, November rains wash the landmarks grey:

The sheen on the roof of the Millennium Dome, still decorated with the flags of all nations from the 2000 Olympics.. The muted greens of Neville Chamberlain Memorial Great Park.. A flash of reflected late afternoon sunlight, through the tiniest chink in the nimbostratus, on the colossal, chrome-faced, Richard Rogers-designed, headquarters of the largest computer corporation on Earth - the GPO, and the great avenue of Alan Turing Way which led to..

..West Drayton / Edward VIII International, and Terminal 6 of the largest airport in the world.

She was due to be met at the airport by two London fans; one, a mid-ranking civil servant, had swung the use of her chauffeur for the journey. Spotting them was no problem, as the other worked for Customs & Excise and had come straight from the office in full uniform; "You'll spot the plumes a mile off," he'd said.

Yes indeed. We can all play with the subtle (and not so subtle) twists and turns of history that marked the cards of each great empire. Why, if one pursues the above scenario to its logical conclusion, even a British Worldcon starts to sound like a reasonable idea. It's entertaining, it's enlightening, it's even *science fictional*. Doesn't mean we're any good at it, though.

From rehashings of what would have happened if Clement Freud had voted the other way in the vote of no confidence that ushered in the era of Margaret Thatcher, to Lenin never getting a

train ticket, we're bombarded with speculation and deconstruction of the twentieth century. Its events are shuffled and dealt afresh (ha! picks up "cards" metaphor a whole paragraph later) in a game of artistic chance called post modernism.

One person who *is* good at it, though, is Jon Courtenay Grimwood. Continuing the proud Novacon tradition of making sure we don't just get people who write good *science fiction*, but write good fiction full stop, we've got an author who understands that you can't play with the twentieth century for mere amusement, when the smell of blood from it remains so strong. Now *Felaheen* has concluded his "Arabesk" sequence - to the pitiful cries of committee members who hoped he'd go on to write more - Jon has completed a pocket *tour de force* on the Western fascination with playing power politics in the East, and the Eastern fascination with battling the decadence of the West.

With such a Guest of Honour, what *will* we find to talk about?

All that, plus wit, style and a line like: "the kind of teeth that travelled third class on a slow train between Tripoli and Tangiers".

But it won't all be intellectual and artistic, oh no: Steve Green will be appearing, too. After his masterly control of guests last year, Steve's been spending the summer doing something easier, like herding cats, before coming back for another go.

For your Saturday night entertainment, an evil genius (*not* Ian Sorensen, for once..), bent on insulting everything we all hold dear, has been sending me a script, scene by twisted scene, that manages to make me laugh out loud. If you were running programme and saw those staging instructions, you'd laugh out loud as well. Or be taken away.

In the meantime, if there's anything *you'd* like to see, you know where to reach me: <david.hicks70@ntlworld.com>.

Nova Awards 2003

Steve Green

The following fanzines were received between 1 April and 26 July, 2003; all are eligible under the newly revised Nova Award rules, a copy of which will very shortly be posted at the Novacon 33 website <www.novacon.org>. Hardcopies are available for three second-class stamps and a self-addressed envelope from 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ (which is also the address to send all material for inclusion in the Nova Award updates).

- *Brum Group News #379* (April 2003), A5, 8pp, #380 (May), A5, 12pp, #381 (June), A5, 12pp, #382 (July), A5, 8pp, Rog Peyton (for the Birmingham SF Group), 19 Eaves Croft, Bartley Green, Birmingham, B32 3QL.
- *Convers[at]ions #2*, A5, 8pp, Douglas Spencer, 51 Fountains Garth, Wildridings, Bracknell, RG12 7RH.
- *Erg #162*, A5, 16pp, Terry Jeeves, 56 Red Scar Drive, Scarborough, YO12 5RQ.
- *Halo of Flies #2*, A5, 24pp, Tony Keen, 48 Priory Street, Tonbridge, TN9 2AN [note CoA].
- *Old Rat's Almanac*, A4, 4pp, Peter Redfarn, 14 Box Tree House, Gosterwood Street, London, SE8 5PA.
- *Outlaw Mutation Boogie #61*, A4, 10pp, Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Road, Croydon, CR0 6JE.
- *Plokta #29*, A4, 14pp, Steve Davies & Alison Scott & Mike Scott, 24 St Mary Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 9RG.
- *Quasiquote #5*, A4, 42pp, Sandra Bond, 7 Granville Road, London, N13 4RR.
- *Snapshot #3*, A4, 6pp, Ian Sorensen, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, ML3 7HY.
- *Vibrator #7*, A5, 16pp, #8, A5, 8pp, Graham Charnock <graycharnox@blueyonder.com>.
- *Zoo Nation #3*, A5, 28pp, Pete Young, 62 Warmer Road, Woodley, RG5 4PN.

(I understand eligible fanzines were also published at Eastercon by both Max and the FONT group, but have not received copies.)

All the above are available upon request for return postage, your own fanzine in trade (a copy for each editor is customary) or a promise to respond with a substantial letter of comment. In certain quarters, this is known as "The Usual". Electronic fanzines are only listed if the editors are willing to supply a hardcopy.

Novacon 33 Contacts

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Novacon Artshow: Ann Green <neergna@yahoo.co.uk>
Publications / Nova Awards: Steve Green <novacon33@yahoo.co.uk>
33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ

Treasurer: Alice Lawson <fab@zoom.co.uk>
Registrations Steve Lawson <xl5@zoom.co.uk>
379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ

Novacon Playgroup

Novacon will once again be helping parents organise activities for its youngest members, thanks to the sterling efforts of Helena Bowles and Richard Standage. We'll carry further details next issue, but anyone likely to make use of this facility should send an stamped, self-addressed envelope to Richard and Helena at their new address: 38 Harold Road, Smethwick, B67 6LJ (tel. 0121 420 2672, e-mail Richard@standage-bowles.freeserve.co.uk).

Dealers' Room

Tables in the Dealers' Room cost £15.00 and bookings will only be taken from Novacon members; please contact the main address on page two to specify how many tables you need.

Membership Update

87	Debra Kerr	114	Paul Treadaway
88	Linda Ternent	115	Dave Langford
89	George Ternent	116	Alison Tomkinson
90	Calvin Ternent	117	Rachel Tomkinson
91	Malcolm Davies	118	Tony Berry
92	Kate Solomon	119	Phil Bradley
93	John Meaney	120	Jill Bradley
94	Yvonne Meaney	121	Farah Mendlesohn
95	Marcus Streets	122	Edward James
96	Rae Streets	123	Jim Walker
97	Mathilda Streets	124	Jennifer Swift
98	Noel Collyer	125	Lynn Edwards
99	Andy Sawyer	126	John Jarrold
100	Chris Stocks	127	Jae Leslie Adams
101	Del Cotter	128	Tony Cullen
102	James Odell	129	Dave Lally
103	Peter Mabey	130	Al Johnston
104	Dave Hardy	131	Nic Farey
105	Christina Lake	132	Bobbie Farey
106	Doug Bell	133	Richard Standage
107	Sherrie Powell	134	Helena Bowles
108	Tony Keen	135	Ray Bradbury
109	Kate Bodley	136	Ian McDonald
110	David Laight	137	Enid Crowe
111	Helen Hall	138	Rog Peyton
112	June Strachan	139	Brian Aldiss
113	Sue Edwards	140	Harry Harrison

**Have you booked your
hotel room yet?
Send your form in *today!***

Novacon 33 Progress Report #2: edited by Steve Green. Thanks to Dave Hicks, Steve Lawson and Martin Tudor for their contributions. Illustrations last issue by Eddie Trenchcoat. Novacon 33 logo: Hicks / Green.