



Helena teaches Alex the subtle art of dealing with complaints

Progress Report Two

Novacon 38

Date: 14th-16th November 2008

Venue: Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall, (off M6, Junction10)

Guest of Honour: Ian R MacLeod

Fan Guest of Honour: Vernon Brown

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £38 (or £42 on the door). Postal registrations should be received by 4th November 2008; after this date, please join on the door. Children under 12 attend free; 12-16, £10.00. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to "Novacon 38" and sent with your completed form(s) to: **Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ**. Further information is available at <http://www.novacon38.org.uk>

Room Rates: £38 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms and £50 pppn for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). NB: hotel booking forms, and deposits equivalent to one night's stay per person (£38 or £50), must be received by Steve Lawson no later than **4th November 2008**. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Quality Hotel". Enquiries regarding hotel bookings should be sent to Steve Lawson at the address above or e-mailed to x15@zoom.co.uk (tel: 0114-281-1572).

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for both the next two progress reports and for the programme book. The rates are as follows. Progress reports: professional £35 (fan £15) for a full page, £17.50 (£9) half-page, £9.50 (£6) quarter-page. Programme book: £80 (£35) full page, £50 (£17.50) half-page, £27.50 (£10.50) quarter-page.

Anyone interested in advertising should contact: **Helena Bowles** at the contact details below

Advertising Deadlines: PR #3: 27th September 2008, (mailed in October); programme book, 17th October (to be distributed at Novacon 38).

Book Room Rates: Tables (6' x 2'6") cost £20 each for the whole weekend. To book a table, you must be a member of the convention and return a completed booking form (enclosed with this progress report).

Committee: Our Glorious Leader Helena Bowles (chair), 38 Harold Rd, Smethwick, Warley, B67 6LJ (helena.bowles@tiscali.co.uk); Tony Berry (hotel liaison), 68 Windsor Road, Oldbury, B68 8PB, (morbius@zoom.co.uk); Alice Lawson (treasurer) and Steve Lawson (registrations), 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (x15@zoom.co.uk); Richard Standage (programme), address as Helena Bowles above (richard.standage@tiscali.co.uk)

Words From the Chair

So here we are at PR2. It's little later than planned and a little sadder, too.

The saddest event, of course, was the sudden death of Ray Bradbury. Ray was a fan who had a long association with Novacon, most notably in that for many years now, he has been responsible for creating the Nova Award Rocketships. In order to do him full justice we are postponing our obituary proper until PR3. In the meantime: farewell, Ray. We'll miss you.

We also intend to have a display dedicated to Ray's fannish life and work at Novacon 38. To that end we'd like to ask if anyone has any photographs, artwork or memorabilia relating to Ray. If you do, and would be willing to loan it to us for this year's convention please could you get in touch with me at helena.bowles@tiscali.co.uk.

We also have to announce with regret the resignation, due to personal reasons, of Martin Tudor from the post of Publications Editor. We wish him well. Publications have now been taken over by a combination of Richard Standage and me, ably assisted by the rest of the committee.

On to more cheerful matters. The convention is pulling together nicely. We've an interesting programme planned but, like Richard in his Programme Update, I'm remaining close-mouthed until we've a few more details pinned down.

We also have an article from Ian, in which he looks at the idea that the future is here. I tend to agree. The future, as envisioned in the books I devoured as a teenager, is here. The technological, push button "indistinguishable from magic" future is all around

us. It's everything those fifties and sixties writers promised, and more.

So why do we feel short changed? Okay, we don't have the space stations and the moonbase, but is that so hugely important? Surely, when we look at our world we experience that "sensawunda" that the vision of a world not unlike this one gave us when we opened those yellow jacketed Gollancz volumes and learned to dream. Don't we?

The answer, I know, for most of us, is mostly: no. We aren't thrilled by our world. Rather we are jaded and cynical and long for the bits we haven't yet got. Why?

I think the answer is that there were two kinds of future shown to us and we got the wrong one. What we really miss are not the spaceships and mars colonies but the *optimism* that went with them; the feeling that the human race really could throw off the juvenile shackles of internecine conflict and boldly go to the stars, or at least the moon, anyway. We believed that technology was ultimately a force for good and would improve the lot of most of the human race. For a while it seemed true. Medical advances, better standards of living seemed to herald a better future. Then the analysis came in. Our standards of living are based on the economic subjugation of over half the world, our developing technologies contributing to the deforestation and exfoliation of much of the planet.

We aren't gazing in wonder at the stars. We're too busy staring at our McDonald's burger and, to steal Harlan Ellison's phrase, sucking on the glass tit in the corner of the room.

And that is the true loss.

Past Magic by Ian R. MacLeod.

Tony Berry

This collection of short stories covers the period from 1990 - 2000 and shows MacLeod's skill as a writer and storyteller. They encompass several genres: science fiction, fantasy, horror and downright weird, and although they are very different from each other, a sense of melancholy runs through them, a sense of longing for something that was lost or which might have been, as unreliable memories of better times fade. One of MacLeod's favourite themes is alternate reality, or alternate history - realities which at first glance are recognisable as our own, but which are twisted slightly so as to make them just that little bit alien. Several of the stories here are set in such worlds.

The title piece features a man who mourns his daughter, drowned at sea in a sailing accident. He is then invited to stay with his ex-wife and her new partner, and the clone she has created of their child. Does he keep in touch and watch her grow up as the daughter he lost? Can she ever be the daughter he lost? But then his feelings on the matter become irrelevant, because his wife has other plans for him.

"Snodgrass" is the tale of an angry, bitter man called John who used to be in a pop group back in the early sixties. They were starting to get noticed, but John's creative differences with Paul, another member, led to him walking out. The band went on to have modest success, but it could have been so much more if he'd stuck around, and he knows it. Years later the lads stage a reunion tour and John receives tickets and a back-stage pass from Paul....

“The Bonny Boy” is a companion piece to the novel “The Light Ages”, set in a post Industrial Revolution England, but where the all-powerful guilds use magic as well as machines. This magic stems from “aether”, a naturally occurring substance which allows the artisans to do impossible things, but which can have a terrible effect on those who handle it.

In “Nevermore” virtual reality is so commonplace it is simply called “reality”. The VR engines shape the all-pervading nanosmog and give it form and substance, object or person. Before they die, people can have their minds uploaded into the datanet so that they can live again in a body created by the engines. An artist is contacted by his dead lover, who wants to resume their relationship, even though that relationship had previously failed. Within the VR field her body is ageless, her mind, her memories are all as they were. He has another chance, a chance to love her, to put things right, to make the same mistakes, to screw it up again. But then, could it ever be the same? Could he ever recapture what he felt for her? After all, she’s not real. Is she?

These stories cover most of the tropes: time travel, alternate universe, VR, even the Old Ones put in an appearance, but it’s the quality of the writing which sets them apart. To pinch a bit from Jack Dann’s introduction: “...this author has absolute control over his material and has mastered his craft”. Oh, yes. This collection is a good place to start if you’ve never read any Ian R. MacLeod.

The Future – Why We Never Got It Wrong

Ian R MacLeod

I was really looking forward to the future when I was a kid. Not growing up - no, that was something different. In fact, come to think of it, the two were near-opposites. Sometimes, they fought like angry ferrets inside my head. They still do to this day.

When I say *the future*, I should draw a distinction between what I actually thought, or feared, would happen in the years ahead, and the place which I longed to glimpse, and loved to read about. I guess you’re expecting me to mention all the usual tropes – the jetpacks, monorails, time portals and starships we’ve all grown so tired of waiting for that they’ve become a weak joke. But I don’t think that ever was what the future was about for me. Sure, they might arrive, along with teleportation and the food tablet. You could perhaps even order your latest jet pack on some kind of computer, and it would arrive, near magically, within two to three working days. And so on. And so forth.

I rather dreaded that kind of future, if I’m honest. Not as a vision, visions were fine, but as the mundane stuff of everyday life which anything inevitably becomes once it steps past the line of reality. And now, for all that we bemoan our lost future, I really don’t see such a huge difference between the future we thought we were going to get, and the version which has actually arrived. Sure, space travel hasn’t exactly gone ahead as quickly as we’d hoped, artificial intelligence always seems to be a generation away and the means by which we might annihilate ourselves have moved on, but the world we’re in is just as mind-boggling as anyone could reasonably have expected. It’s just that, seeing as it’s all around us, we barely notice it. Cheap air flight (I know, I know – but just think what it means). Mobile phones (again – think when you get that expensive and annoying

call from a relative in another continent). Computers in almost everything. Mechanical body parts. The fall, for Chrissake, of Communism. And string and m-brane theory, whatever they really are. Not to mention genetic engineering, AIDS and the internet. Of course, we're fascinated for a while by each and all of these things, and then we become less so. Eventually, we shrug and take them for granted in the same way that our great-grandparents did typhoid, the telegraph and their new safety bicycles. We look ahead, with renewed but somewhat diminished nostalgia, for whatever's going to happen next.

So we haven't been short-changed. The future *has* arrived. Things have happened which, in their own way, are pretty amazing, and really not that far off what was expected. Turn off the kitchen light at night, and little lights glow out at you. Then you can check your e-mails on your Blackberry as you head up the stairs to bed. You can even log on to watch the feed from some satellite, or chat online with global terrorists. Only sleep itself remains unchanged, undimmed — that, and our hopes and dreams.

And that's where good SF comes in. Of course, it was never about prediction. But neither, for me, was it ever really about technological or social change — or space travel, or aliens. Even when I was a kid, I think that part of me realised that the future I dreamed of was never going to happen, and that I was always going to be stuck in the present, and that the present, once you've got used to it, tends to become mundane. It's a truth which SF has eternally struggled with. Indeed, the gap between hope and reality is the space which the genre still endlessly explores. Rather like the knights of the round table in search of the grail, SF searches for the future not because it ever expects to find it, but because the search itself is the thing.

The Programme

Richard Standage

The big idea for this year's programme is to take our Guest of Honour Ian MacLeod's common theme of alternative histories and turn it around to look at possible futures and, more importantly, whose are we living in? This is going to be from a light hearted point of view with our opening ceremony (currently classified information) to more serious panels looking at issues such as SF views of potential futures, and the impact of the internet with its implications for privacy.

To get everyone in a festive mood we are planning a party on the Friday night followed by some light hearted entertainment. Saturday evening will see the return of the very popular pub quiz, so start planning your teams. Naturally we will be giving you a chance to spend your money and boost your extensive collections with our book and art auctions, while Sunday will wind down with the traditional beer and food tasting.

In addition of course we have our two excellent guests Ian R MacLeod and Vernon Brown, who will have their own slots plus anything else we can involve them in.

If you have any ideas or suggestions, or want to volunteer your time or expertise, then feel free to drop me a line (details elsewhere in this PR).

2008 Nova Awards

Steve Green

In 1973, Novacon instituted the annual Nova Awards to celebrate achievement in British science fiction fanzines. Originally handed down by a panel of judges, these accolades are now decided by all Novacon attendees who can demonstrate a basic knowledge of current fanzines. Following Novacon 32, the three existing categories - best fanzine, best fanzine writer, best fanzine artist - were extended to cover fanzines produced in Eire. In addition, electronic fanzines are now eligible, provided a file hardcopy is lodged at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ, UK. The current rules and a list of known eligible fanzines are available at the Novacon 38 website.

The 2007 Nova Awards were presented on 6th November 2007 by Novacon 37 guest of honour Charlie Stross. Special thanks to Charlie, to Ann Green for processing the ballot forms and to the 30 members who voted. The full results were as follows.

Best Fanzine: *Prolapse*, edited by Peter Weston (43 points); 2, *Banana Wings*, ed. Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer (38); 3, *Tortoise*, ed. Sue Jones (19); 4, *iShoes* (11); 5, *Plokta* (9); 6=, *Gotterdamerung Redux*, *Procrastinations* (7); 8=, *Demeter's Daughter*, *I Knew thePorridge Was Trying to Tell Me Something* (5); 10, *Brum Group News*, *Fanzine of the Teledu* (4); 12=, *A Cry For Help*, *Foundation & Empire*, *Head*, *Outlaw Mutation Boogie* (3); 16=, *Inca* (2); 17=, *Clues & Gropes*, *Motorway Dreamer*, *Phlizz* (1). **Best Fan Writer:** Mark Plummer (32 points); 2, Claire Brialey (30); 3, Peter Weston (19); 4, Yvonne Rowse (9); 5, James Bacon (8); 6=, Tanya Brown, Sue Jones (6); 8=, Julian Headlong, Tony Keen, Max (5);

11=, John Coxon, Mark McCann (4); 13, Giulia De Cesare (3); 14=, Abi Brown, Niall Harrison, Rob Jackson, Dave Langford, Ang Rosin (2); 19=, Tommy Ferguson, Flick, Christina Lake, Kari Maund, Dave Spencer (1). **Best Fan Artist:** Alison Scott (26 points); 2, Sue Jones (19); 3, Sue Mason (17); 4, Anne Stokes (7); 5, Arthur "ATom" Thomson (6); 6=, Steve Jeffery, Pete Young (4); 8=, Peter Harrow, John Toon (3); 10, Flick (1). A single second-place vote for Taral Wayne was disallowed, as he is not resident in either the UK or Eire. Best Fan (awarded by the Novacon38 committee): Peter Weston.

Hotel Information

The Quality Hotel at Bentley, Walsall, is situated beside Junction 10 of the M6 - so access by road couldn't be easier. The nearest railway station is Walsall and the nearest InterCity railway station is Wolverhampton. Full details about travel will appear in our third and final Progress Report.

The Quality has 150 twin / double rooms - no singles. The rate for twin / doubles is £38 per person, per night. The hotel has agreed we can use a number of these as singles, at the special rate of £50 per person, per night. So, if you want a single room, complete the enclosed hotel booking form **now** - singles will be allocated on a strict first come, first served basis. Children under five will be accommodated free of charge, and children aged 5-12 will be charged £10 per night (all prices are inclusive of full English breakfast, or you can exchange your voucher for a baguette at the bar later in the day if you miss breakfast). All residents will be able to enjoy full use of the Quality's leisure club, which comprises indoor heated swimming pool, spa-bath, sauna, solarium, and gymnasium. For those who insist on a single but don't book in time, there are overflows nearby, but you'll need to book direct. The Premier Travel Inn is a 10-minute walk from the Quality (15 minutes back, as it's uphill on your way back); contact them at Bentley Green, Bentley Road North, Walsall, WS2 0WB, telephone 0870 197 7258, or www.premierinn.com. On the other side of Junction 10 is the more expensive Village Hotel on Tempus Drive, Tempus Ten, Walsall, WS2 8TJ, 0870 701 4444 or www.village-hotels.co.uk For further information contact: Steve Lawson (see committee contacts).

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. 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: Steve Lawson (see page two).

Children's Facilities:

Although, as in recent years, Novacon 38 will not be organising an official crèche, we will have a room set aside for younger members to amuse themselves. Please note any use of this facility will be strictly the responsibility of their parents.

Artshow & Auctions:

Novacon will once again be running a packed artshow, with many of the items featured in Sunday's arts and crafts auction. We'll also have our CD-ROM art display up and running. Do contact us at once if you want to exhibit your artwork. Members can also enter items in both the Novacon book auction (Saturday) and the Novacon arts & crafts auction (Sunday). Please advise the Registrations Desk immediately upon arrival if you have items for auction. A 10% commission is charged on all sales. For full details, contact Steve Lawson (see committee contacts).

Novacon's RNIB Raffle:

As usual, we will be selling raffle tickets to raise money for the Royal National Institute for the Blind's "Talking Books for the Blind" project. If you have anything you would like to donate as a prize for the raffle, please contact Helena Bowles (see committee contacts). Make sure you buy a ticket or two from the Registration Desk as well!

Dealers' Room:

If you wish to book tables in the Dealers' Room, please complete the relevant section of the membership form enclosed with this PR and return it to Steve Lawson. If you are already a member of Novacon 38 (see web site for the list of current members), simply endorse the form accordingly and complete the appropriate section.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ian R MacLeod, Tony Berry and Steve Green for their written contributions to this progress report. Thanks also to Steve Green and Kevin Clarke for running the Novacon website.


Novacon is organised under the auspices of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. The BSFG meets on the second Friday of each month at the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham City Centre. Membership costs £16 per year which includes a monthly newsletter. For further information write to 5 Greenbank, Barnt Green, Birmingham, B45 8DH, or visit www.bsfg.freesevers.com

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www.novacon38.org.uk




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NOVACON

The 50th British National Science Fiction Convention
EASTERCON




10th - 13th April 2009 Venue: The Cedar Court hotel, Bradford

GUESTS OF HONOUR

 Jon Courtenay Grimwood <i>Author of End Of The World Blues, 9Tail Fox and The Arabesk Trilogy</i>	 Tim Powers <i>Author of Three Days to Never, On Stranger Tides and A Soul in a Bottle</i>	 Dirk Maggs <i>Radio productions: Hitchhikers Tertiary phase, Voyager, 2001: A Space Odyssey</i>
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Plus Fan Guests of Honour
Mary and Bill Burns
Check out eFanzines.com

**The Cedar Court
Hotel, Bradford**
10TH - 13TH APRIL 2009



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