

NOVACON 39



Since Novacon left, the Quality Hotel in Walsall has moved slightly down market...

...so remember it's *Nottingham*
this year...

PROGRESS REPORT THREE

NOVACON 39

Guest of Honour **Justina Robson**

13-15 November 2009

The Park Inn, 296 Mansfield Rd., Nottingham, NG5 2BT

MEMBERSHIP RATES: Adults £39, 13-16 yrs £10; 12 and under free (age at 13/11/09). Postal membership taken until 31st October 2009. On the door, £45 for the weekend. Day membership, Friday £10, Saturday £20 and Sunday £15.

HOTEL ROOMS: Double or twin rooms will cost £40 pppn, while singles will be £56 pppn. Children: under 5 yrs free; 5-14 yrs £5.00; over 14 yrs adult rate.

Deposits are not required when booking. We will take hotel bookings as long as the hotel will let us. Since a deposit is not required you may e-mail your form to me if you wish.

Novacon 39 contact details:

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WEB SITE: www.novacon39.org/index.htm

Chair

Alice Lawson

Well, here we are, only weeks to go now before seeing you all at the convention. Doesn't time fly when you are having fun?

Since the last PR, my team have been very busy doing all the bits that need to be put together to give you the best convention we can.

We spent a very tiring weekend in Leicester refurbishing the (very) tatty art boards. It took a full weekend ~~including child labour~~ to get them done. You can read about our efforts later.

We've visited the hotel for a dry run, and very enjoyable it was too. We did the usual wandering around to check shops etc. Yes there are few shops nearby - within very easy walking distance. Amongst them are a newsagent, a wine shop, also a cash point across the road and a supermarket; there's also a shop that specialises in Tin Tin stuff. They have some lovely t-shirts etc. You can have a look at <http://www.joesstore.co.uk/Tintin/TinTin5.htm>

Surprisingly we found that there are also a couple of pubs nearby. There is one directly across the road, which unfortunately does not allow children. However a little bit further along is another pub, which is child friendly until 21:00

Turn right out of the hotel, cross the road past the Best Western, and there is a hotel that has an Indian Restaurant. We haven't tried it yet so we've not idea whether it's any good or not. Let us know!

September's BSFG meeting gave us a dry run of the Guest of Honour. Justina gave an excellent talk that managed to be both informative and entertaining and she spent time after the talk getting to know people and answering questions. All in all she was a really nice, intelligent and entertaining lady and I am really looking forward to having her as a guest for Novacon. I am sure you will like her as well. Don't forget to buy her a drink if you see her in the bar.

The last touches have been made to our programme. We are pleased to announce that some of our previous guests, including Ian R. McLeod and Charlie Stross, will be taking part. More programme information can be found elsewhere in this PR including what we have planned for the traditional Friday night knees up.

Looking forward to seeing you all there.

Alice

Justina Robson: Enter the Dragon

Julian Headlong

“... we can pull you if it gets too much.”

“No,” Lila said quickly. She’d reached her bike. Its sleek, powerful lines and instant reaction to her touch on the grips had already calmed her more completely than her AI-self’s drug response to her nervousness. The doses themselves had been so low that their effect was already gone and here, where inappropriate reactions didn’t matter, the AI didn’t bother masking her true responses. The engine purred like a giant cat, making the concrete vibrate under her feet. “I’m fine.”

But Lila isn’t ‘fine’. Lila Black isn’t ‘fine’ at all. In fact, Lila Amanda Black is a complete and utter mess. But she’s also someone you just don’t mess with.

... her right thigh opened with smooth clockwork precision and she took out the gun, always loaded, that was kept there in the hollow where a bone would be. The first shots were out of it before the image of her assailant had resolved to more than a blur...

As I said in PR1, the Quantum Gravity sequence (so far – ‘Keeping It Real’, ‘Selling Out’, ‘Going Under’, and now - ‘Chasing the Dragon’) uses ideas similar to those found in John M Ford’s ‘The Last Hot Time’ or Diane Duane’s ‘Stealing The Elf-King’s Roses’ – reality has fractured, strange worlds have impinged on ours, and elves and demons and fey and *others* are running about all over the place causing havoc and rock music and seriously fun parties and ghosts and faery diet food and scaring all the children.

It’s the end of the world as we know it, and nobody gets to feel fine.

Our heroine, Lila Amanda Black, once a secretary in the embassy to the Elven homeland, is now a magically enhanced cyborg spy with built-in machine-guns, flame-throwers, jump-jets, and a nuclear reactor core, who is only saved from serious mary-sueism by her relentless bad luck. Which, by book four, has reached epic proportions, and now Buffy isn’t the only one who wants to know what the plural of ‘Apocalypse’ is.

Speaking of Buffy, when asked what the basic idea beneath ‘Buffy the Vampire Slayer’ was, Joss Whedon replied “Torture Buffy”. That seems to be the underlying motif of ‘Quantum Gravity’, too – torture Lila. And, like Buffy, Lila makes you care. She *hurts*.

She also hurts the bad guys. A lot.

... she shot straight up as fast as her jets would carry her... She raised her right arm, felt the gun system assemble itself and the shot depart without having a single thought go through her head. There was only the wind, the vector, the target and the intent ...

Each of the books in the series so far has ended up with Lila undergoing yet more weird transformations, ending up with even more weird super-powered baggage, and leaving her private life in even greater disarray.

So far, so *manga*. Because “Quantum Gravity’ is sf for those who grew up with Dark Horse comics – The Authority and Jenny Sparks, vampire manga, giant *mecha* anime, game consoles with first-person shooter games, and reality-bending movies - ‘Final Fantasy’ or ‘The Matrix’.

It is over-loaded, everything-including-the-kitchen-sink mix of fantasy and sf for our over-loaded mixed-up world. And that’s what can make a nuclear-powered demon-slayer into something you can believe in (when your finely-tuned *willing-suspension-of-disbelief* systems kick in, that is) and make you happy to follow Lila along on yet another outing to hell and back.

... one moment she was herself, the next she was a tall battle mechanoid with vastly impressive shear-bladed blue metal armour and impossible-looking gearing... she’d used every comic book from the library to come up with it... she looked quite mad. It was perfect ... there was light and the roar of a serious blast. She remembered at the last second to strike a heroic pose...

Pure anime fun.

There’s also a shed-load of fantasy going on here. The fey are gearing up for war, the elves are in the middle of a civil war, and the demons are *always* at war. And humans? We have been seriously screwed over by the Quantum Bomb, North America is a series of islands in a sea of trouble, and Earth has been re-named ‘Otopia’. Why? Who knows? It just *has*, OK?

And Lila has mislaid another husband. Now, to lose one husband is unfortunate, but to lose two is down right *careless*. So Lila is on a quest, a great quest to find her wandering husbands – one an elf and the other a demon. She really *does* have relationship problems. Oh! She also has to save the world. Again.

So far there have been magic spells, elemental golems, necromancers, Hoodoo, fairy rock stars, magic swords, ghost ships, enchanted keys, magic airships, and guns. Lots of guns.

In 'Chasing the Dragon' there are meetings with the Hunter's Chosen (left over from a previous Apocalypse), meetings with void-walking Strandlopers (left over from a previous plot) and meetings with Death (a cute chick dressed all in black – but this one smokes a cigar, so that's all right then). Plus more meetings with elves, demons, fairies, angels, ghosts, zombie pirates, vampires, and talking cats than you can shake a stick at.

Oh. And dragons. Them too.

**** A Public Awareness Message for Readers ****

When reading this series I would recommend skipping the first chapter of book one ('Keeping It Real'), as the info dump includes many un-necessary spoilers for details that are all brought out more naturally during the course of the novel – and you can always go back and read it after finishing the rest of the book if you still can't work out what's going on.

The Famous Novacon Art Boards

Tony Berry

Those of you who frequent the art show at Novacon will be familiar with the art boards. Their origin is lost in the mists of time, but every year we drag them out, look at them and say, "These are bloody awful!" and then spend some time trying to find a few that are decent enough to display pictures. This year we decided that Something Must Be Done (actually we say that every year). A trawl of the interweb showed that the cost of buying new boards was prohibitive, which only left one alternative: to refurbish the things ourselves. I didn't believe for a second that this would actually happen, but it just goes to show....

A few weeks ago the entire committee, plus children, convened at Dave and Cat's house in Leicester on Saturday morning, ferried the smaller art boards from Dave Holmes's shop, then worked our arses off for the rest of the weekend to refurbish them. Armed with a small fortune in felt and glue, the boards were dismantled, stripped and recovered, frames and poles cleaned, and then the lot reassembled. And I have to say they look terrific. **In fact far too good to use.** We may just have an art board display and any actual art will be propped up against the walls or left on the floor.

The larger boards are still waiting for the treatment, but now we've got the hang of it we fear nothing. There should be some photos of the operation available on the website.

“There Will Be A Programme”

Helena Bowles & Richard Standage

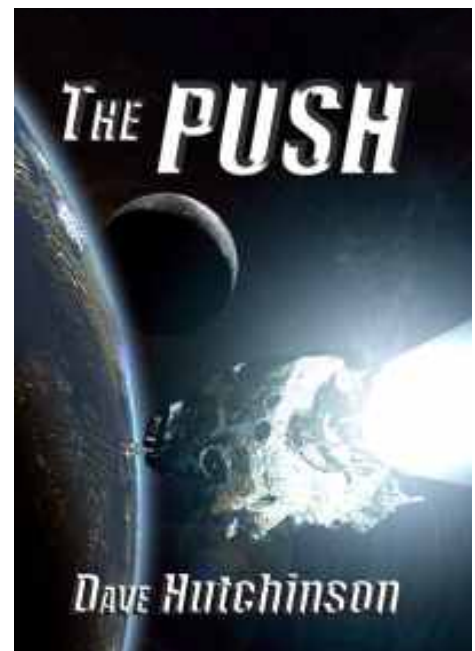
So here we are, within six weeks of the convention and, as is traditional, the air rings with the Programme Team's howls of disappointment (“whaddaya *mean* he's not coming any more?”) and shrieks of frustration (“*why* won't Alice let us pay for Richard Dawkins?”)

It is, therefore, with the equally traditional shaky hands and shifty looks that we *assure* you that there will be a programme – and a *good* one, honest! It's just that we have to firm a few things up, grease a few more palms, avert a few more disasters and probably bring about world peace on the way.

Seriously, though, we have some great stuff lined up. Justina is proving herself prepared to work very hard for your pleasure. Steve Green will grill her during the ever-popular “Room 101” challenge and Pauline Morgan for the regular Guest of Honour interview. She will be taking part in a panel discussion about necessity – or desirability – of the purity of genre fiction. She has also created her own programme item (we like it when guests do that...) called **The Good Book Hour**. Justina will be hosting a space where people bring along their all time favourite book, plus a recent discovery, and talk about each for a few minutes. This way we get to share people's pleasure and find books we might not have otherwise picked up. **NB. There will also be cake!**

On a sadder note we have to correct one previous announcement: Mark Pallen, who was going to talk about Charles Darwin, has had to pull out due to health problems. Do not despair, though! Stepping ably into his shoes is **Dr Alison Pearn**, the Assistant Director of the Darwin Correspondence Project, who is able to give us a unique and private insight into Darwin himself.

Novacon would not be Novacon without a knees up and this year we have two. On Friday night we are delighted to be launching **Chasing the Dragon**: the fourth book in Justina's Quantum Gravity series. If that's not enough we have a second launch party on Saturday for **Dave Hutchinson's** new book, **The Push**. Come along, have a drink, buy a book, get it signed.



There will be all the usual fun and frolics – panels, discussions, Big Quizzes and silly games plus the ever-popular beer tasting. We expect the kaffeeklatsches to be just as popular this year the last few and we have **Ian Watson** and **Ian MacLeod**, amongst others, confirmed to take part. So come along, bring a book to chat about and lift a glass while you're talking. Novacon is about participation and the best programme will be nothing without your input. We look forward to seeing you.

Miscellany

Art Show will be all in one room again!

The new venue means we can return to an art show all in a single space. **Serena Culfeather** has agreed to run it again after her excellent work last year. We will run the CD-ROM art show if we have enough material. Artists looking to exhibit either actual work (for auction or not) or electronically should get in touch soon.

Bigger Dealers' Room

We'll have a bigger dealers' room and it's right next to the bar! Interested dealers should contact **Tony Berry**

Parents' co-op

Novacon will not be operating a crèche but we will look into setting up a parents' co-op, where a room is set aside for smaller children to play under parental supervision if there is sufficient demand. If you're interested let us know as soon as possible.

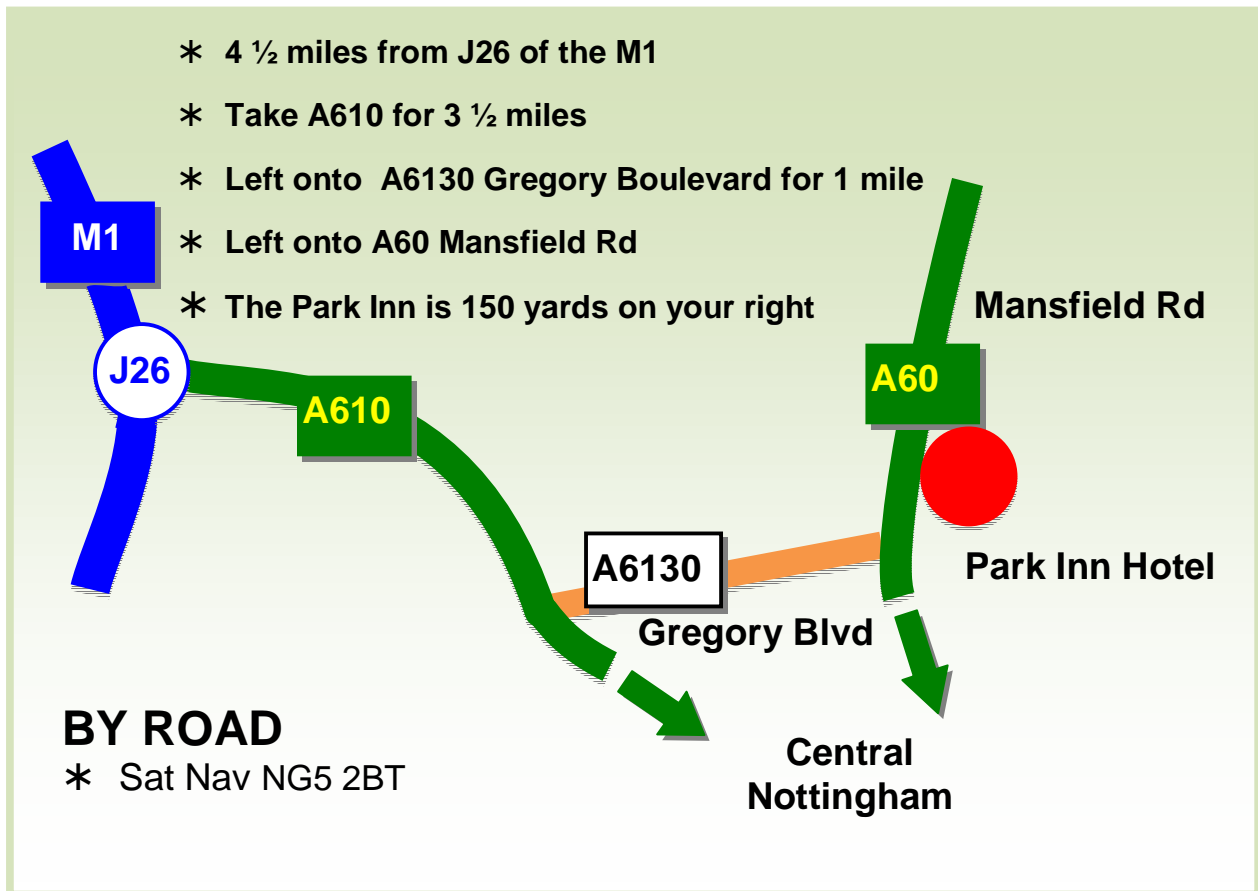
But The Sky My Lady, The Sky!

Dave Lally is willing to lead a group to observe the night sky from a nearby open space during the con. If you're interested then bring any binoculars/telescopes you have to hand and speak to Dave at the Convention.

See page 2 for all contact details.

How to get there

We have a new venue in Nottingham so pay attention



(Even if coming from the South, it's easier to use J26)

By public transport

You'll arrive at **Nottingham railway station** or the next door **Broadmarsh bus station**.

If there's two or more of you arriving at the same time, a taxi costs about £6.

The cheapest option from the Railway station or Broadmarsh Bus depot is to walk up through the town (see below) until you get to the bus stops on **Lower Parliament Street**. The walk is 15- 20 minutes and up hill most of way, so if this is a problem, consider a taxi.

At time of research there was a frequent free bus service due to start in September operated by Barton Buses from stand 6 of **Broadmarsh bus station** which should stop at the Victoria Centre close to Lower Parliament street. Last scheduled service is 19:00. If you use this, ask the driver for the best place to get off for the bus stops in Lower Parliament Street.

For walking through the town, turn left out of the main railway station into Carrington Street. Go over the canal – walk past the entrance to Broadmarsh bus Station (travellers from Broadmarsh should pick up directions at this point) walk up to Collin street and cross at pelican and go into the entrance of the Broadmarsh shopping centre to the left. Walk straight through the Shopping centre and emerge into a shopping precinct, Lister Gate. Keep walking up the hill and you should emerge into the huge Old Market Square characterised by fountains, Town hall etc. Keep walking up, go up either Market Street or Queen Street and you will find yourself on Upper Parliament Street. Turn left for Lower Parliament Street.

WATCH OUT FOR TRAMS!

Once at LOWER PARLIAMENT STREET you can catch a bus from a number of stops: a single fare is £1.50 (exact money). There's six buses going up the Mansfield Road and the journey takes about 7 minutes. The bus stands are the purple routes: numbers **87**, **88** and **89** and the lime green routes: **56,58** and **59**, found outside Burger King, Britannia Building Society and William Brown Estate agents. Buses are frequent.

After about 2 miles, look out on the left and you'll see a cemetery while going down a hill: the bus will cross a large roundabout with flowerbeds. This is the junction with Gregory Boulevard. The stop immediately after is Clarendon College and you should get off here.

There's a Pelican crossing 20 yards up, cross here and the Park Inn is 80 yards up the road on the left. If you go past a pub called the Grosvenor, you've gone too far and need to get off bus sharpish and walk back.

Adventurous fans may wish to take the tram to the bus stops. These can be easily accessed via the railway station – simply follow the signs. From Broadmarsh, exit left to Carrington Street, cross the Canal bridge and turn left into Station street. The lifts to the Tram terminus are about 50 yards down on the left. Get on a tram and a conductor will take your fare – a combined tram and bus day ticket is £3 and your conductor will give change, but will not accept £20 or £50 notes. Get off at the Royal Centre and cross the road to walk past the Theatre Royal towards Lower Parliament Street.

Yes, we know that's a lot – that's how public transport is in provincial cities in the 21st century...

For diligent travellers keen to research their destination: Nottingham has Street View enabled on Google.

“Whither the Book Room?”

Caroline Mullan

Caroline is presenting a programme item on Sunday, allied to events over the weekend to explore what the dealers' room means and what we want from it in 21st century fandom.

Sounds pretentious, doesn't it? “*Whither the book room?*” But I think it needs asking. Without books – ink on paper, transported and displayed to find, buy or borrow - there would not be any SF. But this is changing, and what happens at cons is changing. We need to talk about what is happening in the book room.

Books remain incredibly important to fandom; our history is in them, our dealers sold them when you couldn't get them anywhere else, and still do so today.

Will they continue to do so?

There are few or no new booksellers coming to UK conventions. We continue to lose old booksellers. Specialist publishers now bring their own stock to sell direct. Is the book room still vital to the convention experience? If the day comes when there are no more booksellers at conventions, what will we have lost?

We won't lose books: everyone who ever wanted to write or read will see to that. But we'll lose something: the serendipitous discovery that comes when books jostle each other; the cover that catches your eye; the book mentioned last night in the bar. We'll lose a place where you can buy a book you always wanted or never knew existed. We'll lose a place to pass on books to new readers.

We will lose (perhaps have already lost) a peaceful place at the heart of the convention, where readers linger to browse among books at rest on their journey from writer to reader. We lose altogether a longer, slower conversation among the books. And we will lose our links to the time when people could make their livings buying and selling books. In short, we will lose some significant part of the conversation between the readers and writers of SF.

I do not think it is necessary to lose all these things. I think that if we still want the book room it will be possible for books still to be sold at conventions, and for booksellers (as well as publishers or writers or fans), to sell them. But we will have to want the books, and someone will have to want to sell them, and we will all – writers, publishers, readers and conrunners - have to adapt to the changes that will make it possible.

Will we call for the booksellers still? And will there be booksellers to answer the call?



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 Novacon members who can demonstrate a basic knowledge of current fanzines.

Following Novacon 32, the three 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 hardcopy is lodged with the administrator.

The following fanzines were received by or brought to the notice of the Nova Awards administrator between 1 October 2008 and 30 September 2009 inclusive, and are considered eligible for the 2009 awards, presented at Novacon 39: *Ansible* #255 - #266, Dave Langford; *Are You Still Here*, Steve Green; *Banana Wings* #36 - #39, Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer; *The Banksoniain* #14, David Haddock; *Brain Scrapings*, Selina Lock; *Bye Bye Johnny* #3, Graham Charnock; *Critical Wave* #2.01, Steve Green & Martin Tudor; *Data Dump* #130, #132 - #134, #136 - #140, Steve Sneyd; *The Descent of Fan*, Douglas Spencer; *Fourth Age Lembas*, Sandra Bond (primarily a contribution to the Fantasy Amateur Press Association); *Head* #8, Doug Bell & Christina Lake; *Inca* #4, Rob Jackson; *Journey Planet* #3 & #4, James Bacon, Claire Brialey & Chris Garcia (Pete Young was guest editor on #3); *Lost in Space* #1 & #2, Jim Mowatt; *Motorway Dreamer* #6, John Nielsen Hall; *No Sin But Ignorance* #49, Claire Brialey (received 1 October, but published in September); *Plokta* #39.5 & #40, Steve Davies, Alison Scott & Mike Scott; *Quasiquote* #7 & #8, Sandra Bond; *Relapse* (formerly *Prolapse*) #13 & #14; *Virtual Tucker Hotel* #22 - #24, Peter Sullivan (although primarily an electronic fanzine, paper copies are available upon request).

The following were also received during the same period, but are ineligible under the current rules: *Chunga* #15, Andy Hooper, Randy Byers & Carl Juarez; *Festival of Fantastic Films Progress Report Vol.19* #2, *Vol.20* #1 & #2, Tony Edwards for the Society of Fantastic Films; "*Smooooooth...*", Curt Phillips; *This Here...* #10, #12, Nic Farey; *Vanamonde* #773-792, John Hertz.

Members

October 2009

1	Justina	Robson	39	Roger	Robinson
2	Ian R	MacLeod	40	David	Thomas
3	Charlie	Stross	41	Margaret	Croad
4	Feorag	NicBhríde	42	Caroline	Loveridge
5	Ken	MacLeod	43	Gavin	Long
6	Brian	Aldiss	44	Dave	Cox
7	Harry	Harrison	45	Tony	Rogers
8	Alice	Lawson	46	Dave	Tompkins
9	Tony	Berry	47	Paul	Dormer
10	Helena	Bowles	48	Niall	Gordon
11	Cat	Coast	49	Michael	Abbott
12	Dave	Hicks	50	Anne	Wilson
13	Steve	Lawson	51	Ian	Maughan
14	Richard	Standage	52	Stephen	Dunn
15	Martin	Tudor	53	Ian	Sorensen
16	Vernon	Brown	54	Yvonne	Rowse
17	Pat	Brown	55	Adrian	Snowdon
18	Ina	Shorrock	56	Gwen	Funnell
19	Gavin	Shorrock	57	Peter	Wareham
20	Neil	Summerfield	58	Peter	Mabey
21	Chris	Stocks	59	Brian	Ameringen
22	Tim	Stannard	60	Meriol	Ameringen
23	Chris	O'Shea	61	Caroline	Mullan
24	Gerry	Webb	62	Sue	Jones
25	Mali	Perera	63	Dave	Hardy
26	Kostya	Milayev	64	Julia	Daly
27	Chris	Bell	65	Douglas	Spencer
28	½r		66	Jim	Walker
29	George	Ternent	67	John	Dowd
30	Linda	Ternent	68	Fran	Dowd
31	Calvin	Ternent	69	Rog	Peyton
32	Anne	Woodford	70	Claire	Brialey
33	Alan	Woodford	71	Mark	Plummer
34	Pauline	Morgan	72	Julian	Headlong
35	Chris	Morgan	73	Penny	Hicks
36	Barbara-Jane		74	Steve	Davies
37	Marcus	Thierstein	75	Giulia	De Cesare
38	James	Odell	76	Liam	Proven
			77	John	Harvey
			78	Eve	Harvey
			79	Steve	Green
			80	Dave	Lally

81	Al	Johnston	123	John	Wilson
82	Heloise	Tudor	124	Serena	Culfeather
83	Jennifer	Swift	125	Wendy	Graham
84	Mike	Scott	126	Michael	Meara
85	Flick		127	Pat	Meara
86	Marcus	Rowland	128	Greg	Pickersgill
87	Simon	Dearn	129	Catherine	Pickersgill
88	Thomas	Recktenwald	130	Simon	Bradshaw
89	Steve	Cooper	131	Hailey	
90	Susan	Peak	132	Noel	Collyer
91	Farah	Mendleson	133	Angela	Rosin
92	Steve	Rogerson	134	Ian	Warner
93	David	Cochrane	135	Dave	Langford
94	Andy	Sawyer	136	Del	Cotter
95	Martin	Easterbrook	137	Neil	Tomkinson
96	Margaret	Austin	138	Alison	Tomkinson
97	Tony	Keen	139	Christy	Avraam
98	Kate	Bodley	140	Phillip	Collins
99	Nik	Whitehead	141	Ian	Brown
100	Wilf	James	142	Helen	Cross
101	Susie	Haynes	143	Chris	Murphy
102	Martin	Holmes	144	Teresa	
103	JFW	Richards	145	Andrew	Patton
104	Nicholas	Jackson	146	Carol	Morton
105	Bridget	Wilkinson	147	Tony	Morton
106	Peter	Wilkinson	148	Christopher	Brooks
107	Harpal	Singh	149	Mark	Slater
108	David T.	Cooper	150	Eddie	Stachelski
109	Jane	Cooper	151	Sue	Hobson
110	Duncan	MacGregor	152	Andrew	Hobson
111	Christina	Lake	153	Robert	Smith
112	Lennart	Uhlin	154	Tobes	Valois
113	Doug	Bell	155	Martin	Hoare
114	Roderick	O'Hanlon	156	Christine	Davidson
115	Laura	Wheatly	157	Michael	Davidson
116	Sue	Edwards	158	Ian	Whates
117	Tanya	Brown	159	Edwin	Rydberg
118	Dave	Holmes	160	Ian	Watson
119	Richard	Crawshaw	161	Lazlo	Kenzler
120	David	Cluett	162	Peter	Harrow
121	Joyce	Cluett	163	Anthony	Hilbert
122	Beth	Giddins	164	Tony	Naggs

165	Omega		176	John	Medany
166	Harry	Payne	177	Rita	Medany
167	Jodie	Payne	178	Lisa	Konrad
168	Hal	Payne	179	Campbell	McLeay
169	Jamie	Scott	180	Martin	Smart
170	Nick	Mills	181	Melica	Smith
171	June	Strachan	182	Clare	Boothby
172	Ann	Looker	183	Malcolm	Davies
173	Mark	Young	184	Kate	Solomon
174	Peter	Crump	185	Peter	Sullivan
175	John	Bray	186	Mike	Shevdon

To advertise in our splendid publications:

Advertising is welcome for the programme book.

The Programme book rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets).

£80 (£35) full page,
£50 (£17.50) half-page,
£27.50 (£10.50) quarter-page.



BIRMINGHAM Science Fiction GROUP

The **Birmingham Science Fiction Group** was founded in 1971 to enable local and not so local fans to get together to discuss science fiction and related topics.

We meet on the second Friday of every month, 7:45pm at the Old Joint Stock, Temple Row (please note new location), just 5 minutes walk from New Street Station and handy for all bus routes. We usually start the evening with a guest speaker, often a professional in the field such as Brian Aldiss, Terry Pratchett or Peter Hamilton.

If you live anywhere in or around the West Midlands, the BSFG is the group for you! For further information, and a copy of our monthly newsletter, please:

Email: **BHAMSGROUP@YAHOO.CO.UK**

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT: **www.birminghamsfgroup.org.uk**

