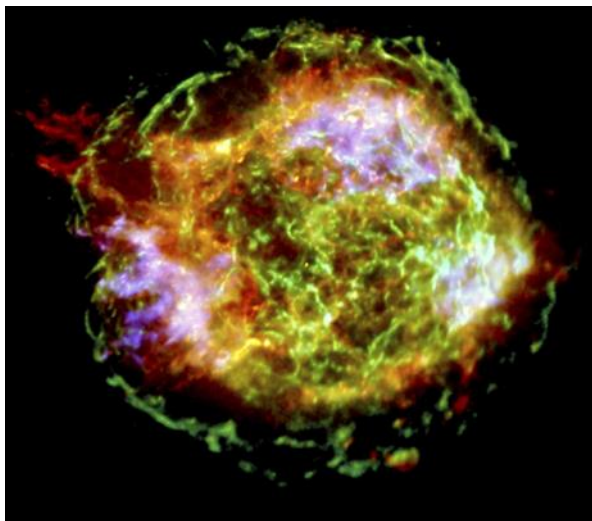




NOVACON 50
PROGRESS REPORT 2



12 – 14th November 2021

Guests of Honour

**Chris Baker, Emma Newman, Claire North,
Christopher Priest**

The Annual Convention of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group

COMMITTEE

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A WORD FROM OUR CHAIRS - IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT – CHANGE OF VENUE



Over the last few months, the Mercure hotel in Nottingham has been hosting a Nightingale Court as a way to generate income. The contract with the Justice Department was to run until June, but now it has been extended until the end of the year and the hotel is not in a position to refuse. So, regrettably, we will not be able to hold Novacon 50 here for what would have been our 12th year!

The good news is that we have found a new venue, which is the Palace Hotel in Buxton, Derbyshire on the edge of the Peak District. Located next to the train station, it is an imposing Victorian listed building which has been nicely refurbished. All the function rooms, the bars and toilets are on the ground floor and there is plenty of lounge area. The whole place is light and airy with high ceilings and some impressive decor. And a conservatory. And the longest continuous wrought-iron bannister in Britain, or was it Europe? And possibly a ghost. There are several fully-accessible bedrooms and some family rooms. Room rates are actually a bit cheaper than last year, being £60pppn for a single and £45pppn for a double/twin.

Needless to say, we are still planning an in-person convention and will soon start taking room bookings. As it's a new venue we would appreciate it if you could book your room as soon as possible. Booking will continue to be via Novacon website/Membership Secretary. The website will be updated soon to show these changes.

We will still be able to host the Art Show and Dealers Room at the new venue. If you want tables in the dealers' room or space in

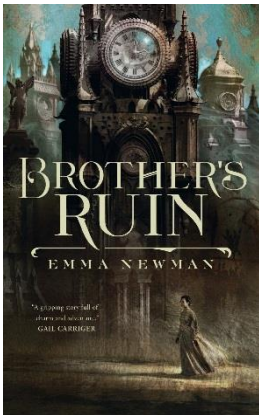
the art show let us know. Please contact either Tony (Dealers) or Serena (Art Show).

In between watching Netflix and drinking too much, we have expanded the Novacon website: on it you will find articles by previous Guests of Honour remembering their experiences at the con, and photographs of previous Novacons. We will be putting up more of these, so if you have any photos you'd like to send us we would appreciate it. We have also started a blog where you can read stuff, reply to it and send anything you think people would find interesting. For details, see NovaconPlus section below.

That's about it for now, so stay safe and we'll be speaking to you again.

Tony and Alice.

GUESTS OF HONOUR ACTIVITIES

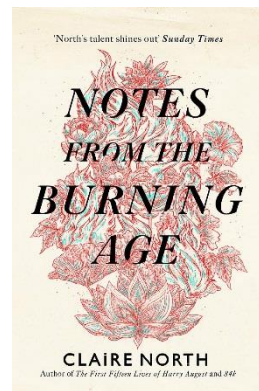


According to her website, **Emma Newman** is currently working on a third book in her *Industrial Magic* series. These are described as “gaslamp” fantasy set in 1850’s England, with an industrial revolution powered by magical, rather than scientific advancements. Unfortunately, for fans of her SF *Planetfall* series, there are no publishing offers to support a fifth book in the series.

Claire North

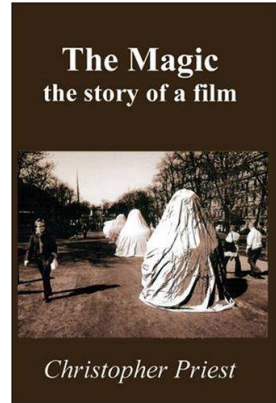
has a new novel, **NOTES FROM THE**

BURNING AGE due to be published on 22nd July. Ven was a keeper of ancient records from the “Burning Age” – a time of excess and disaster. His duty was to interpret them; sorting useful knowledge from “heretical” ideas so that the ills of that era can never be repeated. But when the revolutionary Brotherhood pressure him to translate stolen writings, his life is turned upside down and he must decide how far he will go to save his new world. It will be



published by Orbit as a hardcover for £18.99 RRP (ISBN 978-0-35-651475-8) and ebook (£9.99).

Christopher Priest, in collaboration with David Langford has produced an ebook version of his non-fiction book, **THE MAGIC – THE STORY OF A FILM**. This was originally published in 2008 (as a hardcover and paperback) but this is the first time it is available in ebook form. The film in question is Christopher Nolan’s **THE PRESTIGE** which is an adaptation of Chris’s book of the same name. It looks at the transition from book to film and is in Chris’ words “A book writer’s analysis and celebration, of what is probably Nolan’s most interesting film to date”. The ebook is £4.99. Details on ordering any of the three formats (hardcover, paperback or ebook) can be found at <https://christopher-priest.co.uk/grimgrin-studio/the-magic-the-story-of-a-film>



Carol Goodwin

HOTEL & CONVENTION INFORMATION



As announced above, Novacon 2021 will be moving to the Palace Hotel in Buxton Spa in the Peak District. The dates remain the same

ie **12th – 14th November 2021** so book the date in your diaries for then.

The hotel is next to Buxton Railway Station for those travelling by public transport. For those driving, it has 180 parking spaces (10 disabled) and we have negotiated free car parking.

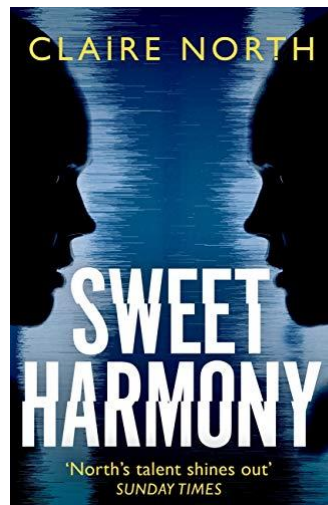
Buxton is a thermal spa town, with lots of Victorian/Georgian buildings. It also has plenty of shops, restaurants, cafes etc for those who wish to venture outside the hotel. More details will be added to the website and in the next Progress Report.

SWEET HARMONY – Claire North

In a future so close to us that it may already be happening, is a UK in which electronic health enhancements called nanos are available. Not only available but vital if you want to maintain health, fitness and bodily beauty. But they're expensive. Stuck in the middle of this is Harmony Meads, an only child in her late twenties (when we first meet her), originally from Reading but working for an estate agent in London.

The plot concerns Harmony's ups and downs of life, mostly due to nanos (and their absence). She gets a degree (from Reading Uni) but fails to find a job better than estate agenting. She has no control over her credit and comes across as a spoilt brat (though quite a loveable one).

We pop back and forth between episodes of Harmony's life from the age of 19 to her early 30s. Her high point is finding an executive boyfriend (she sells him a swish apartment) and becoming dragged into paying for ever more expensive nano upgrades by renewable subscription that's expensive to maintain, expensive to get out of. They cover every part of her body, ensuring that she becomes and remains toned and beautiful. She and Jiannis have a great few months. A wedding is being planned.



But there's always a downside, that I'm not going to describe. North has wonderful names for the nano services, including Cellublast, Bright Eyes, Dermaglow, Fresh and Perky, Control My Breath, K-blast, Zenblood and No More Dentists, each with a health warning in very tiny print, that Harmony never bothers to read. The heroine of all this is Harmony's mum, Karen, a widow, who always stands by Harmony and offers a place to return to when things get bad.

Themes are that perfection is an illusion and always read the small print, with a touch of all men are bastards. There's no supernatural element (as there was in her previous book *THE PURSUIT OF WILLIAM ABBEY*) but the SF horror here is every bit as nasty. As always, North uses a range of great similes and metaphors in this easy-to-read romp.

Chris Morgan

NB At present the book is only available as an eBook

NOVACON Plus

Hopefully some at least of you have been looking at the new sections of the website, the **NovaBlog** and the NovaNostalgia sections.

While the NovaNostalgia section has up to now featured reminiscences from previous Guests of Honour, we think it would be good to expand that and ask Novacon members for their thoughts and memories of past Novacons. Photographs or short articles would be welcome.

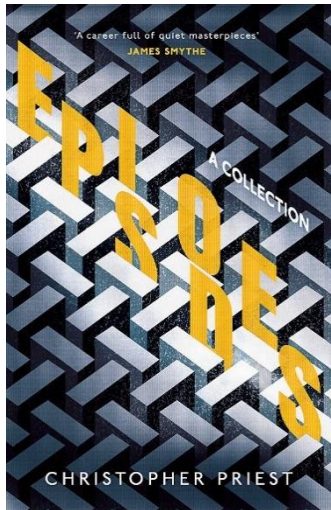
Articles should be up to a maximum of 500 words, although shorter is fine. Also, if you have any accompanying photographs that would be helpful. Please let us know who the subjects in the photographs are (where known) for the avoidance of any errors or upset).

Contributions should be emailed to website@novacon.org.uk
Please send articles as Word or Plain text. Photos preferably as J-pegs.

EPISODES – Christopher Priest

EPISODES is a collection of 11 stories covering the whole of Chris's writing career, the last fifty years, published in July 2019. And what an enjoyable volume it is. What's different and most fascinating

about this collection is that for each story Chris has provided 'Before' and 'After' notes. He explains how stories came to be written, how they compare with the novels he was writing at the time, and what happened to the story afterwards. His theory is that most stories (not just his but all those within SF/fantasy/horror) are quickly forgotten even if they make a splash at the time. It's a theory that almost falls at the first fence with "The Head and the Hand". The gruesome tale tells of a man who, for reasons of huge monetary gain, has parts of his body cut off in public performance.



Once you've read it you can't forget it. It's a story written in 1970, from which a movie was planned but never executed. It should be reprinted in any 'Best of...' horror anthology. Several of the stories included here fall into the horror category, yet are elegantly told, fully demonstrating the power of Chris's style.

Two of my favourite Priest stories are here: "Palely Loitering" and "An Infinite Summer", both of which are SF with fantasy trimmings and feature in his collection AN INFINITE SUMMER (which I recommend strongly but which is now 43 years old). Both are, in different ways, love stories. "Palely Loitering" was nominated for a Hugo but had to settle for a BSFA Award. I remember it, but how many of you do?

Several of the later stories in the volume were new to me—especially those with surreal elements. They had one appearance in an anthology (sometimes a very obscure one) and have not been seen since. In his 'Before' note to "futuristic.co.uk" (sic) Chris mentions Robert Sheckley's humorous social satire, and that is, indeed, a story Sheckley would have been proud to have written. Yet it was broadcast on Radio 4 and this seems to be its first printed appearance. "Shooting an Episode" is a fine piece of OTT future technology that has only appeared in a slightly obscure anthology, 2084 edited by George Sandison. And the final story is the unsettling "The Sorting

Out" a very subtle suggestion of horror that not even I have in its original anthology, *The New Uncanny* edited by Ra Page.

So if you enjoy good, clever writing across the genres of SF, fantasy and horror, hunt out this volume. (I bought my trade paperback direct from Chris Priest; it's a 2019 book; the hardcover and Orion standard paperbacks are still available.) *Chris Morgan*

CLASSIC SCIENCE FICTION STAMPS

On April 15th, the Royal Mail issued a series of 6 special stamps to celebrate "Classic Science Fiction". Each stamp features a new artistic interpretation of a "classic" story by British SF authors. The authors and stories featured were:

1. **FRANKENSTEIN** by Mary Shelley (Illustration by Sabina Šinko)
2. **THE TIME MACHINE** by HG Wells (Illustration by Francisco Rodríguez)
3. **BRAVE NEW WORLD** by Aldous Huxley (Illustration by Thomas Danthony)
4. **THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS** by John Wyndham (Illustration by Mick Brownfield)
5. **CHILDHOOD'S END** by Arthur C Clarke (Illustration by Matt Murphy)
6. **SHIKASTA** by Doris Lessing (Illustration by Sarah Jones)

I'm sure with only 6 there will be endless debate about whether the 'right' six have been chosen and who else might they have picked? The stamps were issued to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of H G Wells death, and the 70th Anniversary of the publication of **THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS**, so unsurprisingly Wells and Wyndham make up two of the



six. I also feel that to not have included Mary Shelley, whose contribution to SF should not be debatable, would have been criminal. The only other female author chosen was Doris Lessing,



who would probably not have been my next choice, and I wonder who they might have added to get an even 3:3 split.

The term ‘Classic’ is a bit vague, with publication dates ranging from 1818 through to 1979 (for SHIKASTA by Doris Lessing). If we take that as a range, then there are many others who I would have thought worthy of consideration.

If we consider women authors first, then a few come to mind. Taking them in roughly chronological order, the first contender in my personal opinion would be Margaret Cavendish, who wrote THE BLAZING WORLD in 1666 (wonder if the Great Fire of London was a part inspiration?). For those who don’t know, it describes a utopian kingdom on another world, which can be reached via the North Pole. The story is of a young woman who is kidnapped and becomes Empress and military leader of The Blazing World. It is seen as important not only as an early example of science fiction but also of “proto-feminist” writing.



A couple of twentieth-century writers I would suggest are Katherine Burdekin (1896 to 1963) and Naomi Mitchison (1897 to 1999). Katherine Burdekin wrote several “feminist utopian/dystopian” novels. These included THE BURNING RING

(1927) and the REBEL PASSION (1929) which were time travel fantasies. Her more well-known novels, written using the pseudonym of Murray Constantine, were PROUD MAN (where a hermaphrodite from the future criticises 1930's gender roles) and SWASTIKA NIGHT. The latter, which was published in 1937, is set a few hundred years in the future where the world is ruled by the Nazis and the Japanese. It anticipates the Holocaust, and has many similarities to 1984, (which wasn't published until 1948).

Naomi Mitchison who lived to the age of 101, published over 90 novels and wrote in a number of genres, including historical, children's and science fiction and fantasy. She was controversial for her time, and wasn't afraid to tackle subjects such as "free love",



abortion and rape. Her 1932 book, AN OUTLINE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS AND THEIR PARENTS was attacked for a "lack of emphasis on Christianity" and a claimed sympathy with the Soviet Union. Her fantasy works included GRAEME AND THE DRAGON (1954) and a humorous Arthurian novel, TO THE CHAPEL PERILOUS (1955). Her SF novels included

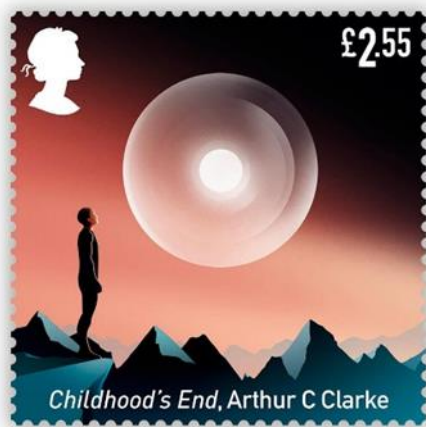
SOLUTION THREE (1975) and the most famous, MEMOIRS OF A SPACEWOMAN (1962). This is set in a future society where men and women are equal, and humans have visited many worlds in a quest for knowledge but with a strict rule against 'interference' (sound like *Star Trek's* Prime Directive, anyone?).

Turning to the male authors who else might have been chosen. Perhaps the most obviously missing author to the general public would be George Orwell. The dystopian society of 1984 influenced many future SF writers and is familiar to many who don't follow SF. ANIMAL FARM (1945) is another widely-read novel (many of us will have memories of dissecting its themes etc in school

English lessons!) and fits into the wide definition of fantasy, although we know it is primarily intended as a political allegory.

For other male authors who might have been considered, I took a quick look at the BSFA and Hugo Award finalists for the 60's and 70's. Again taking 1979 as my cut-off date for publication, there are some excellent authors who are still familiar and in print to this date. For example, John Brunner who was a prolific writer of SF with his first novel published in 1959. His *STAND ON ZANZIBAR* won the Hugo and BSFA Awards in 1969. He also won the next year's BSFA for *THE JAGGED ORBIT* in 1970.

Another contender that many would vote for would be J G Ballard. Another controversial author and not to everyone's taste, his debut novel, the SF book, *THE WIND FROM NOWHERE* was published in 1961, quickly followed by *THE DROWNED WORLD* in 1962, which was the novel that brought him to prominence. He was not always popular in SF circles and the only award he received was a BSFA in 1980 for *THE UNLIMITED DREAM COMPANY* which is not the best representative of his work (and technically not SF).



Last but certainly not least, one of the most significant contributors to SF and the one I think should definitely have been included is Brian Aldiss. In a short article like this there is not enough space to detail all his contributions, and there are plenty of people at Novacon who will know him and his works in far more detail than me.

As well as fiction (mostly SF), he was also an editor, critic, poet, anthologist and wrote much non-fiction as well. He also did much to promote science fiction especially as something of literary merit. He was the first President of the BSFA and a joint President (with Harry Harrison) of the Birmingham SF Group. His first novel

NON-STOP was published in 1958, with HOTHOUSE following in 1962 (which won the Hugo). Other award-winning titles include THE SALIVA TREE (1966), which won a Hugo and HELLICONIA



SPRING (BSFA & John W Campbell Memorial Awards). He also won a Hugo for Non-fiction with TRILLION YEAR SPREE in 1987. He was made an SFWA Grand Master in 2000 and was awarded an OBE for literature in 2005.

I could continue to list other authors, but enough of my thoughts. What do you think? Obviously, the Royal Mail primarily chose authors that the

general public would have likely have heard of – either from films/TV or from school English Literature lessons. However, we as SF fans would probably have different ideas. Do you agree or disagree with some of my suggestions? Who else would you recommend? What would a 21st century selection or an all women line-up look like?

Carol Goodwin

NOVACON CODE OF CONDUCT

A Convention is a private event and, as such, the Committee has always had the right and the ability to remove any attendee for antisocial behaviour. Over recent years, it has become standard practice for such events to publish a Code of Conduct providing guidelines as to what that antisocial behaviour may include.

The Code of Conduct is a living document. It evolves, intending always to reflect current best practice. The version in use at each Novacon is fixed in advance of the convention, and the version for Novacon 50 is available on the website (www.novacon.org.uk/n50/) and will be printed in Progress Report 3 and in the convention Programme book.

It should be noted that the Code of Conduct governs not only behaviour at Novacon, but also in certain spaces elsewhere, including but not limited to activity online, such as in messages or replies to Novacon accounts on social media, and posts in Novacon pages and groups. The

Novacon Code of Conduct team receives complete information from preceding Novacon Code of Conduct teams, and passes complete information to future Novacon Code of Conduct teams. It also maintains an awareness of activity which has been of concern to other conventions. For most people, the simple principle of, “Behave like a decent human being,” is enough of a guideline. However, if in any doubt, please consult the Novacon website or contact the team at CodeOfConduct@novacon.org.uk

Cover: Supernova remnant of Cassiopeia A (<https://go.nasa.gov/3g885zF>)



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6. Chris Beckett
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8. Alice Lawson
9. Cat Coast
10. Carol Goodwin
11. John Harvey
12. Steve Lawson
13. Yvonne Rowse
14. Magdalen Standage-Bowles
15. Serena Culfeather
16. John Wilson
17. Noel Collyer
18. Stephen Cooper
19. Marcus Rowland
20. Pat Brown

- | | |
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| 22. Bridget Wilkinson | 64. Hazel Ashworth West |
| 23. Julia Daly | 65. Mary Peek |
| 24. John Bray | 66. Bernard Peek |
| 25. Mike Scott | 67. Niall Gordon |
| 26. Tim Kirk | 68. Sue Edwards |
| 27. Chris Bell | 69. Douglas Spencer |
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| 31. Margaret Austin | 73. Barbara-Jane |
| 32. Martin Easterbrook | 74. Christina Lake |
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| 34. Tim Stannard | 76. Mark Meenan |
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| 36. Alan Woodford | 78. Martin Smart |
| 37. Pete Wright | 79. Melica Smith |
| 38. Anne Wright | 80. Kate Solomon |
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| 40. James Odell | 82. Chris Morgan |
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| 44. Michael Davidson | 86. Anne Wilson |
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| 46. Hal Payne | 88. Vanessa May |
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| 50. Roger Robinson | 92. Steve Dunn |
| 51. Paul Oldroyd | 93. Alison Scott |
| 52. Chris Donaldson | 94. Steven Cain |
| 53. Ian Sorensen | 95. Brian Ameringen |
| 54. Ron Gemmell | 96. Emjay Ameringen |
| 55. Paul Dormer | 97. Caroline Mullan |
| 56. MEG | 98. Roger Earnshaw |
| 57. Tim Broadribb | 99. Sue Jones |
| 58. Dai Walters | 100. Steve Jones |
| 59. Dave Hicks | 101. DC |
| 60. Penny Hicks | 102. AC |
| 62. Morag O'Neill | 104. Giulia De Cesare |

105. Steve Davies
106. William Armitage
107. Helen McCallum
108. Alison Buck
109. Peter Buck
110. Phil Nanson
111. Kari
112. Eira Short
113. Cuil Short
114. Smuzz
115. Stan Nicholls
116. Anne Nicholls
117. John Dowd
118. Fran Dowd
119. Richard Standage
120. Helena Bowles
121. Nigel Rowe
122. Peter Wilkinson
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151. Catherine Pickersgill
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153. Mali Perera
154. John Richards
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