

NOVACON 23

Progress Report One



NOVACON 23
Guest of Honour Stephen Baxter
Royal Angus Hotel, Birmingham
Friday 5th to Sunday 7th November 1993

COMMITTEE : Carol Morton is chair with Bernie Evans doing Registrations; Richard Standage as Treasurer; Andy Wright organising the Programme; Helena Bowles in charge of Ops and Tony Morton on Publications.

STAFF : Chris Murphy, responsible for the Bookroom; John Harold who will arrange the Artshow and Martin Tudor Hotel Liaison.

MEMBERSHIP and ENQUIRIES : This will cost £25 until 1st October when postal memberships close, then £30 on the door. Bernie Evans (121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4HS tel: 021 558 0997) is the person to send your cheques to and will try to answer any convention enquiries.

ROOM RATES : Twin/Double rooms will be £29.50 (per person) and Single rooms £33.50 per night.

ADVERTISING RATES : Advertising is welcome for the next two Progress Reports and the Programme Book at the following rates: Progress Reports 2 & 3 (Professional) £22.50 full page, £17.50 half page, £7.50 quarter page, £40 back covers; (Fan) £17 full page, £9.50 half page, £5 quarter page, £30 back cover. Programme Book (Professional) £45 full page, £25 half page, £15 quarter page, £80 back cover; (Fan) £22.50 full page, £12.50 half page, £7.50 quarter page, £40 back cover. Anyone interested should approach Tony Morton at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS (0384 897206). Deadlines camera ready advertising copy are PR2 18 June, PR3 20 August and the Programme Book 17 September.

BOOKROOM RATES : Tables will cost £15 for a six foot table for the whole weekend however, if you are allocated a smaller four foot table the cost will be reduced accordingly. To book a table you must be a member of the convention and fill in and return your booking form (which will be out with PR2).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS : Our thanks go to Stephen Baxter for the story, Dave Mooring for the cover art and Tony Berry for the Novas article.

IN PROGRESS REPORT TWO : The second instalment of Stephen's story, more about the committee, further details of the hotel and your all important booking form.

INTRO FROM THE CHAIR

Carol Morton

What on Earth have I let myself in for? Why do I agree to do these things? Why I ask myself, why? Oh well, it's too late to back out now, (not that I really want to) so on with the show.

Last year saw Novacon returning to its roots with the con being held at the Angus, and talking of returning to roots, not only is the con at the Angus but we have as GOH, Stephen Baxter a "hard" SF writer, the first since Iain Banks at Novacon 17.

Our GOH has kindly agreed to let us serialise one of his stories the first instalment of which is in this PR. To read the rest of the tale and get the other PRs you'll have to be a member of the con but, as we are back at the Angus, we have had to set a membership limit and the way things are going if you haven't joined already you'd better do so quickly!

THE PROGRAMME

Andy Wright

This year I've been told it's hard, the SF that is. With a 'hard' SF author as guest of honour we're harking back to past Novacons. As usual with PR1 the programme is still in the early stages of being put together and we are open to suggestions on what you would like to see (or not). What events at past Novacons did you particularly enjoy? What did you hate, loathe and detest? We particularly want suggestions for 'hard' SF items, but there's no need to feel left out if you don't have a degree in astrophysics, a panel on the social effects of Carl Sagan announcing that SETI had found something is just as 'hard' as all that technology.

So please send me your suggestions, comments money, and we will try and put together a programme that will keep you amused, amazed and something else beginning with 'a' (alcoholic, anarchic, anacrobic.....?).

ME AND ME FORMS

Bernie Evans

Have I got news for you! This is your very last chance to collect a set of my famous forms, 'cos I've handed the job over to someone else next year, so join real quick and get these rare collectors' items.

I do mean JOIN, just because you've got this PR doesn't mean you're a member, it means either you were a member of Novacon 22, or you've told me you're interested, or I think you SHOULD be interested, (and if not, why not?). To check if you're a member look at the list elsewhere in this PR, unless you only joined after May 4th you will be on it. If you're not and you think you should be give me a call, 021 558 0997 evenings/weekends.

If you want to make sure you're on the next list send your money now. This is the last PR you'll get if you don't, and as PR2 will have the Hotel Form and PR3 will have a NOVA Voting Form, you don't want to miss out, do you? Speaking of NOVA voting forms, we've decided to re-introduce SUPPORTING memberships this year, at £8.00, (converting at the difference between the two rates at the time you do it). A supporting membership WON'T I'm afraid guarantee you a last minute membership, we've still got a limit imposed by the Hotel, but it's gone up from 300 to 350. What you WILL get is all the publications, AND the right to vote in this year's NOVA AWARDS.

Continues after Omega tropic...

OMEGATROPIC By Stephen Baxter

Part One

When the silver woman first appeared, in the midst of the sleet- and smoke-shrouded carnage of the battle, Angus Ban thought perhaps she was an angel.

The battle seemed already to have lasted a lifetime. At daybreak the Rebels had been drawn into a stern line facing the English Army; Angus, with the rest of the MacDonald Clan, stood at the left end of the thin line. After a night of futile marching at the behest of Prince Charles and his staff the Clans were already shorn of sleep. Now the wind and sleet pounded their faces; and soon there came a deadlier rain from the Royal battalion guns.

The shots burst the bodies of men around Angus, scattering their limbs as if they were dolls. The Rebels stood, waiting for orders from their Clan chiefs.

At last the Clan Chattan broke from the centre of the Rebel line, to Angus' right. The rant of the pipes rose to a scream. With their kilts pulled high to the groin and their white-cockaded bonnets jammed down over their brows, the Rebels ran with bodies bent and their feet kicking at the sodden heather.

Musket fire exploded from the white-gaitered ranks of English troops. The metallic smell of gunpowder - and the butcher's-slab stench of blood - drifted to Angus through the rain.

At last, in the mist and confusion, Angus heard the cry to advance from his own Clan chief, his father the MacDonald of Keppoch. Angus raised his broadsword high, and with his dirk and target before him he ran forward, his feet pounding on the uneven, wet ground.

He got within twenty paces of the English line. All around him Clansmen fell to English grape. Angus, to his horror, found himself treading on still-warm, broken flesh. The Clansmen roared Gaelic oaths. They feinted attacks, hoping to draw the Royal troops forward. But the English stood their ground and cut the Highlanders down where they stood - with, Angus realised to his disgust, virtually no cost or risk to themselves.

Angus was an educated man of twenty-three years; the previous summer, of 1745, had seen him matriculate from St John's College, Cambridge. So he had enough detachment to be able to interpret the patterns of the battle around him.

In fact he felt a sense of dislocation in time: for surely the disciplined formation of the English represented the military methods of the future, while the Rebels - with the wild charge their only tactic - were a failing relic of history.

And yet he stood with the rest, roaring defiance in Gaelic and French at the English muskets' bark, and letting humiliation turn his blood to fire.

Now a corridor of air opened up in the smoke before Angus, connecting him with one of the English line: a squat fellow, with the blunt features of a farmer. The Tommy-Lobster's eyes seemed to meet Angus', and Angus saw fear and determination there. His scarlet coat was cuffed with regimental colours, his black tricorne was pushed down over his square head, and his thigh-length gaiters were caked with thick Scottish mud.

The soldier took a fresh cartridge of grape and bit savagely into it, releasing a dribble of powder to prime his pan. Angus, feeling as if he were standing next to the Englishman, saw teeth and tongue coated with the black powder.

The soldier raised his musket at Angus.

Clansmen falling all around him, his father and brothers lost in the smoke before him, Angus Ban raised his broadsword.

The musket flashed, barked an instant later.

The silver woman appeared.

She arrived a few paces before Angus, as suddenly as if through a trapdoor in the ground. She stumbled on the blood soaked heather. She was coated in a suit of tight, flowing armour, and her face was hidden by a featureless visor.

The grape cartridge slammed into her right shoulder blade. The woman was spun about; she raised her face to the sky. She fell on her back, at Angus' feet.

Angus, astonished, stared down. The silver suit was bright amid the greens and scarlets of the fallen tartan. Could this indeed be an angel? And yet no angel would be felled by grape, English or no.

All around him the Rebel lines were breaking up. Angus saw ferocity bleach from grim, bearded faces, to be replaced by fear - for the Clansmen themselves, and for their families in the dark future of English reprisals.

Kilts were raised once more, but this time in retreat.

Angus, acting on impulse, dropped his target. He knelt, grabbed the silver woman by the scruff of her neck, and dropped her over his shoulder. He turned and fled Culloden Moor, with the long limbs of the silver woman dangling around him.

*

Tracy Fernandez opened her eyes.

She was lying on her back. She waited for the visor's IR imaging system to kick in.

It didn't.

She raised her hands to her face (no, her left hand only; her right arm from the shoulder down was stiffened, immobilised within the biocomposite suit). Her visor wasn't there.

Panic hit her now, shocking her to alertness. Using her left arm she struggled to a sitting position. Her right shoulder sent her echoes of pain, filtered through the suit's biomedical systems. Dimly she remembered smoke, noise, the stink of gunpowder, an instant of explosive pain. She felt dizzy, oddly elated: side effects of the anaesthetics her suit was pumping into her shoulder. The biocomposite of the suit was unbroken and would have attenuated the impact, and interceptor molecules in her bloodstream would keep her free of infection until she got home, after her last Dislocation. She scraped backwards. The floor was gritty and cold, and mud worked under her fingernails. Her back collided with a crude wall. She felt stone, sod, heather compacted together. She was in a hut, then. A hovel.

Impressions of this time, this place, crowded in on her. The air was cold, damp. The hut stank - of stale urine, of rotting heather, of burnt peat.

She heard breathing.

She wasn't alone here.

A form, over there, on the opposite side of the hut: a pale face, bearded, dimly visible over dark clothing. White legs glowing like bone in the chinks of light from the broken walls. A skirt of some kind - no, a kilt?

Black eyes, fixed on her.

Her good arm flew to her waist, her chest. - But her laser crystal was gone - as was, crucially, the chest pack containing her Dislocation switch. She cursed herself silently.

She regulated her breathing, felt the focus of her awareness move out from her own uncomfortable body. Tentatively she raised her good arm, listening to the soft whirl of the suit's exoskeletal multipliers. She assessed the distance between herself and the stranger.

"Do not fear. I do not intend to harm you."

Lightly accented English. And - civilised.

Tracy hesitated.

The man raised his empty hands. "We are safe here. This hut is abandoned, overgrown by the heather; from without it will appear as no more than a hummock, in the foreign eyes of the Lobsters."

"You took my visor. And other materiel."

He didn't respond directly. "At first I thought you were an angel...But a woman dropped from nowhere in to the hell that was Culloden this morn is a no less remarkable sight."

Culloden?

Discreetly, her movements hidden by her body, she tapped queries into the datastore touch pad embedded in the suit material over her right thigh.

"I am Angus Ban," the boy said. "Elder son of Alexander MacDonald, of Keppoch."

"Angus Ban," she repeated. "My name's Tracy Fernandez. UN Special Forces. Uh, United Nations."

The datastore whispered through the boned of her skull. Scotland. Spring, 1746. Scene of the rout by the English troops of the army of Clansmen raised by the exiled Charles Stuart, the so-called Bonnie Prince. The causes of the Rebellion -

Bonnie Prince Charlie. Christ.

Angus frowned, looking hunted. "Are you a Lobster after all, then, girl? United Nations. That's no regiment I've heard of."

Automatically she analysed his tone of voice. Light, feverish. She saw his pallor, his jerky movements. Classic shock symptoms. Not Surprising.

"No regiment, Angus. I'm not even English." The simulations had all advised one of two tactics in this sort of situation. Tell the truth, or pretend to be God. Well, Angus was no fool; and she might need to trust him. "I'm a time traveller. I've come from the future, from the year 2073. Do you understand me? I've come back three centuries through time..."

Angus nodded gravely. He didn't seem to find the concept impossible to accept.

She was feeling dizzier, dull. The suit was doing its best, but she was going to need to sleep soon. She had a choice to make. Sleep, and trust Angus. Or kill him now.

Angus said, "But why? Simply to save me from a Lobster's cartridge? For you did, and that is why I dragged you from the Moor, abandoning my Clansmen."

She laughed, and let herself slump down to the cold ground. She seemed to have made her decision. "That was a happy accident, Angus. My journey is random... but it is Omegatropic. That is, I am seeking the Omega Numbers. The truth at the end of the universe."

He smiled. "Universal truth? On Culloden Moor?"

"I'll tell you about it later. Wake me if the Lobsters come."

Thomas Lobster. Clannish slang for the redcoated English troops, who - She shut off the data trickle and let sleep claim her.

To be continued in PR2...

There are some good fanzines around, see Tony Berry's piece for more on that, and we've got a hot new contender for best writer here in Birmingham, so get sending those stamps to the editors, get reading, and get joining Novacon so you can VOTE.

You'll find your all-purpose membership form in here somewhere, use it to volunteer for something, book Art Show or Book Room space, tell us your ideas, or just to remind me who you are.

PR2 out in about 3 months, join between now and then and that will be your first acknowledgement unless you send an SASE. Same applies to receipts, SASE will secure one at once, otherwise you may get one with your PR2, I only send them to filthy pros who can claim against tax, to save time and effort, unless specifically requested. I hope that's clear, any complaints can be referred to me on the number above, as long as you don't call in the middle of Coronation Street or The Bill.

NOVAS.

Tony Berry

This year is shaping up very nicely, with a number of new titles appearing, some old ones revived, and even some supposed-dead resurrected. By the time we get to Novacon there should be a mountain of fanzines to choose from, and I intend to produce as complete a list as I can of those that are eligible and distribute it at the con. From what I've seen there is some excellent work being produced, which should encourage you all to vote; after all, if the same old stuff was being churned out year after year I could understand apathy setting in, but this time there'll be no excuse.

Boring rules bit (actually very condensed-the complete Nova rules run to some 5 sides of A4! And you thought it was just a bit of fun). The Novas are awarded for work on the fanzines produced by science fiction fandom.

Created in 1973 by the late Gillon Field, originally there was only the one award, for the best fanzine of the year, decided by a committee of famous fans. These days voting is open to all active fans who are attending or supporting members of Novacon, and there are now three awards: Best Fanzine, Best Fanwriter and Best Fanartist. For a fanzine to qualify for this year's award, one or more issues must have been published between 1st October 1992 and 30th September 1993. For a writer or artist to qualify, they must have at least one piece of work published for the first time between those dates.

For the purposes of voting, a "fanzine" is defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with science fiction, fantasy, SF and fantasy fans and related subjects, copies of which may be obtained in exchange for other fanzines or in response for letters of comment. An "active fan" is defined as someone who has received 6 or more different fanzines during the year (different publications, not different issues of the same publication. Society and club magazines do not count as different publications).

Fanzines produced so far this year: **ANSIBLE** #63-#69, Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU. **BALLOONS OVER BRISTOL** #3, Christina Lake, 47 Wessex Avenue, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 0DE. **BOB?** #4, Ian Sorenson, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, Scotland, ML3 7HY. **CONRUNNER** #18, Ian Sorenson, 7 Woodside Walk, Hamilton, Scotland, ML3 7HY. **THE DOG FACTORY** #1, Dave Wood, 1 Friary Close, Marine Hill, Cleveland, Avon, BS21 7QA and Les Escott, 84 Ivy Avenue, Bath, Avon, BA2 1AN. **EMPTYIES** #11, Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG. **EYEBALLS IN THE SKY** #6, #7, Tony Berry, 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands, B69 4EP. **FANS ACROSS THE WORLD**

NEWSLETTER, Bridget Wilkinson, 17 Momosa, 29 Avenue Road, Tottenham, London, N15 5JF. **GAJJIN #2**, Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ. **THE LIGHT STUFF #7**, Rhodri James, 18 Harvey Goodwin Avenue, Cambridge, CB4 3EU. **THE OLAF ALTERNATIVE #2,#3,#4/OUTHOUSE#6,#7,#8**, Ken Cheslin, 10 Coney Green, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 1LA. **ORMOLU #1**, Ann Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 7LQ. **SALIROMANIA #9**, Michael Ashley, 9 Blakely House, Kelmere Grove, Woodside, Bradford, BD6 2RF. **SLUBBERDEGULLION #6**, Nigel E Richardson, 9 Windsor Green, East Garforth, Leeds, LS25 2LG.

All of the above fanzines are available for "The Usual". If there are any you would like to see, simply send the editor a couple of stamps to cover postage. Also, if you produce a fanzine and it is not listed above, please send a copy to me, Tony Berry, at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, Warley, West Midlands, B69 4EP.

Membership List as of 4th May

001 Stephen Baxter	040 Brian Stovold	081 Kay Allan
002 Sandra Shepherd	041 Alison Cook	082 Andrew Stephenson
003 Carol Morton	042 Chris O'Shea	083 Larry Van der Putte
004 Bernie Evans	043 Malcolm Reid	084 Tony Rogers
005 Helena Bowles	044 Alison Weston	085 Pam Wells
006 Tony Morton	045 Steve Davies	086 Brian Davies
007 Richard Standage	046 Giulia De Cesare	087 Lesley Ward
008 Andy Wright	047 Tim Stannard	088 Dave Hardy
009 Dave Mooring	048 Peter Mabey	089 William McCabe
010 Sarah Dibb	049 Niall M Gordon	090 Paul Kincaid
011 Pat Curzon	050 Dave Lally	091 Maureen Speller
012 Kathy Westhead	051 Dave French	092 Ethel Lindsay
013 Rog Peyton	052 Shirley French	093 Richard James
014 Rod Milner	053 Lynn Edwards	094 Peter Dunn
015 Julian Headlong	054 Paul Edwards	095 Chris Murphy
016 Mark Reynolds	055 Linda Krawecka	096 Rhodri James
017 Nic Farey	056 Tim Broadribb	097 Steve Grover
018 Paul Dormer	057 Richard Rampant	098 Tim Morley
019 Mike Westhead	058 Kati Wright	099 Helen Steele
020 Mike Stone	059 Pat Silver	100 Alan Woodford
021 Ina Shorrocks	060 Caroline Mullan	101 Anne Woodford
022 Norman Shorrocks	061 Brian Ameringen	102 Ian Sorensen
023 Roger Robinson	062 Margaret Austin	103 Sally-Ann Melia
024 Dave Ellis	063 Martin Easterbrook	104 Mike D Siddall
025 Steve Jones	064 Mike Abbott	105 Duncan Booth
026 Chris Stocks	065 Marcus Rowland	106 Judy Booth
027 Chris Bell	066 Susan Francis	107 Marion Pitman
028 Arthur George	067 Alice Lawson	108 John D Rickett
Eccle-Cruttenden	068 Steve Lawson	109 Chuck Connor
029 Pat Brown	069 D M Sherwood	110 Mike Llewellyn
030 Vernon Brown	070 Phil Rogers	111 Freda Warrington
031 Helen Eling	071 Sue Harrison	112 Malcolm Davies
032 Stan Eling	072 Adrian Snowdon	113 Kate Solomon
033 Ray Bradbury	073 Steve Green	114 Martin Smith
034 Mike Ford	074 Ann Green	115 Sherrie Powell
035 Dave Thomas	075 Mickey Poland	116 Sam Bennett
036 Martin Tudor	076 Lorna Poland	117 Dave Cox
037 David T Cooper	077 Pete Weston	S 1 Dee Ann Lipscombe
038 John Harold	078 Eileen Weston	
039 Neale Mittenshaw-	079 Chris Morgan	
Hodge	080 Pauline Morgan	