



PROGRESS REPORT TWO

1st-3rd November 2002.

The Quality Hotel, Bentley, Walsall

Guest of Honour:

Ian McDonald

Novacon 32 The Vital Statistics

How Much? Attending membership is:

- £32 until Easter
- £35 after Easter until
- £40 on the door.
- Supporting membership costs £15 throughout.

Postal registrations should be received by **20th October 2002**, after this time please join on the door. Daily rates will be available on the door at £10 Friday, £20 Saturday and £15 Sunday. Cheques/Postal Orders should be made payable to "Novacon 32" and sent with your completed form(s) to: **Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ**. Further information from <http://www.novacon.org.uk>.

Accommodation: Room rates held to last year's prices! £32 per person per night for double or twin rooms and £45 pppn for singles (inclusive of full English breakfast). A deposit of one night's stay per person (£32 per person twin/double or £45.00 per person in a single), cheques payable to "The Quality Hotel" MUST be enclosed, or details of your credit card, and sent to **379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ** by 30th September 2002, e-mail enquiries to xl5@zoom.co.uk or tel. 0114-281-1572.

Advertising: We welcome advertising for both the next two Progress Reports and the Programme Book. For details see inside back page.

Dealer's Room: Tables will cost £15.00 each for the whole weekend. To book a table (or tables) you must be a member of the convention and fill in the relevant section on your membership form or contact Steve Lawson.

Committee:

- **Chairman** Martin Tudor, 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net);
- **Secretary** Cat Coast, 1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ (little.jim@dial.pipex.com);
- **Treasurer** David T. Cooper, 3 Yate Lane, Oxenhope, Keighley, West Yorks., BD22 9HL (elwher@ic24.net);
- **Programme** Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, West Midlands, B927LQ (ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk);
- **Publications** Dave Hicks, postal address as Cat Coast's above, (little.jim@dial.pipex.com);
- **Registrations** Steve Lawson, 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (xl5@zoom.co.uk);
- **Operations** Alice Lawson postal address as Steve Lawson's above (fab@zoom.co.uk).

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Martin Tudor, Tony Berry, Dave Hicks and Steve Green for their contributions. Uncredited text by Dave Hicks and Martin Tudor. Artwork/logo by Dave Hicks.

Novacon 32 No Sacrifice of Quality

Chairman's Address by Martin Tudor

I am pleased to confirm that the management of the Quality Hotel was every bit as happy with the business we gave them at Novacon 31 as we were delighted by the service they gave us, and so Novacon will have a Quality Hotel again this year!

To go with our Quality Hotel we again have a quality Guest of Honour this time in the form of Ian McDonald. Having just finished re-reading his wonderful 1996 novel *SACRIFICE OF FOOLS* I am happy to confirm that I made the right choice for our GoH....

SACRIFICE is a superb novel set in a near-future Ulster, where Protestants and Catholics have been forced together into an uneasy peace under a joint Anglo-Irish rule. As if the situation wasn't volatile enough the Government decides to settle a third force in the province – the Shian, an alien race with whom the governments of Earth have agreed settlement rights in return for access to their advanced technologies. However, the massive social experiment of introducing a community of 80,000 Shian into such a polarised society looks likely to explode when one of the leading Shian families is brutally murdered with previously unknown alien weaponry....

SACRIFICE is a stunning whodunit with many bizarre twists. I cannot recommend it too strongly – a high-quality read!

Returning to the subject of our Quality Hotel, enclosed with this Progress Report you will find a Hotel Booking Form which we urge you to complete and return immediately to Steve Lawson at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ. As you are aware, although we have an abundance of twin and double rooms we have an allotment of just 30 single rooms – so if you want one of these book now! (Steve will be date-stamping these forms on receipt and requests for singles will be dealt with on a strict first come, first served basis!)

However, we do urge anyone who would normally request a single to consider a twin. This year we have arranged with the Hotel for everyone sharing to have a key each and have received an apology from the Manager that this wasn't possible at Novacon 31. (Last year the company supplying the key blanks misinformed him - but he has now arranged for a supply of duplicates specifically for Novacon!)

In other news some of you may have heard a rumour that NOVAcon 31 made a substantial loss. This is not so. We were worried on the Sunday night of the convention, although the Birmingham SF Group had reserves that exceeded the shortfall we thought we were looking at, but once we checked the accounts after the con it turned out we'd been erroneously charged VAT by our printers, when the programme book should be VAT exempt. In fact we made a modest surplus, which will be spent on the traditional committee meal just as soon as we can decide between salt and vinegar or smokey bacon.

Novacon 32 Snookered on the New Frontier

Ian McDonald by Dave Hicks

This isn't meant to be an objective overview, but an introduction to some of Ian McDonald's work from my own perspective. For all I know it's not some over-arching thematic agenda that made him put locomotives on Mars but a youth spent train spotting, but this what I get out of it, and the sharing of such opinions is one of the key reasons I attend, and run, conventions.

Last year, before Novacon, I was talking to Gwyneth Jones. Firstly we discussed how seriously 'lit crit' she could get on the programme. "Post-modernism" I suggested, "will probably clear the room. 'Structuralism' will clear the building." The conversation turned to her reputation as an 'intense' writer, the densely textured prose, the plots that reveal themselves through the emotional landscapes of her characters, the characters themselves not immediately possessing motives transparent to the reader as in facile Hollywood back stories but comprehensible only as you get to know them, as they let their guard down over the course of the novel like, well, real people. The whole gamut of qualities, in fact, that distinguish real writing from that blurb writer's shorthand for hack work, *storytelling*. "I don't *set out* to be like that," she said, "but I can't write any other way..."

Clearly enough of you found her convincing to clear Rog Peyton out of copies of **BOLD AS LOVE** by Sunday morning. So, hopefully, you know what I mean. Think of the other writers who attended Novacon last year. The authors of **INVERSIONS**, **THE STONE CANAL**, **MIDNIGHT ROBBER** and **MAPPA MUNDI**.

Intense. Is any science fiction writer who's any good *not* intense?

All intense stuff, but intense doesn't mean impenetrable and complex but mature and committed. It doesn't mean prolix and self indulgent but articulate. It doesn't mean extreme but passionate. All difficult enough to pull off when the stories about the likes of you and me in situations we can literally relate to, but in alien landscapes, or among alien bodies at the mercy of alien biologies...

Which brings me to Ian McDonald. There's a film industry concept called the "calling card movie", a low budget independent flick made to announce one's potential and attract future backers for more ambitious projects, to imply that one will go on and do great things. Eventually. Similarly first novels are all about promise, and inevitably reviewed as much with an eye on what is to come from the author as the merits of the initial work itself. You're not supposed to hit the ground running with a fully-realised high-octane magic-realist new frontier milieu featuring a multi-generational epic of money, power, sex, family, politics business, railroads and snooker. However McDonald did just that, with *DESOLATION ROAD*, extolled elsewhere by Steve Green, the anything but simple story of the life of a community that springs up both by accident and intriguing design along a railroad in the early years of the colonisation of a partially terraformed Mars. It's a setting he has returned to in some of his short fiction and the recent *ARES EXPRESS*.

It's a bold step, given the associations with trains that permeate modern Britain: ineptitude and unreliability (Railtrack allegedly almost bankrupt), or in America: irrelevance (Amtrak is on the verge of bankruptcy). There was however, a time when rail travel was invested with romance, was a vehicle for epics, in the era of the Old West and The Empire, new frontiers of opportunity for real and fictional characters throughout the nineteenth century. Handled skilfully by McDonald this world of mighty iron engines – in this case nuclear powered behemoths of awesome size and power - pounding across scorching, dust-filled wildernesses, carrying humanity's eccentrics and adventurers in search of new destinies lives again. With nowhere left on this world like that where else is there to turn but Mars? I know, I know: everybody writes about Mars these days, but it's no longer one small theme among many, our near neighbour; it's become the new frontier, an open territory for science fiction writers to stake out turf.

It's such a *romantic* notion, too. Personally, I'm deeply suspect of the position put forward from time to time in fandom that the space programme needs to be supported for entirely and purely rational reasons. If we're going to live

on the new frontier we'll need to transcend the phlegmatic practicality of pioneering space exploration and form communities that embody the whole range of human experience in order to grow. We'll need hearts and balls as well as minds. DESOLATION ROAD is such a romantic novel in that sense. A community born out of happenstance, desperation and idiosyncrasy on a desert railhead that nobody knows is even there (not the least of its problems) grows, flourishes and meets its fate as much because its characters pursue the emotional potential of their new lives, because in this intense place only intense people can survive to exploit the possibilities.

The blank canvas of the new community is a classic SF theme too, although more frequently as some sort of monoculture starting afresh and pursuing a single agenda. In DESOLATION ROAD the characters have not chosen to be with each other, merely together in the same place by force of circumstance, so that not even single families can hold together on the same course. Consequently there's a magnificent concatenation of conflicting ideas that spring from their ambitions and adventures, the battle for individuality against control-freak super-corporations, causal loops in time travel, terraforming, decadent frontier cities, and yes, I did say snooker, including a science fictional twist on the virtuoso playing the devil for his soul. It's all so skilfully woven together for you to admire the detail close up and then step back to appreciate the bigger pattern.

SACRIFICE OF FOOLS, lauded by Martin Tudor at the beginning of this PR, appeared eight years later, in 1996. Set in near-contemporary Northern Ireland with the imposition of an alien community it's not difficult to see how the word intense can be applied to such a novel, but more so at first to relate it directly to DESOLATION ROAD. Where ROAD is extravagant and expansive, SACRIFICE occurs in a short time frame in a limited space and is almost claustrophobic.

Northern Ireland strikes me as the kind of place where it may be impossible to live as a writer and not feel compelled at some stage to address what's happening, not in over-arching theories of its whole history or political landscape, but what it feels like to live there. The immediacy of events in the community make it seem initially the last place for science fiction, demanding harsh social realism. I think that's the point. The 'mean streets' detective story with the political overtones that are inevitable in Northern Ireland is, like the new frontier, an established theme, one so fixed in the public mind that it's the perfect counterpoint to a novel like ROAD, a flip side to the broad drama of a new world. It struck me that the works Steve and Martin had reviewed were the opposite

sides of the same coin, the latter being what happens when we don't go seeking the new frontier, but it finds us.

Despite this, there are scenes in SACRIFICE that are far more alien than anything in ROAD, since they're experienced by people just like us. The discontinuity of encountering an alien mindset on one's own high street is always more profound than after space travel, and in Northern Ireland what's regarded as an alien mindset in the first place is such a charged concept *without* the introduction of extra-terrestrials. The atmosphere of the place charges the book in the same way the inhospitable desert of Mars energises ROAD.

Novacon 32 Business as (Un)usual

The Programme by Steve Green

Tradition is a double-edged sword. In the case of Novacon, it provides regulars with a sense of reassurance, secure in the knowledge that this year's instalment will build upon the strengths of earlier incarnations, whilst newcomers can pick up on the previous year's buzz and ride the vibe. Which both ties a new committee's hands and frees its horizons.

Novacon remains one of the few occasions where science fiction and science academic sit comfortably together, as proven last November with the fantastic reception afforded NASA scientist Inge Heyer, so you can be sure we're working on a suitable sequel to Inge's astonishing Hubble slideshow. And whilst Novacon 31 featured the very last madcap collaboration between Dave Hicks and Mike Siddall (to paraphrase D. West, the poor boys were exhausting themselves watching TV shows to pinch ideas from), we're already exploring avenues for the "fannish fun" for which Novacon is renowned.

(This is probably the best juncture for thanking all those who filled out last year's questionnaires - and to ask anyone who still has one to return theirs as soon as possible; the feedback has been hugely valuable. We're also very eager - very very eager, in fact - to hear from Novacon members with photographs taken in past years: I can be contacted via e-mail at ghostwords@yahoo.co.uk or by post at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ.)

One certainty about this year's programme is that it will commence at 7pm on Friday (with the customary opening ceremony followed immediately

by an on-stage interview with our guest of honour, Ian McDonald), and will conclude some forty-eight hours later. Shortly afterwards, the organisers of the James White Award will join us for their presentation, and then we're off for Novacon's unique spin on the "dead dog party". Be warned: the beer tasting grows more intriguing each year, and the hotel staff is even now hard at work in the sausage mutation lab. Those who can join us late into the Sunday will be most welcome.

On a parting note, I have to confess I'd only a cursory acquaintance with Ian's work prior to his agreeing to being our guest of honour: short stories, yes, but I'd yet to encounter his longer works. That's no longer the case. A swift trip to the legendary Andromeda bookshop soon equipped me with a box chock full of Ian's canon, which I decided to launch into with the splendid Drunken Dragon edition of his first novel, *Desolation Road*. Scarce pages in, I was hooked: this book - absurdly overlooked by UK publishers until Rog Peyton's small press imprint granted it a hardback release - embodies everything which first attracted me to science fiction: bold ideas, scalpel-sharp characterisation, expressed through exciting prose against the backdrop of a wildly engrossing landscape the very essence of alien.

I tell you, if Ian is a fraction as interesting a guest of honour as he is a novelist, we're in for one heck of a Novacon.

Novacon 32 The Nova Awards

by Tony Berry

The Nova Awards are given for work in fanzines. There are three awards: Best Fanzine, Best Fan Writer and Best Fan Artist. All members of Novacon who are active in fandom can vote. A "Fanzine" is defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with SF, fantasy, SF and fantasy fans and related subjects, copies of which may be obtained in exchange for other fanzines or a letter of comment. An "active fan" is defined as someone who has received six or more different fanzines during the year (different publications, not different issues of the same publication. The various official organs of a group, society or convention do not count as different fanzines).

For a fanzine to qualify, one or more issues must have been published between 1st October 2001 and 30th September 2002. For artists or writers to qualify, a piece of their work must have been published for the first time between those dates.

Voting is open to full or supporting members of Novacon who meet the requirements above. For further information contact me at 68 Windsor Rd., Oldbury, B68 8PB. If you want a copy of the rules please enclose 50p to cover copying and postage.

Here's the fanzines which I've received since October 2001.

ANSIBLE #171-175. Dave Langford, 94 London Rd., Reading, Berks., RG1 5AU.

CONVERTIBLE BUS #8. Tony Keen, 15 Heatherbridge Approach, Brooklands Rd., Weybridge, Surrey, KT13 0UN.

JOIE DE VIVRE. Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Ln., Trimley, Worcs, DY12 1NP.

PARAKEET #9. Claire Brierley and Mark Plummer, 26 Northampton Rd., Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA.

PLOKTA VOL 7 #1. The Cabal, 52 Westbourne Terrace, Reading, Berks., RG30 2RP.

TALKING SHIT. Yvonne Rowse.

TORTOISE #12-13. Sue Jones, Flat 5, 32/33 Castle St., Shrewsbury, SY1 2BQ.

ZOO NATION #1. Pete Young, 62 Walmer Rd., Woodley, Berks, RG5 4PN.

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! It's an excellent way to make new friends and to feel you're part of the weekend. 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 our Ops Manager, Alice Lawson, at 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ (e-mail fab@zoom.co.uk).

Crèche

We are looking into the possibility of running a crèche again this year. If you are interested in using such a facility please contact Martin Tudor at the address below.

Please let him know names and ages of the children who might be using the facility, along with any special requirements or other relevant information (allergies, special needs etc).

Contact: Martin Tudor (Chairman), 24 Ravensbourne Grove, Willenhall, WV13 1HX (empties@breathemail.net).

Novacon 32 The Art Show by Ann Green

This year's Art Show is being run by yours truly, Ann Green. If you're planning to show any work please contact me to let me know your display needs. If you'd like to help out in any way please get in touch either by contacting me beforehand or early at the Con. All help and advice is greatly appreciated.

33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ,
0121 706 0108 (if you get the answer phone leave a number)
or e-mail neergnna@yahoo.co.uk

The CD-ROM Art Show

Following the success of our innovative CD ROM Art Shows we are again inviting contributions. If you have work you wish to exhibit on CD-ROM or you know of someone who has, please contact Martin Tudor.

Novacon's RNIB Raffle

We're pleased to announce that last year we raised £223.45 for the Royal National Institute for the Blind's "Talking Books for the Blind Project". So, if you have anything you would like to donate as a prize for this year please contact Martin Tudor (Chairman), address as above.

To advertise in our splendid publications...

Rates: The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets):

Progress Reports –

- Full page £30.00 (fan £15.00)
- Half page £16.50 (fan £9.00)
- Quarter page £9.00 (fan £6.00)

Programme Book –

- Full page £75.00 (fan £35.00)
- Half page £40.00 (fan £17.50)
- Quarter page £20.00 (fan £10.50)

Anyone interested in advertising should contact Dave Hicks (Publications):
1 St. Woolos Place, Newport, NP20 4GQ (little.jim@dial.pipex.com).
Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines:

- PR #3: 26th July 2002, to be mailed end August 2002.
- PR #4: 13th September 2002, to be mailed mid-October 2002.
- Programme Book: 13th September 2002, distributed at Novacon 32.

Bar prices a bit steep?

The more people who book early, then the more leverage the committee has with the hotel management to ensure you have a good, *affordable* convention.

You know you're coming, so book now!

Novacon 32 Members to mid January 2002

1 Ian	McDonald	47 Tony	Keen
2 Martin	Tudor	48 Julie	Rigby
3 David T.	Cooper	49 Alex	McLintock
4 Steve	Lawson	50 Tim	Evans
5 Alice	Lawson	51 Julian	Headlong
6 Dave	Hicks	52 Anne	Woodford
7 Cat	Coast	53 Alan	Woodford
8 Steve	Green	54 Andrew A.	Adams
9 Ann	Green	55 Claire	Brialey
10 Dave	Hardy	56 Mark	Plummer
11 Brian	Ameringen	57 Paul	Oldroyd
12 Caroline	Mullan	58 Chris	Donaldson
13 Wendy	Graham	59 Chris	Stocks
14 Austin	Benson	60 Marcus	Rowland
15 Caro	Wilson	61 David	Thomas
16 Peter	Day	62 Gerry	Webb
17 Liam	Proven	63 Mali	Perera
18 Kirsty	Thunem	64 Alan	Webb
19 Maureen	Kincaid Speller	65 Sue	Hobson
20 Paul	Kincaid	66 Andrew	Hobson
21 Martin	Hoare	67 Dave	Langford
22 Robert	Sneddon	68 Niall	Gordon
23 Chris	O'Shea	69 Adrian	Snowdon
24 Simon	Bradshaw	70	Barbara-Jane
25 Bridget	Bradshaw	71 Ken	Slater
26 Roger	Burton West	72 Giulia	De Cesare
27 Chris	Bell	73 Steve	Davies
28 Arthur	Cruttenden	74 Paul	Dormer
29 Simon	Dearn	75 Dave	Tompkins
30 Peter	Mabey	76 Neil	Tomkinson
31 Richard	James	77 Alison	Tomkinson
32 Roger	Robinson	78 Susan	Francis
33 Caroline	Loveridge	79 Sue	Edwards
34 Gavin	Long	80 Bridget	Wilkinson
35 Pauline	Morgan	81 Tony	Rogers
36 Chris	Morgan	82 Ian	Sorensen
37 Gwen	Funnell	83 Eve	Harvey
38 Peter	Wareham	84 John	Harvey
39 Lynn	Edwards	85 Michael	Abbott
40 Vernon	Brown	86 Anne	Wilson
41 Pat	Brown	87 Margaret	Austin
42 Carol	Morton	88 Martin	Easterbrook
43 Tony	Morton	89 Noel	Collyer
44 Stephen	Dunn	90 Neil	Summerfield
45 Ina	Shorrock	91 Ken	MacLeod
46 Erhard	Leder	92 Pete	Young