

NOVACON 49

PROGRESS REPORT 1

**8 – 10th November 2019
Nottingham Sherwood Hotel**



**Guest of Honour
Mike Carey**

**The Annual Convention of the Birmingham Science
Fiction Group**

COMMITTEE

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Committee Member	Alice Lawson	
STAFF		
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Additional Publications	Gary Starr	

A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR

So here we go again, another year and another **Novacon** is on its way. This year we have some changes on the committee with Helena Bowles and Richard Standage stepping aside and Dave Hicks taking a lesser role helping with the Saturday evening programme (and making Pizza for committee meetings).

I would like to welcome two new committee members. Firstly, **Carol Goodwin** who will be publications guru. Some of you may be aware of her sterling work with the BSFG newsletter and that she has recently taken over as the Chair of the group. We also say hello to **Maggie Standage Bowles** who will be running our social media.

Our venue remains mostly unchanged, same location, different name; we are now assembling at the Nottingham Sherwood Hotel where we are assured that we will receive the same great service that we have become accustomed to.

So, what can you expect this year? Well, all the usual. The Scientific Talks, the panel discussions, the Big Sociable Thing on Saturday night, the art auction, a book auction, some excuse for wine and nibbles on Friday, the beer tasting and guest banquet on Sunday night, and so on – but we can always do with new and interesting ideas from our members, so please contact us with any thoughts.

Novacon is a single-stream convention with a mix of serious and fannish items. In recent years we've been running what amounts to a one-and-a-quarter-stream convention, with smaller items occurring "off-piste" in the rooms downstairs near the **Art Show**.

Talking of the **Art Show** after the magnificent exhibition that John and Serena gave us last year, I'm really looking forward to seeing what they can achieve this year.



I am also very pleased that this year's **Guest of Honour** is the wonderful **Mike Carey**. Some of you will know his novels including the very popular *Felix Castor* series and *THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS* for which he also wrote the screenplay. Others of you will be aware of his work in numerous comics including *Lucifer*, *Hellblazer*, *The Fantastic Four*, *X-Men* as well as Neil Gaiman's *NEVERWHERE* and many, many more!

I have just been reading Mike's take on *Barbarella* for Dynamite Entertainment which I have enjoyed very much. I must also thank Peter Harrow who, quite forcibly, introduced me and Alice to Felix Castor back in the late noughties, and I just realised that it's time to re-read those books.

Steve Lawson

HOTEL INFORMATION



The Nottingham Sherwood
Hotel
Mansfield Road, Nottingham
NG5 2TB

Although we are still using the same venue (the old Park Inn) for the convention, it is now under new ownership and has been renamed as the Nottingham Sherwood Hotel. The committee have been assured that the new owners will honour our contract. If in the unlikely event that there are any substantial changes, this will be noted in future progress reports.

For those who haven't visited before, the hotel has all the main function space on the ground floor. There is a downstairs area which is utilised for the Art show and off-piste items, but this is easily accessible by lift from the main lobby.



We have a large area for the Dealers' Room next to the bar, so you don't have far to walk to spend any change you have left after buying the committee a drink



The location of the hotel on a main road makes it easy to find, and easy to get into the centre of Nottingham should you wish to visit the Olde Trip to Jerusalem, one of the oldest pubs in England. Not that you will want to leave the convention, of course, in case you miss something

but there are also shops, a supermarket and cashpoints nearby.

There is plenty of parking at the hotel which is free to residents; they also get use of the pool and gymnasium next door.

Convention Room Rates

£49 per person per night for Double/Twin

£67 Single

Please remember to book your room early as we need to give the hotel numbers. The hotel has a couple of family rooms, which are actually two interconnected rooms, but you need to get in asap. Z-beds and cots are available on request. If you intend to arrive on the Friday of the convention after 4pm, please ring the hotel on 0115 935 9988 to reserve your room with a card to stop the automated letting system giving your room to someone else.

The hotel is easily accessible by public transport, for those of you without a car, with buses, trams and taxis available to ferry you from the rail station in a short amount of time.

Tony Berry

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 will be

published on the website, in Progress Report 3, and in the programme book for that convention.

At Novacon 48 complaints were raised in connection with the conduct of a specific member of the convention.

The Code of Conduct team, together with the chairs of Novacon 48 and Novacon 49, wrote to the person concerned, advising them of the complaints that had been made, and instructing them that the position they were taking was incompatible with future membership of Novacon.

We invited them to state unequivocally that:

1. They understood the Novacon Code of Conduct.
2. They accepted the validity of the Novacon Code of Conduct.
3. They agreed to be bound by the terms of the Novacon Code of Conduct, in the iteration that would be in force at the time of Novacon 49.

The person concerned wrote back to the Code of Conduct team making the required assertions in writing, and the team now consider the matter closed unless the person concerned re-opens their case by engaging once more in unacceptable behaviour.

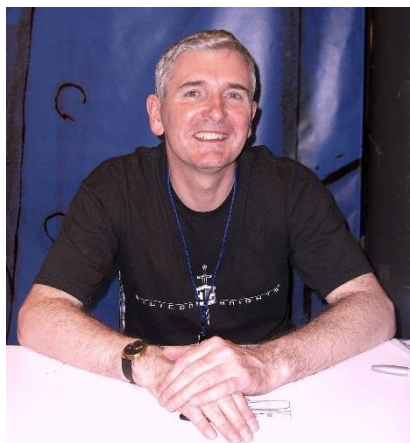
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Earlier, I stated that the Code of Conduct is a living document, and that it evolves. One of the changes in the Code of Conduct between Novacon 48 and Novacon 49 will be the inclusion of an expectation that all members of Novacon agree with the three points mentioned above.

This clause joins many clauses in the Code of Conduct which might prompt conversations of the form “Why does this line appear in the Code of Conduct? Surely no-one would need that mentioned explicitly?” – “Well, you might think so, but there was once this one person ...”

Don’t be remembered as that one person. And enjoy the convention. *Douglas Spencer, Novacon Code of Conduct team*

GUEST OF HONOUR – MIKE CAREY



Mike Carey is a novelist, BAFTA-nominated screenwriter, and comic book writer. Born in Liverpool, he worked as a teacher for fifteen years before resigning to write full-time.

He wrote the movie adaptation for his post-apocalyptic novel *THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS*, parts of which were filmed around Birmingham. The movie opened the Locarno festival in 2016 and

was in competition at Toronto's Midnight Madness.

Mike started his writing career working for independent comics – even writing a biographical comic about Black Sabbath's Ozzy Osbourne – before joining *2000 AD* where he created original series *TH1RT3EN* and *CARVER HALE*. Since then he has worked extensively in the field of comic books, including work for both *DC Comics/Vertigo* and *Marvel Comics*. Although his credits are too numerous to list here, he notably completed long and critically acclaimed runs on *Lucifer*, *Hellblazer* and *X-Men*. His comic book series *The Unwritten* has featured repeatedly in the New York Times' graphic novel bestseller list. More recently he has been writing a series for Dynamite Entertainment featuring the sci-fi icon *Barbarella*.

His first prose novel was *THE DEVIL YOU KNOW* (April 2006) and was the first of the acclaimed *Felix Castor* novels, of which there are five to date. He is also the author (along with his wife Linda and their daughter Louise) of two fantasy novels, *THE CITY OF SILK AND STEEL* and *THE HOUSE OF WAR AND WITNESS*, (published in the UK by Victor Gollancz and in America by Chizine Press). He has also written *THE BOY ON THE BRIDGE*, a stand-alone novel set in the same world as *THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS*. His latest two novels are *FELLSIDE* and *SOMEONE LIKE ME*. A list of Mike's novels follows, I don't think

we have room to even start to list all his comic writing which goes back to the late 90's.

Steve Lawson/Carol Goodwin

Felix Castor series:

1. THE DEVIL YOU KNOW
2. VICIOUS CIRCLE
3. DEAD MEN'S BOOTS
4. THICKER THAN WATER
5. THE NAMING OF THE BEASTS

Other titles:

THE CITY OF SILK AND STEEL (co-written with Linda Carey and Louise Carey)

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

THE HOUSE OF WAR AND WITNESS (co-written with Linda Carey and Louise Carey)

FELLSIDE

THE BOY ON THE BRIDGE

SOMEONE LIKE ME



THE RNIB AND THE TALKING BOOKS SERVICE



For many years now Novacons have been involved with raising money for the RNIB Talking Books Service. This

year marks the 150th anniversary of the RNIB. Founded on October 16th, 1868 by blind doctor Thomas Armitage, at first it had the snappy title of The British and Foreign Society For Improving The

Embossed Literature Of The Blind. Yeah. Over time there were a couple of name-changes before settling on the Royal National Institute for the Blind in 1953. These days it is the Royal National Institute of Blind People.

With Queen Victoria as its first patron, it soon began to make a difference. In 1870 Braille was published in the UK for the first time, with separate Braille music notation standardised in 1922. A college was founded to help blind people get into employment. More recently the RNIB has worked with the Bank of England to develop more tactile coins and notes, tactile paving at pedestrian crossings, TV has audio-description, text-to-speech software makes computing easier and visual recognition/description apps are on mobile phones.

The Talking Books Service was started in 1935 with the first recordings made on gramophone records. These days books are available on Daisy CD (which has many more control features for reading a book than a normal CD, rather like you get on an e-reader), on USB stick, digital download, and of course as a physical Braille book. You can also buy books from the online shop. There are about 25,000 titles available to choose from.

The cost of getting a single book produced is £2500 for an adult book and £1500 for a children's book. Paying the entire amount means you can choose the book and record a personal dedication to go with it. So next time somebody waves raffle tickets in your face at Novacon, use some of your beer money to buy a few. *Tony Berry*

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS – M. R. Carey

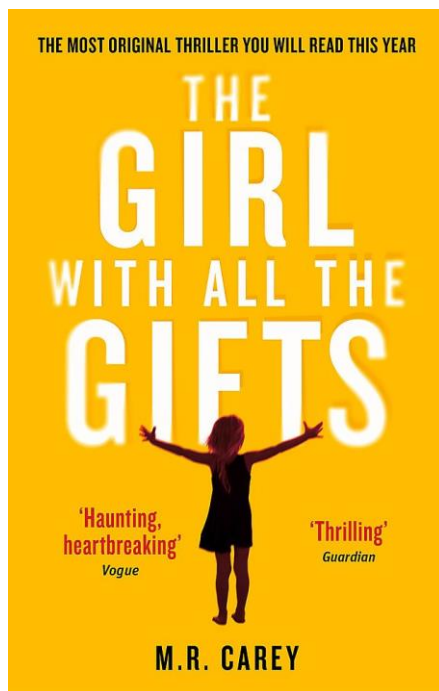
Let's be upfront about this. For those who aren't aware, THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS (and the second novel set in the same world) THE BOY ON THE BRIDGE are about – Zombies! Now before you turn away, saying things such as “I don't read Horror” or “This isn't Science Fiction, so it's not for me” let me explain why I consider them science fiction and why these excellently written, thoughtful novels should be of interest to the SF reader. Whether the post-apocalyptic novel should be considered Science Fiction or Horror is one of those old chestnuts that often gets debated. For example, nobody disputes that John Wyndham's THE CHRYSALIDS (nuclear war) or George Stewart's EARTH ABIDES

are Science Fiction novels yet they clearly fall into the post-apocalyptic genre.

In my opinion, I think it depends very much on the nature and plausibility of the precipitating factor and how credible and realistic the characters' responses to the situation. For example, Richard Matheson's wonderful *I AM LEGEND* is on one level a book about vampires (ie something which most rational people don't believe exist) yet most readers regard it as science fiction, probably because the cause of the vampiric effect is plausibly presented as a disease and not something supernatural. In *THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS*, the "zombie" infection that causes society to collapse is also caused by a disease.

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS starts from the viewpoint of a young girl, Melanie as she gets ready to attend school. Melanie is clever, academic and clearly worships her teacher, Miss Justineau. But it is apparent that this is not a normal school and for some reason the adults are very afraid of the children. It slowly becomes clear that the children are infected with the fungus that has reduced most of the human population to mindless, bloodthirsty "zombies" but, unlike the infected adults these children retain the ability to think and learn. The story then becomes a quest to work out why the children are different and to hopefully find a vaccine or cure for the remaining adults.

One of the very clever things in this book (and which make it primarily an SF book in my opinion) is that the infection is based on a very real fungal parasite, the *Ophiocordyceps* genus that uses insects as hosts, often ants. The infection alters the behaviour of an



infected ant, in a way that benefits the fungus and most definitely not the ant. In the book, much as with the original *Ophiocordyceps* organism, the parasite also controls the hosts' behaviour in ways that sustain it and optimise its propagation and spread to new hosts. The children have a dual nature and there is a struggle between their desires and the "instinctive" behaviours prompted by the infection.

On one level the book is, like many genre books, a quest to find the "maguffin" that will solve all the problems, but this is not a "fantasy" quest - the methods used are scientific, not magical; the hazards and problems they encounter are realistic and credible. However, the author also looks deeper and explores the issues and ethics of their situation. Dr Caldwell, the chief scientist working to stop the plague, would in many books be portrayed as the hero, but here, her single-mindedness and ruthlessness means that in many ways she is the true monster. Melanie and the other children are capable of extreme savagery, but how much is under their control and therefore their "fault"? All the characters have differing weaknesses and virtues and as they progress through the devastated land, these affect the team's decisions and have serious consequences for their progress.

A major strength of this book is the depth of the characterisation. Characters are complex and don't fit neatly into good or bad definitions. The reader can both understand and yet deplore some characters' actions, whilst even the more sympathetic characters may make morally dubious or rash decisions. Central to the story is the developing bond between the foundling, naïve but clever, Melanie and the teacher she hero-worships, the initially frightened and hesitant Miss Justineau, which engages the reader on an emotional level but is also ultimately central to the plot. The world of the "hungries" is imaginative, well thought out and a credible development given the reader accepts the original premise. As it's a "zombie" novel, there are some scenes which are a bit gruesome or hard-hitting, but nothing felt gratuitous or that I, as a squeamish, non-horror reader, had any major problem with reading. As to the meaning of the title, for those who know their Greek mythology, the fact that Melanie mentions in the first chapter that she would have preferred to be named Pandora should give you a clue, and without

any spoilers, is very apposite to her character and role in the book. This is an original, memorable and at times heart-breaking book which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Carol Goodwin

APOLLO 50 – 1969 – A Year to Remember

It's a sobering thought that the first Novacon was only two years after the first Moon Landing. This year will be the 50th Anniversary of the first Moon Landing on 20th July 1969.

Whilst most of us know that Apollo 11 was the first successful Moon Landing, the year of 1969 actually had three successful Apollo missions.

The first was Apollo 10 and was seen as the “dress rehearsal” for the actual landing. Launched in May 1969, it was crewed by Thomas P Stafford, John W Young and Eugene Cernan. Apollo 10 achieved lunar orbit and then flew the Apollo Lunar Module (LM) to a height of just 15.6 kilometres above the lunar surface. This was important as it was the



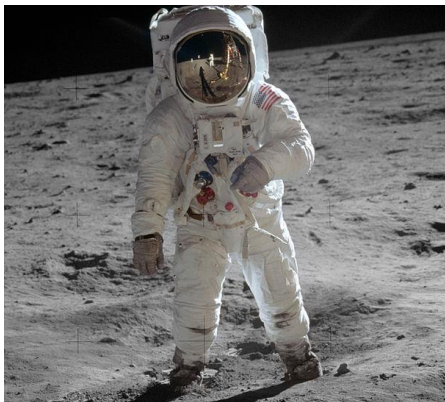
point where powered descent would begin on the actual landing. In the book *ROCKET MEN* (by Craig Nelson) it was claimed that NASA was worried that the astronauts might be tempted to make the first landing. Cernan allegedly said “A lot of people thought about the kind of people we were; ‘Don’t give those guys an opportunity to land, ‘cause they might!’ So the ascent module, the part we lifted off the surface with, was short-fueled. The fuel tanks weren’t full. So had we literally tried to land on the Moon, we couldn’t have gotten off.”

Despite not landing, the Apollo 10 crew did set several records. John Young became the first human to fly solo around the Moon (while the other two astronauts were flying the LM in lunar orbit). They hold the record as the humans who have travelled

furthest from their homes, due to the varying distance between the Moon and Earth and that the furthest point of Apollo 10's orbit was reached when Houston, due to the Earth's rotation was facing away from the Moon (adding nearly a full Earth diameter to the distance). Two of the astronauts did get to subsequently land on the Moon; John W Young on Apollo 16 (1972) and Eugene Cernan on Apollo 17 (1972). Eugene Cernan also holds the title of the Last Man to leave the Moon's surface.

Only two months later, Apollo 11 was the first mission to land people on the Moon's surface. Most of us know that Neil Armstrong was the first man on the Moon, followed by Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin Jr, having landed the *Eagle* lunar module in the Sea of Tranquillity. There were some worrying moments during the descent, with varying computer alarms (due to the rendezvous radar switch being in the wrong position!). There were also problems in finding a safe landing spot due to the presence of boulders and a crater that had not been visible until nearer the surface. When the *Eagle* finally landed it had only about 25 seconds of fuel left!

It was then six and a half hours before they exited the craft and stood on the surface of the Moon. They collected samples and

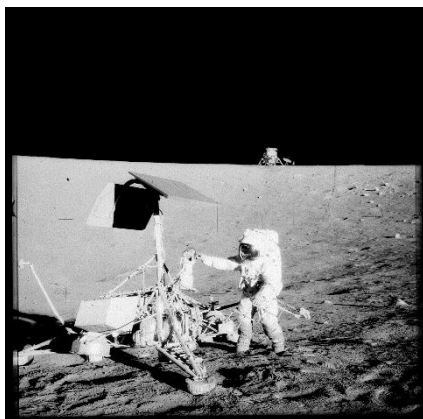


left scientific instruments, tested methods of moving around and planted the famous Lunar Flag Assembly. In total they spent only 2 hours and 30 minutes outside the *Eagle*.

Michael Collins was the astronaut who remained in orbit in Apollo 11. Although he never landed on the Moon, he became the fourth person to ever perform a spacewalk (EVA) and the first person to do more than one spacewalk.

After the successful return of the Apollo 11 crew, the third Apollo mission in 1969 was Apollo 12. This was only four months after Apollo 11, in November. The crew was Richard F Gordon Jr (the Command Module Pilot), Charles "Pete" Conrad Jr and Alan L

Bean. This mission landed in the Ocean of Storms and this time, it was a precise landing at the expected location. They had the first colour TV camera with them but Alan Bean accidentally destroyed it by pointing it at the Sun. They had two moonwalk periods totalling 7 hours 45 minutes, far longer than Apollo 11. Richard Gordon, who stayed in orbit, was assigned to be a moonwalker (and Commander) for Apollo 18 but that mission was cancelled due to budget cuts.



There were to be a further 5 Apollo missions before the programme was cancelled in 1972, but 1969 was definitely a very busy and momentous year. Since 1973 no humans have been back to the Moon, although this year China landed its Chang'e-4 spacecraft (January 3rd) at the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the far side of the Moon. In February, Israel launched *Beresheet*, an unmanned spacecraft which is scheduled to land on the Moon on April 11th. If successful, it will become only the fourth country to make a “soft” landing and the first by a private enterprise. Hopefully we won’t have to wait another 47 years before we see people back on the lunar surface.

Carol Goodwin

Figure 1: Earthrise – photographed by Apollo 10

Figure 2: Buzz Aldrin, with Neil Armstrong visible in visor reflection

Figure 3: Apollo 12, Pete Conrad inspects Surveyor 3 spacecraft

Images: NASA public domain, <https://history.nasa.gov/>

Rocket Men by Craig Nelson. Published by John Murray (2010). ISBN: 978-071-9569-586

DEALERS TABLES

Dealers’ tables (6 ft) are available for £20 for the weekend. Dealers normally have to be a member of the convention but if you just want to come for the day, we can talk about this too. Either way contact Tony at the email address on Page 2

CONVENTION TABLES

These are free to anyone who is running a convention. Contact Tony for reservations.

ART SHOW

If you want to show your art it is free to convention members, but you will need to reserve space. So, contact us to discuss what you need and so that we can do a little planning. If you have any questions related to the art show, please contact Serena or Tony.



MEMBERSHIP LIST APRIL 2019

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mike Carey | 16. Dave Lally |
| 2. Chris Beckett | 17. Steve Jones |
| 3. Adrian Tchaikovsky | 18. Richard Standage |
| 4. Steve Lawson | 19. Steve Rogerson |
| 5. Tony Berry | 20. Dave Tompkins |
| 6. Cat Coast | 21. Peter Cohen |
| 7. Carol Goodwin | 22. John Bray |
| 8. Eve Harvey | 23. Chris Stocks |
| 9. John Harvey | 24. Ron Gemmell |
| 10. Alice Lawson | 25. Rob Jackson |
| 11. Douglas Spencer | 26. Tim Kirk |
| 12. Magdalen Standage-Bowles | 27. ½r |
| 13. Gary Starr | 28. Harpal Singh |
| 14. Serena Culfeather | 29. Harry Payne |
| 15. John Wilson | 30. Omega |

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 31. Hal Payne | 70. Gwen Funnell |
| 32. Jodie Payne | 71. Gerry Webb |
| 33. Steve Davies | 72. Mali Perera |
| 34. Giulia De Cesare | 73. Alan Webb |
| 35. Marcus Rowland | 74. Pauline Morgan |
| 36. Neil Summerfield | 75. Chris Morgan |
| 37. Brian Ameringen | 76. Sue Edwards |
| 38. Caroline Mullan | 77. Dave Hicks |
| 39. Emjay Ameringen | 78. Penny Hicks |
| 40. Michael Abbott | 79. Paul Dormer |
| 41. Anne Wilson | 80. Steven Cain |
| 42. Niall Gordon | 81. Alison Scott |
| 43. Dave Hardy | 82. Jim Walker |
| 44. Claire Brialey | 83. Roger Earnshaw |
| 45. Mark Plummer | 84. Laura Wheatly |
| 46. Tim Stannard | 85. Pat McMurray |
| 47. Julia Daly | 86. Julie McMurray |
| 48. Roger Robinson | 87. Hazel Ashworth- West |
| 49. Pat Brown | 88. Yvonne Rowse |
| 50. Vernon Brown | 89. Ian Sorensen |
| 51. Alan Woodford | 90. Fran Dowd |
| 52. Anne Woodford | 91. John Dowd |
| 53. Jamie Scott | 92. Peter Harrow |
| 54. Tony Rogers | 93. Helena Bowles |
| 55. Steve Dunn | 94. Judy Perrin |
| 56. Morag O'Neill | 95. Barbara-Jane |
| 57. Margaret Austin | 96. John Richards |
| 58. Martin Easterbrook | 97. Maerryn Richards |
| 59. Al Johnston | 98. James Odell |
| 60. DC | 99. Peter Wilkinson |
| 61. AC | 100. Stan Nicholls |
| 62. Bridget Wilkinson | 101. Anne Nicholls |
| 63. William Armitage | 102. Sue Jones |
| 64. Vanessa May | 103. Helen Gould |
| 65. Adrian Snowdon | 104. Mike Gould |
| 66. Michael Davidson | 105. Bernard Peek |
| 67. Christine Davidson | 106. Mary Peek |
| 68. Simon Beresford | 107. Peter Buck |
| 69. Peter Wareham | 108. Alison Buck |