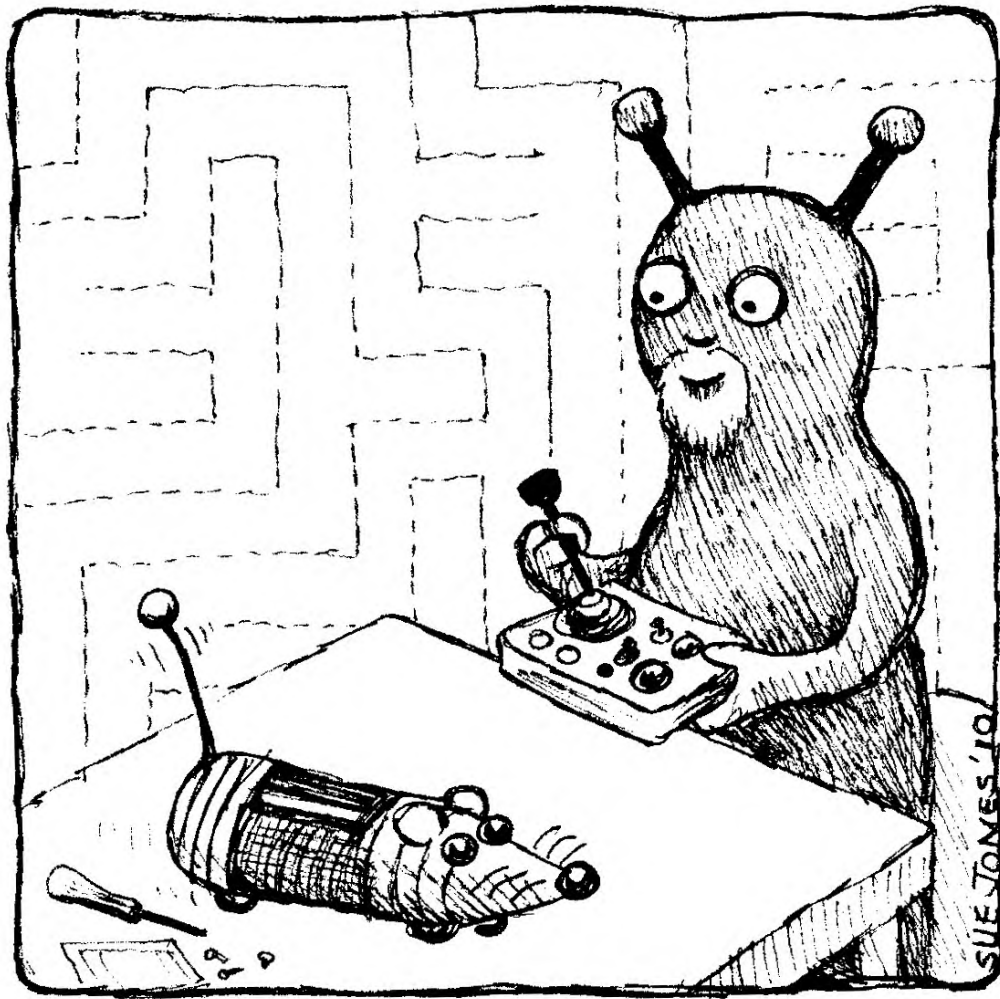


# Novacon 40



Progress Report 1

# Novacon 40

**12-14 November 2010**

**The Park Inn, Nottingham**

Guest of Honour: **Iain M Banks**

Special Guest: **Brian W Aldiss**

Unfortunately Harry Harrison as previously advertised is no longer able to attend

## **Membership rates**

Adults £40, 13-16 yrs £10; 12 and under free (age at 12/11/10). Rates apply until Easter and subject to review afterwards. Day rates will be available.

## **Hotel Rooms**

Double or twin rooms will cost £57 pppn, while singles will be £41 pppn. Children: under 5 years free. 5-14 years £5. Over 12 years adult rate.

Availability of singles is not expected to be a problem but we recommend booking early to make sure. Deposits are not required when booking. A booking form is enclosed - you know what to do...

# **Novacon 40 Contact Details**

Chairman: Vernon Brown  
vcbrown@btinternet.com

Hotel & Memberships: Steve Lawson  
379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield  
SH2 3HQ  
steve@altair-4.co.uk  
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Treasurer: Alice Lawson  
alice@altair-4.co.uk

Programme: Dave Hicks  
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## Chairman's Bit

### Vernon Brown

Welcome to the first Progress Report of this year's Novacon, a special convention this time because it's Novacon 40, a major milestone in our career as the second longest running con in the UK and, I believe, in Europe.



With the exception of yours truly the Committee remains much the same as last year, although there has been some swapping of roles; elsewhere in this publication you will find who does what and how to contact them with money, ideas, money, praise, money or anything else. In other words, if you haven't already joined do so now because the membership subscription goes up after Eastercon and, from the Committee's viewpoint, the sooner we know how many people are likely to attend the quicker and better we can arrange things.

Our return to the Park Inn, Nottingham will be welcomed by all who attended the con there last year; the layout of con facilities is excellent and the staff could not be bettered. Room prices have gone up a little because of the VAT increase but that's all.

There will be the usual single stream Programme in the Con Hall plus one off special items elsewhere as well as the Dealers' and Art Rooms. This year we hope to have the downstairs bar open as well to help spread the load. We have sketched out a number of programme items already, fannish, pro, science and otherwise but if you have any reasonably specific ideas for suitable things please contact us.

To help coordinate all this we will need those essential people called gophers, so if you would like to lend a hand please let us know when the time comes – your help will be rewarded in due course with Groats (Gopher Reward Tokens) to exchange at the bar.

No con would be complete without a Guest of Honour but this year we have gone one better and have two! Iain M Banks has agreed to be Novacon Guest of Honour with Brian Aldiss, one the Honorary Presidents of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, being Special Guest. Harry Harrison is unfortunately no longer able to join us.

Don't forget, book early and keep an eye on our website for the latest news.

# [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk)

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## **Now for a message from the Department of the Bleeding Obvious.**

We cannot have a Novacon without you. We need your membership to enable us to plan the best programme we can. We also need volunteers to help us keep the convention running during the weekend. If you want to help please contact us.

We'll also be in a much better position to negotiate with the hotel over food and drink if you book your rooms early - and remember there's **no deposit required** this year.

## Iain Banks

### Helena Bowles

Back in the mists of time at the tender age of nineteen I attended a writing group that was almost an offshoot of the BSFG given that Anne Gay, Peter Day, Chris and Pauline Morgan were a few of the members. One evening Chris came up with an unusual request: he wanted to read to us the review he had produced, as a publisher's reader, for a new novel from a new writer.



We agreed and settled down to listen to a description of an utterly original novel, the story of Frank Cauldhame growing into adulthood on a remote Scottish Island. Chris described the story as brilliant but disturbing, the central character an unreliable narrator dependent upon grotesque rituals and animal cruelty.

Chris's recommendation was glowing enough for me to go out and buy what you all know was *The Wasp Factory*. It certainly was grotesque and disturbing as well as being full of deeply black humour. I loved it and hated it at the same time. It was one of the most original things I have ever read.

Iain was a regular Novacon attendee at that time with a reputation for the same daring and humour his writing displayed. Stories grew up around him – many based around the infamous Conspiracy 87 Hotel Balcony Incident where Iain decided to enter the room next door by stepping across from one balcony to the next. Several floors up.

Other novels followed. Like *The Wasp Factory*, *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge* inhabited that strange hinterland caught in limbo between recognisable science fiction and literary fiction – but we all knew he was one of ours. Iain proved this in 1987 when he produced his first straight SF novel, *Consider Phlebas*, full of sentient AI space ships, universal leisure and almost unlimited freedom for all. This eagle flight into space coincided with Iain agreeing to be Guest of Honour at Novacon 17 that year.

*Walking on Glass* had dealt with intersecting realities but not in a traditional SF style. Indeed all of Banks's early works were rooted in the traditions of literary fiction. *The Bridge* – a personal favourite of mine – took us into the shattered mental processes of a man in a waking coma, lost in his own thoughts. While we might have clearly recognised these odd narratives as having deep roots within the SF tradition they were generally marketed as mainstream or cult literature which is why Banks's first overt SF novel *Consider Phlebas* necessitated the alternate publishing persona of Iain M Banks.

The next book surprised everyone. *Espedair Street* charted the fortunes of Daniel Weir, bass player in the rock supergroup Frozen Gold. It was unarguably mainstream and yet remains a firm favourite of many die hard SF fans. The next year Banks gave us *The Player of Games*, another Culture novel.

Since then he has continued to alternate his “acceptable” mainstream semi-literary fiction with novels exploring the Culture universe. 1992's *Crow Road* has been made into a TV series and 1993's *Complicity* was made into a film in 2000. Banks has become not only hugely popular within the SF community but is also widely considered to be one of Britain's – he may prefer me to say Scotland's – most significant and important contemporary writers.

# Life Begins at 40: The Programme

**Dave Hicks**

I am aware that some of you like to leave the bar and attend what I am informed is called the “Programme”. Furthermore, while inadvertently minding my own business I was cornered and agreed to ensure this happened on account of how I’ve done it before and it kind of worked. It’s early days and there’s not a lot of detail I can offer right now, although Iain M Banks and Brian Aldiss should be there and that might be enough to be getting on with. We’ll be striving to encourage as many as possible of the gifted writers who’ve been past Guests of Honour to participate as well.

I’ve planned meticulously in the past only to arrive and find Harry H has turned up unannounced, panellists can only attend on a day different to when their item is scheduled and rewritten the whole programme on the fly. It’s fun, in a life-shortening, nerve-wracking sort of way.

But this is Novacon 40. Forty for goodness sake! Four decades of fan culture, four decades of science fiction and some of the fans who were around in the seventies are more alive and kicking now than they’ve been since Margaret Thatcher was snatching milk (younger fans – ask a grown up). What’s their secret? Meanwhile what might the *next* forty years hold? Will there be a Novacon 80? And will its progress reports be compatible with e-book readers?

Those of you who know me as an earnest and serious chap will be pleased that a little light relief may also occur in the form of the Good Old Fashioned Undignified Slap Dash Rip Off Vulgar Alcohol Soaked Novacon Game Show.

We’re interested in hearing from any of you who have photographs, publications or scars in intimate places from Novacons of yesteryear. And, as usual, if you’ve got an idea for something you’d like to do, or like to hear someone else tackle, do get in touch.



# **The Hotel**

## **Tony Berry**

So, last year we moved to a new hotel. Of course, despite months of phone calls, emails and meetings with the conference manager, I still worried that on the day it would all fall to pieces, the staff wouldn't have a clue, we wouldn't get anything I'd asked for, everybody would hate it, and I'd spend the entire weekend locked in my room. Well, to say that I was pleasantly surprised is an understatement! The staff were great, they knew what was happening and when, and it all went off splendidly. When I found out a week before Novacon that instead of the usual buffet of con food they intended to serve it to order from the bar, I thought they were crazy. But it worked, and although people had to wait a bit longer, the food was freshly cooked and the quality was excellent. I pestered them to get real ale which they did, and at a price far cheaper than expected. The hand-pump is now a permanent fixture on the bar.

Of course there were teething problems, and some things got off to a shaky start, but when everybody got into the groove it was fine. So with a bit of tweaking we'll do it all again this year. If you have any specific comments or suggestions, let me know and I'll see what I can do.

The price of bedrooms has risen only because of the return to the higher rate of VAT. And before you get out your calculators, we rounded them to whole pounds.

## **Stuff You Need To Know**

The hotel has no family rooms as such, but it does have a small number of connecting rooms which can be used for families. Two interconnecting rooms (1 double and 1 twin) for

2 adults and 2 children up to 14 years will cost £120 per night. If you want one of these get in quick. You can also have a fold-away bed or cot (for a child up to 14 years) put into your room at no extra cost, but you will have to pay for the child's breakfast.

Although the hotel does not require a deposit, if you are going to arrive after 4pm on the day you show up (this applies to a lot of us!) you will have to guarantee your room with a credit card. Please ring the hotel direct and tell them. No charge will be taken from the card, it's to do with the hotel's automated letting system. Got to keep the computer happy so it doesn't flog your room to somebody else.

## **The Magnificent Six**

Only six people have had the staying power to make it to all forty Novacons: Vernon Brown, ½r Cruttenden, Chris Morgan, Pauline Morgan, Rog Peyton and Tim Stannard.

In honour of their achievement we plan to print a short reminiscence of each of them over the three Progress Reports. We kick off this time with Chris and our Chairman Vernon.

## **My First Convention**

### **Chris Morgan**

I want to tell you about Novacon, whose organisers were so unsure of its chances that they didn't dare call it Novacon 1. It was my first con, and I'd spotted details of it in (I believe) one of Ken Slater's regular mail-order book lists.

I was living and studying in Oxford in 1971, not at the University but at the College of Technology, Art & Commerce, which was due to become a polytechnic within a

year or so. I'd realised that the 1969 Eastercon was held in Oxford, but I'd been too busy with first-year exams to contemplate attending. By 1971 I had a little more free time. I travelled by train and managed to find my way to the Imperial in Temple Street on the Friday night. I'd been in touch with a few of the young, unpublished British SF authors of the time (including the late and much-loved Rob Holdstock, who I hoped to see there later in the weekend) but I'd never met any of the big-name authors. As I entered the bar I saw a slightly plump, bearded man, whose photo was on several books in my collection.

"Hello," I said, in my gauche way, "are you Bob Shaw?"

"Yes," he admitted, deadpan, "I can't deny it. Come and meet James White and Anne McCaffrey."

It was the start of a wonderful weekend, most of the details of which now escape me. On the Sunday, as I was leaving, I spotted the chairman on the stairs.

I said, "Thank you, Mr Brown, for organising such an enjoyable event."

In reply he gave me an inscrutable look, halfway between that of Medusa and a basilisk, but I looked away quickly and survived.

## **Looking Backward 2010-1971**

### **Vernon Brown**

Good lord, is it really that long? Forty NOVACONS (in a few months time) and forty years (soon) including the year or so spent organising the first one. The ancients thought of forty

days and forty nights as a mystical period regarded as a long time, what would they make of forty cons and forty years?

Mystical or not, I find reviewing such a span of years quite a daunting undertaking because if I could remember everything I wouldn't know which events to pick out, whereas if things have blurred together in my memory the events that I do remember may not be the important ones. And as the latter is the case I have no doubt that other attendees over the years will take me to task.

But starting at the beginning is usually a good thing and the first NOVACON did turn out to be a good thing. In those days there was only one SF convention a year in the UK – Eastercon – and the rejoinder of the general public to a mention of the genre was “Oh, little green men in flying saucers”, although things were improving after “2001: A Space Odyssey” hit the big screen in 1968. So in 1970 the newly formed Aston University SF Group decided to organise a smaller, more fannish con the following year, as a one-off. Being unsure how it would be received the actual Programme only ran from Saturday noon to Sunday noon, with a Saturday Dinner and a fancy dress parade. As a Chairman who had never been involved in anything like this before, the weekend passed in a blur of tightly controlled panic, which evaporated on the Sunday night when all present voted the weekend a success and to make the con an annual event to be organised by the nascent Birmingham SF Group. And that is *all* that I can remember!

We stayed at the Imperial Centre Hotel in the City centre for three more years before outgrowing it and moving to the Royal Angus, a little further from the centre, where we stayed for thirteen of the next twenty years. It was modern and a bit bland and I cannot remember anything of note happening. There were changes of course, the dinner went, as did the

fancy dress, to be replaced with a disco type dance, which did not have quite the same atmosphere. The programme lengthened to run from Friday to Sunday nights, the Book room expanded and an Art room was added, while in 1973 the late Gillon Field created the Nova Award. Somewhat later another highlight was added – the Sunday evening Beer Tasting and Meal a la GoH. The years rolled on until we took our last move to the Park Inn last year, an excellent move indeed to an excellent hotel.

But some things do stick in the mind! Like the De Vere in Coventry, where we got locked in to the Bar and had to go out of the back door and re-enter via the front entrance where we met a couple of police officers – have you ever had to explain SF, after midnight, while not entirely sober, to the Police? Or the Grand in Colmore Row, a cavernous place now converted to shops and offices, where the corridors were wide and winding enough to relax in to a more than usual degree, although there were no horses around to frighten. Then there was the time we went to the Chamberlain in Digbeth, a converted poorhouse, when a fan was mugged crossing the pavement from his taxi and spent the weekend with his face bandaged. Pat and I gained that weekend though; the beer in the hotel was not brilliant so we ventured out and found “The Anchor”, which has been a port of call ever since.

You may have noticed from the foregoing that I have not made a great point of the programme items, although without them there would be no con. This is less a matter of not remembering them but more a matter of thinking of the cons in their entirety. To me they are weekends away from it all, to spend talking with friends, browsing the Dealers’ Room and Art show, attending those events and programme items that interest me, relaxing over a meal or a drink and generally enjoying myself. Each one is a gestalt and I consider myself lucky to have attended them all.

# The Nova Awards

## Martin Tudor

The Nova awards were created in 1973 by the late Gillon Field and are presented annually by the Birmingham Science Fiction Group for work in fanzines. The awards are voted for by “informed fans”. Until 1981 there was only one award for Best Fanzine, but now there are also awards for Best Fanwriter and Best Fanartist.

For a fanzine to qualify, one or more issues must have been published between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009 and 30<sup>th</sup> September 2010. For artists and writers to qualify, a piece of their work must have been published for the first time between those dates. A “Fanzine” is defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with SF/Fantasy, SF and Fantasy fans and/or related subjects, copies of which can be obtained in exchange for other amateur publications or for letters of comment.

The Novas are awarded by informed vote, from informed fans. These are defined as Novacon members (or supporting members) who have received six or more fanzines during the relevant year. These must be different publications, not different issues of the same publication. The various official organs of a society or group do not count as different publications.

Last year the winners were:

**Best Fanzine:** *Banana Wings*, ed. Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer

**Best Fanwriter:** Claire Brialey

**Best Fanartist:** Sue Mason.

This year the following fanzines have been received by or brought to the notice of the Nova Awards administrator since 30 September 2009 and are considered eligible for the 2010 awards, presented at Novacon 40:

***Ansible*** #267 [10/09], #270 [11/09], #271 [12/09], #272 [1/10], #273 [2/10; all 2pp, all A4], Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU.

- download from [news.ansible.co.uk/](http://news.ansible.co.uk/)

***Banana Wings*** #40 [60pp, A5], Claire Brialey & Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES.

***Brum Group News*** #458 [11/09; 12pp], #459 [12/09; 8pp, both A5], Rog Peyton for the Birmingham Science Fiction Group, 19 Eves Croft, Birmingham, B32 3QL.

***Data Dump*** #144, #145 [both 4pp, A5], Steve Sneyd, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD5 8PB. Also available for UK£0.70.

***The Fortnightly Fix*** #1 [2pp], #2 [4pp], #3 [3pp], #4 [3pp], #5 [3pp], #6 [4pp], #7 [2pp], #8 [3pp], #9 [3pp; all A4], Steve Green, 33 Scott Road, Solihull, B92 7LQ.

- download from [efanzines.com/FFix/index.htm](http://efanzines.com/FFix/index.htm)

***Inca*** #5 [50pp, A4], Rob Jackson, Chinthay, Nightingale Lane, Hambrook, Chichester, PO18 8UH.

***iShoes*** #3 [28pp, A5], Yvonne Rowse, 23 Roach Road, Sheffield, S11 8UA.

***Journey Planet*** #5 [60pp, A4], James Bacon & Claire Brialey & Chris Garcia, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES.

- download from [efanzines.com/JourneyPlanet/index.htm](http://efanzines.com/JourneyPlanet/index.htm)

The following have been distributed during the same period, but are ineligible under the current rules:

***Journey Planet*** #4 [56pp, A4], James Bacon & Claire Brialey & Chris Garcia, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, CR0 7ES.

[Although paper copies of #4

w<http://efanzines.com/Littlebrook/index.html>

***This Here...*** #13 [21pp, A4], Nic Farey, 3345 Cape Cod Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89122, USA.

***Trapdoor*** #26 [60pp; half-quarto], Robert Lichtman, 11037 Broadway Terrace, Oakland, CA 94611-1948, USA.

***Vanamonde*** #798 - #812 [all 2pp, quarto], John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, CA 90057.

eren't distributed until November, this was available online in July.]

- download from [efanzines.com/JourneyPlanet/index.htm](http://efanzines.com/JourneyPlanet/index.htm)

***Littlebrook*** #7 [24pp, quarto], Jerry Kaufman & Suzanne Tompkins, PO Box 25075, Seattle, WA 98165, USA.

- download from

For further information please contact me at: 8 Temple Bar, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 1SQ, e-mail empties59@rocketmail.com or check the Novacon web site at [www.novacon.org.uk](http://www.novacon.org.uk)

## **Further Committee Sleaze**

### **Dave Hicks**

Due to an administrative error (or possibly a cover up if you want to get all conspiratorial), we forgot to run Martin Tudor's redacted expenses in the Programme Book last year. So, in the spirit of transparency, we reproduce them here. Please note the Director of Public Prosecutions has not ruled out the possibility of testing "con runner's privilege" in the courts at a later date.

Name: Martin Tudor (Publicity)

Postage: £4.60

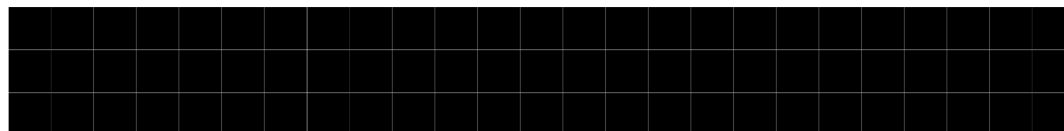
Paper Clips: £0.99

Kebabs: £22.55

Entertaining top publishers at the

Wagon and Horses, Oldbury: £3.50

Real Ale:





## **Miscellany**

### **Art Show**

Serena Culfeather has agreed to run this again after her excellent work last year. Artists looking to exhibit work (for auction or otherwise) should get in touch soon.

### **Dealers' Room**

As last year this will be large and right next to the bar! Interested dealers should contact Tony Berry at morbius@altair-4.co.uk

### **Nova awards**

A tradition of Novacon for more than 30 years, the Nova Awards will be presented for outstanding achievement by fan editor, writer and artist, as voted for by the membership of the convention. Martin Tudor has taken over as administrator. See his piece in this PR for further details.

### **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.

### **Food and drink**

As last year we expect to provide real ale and a good cider plus a range of affordable snacks and meals throughout the weekend.

As always our hand is stronger when negotiating if everyone books hotel rooms as soon as possible - **book early, book often.**

# Members

As at 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Iain M Banks	Mark Plummer
Brian Aldiss	Harpal Singh
Harry Harrison	Dave Tompkins
Justina Robson	Marcus Rowland
Ian R MacLeod	Sue Jones
Vernon Brown	Linda Ternent
Tony Berry	George Ternent
Helena Bowles	Calvin Ternent
Dave Hicks	Roger Robinson
Cat Coast	Chris Stocks
Alice Lawson	Stephen Dunn
Steve Lawson	Thomas Recktenwald
Richard Standage	Wilf James
Martin Tudor	Neil Tomkinson
Pat Brown	Alison Tomkinson
Tim Stannard	Dave Langford
Dave Cox	Barbara-Jane
Chris Morgan	Markus Thierstein
Pauline Morgan	David Cluett
Margaret Austin	Joyce Cluett
Martin Easterbrook	Julian Headlong
Dave Hardy	Greg Pickersgill
Chris O'Shea	Catherine Pickersgill
Campbell McLeay	Tony Rogers
Lisa Konrad	James Odell
Neil Summerfield	Caroline Loveridge
Chris Bell	Gavin Long
½r	Tobes Valois
Michael Davidson	Adrian Snowdon
Christine Davidson	Niall Gordon
Claire Brialey	Harry Payne

Jodie Payne  
Hal Payne  
Omega  
Peter Mabey  
Susie Haynes  
Brian Ameringen  
Meriol Ameringen  
Caroline Mullan  
Gerry Webb  
Mali Perera  
Penny Hicks  
David Thomas  
Margaret Croad  
Jamie Scott  
Lennart Uhlin  
Gwen Funnell  
Peter Wareham  
Carol Morton  
Tony Morton  
Paul Dormer  
Ron Gemmell  
John Medany  
Rita Medany  
Anne Woodford  
Alan Woodford  
Steve Rogerson

Mike Scott  
Flick  
Jim Walker  
David Cochrane  
John Harvey  
Eve Harvey  
Steve Davies  
Giulia deCesare  
Laura Wheatly  
Michael Meara  
Pat Meara  
Tony Ellis  
Emma Pagano  
Julia Daly  
Douglas Spencer  
David Redd  
David Haddock  
Geoffrey Winterman  
Dave Lally  
Martin Hoare  
Al Johnston  
Tim Maguire  
Clarrie O'Callaghan

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Sue Jones for the cover art work. Thanks to Tony Berry, Helena Bowles, Vernon Brown, Dave Hicks, Chris Morgan and Martin Tudor for their written contributions

Thanks also to Steve Green and Kevin Clarke for running the Novacon website.

Novacon is organised under the auspices of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group. The BSFG meets on the second Friday of each month at the Briar Rose Hotel, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham City Centre. Membership costs £16 per year which includes a monthly newsletter. For further information, a copy of their newsletter or a membership application form contact their Membership Secretary Vicky Cook on [bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:bhamsfgroup@yahoo.co.uk) or feel free to go to one of their meetings!

