

NOVACON



11 - 13 November 2016

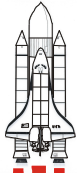
THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

"I DON'T CARE IF HE IS THE WORLD'S LEADING HERPETOLOGIST -
GET THESE MOTHER-LOVING SNAKES OFF MY CONVENTION!"



PROGRESS
3
REPORT

GUEST OF HONOUR **JULIET E. McKENNA**



Editorial....

I was going to start this with a brief joke about Sodium, but then I thought Na... .

I like puns but they aren't for everyone, you can't, for example, tell them to kleptomaniacs; they take things literally.

So, moving quickly on. It's getting very close now, this is the final PR before the Big Day – are you excited yet? Excellent, cause we are looking forward to seeing you all. In these pages are the final details and information you will need. There will also be a list of what to expect Friday night for those of you joining us then, so you can't say you weren't warned. We hope we've remembered everything. If we haven't given you all the information you need to get to the convention hotel... well... thanks for the money and maybe we'll see you next year.

Seriously though, this has been my first time doing the PRs for **Novacon** and it's been a blast. I hope you've enjoyed reading them.

See you there.

THOSE RESPONSIBLE

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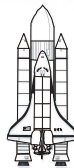
Staff Members

Alice Lawson (We don't need anyone else)

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Illustrations provided by Dave Hicks and Gary Starr

THE CHAIR SPEAKS



It's that time of year. The **Novacon** team are powering into the final five or six weeks of preparation to bring you the best of all possible conventions, and with luck we should be ready to receive you by the beginning of December.

[what's that? When?]

Forget I wrote that last paragraph.

The **Novacon** team are powering into the final three or four weeks of preparation ready to bring you the kind of **Novacon** you've grown to know and love over the weekend of 11th-13th November. Hurrah!

There will be a programme, including science talks, **Guest-Of-Honour** items, book events, and a certain amount of foolishness. There will be a Dealer's Room with a dazzling array of new possessions for you to take home. I imagine the word "Lally" will be used (*verb or noun - Ed*). There will be an Art Show, an Art Auction, and the occasional artist hanging around the bar looking suspicious. There will be our traditional **Beer Tasting And Banquet** on the Sunday evening and of course we will have the company of Juliet McKenna our wonderful Guest Of Honour.

Do please check the envelope your **PR3** came in (or the email you got telling you that **PR3** was available) where you can see whether or not you've booked your hotel room.

Be sure to read the rest of this **PR** while you're at it. There should be a page with vague information about the programme in general and specific information about the programme on Friday evening. There should be a page saying something encouraging about the hotel. There's information about Sunday's beer-and-food adventure. There will be a couple of pages about how to get there. And I'm sure there will be lots of other information. Read it.

Also, please note that if you know anyone thinking of joining we now accept PayPal through our website. Don't say we never make it easy for you.

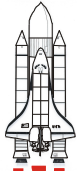
As usual, we will be selling raffle tickets during the con with the proceeds going to the **RNIB's Talking Book Service**, so buy often and buy many. The SFGCSE will be running again and, of course, the hotel will be very pleased to sell you beer & other drinks (*there are other drinks? - Ed*) and provide you with meals and snacks throughout the weekend. Eat, drink and be merry (not Mary... that's a whole other type of convention).

What else can I say? It's a **Novacon**, it'll be good. Share and enjoy.

Douglas.

N46

PR3



Mansfield Road, Nottingham.
NG5 2BT

The convention is almost upon us, so, if you haven't booked your room yet, kindly pull your finger out because they will be released to ordinary people real soon. No deposit is needed, but if you intend to **arrive after 4pm on Friday** please ring the hotel on 0115-935-9988 and reserve your room with a card. Following last year's problems with check-in wrists have been slapped and noses tweaked, so there shouldn't be a repeat this time. Similarly we will endeavour to keep the bar staff behind the bar!

Hotel Rates:

Double/Twin: £46 pp/pn

Single: £64 pp/pn (*that's a Sadness Tax (I will also be paying that) - Ed*)

Hotel forms can be downloaded from the Novacon 46 website.

Now for some good news: not only do we have room 2 downstairs for the Art Show once again (the naughty drivers have been banished to the upstairs rooms) but the Committee will once again be using the glass office for its base of operations (where you will clearly be able to see us doing important committee-like stuff.... drinking tea, snoozing, recovering from a hangover... that sort of stuff). We felt very hard done-by last year being told we could only sit (lounge/sleep) outside it, but not in it.

SUNDAY EVENING BEER TASTING AND FOOD: the traditional Novacon wind-down event.

In order to participate in the Tasting, you need a Beer Badge, obtainable from registration in return for three bottles of beer (the more unusual the better but not just the high alcohol stuff please) or you can just buy a badge for £6. For the food you **MUST** buy a ticket in advance before 12 noon Sunday. This year it will be a Chinese buffet, and the price will be announced at the start of the con.

Everything else is pretty much as usual, so on Friday evening only there will be a fixed-price carvery available in the restaurant as well as con food at the bar. The downstairs bar will also be open with bottled beer and jugs of Black Sheep. The rest of the time it will be a lounge area with some book launches thrown in. Late-night butties will be available in the main bar again.

Don't Forget: bring books for the book auction, bring beer for the beer-tasting, buy a badge, buy raffle tickets, buy the committee drinks.

The Sunday Night Banquet will be Chinese this year so don't forget to buy a ticket at the earliest opportunity. See you all there but in the meantime don't forget.....

DEALERS TABLES

These are available at £20 per 6ft table for the weekend. You have to be a member of the convention to book a table. If you are interested contact Tony Berry or Steve Lawson (email address' on page 2)

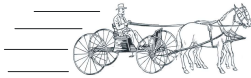
ART SHOW

If you want space to show your art please contact Tony Berry or Steve Lawson (email addresses page 2). Space and tables are free but if you give us some idea of just how big a space you require.... That would be great.

CONVENTION TABLES

These are also free but please let us know in advance if you will require one. Email Tony Berry or Steve Lawson yada yada yada...

HOW TO GET THERE... ER HERE



To begin, it's important to remember that Nottingham has a complete love affair with Speed and Red Light cameras and an utter, utter hatred of cars and those who drive them. Fool is he who tries to drive into Nottingham City Centre for they change the road layout every two weeks and you'll find yourself on an unexpected One Way road faster than you can say, "What ticket?"

Keeping this in mind I have chosen a route that is correct as of time of writing (by the con...who the hell knows).

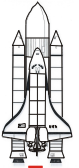
By Car

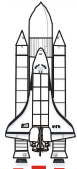
For those coming from the North, "Hello!", you may remove your parkers and clogs now. We do things a little differently in the Midlands and you may come across such things as forks and knives, best ask someone to avoid embarrassment.



You will need to leave the **M1 at Junction 26**. After the slip road you will come to your **first island, take the first exit**, you are now on the **A610**. After a couple hundred yards you will come to your **next island, take the 3rd exit** (still A610)

Now just to change gear after about a quarter mile you will come to yet **another island, go straight across** (second exit).





Stay on this road, you will **pass through three sets of traffic lighted crossroads** (not including pedestrian crossings) the third being a large dual carriageway (there use to be an island here, but they removed it because it worked quite well).

Keep going and you will **pass another set of lights** with a pub on your left, keep going.

Next set of lights is where you come off. At these **take the left turn** (there is a Carphone Whorehouse (I know what I mean) diagonally to your right at these lights.

You are now in Hyson Green; for god's sake don't stop or you will never see your wheels again though you might get a new insight into the drug culture.

Carry straight on over two intersections.

You will soon arrive at the first of **two mini islands**, take the **second on the first** and the **first on the second**.

The Hotel is directly on your right after about two hundred yards.

Eeee Gradley...

Ok, if you are coming from the **South**... lower your expectations, and for god's sake do not ask for a panini... it's a dead giveaway. The locals will be on you before you can even say "Gawd bless ya, Mary Poppins" selling you more *Robin Hood* Related trinkets than you know what to do with (which is 1 *Robin Hood* Related Trinket).

Get off at **Junction 25** and take the **third exit** marked **A52 Nottingham**.

Follow this over **four islands**. The last of these has a bypass going under it and the **Queens Medical Centre** just after it on your right.

Follow this road. You will pass **through two sets of light** (not including pedestrian crossings). The first will have a rather nice Jaguar dealership on it to your left, the second a pub (*The Three Wheatsheafs*), also on your left.

At the third set of lights turn left onto **Lenton Boulevard**, keep going straight on. At the **first intersection go straight on**, you are now on **Radford Boulevard**.

Keep going through one more intersection.

At the third (quite a busy one with a Carphone Whorehouse just over your right shoulder as you are at the lights) you are going **straight on, which is Gregory Boulevard**.

You are now in Hyson Green... *here be Dragons!*

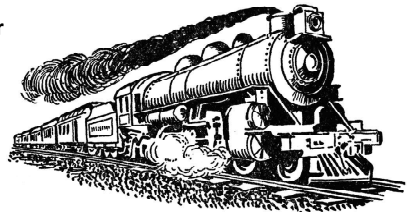
Carry **straight on over two road intersections**.

You will soon arrive at the first of **two mini islands**, take the **second on the first** and the **first on the second**.

The Hotel is directly on your right after about two hundred yards.

What Ho!

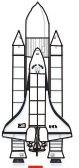
By Train



The best way to visit Nottingham is as a pilot of a bomber plane for a foreign aggressor.

Failing that you could try the train.





Nottingham has a great station as long as you are passing quickly through it. Do so.

Outside you will find a taxi rank. Take one, and tell them where to go. After they have driven off in disgust try another one and give them the hotel address.



Now, now, just stop. I know what you are thinking. "Ooooo, Mr Editor, we were hoping to take the fabled tram like what we have seen on the telly."

Right, first of all, while the trams are indeed very nice looking (and I've nearly been hit by one often enough to have noticed this), the nearest stop to the hotel is **The Forrest** stop (not the football stadium, but the one where we have the Goose Fair). Two things here: I know Royal Marines who wouldn't dare walk around that area in daylight.

It's not that it's rough, it's f*&%\$ng rough. The area is known as The Ark, cause if you don't go around in two's you don't go around. It's also part of the Red Light District (don't ask me how I know this). You have been warned.

But if you do fancy leading a dangerous life be prepared for a sodding good walk when you get off at your stop. On the bright side you won't have to drag your luggage, it will have been stolen by then.

The tram stop for the Train Station is directly above the station itself, board this and get off at **The Forrest**.



You could also **walk** through Nottingham City Centre. Don't let the maps fool you, it's a hell of a long way.

But if you insist....

Coming out of the **train station main exit**.

You are on a quite busy road here, **turn right** and walk down to the main road.

The Bus Station is now in front of you. **Cross the road** and keep the **bus station to your right**.

At the **pedestrian crossing**, **cross the road** and turn left then immediately **right into the Broadmarsh Centre**. Walk **straight through and out the door** at the far end.

Walk up the shopping high street, Those of you from the **North** try not to stare at the shiny things.

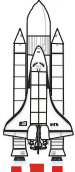
Keep walking, when you get to Marks And Spencers pass that and **turn right at the church**.

At the top of this road **turn left**, as you do there is a Waterstones on your right. Keep going **over the road** straight on past the back of the Council House on your left, **keep going straight on**.

When you reach the **three way road intersection** at the top of here **cross straight over it**.

You are now at the Victoria Centre Shopping thing or whatever it's called this week.

Keep going straight on keeping the centre to your right.



See that hill going straight up, keep going that way (bet you wished you had taken a taxi now, eh?).

The good thing about this route is that about **three quarters of a way up this hill on your left is The Lincolnshire Poacher**, a truly marvellous pub with many a fine Real Ale (brick building with blue doors and a blue sign).

At the **top of the hill** is a set of lights, nearly there now. **Down the hill** you go, past the cemetery on your left, **past the mini island** and there on your right.... Just as you were giving up hope.... It's only the bloody hotel isn't it. Hurrah.

If you are thinking about a bus..... you're crazy. They are digging up the city centre again and I seriously doubt if anything I write here about bus stops will be relevant by the time you get here.

I know at this point that it sounds like I have shares in a cab company, I do but that isn't the issue here, seriously, get a cab

Times. From either M1 junction you are looking at about a twenty minute drive unless you hit traffic (laughs uncontrollably here..there's always traffic).

By tram from the Train Station, well first you have to go back to the 1800's.... about ten minutes plus 15 walking.

By foot from the Train Station about 30 minutes unless you find the Lincolnshire Poacher... then about 6 hours.

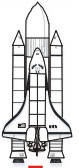


The Party Of Several Lifetimes

A Word From Last Years Joint Guests Of Honour
Anne And Stan Nicholls

Being one of the joint Guests of Honour at Novacon 45 was terrific. It was great to share it with my husband, the inestimable Stan Nicholls, twenty-five years after being one of the GoHs at Novacon 20. I have the most gorgeous engraved crystal goblet from that and the engraved pen for Novacon 45. Also Stan and I first met at a Novacon in the mists of 1993. Nostalgia, meet romance.

Being a GoH at Novacon is highly recommended. If at all possible, give it a shot! There's the social side, the intellectual side, the deep and thoughtful side, the fun side, the literary and artistic sides ... it's pretty much polyhedral.



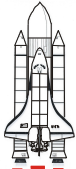
The celebrations actually started in the summer when we were invited to a riotous barbecue with the committee and others at Tony Berry's house. Or, to be more precise, in his beautiful garden though a scrumptious feast was laid out in his kitchen. I was delighted to be asked to design the programme book cover – I cartooned a winky-face balloon in space because Novacon is a party that's out of this world. Stan and I were also invited to write stories for a chapbook with a cover by - drum-roll – Dave Hardy. Such an honour! He knocked out a brilliant image combining Stan's and my stories in no time flat. I was also invited to do an interior illustration, which took me several centuries of which I loved every minute. Except those bits you get in all creative endeavours where you go, "Mmm, this is going to be great. Wait, it's rubbish. Oh the shame! Still, that bit's OK. Pity about ..." Serena Culfeather, who organised the art show, was helpful and showed me the ropes (but fortunately not the handcuffs or thumbscrews). I was thrilled actually to have sold three pieces and to have some of my ceramics auctioned by Chris ("Come on now, you can do better than that!") Morgan.

For the con itself we arrived on the Thursday evening where we were whelmed by the generosity of the committee. I won't say overwhelmed because they were kind and welcoming without being smothering. But a suite! A real live suite! And our hosts invited us over the road for drinks, chish and fips and a pub quiz at which Stan and I were spectacularly hammered. Tony, Alice and Steve Lawson, Julia and Douglas Spencer and all were extremely good company.

On the Friday we enjoyed the atmosphere between celebration and franticosity of stuffing the con-bags in company with hard-working CTs (committee members) and gophers. I really appreciated the consideration involved in planning the programming to take account of my sporadic crumbling at the edges. The opening ceremony was enjoyable, then the Desert Island Discs was great fun what with people joining in for a bop-ette.

Another highlight was Alchemy Press in the form of Peter Coleborn and Jan Edwards launching *Music from the Fifth Planet*, my collection of short stories. Did you know the fifth planet is now actually the asteroid belt? Of course you did! The Brum Group introduced me to fandom, a dimension where many of my more outré utterances are not only understood but agreed with. Where else can non-terrestrial wavelengths peacefully collide? How else would I ever have met such luminaries as Anne McCaffrey, David Brin and Robert Rankin? And without the Brum Group I'd never have been asked to edit the Sci-Fi Zone for LineOne/Tiscali.

The rest of the weekend was similarly entertaining. Everyone was so kind to us! We got to spend time with friends old and new. The panels were a laugh and thought-provoking as well. We were in excellent company at the banquet and got to make the most of our suite (did I mention we were given a suite?) up to the Monday morning. Then it was time to wend our weary way homewards with all the ups and downs of any post-party experience. But wahey! We get invited back again this year to bask in the glow that is this year's GoH, Jules McKenna.



Thanks, committee and all our friends at the Brum Group. Life would be much poorer (and less strange) without you all. Be seeing you.

Anne Nicholls

I used to think that those of us who've spent a lifetime reading science fiction are better equipped to handle whatever the future throws at us. Now I'm not so sure. Mind you, the sf we devoured so avidly was predicated on computers the size of houses, moon rockets built in millionaires' backyards and starships with libraries - the genre was never really that good at prediction. That apart, wasn't it basically more optimistic back in the day, as opposed to the current preponderance of dystopias and various dark futures? But I guess that's sf doing what it always did: reflecting the here and now, amplifying our hopes and fears, chronicling how life changes.

Conventions have changed as well. I'm old enough to remember when the entire membership of an Eastercon fitted into one modest hall. Now the field has grown, broadened and fragmented. We've attended European cons that attracted over 30,000 people, and it's a safe bet that few if any of them have ever heard of Eastercon. And we've all seen how World Cons have expanded. Don't get me wrong; I'm no luddite - I live in the present and my instinct is to look ahead. In many ways it's a very good thing that the population of our particular ghetto has increased so much. But our history's important too.

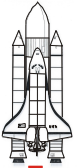
One of the reasons I like Novacon is because it acknowledges that continuity. It's also a manageable size, which encourages sociability. Plus, and I suppose I would be partial to this, it's basically about literature and recognises the importance of writers. Back in the early 90's I interviewed Ray Bradbury, and he told me about the wrap party for the 1969 film of *The Illustrated Man*. The producer thanked everyone from the clapperboard boy to the director, but didn't mention the writer. Bradbury wasn't invited to the premiere either. When people tell me they prefer their sf in films, TV or games rather than books, I point out that none of those forms would exist without writers, which often surprises them. I can't imagine anyone at Novacon having that attitude.

Anne and I had the pleasure of being joint GoHs at last year's Novacon, and we enjoyed every minute of it. The committee treated us royally, we met old friends and made new ones. We didn't feel overwhelmed by programme items or forced to choose which to attend - the single strand programme is another attraction - and talking and laughter characterised the weekend. We came away exhausted, but in the nicest way.

We're very much looking forward to being in Nottingham again this year. With a guest of honour of the calibre of Juliet McKenna, and the welcome prospect of many familiar faces, it takes no great predictive powers to forecast another entertaining, congenial event.

Stan Nicholls





Well, It's about time we gave you an inkling of what to expect over the convention weekend so here is a brief description of what to expect. Everything kicks off Friday night, so without further ado....

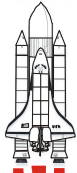
FRIDAY NIGHT. After a stress-free journey on our country's fast-flowing motorway system or on our hygienic, efficient public transport, you can casually check in at reception and head for your room. There you can unpack, freshen up and put on your evening dress. White or black tie, is, as usual, a matter for each gentlemen to decide.



Oh all right – whichever daft T-shirt and technicolour waistcoat is fine.

You'll want to be downstairs and in the **Main Room** by **7.00pm** for the **Opening Ceremony**. There we will welcome our excellent **Guest of Honour, Juliet McKenna**, and give out the latest updates on what's happening for the rest of the weekend. We will also be reminding you about things you need to do, and the things you definitely shouldn't do, to get the best out of the weekend.

7.30pm will see **Juliet** remaining in the **Main Room** for a chat-show style interview. This year themed as **Desert Island Books** (it suddenly occurred to us that most SF fans - if stranded somewhere (we are not asking for anyone to be volunteered for that) - would want eight books and two records, not the other way round) (*You forgot the booze – Ed*).



At **9.00pm** we'll change the **Main Room** around for you to enjoy some wine and a celebration of Juliet's works with, hopefully, the launch of her latest book, **Shadow Histories of the River Kingdom**. There'll be opportunities to get things signed (keep it clean) but remember, **Novacon** is the kind of event where you can approach the Guest throughout the weekend (but not while she's eating, showering and definitely not just standing in her room watching her sleep... that's creepy).

At about **10.30pm** we will finish with some frivolity (?!?) in the form of **Science Fiction Pictionary**, where Dave Hicks has foolishly volunteered to take on SMS (and any other artists we can rope in) in a fight to the death.... or something a little less dramatic. To be honest he's still traumatised from the previous time when played this against SMS as he got **Red Mars** while Dave got **Time Considered As A Helix Of Semi-Precious Stones**.

SATURDAY will kick off at **10-10.30am** with a **Science Speaker**. We know you'll all get out of bed for good science... just like we don't get from "Horizon" any more. The person giving the talk is a secret at this point... not so much because it's someone famous but more because we haven't got a bloody clue who we've blackmailed into doing it this year.

Other things to look out for will be **Juliet's** talk in the afternoon and a reprise of Smuzz's popular **How Green was my Death:**

The Ecology of Dr Who, which threatens to this year include "interpretative dance".

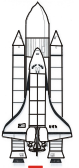


For those of you who want to talk about **BREXIT** at length, a special meeting space has been scheduled on a particularly hazardous stretch of the **M1**.

We don't like to work our Guests until their brains dribble out of their ears but Juliet is fascinating and knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects. You can expect to see her on stage talking on topics from; campaigning on laws that penalize small businesses like book dealers, to commissioning art work and the martial arts (not to be confused with the marital arts – different talk).

IT'S NOT TOO LATE to get in touch if you want to be involved or have a burning desire to lead a panel or do a talk. We're a flexible convention and if there's something fun or interesting we can usually find a space for it.

We're working on some off-piste items in the downstairs bar and there will be at least one book launch on the Saturday as well as **Mr. Lally's Room Of**



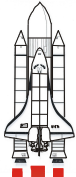
Moving Images available throughout the weekend. If there are enough books then there will be a **book auction** and of course on **Sunday** you will have an opportunity to bid for the art some of the art that has been on display over the weekend and our thanks to Serena Culfeather for looking after the **Art Show** for us.

The convention will finish at **5.00pm** on **SUNDAY** with the **Closing Ceremony** in which we thank the hard-working, condemn the guilty and hand over to the next Committee for **Novacon 47** (yes, there will be another one!). There will also be the, now legendary, raffle draw so expect to be mugged – I'm sorry, *offered* the opportunity to buy tickets by smiling and frighteningly young people throughout the weekend (they will zero in on you if you appear drunk enough to buy more tickets than you otherwise might or too frail to fight them off).

Though the convention may seem ended at this point, do not go home! **Novacon** will finish with the infamous **Beer Tasting And Banquet** starting at **7.00pm**. You can buy tickets for these from Registration up until Sunday afternoon or you can attend the **Beer Tasting** in return for three bottles of 'interesting' ale. A reminder for those of you who ask why we never do this earlier in the convention – it's our more organized version of the **Dead Dog Party**. We need time to wrap up the con and clear the dealers' room before we can set this up for you to fall down.



Of course there will be lots more than this going on over the weekend but for that information read your **Con Book** or **Read Me** which will have times and places listed or, alternatively, open your eyes from your drunken stupor and see what's going on around you.



GUEST OF HONOUR
**JULIET E.
McKENNA**

6



STORIES

Reviews by
Helena Bowles

Something a little different this time. Juliet has kindly sent me a selection of her short stories to give a taste of the scope of her work.

She Who Thinks For Herself: A Tale of Modern Women in the Dark Continent.

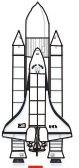
A Steampunk story, originally written for the *Resurrection Engines* anthology (still available through Amazon and a few other sites, and about to be available in an audio version from the **District of Wonders** podcast).

Steampunk is a potentially difficult genre for authors with sensitivities to race and, to a lesser degree, gender and class. By embracing Imperial Victorian mores and society it is hard to avoid also embracing colonialism and its underlying ethos of white supremacy.

McKenna attempts this delicate balancing act by confronting colonialism head on. Her story is a remix of H. Rider Haggard's *She*.

The publishing, by Haggard of Horace Holly's memoirs, prompts Hilda Charteris to tell the story of the search for her Aunt Phyllis, who disappeared into the African interior some years before (with a cheeky reference to a certain steamboat captain called Allnut (property of C. S. Forester from *The African Queen*), and possibly another to the late, great Elizabeth Peters' heroine, Amelia Peabody who was, herself, another product of the clever reworking of the gothic tradition.





Phyllis has, it seems, made her home with Haggard’s “degenerate”, racially mixed Amahagger tribe and taught them the principles of science. The supremacy trope of the white educator of the primitive natives is at least partially subverted by the Amahaggers teaching themselves about steam power from Allnutt’s abandoned steam boat, creating a whole new technology that is, in many ways, superior to European society’s. This creates a satisfying twist in our expectations of who is the technological superior and which society is best represented by the description of Steampunk.

One does wonder what happened to Mr Allnutt though...

Notes and Queries

Originally written for the anthology **Temporally Out of Order** (still available through Amazon and other sites).

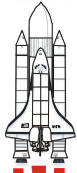
This is an engaging little short starring an impoverished student and a temporally unanchored ATM machine – which is such a lovely idea! One day whilst out busking with a friend history student, Ellie, gets handed a couple of duff bank notes; one is an old £20 with Elgar on it but the other appears to be a very strange fake featuring an elderly King Charles and Jane Austen. Then Ellie witnesses the ATM near their pitch dispense some very strange notes indeed...

This is a very short, short story. The idea is engaging and the mystery of the notes intriguing but it does end rather suddenly. Ellie’s conflicts and money worries perhaps needed bringing more to the fore to give the piece a little more punch. However it is an entertaining and pleasant read.

Alien Artifacts

Written for the anthology **Alien Artefacts** – mass market publication September 15th (still available through Amazon and other sites).

Henry Tall Deer is the first witness to the crash of an alien scoutship. An enigmatic golden sphere, found on the dead body of the ships pilot, is examined over the next two generations by numerous scientists. It seems to have no scientific function that anyone can ascertain. Along the way David Mendlesohn discovers that the sphere will, under some circumstances, make a noise, but it is left to Namrita Kaur later on to realise that not everything we take on a journey is purely utilitarian. Dismissed by the ignorant as “ET’s iPod”, the Mendlesohn Sphere is indeed that – but so much more as Kaur and the descendants of Henry Tall Deer and David Mendlesohn discover when they meet the aliens for the first time.



There are issues examined here about how our interpretation of something as simple and mundane (a music player) may be completely and utterly wrong when we apply our own understanding to it. To the aliens music is so much more than 'just' a thing. This is a very satisfying short story that raises a surprising amount of questions.

Speak Softly And Carry A Big Stick

Written for the anthology **Eve of War** and the prelude to the **Novacon** story (guess where you can get this from... yup).

On a plague infected space station, a doctor leads the hunt for Patient Zero. During the hunt, we are told the history of the plague and how it took hold on Saturn's L4 station. It's rare for biology to be done well in SF and medicine usually fares even worse but the quirks of epidemiology – when new personnel start work on the station the dangers of viral mutations and vectors multiply – are well handled here. McKenna also uses her background in Martial Arts to bring us a small woman with a quarterstaff who can take down a desperate fugitive.

This short is very atmospheric, clearly conveying a sense of claustrophobia along with the viewpoint character's exhaustion and determination. One of McKenna's strengths is her ability to very rapidly sketch interesting two-dimensional characters who engage the reader's interest and sympathy. Another is her world building and, despite this being a short, there are enough details about the social and political background of this universe to centre the action in a world that feels very real.

Walking Shadows

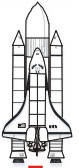
From **Shadow Histories of the River Kingdom** : a new fantasy book from **Wizard's Tower Press** which we will be celebrating the launch of at **Novacon**.

Many children have imaginary friends. For some that imagination can shape reality and create the entities they imagine. Jastro had an imaginary dog but now his father has bought him a real one he has let the fantasy drop. His sister Kemeti though, is a lonely little nine year old girl who has an imaginary friend who is a river boy, a boy with the freedom she lacks for she is the Daughter of the King.

To the people who hide their magic, whose contributions to the safety of their realm are either unknown or unacknowledged, she could be the key to their freedom. But first she must control her own conjurings – or die in the attempt.

Once again the real strength of this story is in the characters and the depiction of their internal consciousness. Kemeti is at once a brave and strong heroine and a believable nine year old girl and her conjured friend proves to be





unpleasantly sinister during her trial. Here is world building that is both economical enough to not overwhelm a short story and detailed enough to provide a real sense of place and society.

There are six other linked stories and a short novel in this volume.

Challoner, Murray & Balfour: Monster Hunters at Law

(Aw... you are never gonna guess where you can get this from)

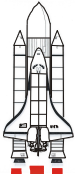
In this collection of four linked stories we are back mining the rich territory of Victorian and Edwardian Gothic literature. The three heroes of this piece, all references to more famous characters of the canon; Challoner (Arthur Conan Doyle), Murray (Bram Stoker) and Balfour (Robert Louis Stevenson) take on a vampire, the Invisible Man, a werewolf clan and the Hound of the Baskervilles.

The first story sets the scene with Murray determined to destroy the vampire who killed his sister. In the second, a young man, Villiers (another gothic reference name) is caught up in their investigation of a strange Scottish family with disastrous, if predictable, results. The next two stories see the three hunters attempting to track down Villiers and becoming embroiled in other incidents. Each story is told from the point of view of an outsider – an Edinburgh policeman, Villiers himself, a maid and, finally, a real life author, journalist and collaborator with such personages as Arthur Conan Doyle himself, Bertram Fletcher Robinson.

I will happily admit to a deep and abiding love for this body of literature so I thoroughly enjoyed McKenna's take on this type of creepy, atmospheric tale. Each story is riffing recognisably on famous works – and the better you know them, the more fun the stories are – but avoids the main action of the original's tale. Challoner, Murray and Balfour (with the assistance of Balfour's wife and another female character) arrive in the aftermath of the more famous story or, as is a common device, are the reality behind the original. It may be worth noting that Fletcher Robinson collaborated with Doyle on *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

I was left wanting to read more and better get to know this trio of Victorian monster hunters. There is a rich seam of material here that could easily be mined for more? I shall wait hopefully...





THE

TEACHING YOU HOW TO SUCK EGGS



WHILE HOPEFULLY BEING A BIT INTERESTING
DEPT.

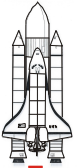
“Space is big. Really big. You just won’t believe how vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big it is. I mean you may think it’s a long way down the road to the chemist’s, but that’s just peanuts to space.”

Or, as Professor Brian Cox would say...(cough), “Space (pointing enigmatically yet sexily at the sky) is very big and stars.... are very, very far away.” (*Man, that was a good impression... it was like he was in the room. I just wish you could have heard me.*)

The first is a quote from *The HitchHikers Guide To The Galaxy* as I’m sure you are all aware and the ‘space is big’ part is now widely accepted as being true (*excepting certain religious groups and J.J Abrams who seems to have no grasp of this, and if you see me in the bar and mention this I will go into great detail about his failings and eventually dissolve into frothing at the mouth and ranting (more ranting)...you have been warned*).

We’ve all seen various TV programmes about space but to actually get your head around the distances involved in your mind is very hard to do. The numbers are so staggeringly great that we truly don’t have the references in our day to day lives to deal with anything of that enormity. Whatever scale you have in your mind for the size of our Solar System alone, I’m guessing, is massively wrong (*see the above quote*). We’ve been corrupted by magazine pictures and TV images but these are representations in a form that will fit on a page or a TV screen. The actual size is surprising.

Now I know we have a lot of amateur Astronermers (very amateur Astronomers and know-alls) amongst us who will find this article patronizing and



won't snicker at all when we mention Uranus and I'm sorry for that, but read on, there may be interesting things anyway.

To start off, we are going to de-biggify (*real word (honest)*) it to show you just how vast our very own Solar System is. Everything will still be to scale, just reduced to a size that will allow us to grasp the distances involved between the various worlds of our mother system.

However, I'm first going to give you some actual sizes. I'm giving you these for reference. There won't be a test, no need to memorise them, but it will give you some idea of the size of the things we are talking about when we start scaling it down.

We will start off with the Big Boy of the Solar System, our sun, **Sol**.

The Sun is nearly a perfect sphere. Its equatorial diameter and its polar diameter differ by only 6.2 miles (10 km). Its diameter is about 864,938 miles (1.392 million km). You could line up 109 Earths across the face of the sun, if you were bored and capable of that sort of thing.

Earth is not quite a sphere, despite what your drinks globe at home would have you believe. The planet's rotation causes it to bulge at the equator the Moon also pulls and distorts the surface as it passes over. Earth's equatorial diameter is 7,926 miles (12,756 km).

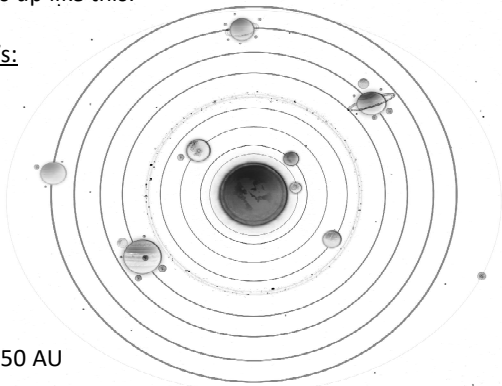
Big numbers, I think we can all agree.

Now, bigger ones. We have all heard of lightyears and understand they are a measurement of distance (except George Lucas), but these are used when talking on a cosmic scale. For interplanetary scale Astronomers use the Astronomical Unit, or AU. The AU has been defined as 92,955,807 miles (149597870.7 km) which is the distance from the Earth to the Sun.

Using the AU our Solar System stacks up like this:

Distance from the Sun in AU's:

- Mercury** 0.4 AU
- Venus** 0.7 AU
- Earth** 1.0 AU
- Mars** 1.5 AU
- Asteroid Belt** 2.8 AU
- Jupiter** 5.2 AU
- Saturn** 9.6 AU
- Uranus** 19.2 AU
- Neptune** 30 AU
- Kuiper Belt** between 30 and 50 AU





The Oort Cloud between 5,000 and 100,000 AU (the latter being defined as the edge of our star's gravitational influence).

OK, those are the numbers. They are very dry and don't really help because they are still just inconceivable distances.

Now let's build a scaled down model you can do at home Or just about. Involve the kiddies if you like (*no Fairy Liquid bottles were harmed in the making of this model*).

You will need a 5 pence piece. This will represent the sun on our scale (actually it's slightly bigger than we need, on the scale we will be working to the sun would be just under 0.5 of an inch in diameter). You won't need anything for the planets as they would be just grains of dust until you get to the gas giants. We have to make the Sun this small or it really does start getting wildly out of hand... you will see what I mean.

So, starting with your heel at the edge of the 5p take a big step (each step should equal approximately 1 meter (about 3.28 feet)).

You are now at **Mercury**, the closest planet to the sun. Take a look at that scale..... bet you didn't think it was so far away, and still close enough for our star to melt it's surface. Just wait.... There's more.

Venus, take 2 steps and you are there. WOW, Cor Blimey (I think is the phrase), look how big the sun looks even from this distance.

Keep going....

Earth = 2.5 steps

Mars = 3.75 steps

Asteroid belt = 7 steps

Jupiter = 13 steps

You may need to go outside

now...

Saturn = 24 steps

Uranus = 49 steps

Neptune = 75 steps

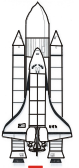
Kuiper belt = between 75 and

125 steps

The Oort Cloud = 12,500 and 250,000 steps (which works out to 155.34 miles (249.99 km))

If you haven't got a sense of the scale yet at least you've





gotten fitter and if You like to travel and ever visit Peoria, Illinois then you might like to visit the Riverfront Museum. Its community Solar System model is the world's most complete large-scale model. The scale factor is 99,000,000:1 and covers 6,000 square miles of Central Illinois.



The Sun is depicted as a 46 ft yellow circle in Riverfront Museum's Sun Plaza.

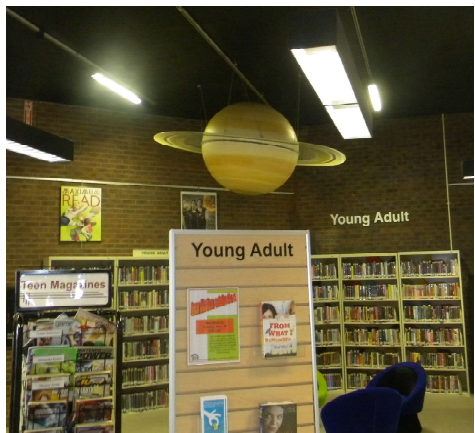
Mercury (1.93 inches in diameter) is located along the Rock Island/Pimiteoui Trail near the Riverplex playground, about 0.36 miles from the Museum (Mercury is 3,032 miles in diameter, and 36,000,000 miles from the Sun).

Venus (4.8 inches in diameter) is located along the Rock Island/Pimiteoui Trail near the volleyball courts, about 0.68 miles from the Museum (Venus is 7,521 miles in diameter, and 67,200,000 miles from the Sun).

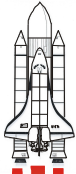
The Earth (5 inches in diameter) is located along the Rock Island/Pimiteoui Trail in Constitution Park, about 0.94 miles from the Museum

Mars (2.7 inches in diameter) is located along the Rock Island/Pimiteoui trail in Detweiller Marina Park playground, about 1.4 miles from the Museum (Mars is 4,221 miles in diameter, and 141,600,000 miles from the Sun).

Jupiter (55 inches in diameter) is located in the Peoria International Airport lobby, about 4.9 miles from the Museum (Jupiter is 88,846 miles in diameter, and 483,800,000 miles from the Sun).



Saturn (46 inches in diameter) is located in Pekin Public Library (301 S. 4th St. Pekin 61554), about 8.9 miles from the Museum (Saturn is 74,897 miles in diameter, and 890,800,000 miles from the Sun).

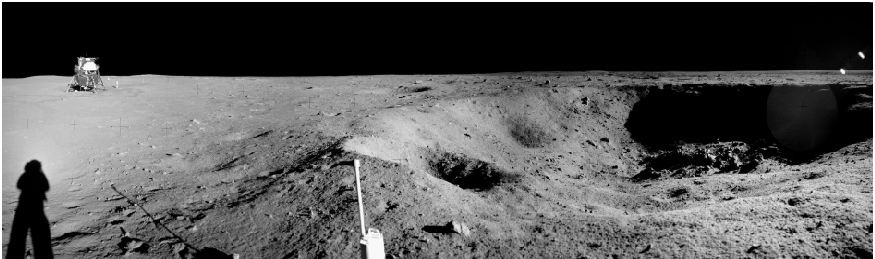


Uranus (18 inches in diameter) is located in Troutman Park in Princeville, about 16 miles from the Museum (Uranus is 31,763 miles in diameter, and 1,784,800,000 miles from the Sun).

Neptune (18 inches in diameter) is located at the Wyoming Train Depot along the Rock Island Trail State Park, about 28 miles from the Museum (Neptune is 30,775 miles in diameter, and 2,793,100,000 miles from the Sun).



The three stars of the **Alpha Centauri** Star System (closest Star System to the Sun), could be located at the Little West Crater, the Apollo 11 landing site, on the Moon.



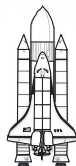
It is about 238,900 miles from the Museum. The three stars could line up across the 100 foot crater. Alpha Centauri A would be 59 feet in diameter, Alpha Centauri B would be 39 feet in diameter, and Alpha Centauri C would be 6 feet in diameter. The actual stars in Alpha Centauri are 1,112,000, 741,000, and 124,000 miles in diameter, and about 4.3 light years from the Sun.

I bet when you started reading this you had a picture in your mind of the size of the solar system. Is it still the same?

(with thanks to the Natural Geographic website for most of the size data)

Gary Starr

NOVACON 46



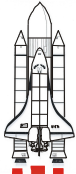
11 - 13 November 2016

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