

NOVACON 39



**"PANDEMIC - WHAT PANDEMIC?"
SAYS NOVACON COMMITTEE**

PROGRESS REPORT TWO

NOVACON 39

Guest of Honour **Justina Robson**
13-15 November 2009
The Park Inn, Nottingham

MEMBERSHIP RATES: Adults £39, 13-16 yrs £10; 12 and under free (age at 13/11/09). Day rates will be available.

HOTEL ROOMS: Double or twin rooms will cost £40 pppn, while singles will be £56 pppn. Children: under 5 yrs free; 5-12 yrs £5.00; over 12 yrs 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 forms is enclosed - you know what to do...**

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WEB SITE: www.novacon39.org/index.htm

Chair

Alice Lawson

Hi there,

Time for some more words from the chair. Well then, that means it is time to tell you how hard all my wonderful team are working to bring you a brilliant convention. And believe me they are. At least they were when I mailed them from my balcony in Madeira when I was on holiday. Strangely the response when I mentioned that was not as... shall I say, *polite* as it could have been ✍

The programme is coming along nicely and I am sure you will enjoy it. As it 150th anniversary of the publication Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and also the International Year of Astronomy we have invited two science speakers. Helena and Richard will tell you more about that later. There will be the usual mix of panels and talks all of which I am sure will be excellent.

The hotel is shaping up nicely. They have agreed a family rate for limited rooms; Tony will let you know about that in the hotel piece.

We are pleased (*understatement!*) to confirm that there will be real ale and this will most probably be Black Sheep. On that note: the hotel is doing this especially for us. As it is not something they normally provide I would like them not to worry about us not drinking it. ("As if," *I hear you cry*). I know you will, you know you will, hotels we have been to before know you will. However this is a new hotel and I do not want them to worry and cut the order to suit the numbers *they* think will be attending, so **PLEASE**, if you have not booked your room at the hotel, will you do so as soon as possible?

Volunteers:

Thank you to all you lovely people who normally step up and help us at Novacon. A convention cannot run without volunteers. The committee alone cannot manage all the areas. At the Quality the layout was such that we could cope with minimal volunteers. However the Park Inn is a totally different set up.

We will need more volunteers that normal. The areas we will need help are:

Art Show set up & tear down

Art Show door duties.

Dealers Room door duties.

General Stewarding

Registration desk

Bag stuffing.

I am sure that nobody wants an overstretched and tired committee.

If most people volunteered, it would only mean a couple of hours each.

For those lovely people who I am sure will rally to the cause, gopher reward tickets will be available.

It is easy to volunteer. Just email me and indicate what areas you are willing to help with. alice@altair-4.co.uk

Cheers

Alice.

Justina Robson – Science Fiction Sweetheart

Ash Charlton

Justina? Oh, she's a sweetheart!

...was pretty much my reaction when I was asked to do a piece on la Robson. Those of you who have seen her speaking at cons and other gatherings will know her as an interesting, cogent and humorous speaker: well, she was just like that when I first met her.

Which was remarkable as she'd only recently given birth to her first baby, Daniel, and was still in the throes of first parenthood while taking time out to teach creative writing at the Arvon Foundation. I went on the course largely because she was teaching it (okay, they had Adam Roberts too, but she was at least half the reason, okay?). And despite being sweet enough later to apologise for not being at her best, was really good all the way through, generous in her attention to beginner's work, fair in her appraisals and really funny to be around.

Justina on motherhood:

Me: (viewing Daniel for the first time) Oh, isn't he sweet!

Justina: Well, he wasn't so beautiful when he was born of course...

Me: In what way?

Justina: (with maternal love) Well, he looked like he was made from tomatoes...

And later, discussing the merits and otherwise of different authors:

Me: I think that Michael Crichton is quite a good writer.

Justina: (witheringly) Jurassic Park.

Me: Okay, perhaps not, but...

This kind of minimalist reply that says it all is something of a stock in trade with her, later in the same discussion:

Justina: I mean, a lot of apparent Science Fiction is in fact Fantasy. Like Ursula LeGuin's ansible: (makes face) oh yeah.

Me: Did the standard of literary criticism just decline slightly? Or is it just me?

Justina: Yes dear, you declined slightly.

Though generally she was more forthcoming on what made good science fiction than that. For me it was really inspiring to be around someone who thought about these things intelligently: I remember during the session on science-fiction world building she kept making the point, "Who's paying for these huge expensive starships? Why are they investing their resources in this way?" which has made me look carefully at every piece of sci-fi writing I've done since with the same eye, as well as making it impossible for me to watch any TV sci-fi less good than, say, 'Battlestar Galactica'. Everything else seems like poorly-thought out kid's stuff.

And that kind of thinking comes across from her writing as well. Someone once defined Justina's books as 'Real fun science fiction you can enjoy without having to hate yourself', and that's right. In a book like 'Natural History' Robson describes an interstellar civilisation which terraforms new planets, a familiar enough trope you may think, but done this time with an insight and intelligence rarely seen ('No-one's ever invented an AI that gave a damn about anything') that means you can really relax and enjoy it. Or, later in her career, the rattlin' good read of the 'Quantum Gravity' books where you can have elves, demons, fairies, dragons, a lead character who wouldn't look

out of place in the X-men and still not hate yourself for reading it as it's so intelligently done.

Okay, so that's her as a teacher and writer, but what about seeing her at a conference? Again, a similarly incisive intelligence:

SCENE: One of the workshops on sexuality and science fiction that you get at every conference and which are always dominated by Americans talking about sexual rights in the US.

Roz Kaveny: (for it is she, being wonderful as always) ...but of course that gets us into the area of the Sex Wars and we don't want to start all that now.

Justina: What were the Sex Wars?

Roz: Oh, let's not start!

Justina: But what were they? I've never heard of them! They sound like Star Wars only much more interesting!

Afterwards I got to tell her that they were a series of heated debates within the lesbian community during the '90s about feminist issues, e.g. pornography, S/M sex etc., which, she commented, meant that they were just like Star Wars only even duller.

Of course she's changed during the time I've known her, and I think something of that is shown in her writing too. The course I was on was a 'two hander' between her and Adam, and they quickly fell into the 'Good Cop/Bad Cop' that every two-hander always falls into, and of course she was the Bad Cop, the one who was a bit tougher to please, just a bit more critical: the one whose approval you worked extra hard for.

Whereas when I spoke with her later at the Glasgow convention she seemed much mellower and rather sweetly apologised for being too distracted during the Arvon course, which she really didn't have to do as she was a wonderful, if strict, teacher. I think some of this

mellowness has affected her writing as well: I've always like her work, but the earlier stuff is a bit colder, less engaging, more ideas-based, whereas with 'Natural History' as the turning point she's gone on to write characters that I can identify with easily and care about, which means that the books become quite unputdownable, rather than interesting in a slightly chilly way.

You may be wondering what huge favour I'm planning to blag off Justina for writing these things about her, but actually I've got nothing to gain as she's already been dead supportive to me and other writers in helping us towards getting published and can't really do any more for me.

So I must just really like her: she's a sweetheart.

Dinner

Have you ever dined out in Nottingham?

Since we're moving to a new location, the committee would be interested to hear from any convention members who've eaten out in the city in recent times.



Naturally the hotel will be providing evening meals and we're always amazed that anyone can bear to leave the convention for single a minute, but for those who do fancy a meal out while at Novacon we're happy to publish any recommendations or reviews of affordable, interesting or unusual places to eat you'd care to send us.

Hotel update

Tony Berry

Family Rooms

Although, as I previously mentioned, the hotel does not have any family rooms as such, it does have a **small** number of connecting rooms. The following rates have been agreed: 2 interconnecting rooms (1 double and 1 twin) for 2 adults and 2 children up to 14 years of age £120 per night. Also 1 double room (or twin) with fold-away bed or cot for 1 child up to 14 years £80 per night, with the child's breakfast extra. If you have already booked your room(s) and want one of these, contact Steve Lawson as soon as possible.

Leisure Facilities

We have full use of the leisure facilities including the pool. However, the pool runs some adult-only sessions. These are Friday: 11.30 – 13.00, 19.00 – 21.30; Saturday: 13.00 – 15.00, 19.00 – 20.00; Sunday: 15.00 – 17.00, 19.00 – 20.00. At other times it's a free-for-all!

Food And Drink

Novacon just wouldn't be the same without certain items on the menu. The hotel has agreed to carry on the noble traditions of late-night bacon/sausage/chip butties, and to run a "tuck shop" (their phrase) from the main bar with essentials like chocolate, sandwiches and baguettes. We also will be holding the Sunday night meal and beer-tasting as usual.



The advertisement features a red box on the left with the text "Great Weekend Offers", a central photo of a smiling couple, a yellow box on the right with the text "From £65 per person", and a photo of a hotel room. Below the images, it says "Spend a great weekend at one of over 20 destinations in the UK. Enjoy 2 nights Bed & Breakfast and dinner on the Friday night". At the bottom, it provides the contact information "Call toll free on 0800 056 0591" and the website "www.parkinn.co.uk", along with the Park Inn logo.

Great Weekend Offers

From £65 per person

Spend a great weekend at one of over 20 destinations in the UK. Enjoy 2 nights Bed & Breakfast and dinner on the Friday night

Call toll free on 0800 056 0591
www.parkinn.co.uk

park inn

“There Will Be A Programme”

Helena Bowles & Richard Standage

Yes, it's that time of year... you have all those lovely, shiny ideas for fantastic programme items and all that's left is to twist enough arms to bring them into being.

Happily we can announce our two science speakers. This year we have chosen to mark the 150th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important scientific works ever written: Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. It's difficult to think of a more significant scientific publication, one that did more to change our perception of who and what we are. We have Professor Mark Pallen, from Birmingham University, author of *The Rough Guide to Evolution*, who will be talking about Darwin's life and his interest in booze, fags and sex and addressing some of the many myths that have grown up about the man.

2009 is also International Year of Astronomy. To celebrate this we have invited Somak Raychaudhury, also from Birmingham University, to talk to us.

We have some old favourite programme items like the inimitable Steve Green interviewing our Guest of Honour for Room 101 and our Friday Night Party with attendant silliness.

We have panels and discussions planned around subjects such as bookselling and dealer's rooms, media SF looking at the reasons for certain programme's longevity or otherwise and the implications of ITV's withdrawal from pre-watershed scripted drama. We'll also be talking about genre boundaries and their significance. There'll be the return of the Saturday Night Quiz but with a twist and Steve Green will be reporting back on his TAFF Trip - if they let him into the States, and if we let him back again!

As always if you have any burning issues you think we should be covering just let us know...



Nova Awards

Steve Green

[Ed: As most of you will be aware, Steve won the Transatlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) and is currently in the USA. More up to date stuff will appear when he returns]

In 1973, Novacon instituted the annual Nova Awards to celebrate achievement in British science fiction fanzines. Originally handed down by a panel of judges, these accolades are now decided by popular vote of Novacon members who can demonstrate a basic knowledge of current fanzines.

Following Novacon 32, the three categories - best fanzine, best fanzine writer, best fanzine artist - were extended to cover fanzines produced in Eire. In addition, electronic fanzines are now eligible, provided a hardcopy is lodged with the current administrator at 33 Scott Road, Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ, UK.

A list of eligible fanzines is maintained on the Novacon Web Site plus the rules and a history of past winners.

If you're unfamiliar with what's being produced these days, good starting places are Dave Langford's *Ansible* links pages at <http://news.ansible.co.uk/> or Bill Burns' *efanzines* at <http://efanzines.com/>

A reminder of last year's winners:

Best Fanzine: *Prolapse* by Peter Weston

Best writer: Mark Plummer

Best Artist: Alison Scott

Best Fan: Peter Weston

(occasional award in the gift of the committee)

Cough, splutter...

Dave Hicks

So we finally get a pandemic and instead of *The Stand* we're living through the apocalyptic equivalent of *Dad's Army*. The cover's a fairly obvious joke but I am an emergency planner – among other things - as well as a sarcastic git; people will die and be missed, but nowhere near as many as we feared might happen.

This time. There've been some 'lively' newspaper headlines about maximum number of deaths in event of the most communicable and lethal viruses but the planning assumptions have been around for years. It seems we're lucky that this one is the former but not (too much) the later.

We're all fans of a genre that presents biology as something dramatic or extraordinary: from the surreal and beautiful genetic engineering of Ryman's *The Child Garden* to Terry Nation's more traditional and robust *Survivors*. There's a romance and a fascination to be had in civilisation ending (or at least getting a good kicking) by micro-organisms; the conspiracies; the cover-ups; the cock ups.

So speaking as a security-cleared (so I can read the documents I wrote in the first place) public sector officer who works in a building with its own nuclear bunker (it's a furniture store these days) and marks exams on health and safety including diseases I didn't even know existed a few years ago, may I assure you that if on the Monday after Novacon you find you have a headache, upset stomach, fatigue, aching body parts, a strange rash and a sense of ennui it's probably just the aftermath of the convention. Sit down with a nice cup of tea and meander through some old fanzines or trawl *Livejournal* before calling the National Flu Line.

Miscellany

Art Show will be all in one room again!

The new venue means we can return to an art show all in a single space. **Serena Culfeather** has agreed to run it again after her excellent work last year. We will run the CD-ROM art show if we have enough material. Artists looking to exhibit either actual work (for auction or not) or electronically should get in touch soon.

Bigger Dealers' Room

We'll have a bigger dealers' room and it's right next to the bar! Interested dealers should contact **Tony Berry** (see front for all contact 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

See Tony's piece on the hotel for latest news.

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

Membership

August 2009

1	Justina	Robson	40	David	Thomas
2	Ian R	MacLeod	41	Margaret	Croad
3	Charles	Stross	42	Caroline	Loveridge
4	Feorag	NicBhríde	43	Gavin	Long
5	Ken	MacLeod	44	Dave	Cox
6	Brian	Aldiss	45	Tony	Rogers
7	Harry	Harrison	46	Dave	Tompkins
8	Alice	Lawson	47	Paul	Dormer
9	Tony	Berry	48	Niall	Gordon
10	Helena	Bowles	49	Michael	Abbott
11	Cat	Coast	50	Anne	Wilson
12	Dave	Hicks	51	Ian	Maughan
13	Steve	Lawson	52	Stephen	Dunn
14	Richard	Standage	53	Ian	Sorensen
15	Martin	Tudor	54	Yvonne	Rowse
16	Vernon	Brown	55	Adrian	Snowdon
17	Pat	Brown	56	Gwen	Funnell
18	Ina	Shorrocks	57	Peter	Wareham
19	Gavin	Shorrocks	58	Peter	Mabey
20	Neil	Summerfield	59	Brian	Ameringen
21	Chris	Stocks	60	Meriol	Ameringen
22	Tim	Stannard	61	Caroline	Mullan
23	Chris	O'Shea	62	Sue	Jones
24	Gerry	Webb	63	Dave	Hardy
25	Mali	Perera	64	Julia	Daly
26	Kostya	Milayev	65	Douglas	Spencer
27	Chris	Bell	66	Jim	Walker
28	½r		67	John	Dowd
29	George	Ternent	68	Fran	Dowd
30	Linda	Ternent	69	Rog	Peyton
31	Calvin	Ternent	70	Claire	Brialey
32	Anne	Woodford	71	Mark	Plummer
33	Alan	Woodford	72	Julian	Headlong
34	Pauline	Morgan	73	Penny	Hicks
35	Chris	Morgan	74	Steve	Davies
36	Barbara-Jane		75	Giulia	De Cesare
37	Marcus	Thierstein	76	Liam	Proven
38	James	Odell	77	John	Harvey
39	Roger	Robinson	78	Eve	Harvey
			79	Steve	Green
			80	Dave	Lally
			81	Al	Johnston
			82	Heloise	Tudor

83	Jennifer	Swift	123	John	Wilson
84	Mike	Scott	124	Serena	Culfeather
85	Flick		125	Wendy	Graham
86	Marcus	Rowland	126	Michael	Meara
87	Simon	Dearn	127	Pat	Meara
88	Thomas	Recktenwald	128	Greg	Pickersgill
89	Steve	Cooper	129	Catherine	Pickersgill
90	Susan	Peak	130	Bridget	Bradshaw
91	Farah	Mendleson	131	Hailey	
92	Steve	Rogerson	132	Noel	Collyer
93	David	Cochrane	133	Angela	Rosin
94	Andy	Sawyer	134	Ian	Warner
95	Martin	Easterbrook	135	Dave	Langford
96	Margaret	Austin	136	Del	Cotter
97	Tony	Keen	137	Neil	Tomkinson
98	Kate	Bodley	138	Alison	Tomkinson
99	Nik	Whitehead	139	Christy	Avraam
100	Wilf	James	140	Phillip	Collins
101	Susie	Haynes	141	Ian	Brown
102	Martin	Holmes	142	Helen	Cross
103	JFW	Richards	143	Chris	Murphy
104	Nicholas	Jackson	144	Teresa	
105	Bridget	Wilkinson	145	Andrew	Patton
106	Peter	Wilkinson	146	Carol	
107	Harpal	Singh	147	Tony	
108	David T.	Cooper	148	Christopher	Brooks
109	Jane	Cooper	149	Mark	Slater
110	Duncan	MacGregor	150	Eddie	Stachelski
111	Christina	Lake	151	Sue	Hobson
112	Lennart	Uhlin	152	Andrew	Hobson
113	Doug	Bell	153	Robert	Smith
114	Roderick	O'Hanlon	154	Tobes	Valois
115	Laura	Wheatly	155	Martin	Hoare
116	Sue	Edwards	156	Christine	Davidson
117	Tanya	Brown	157	Michael	Davidson
118	Dave	Holmes			
119	Richard	Crawshaw			
120	David	Cluett			
121	Joyce	Cluett			
122	Beth	Giddins			

To advertise in our splendid publications:

Advertising is welcome for both the final progress report and for the programme book.

The rates are as follows.

Progress report:

Professional (Fan)

£35 (£15) for a full page,
£17.50 (£9) half -page,
£9.50 (£6) quarter-page.

Programme book:

Professional (Fan)

£80 (£35) full page,
£50 (£17.50) half-page,
£27.50 (£10.50) quarter-page.