

# NOVACON

11 - 13 November 2016

THE ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE  
BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP



PROGRESS  
**1**  
REPORT

GUEST OF HONOUR JULIET E. MCKENNA

# THOSE RESPONSIBLE

## Editorial....

**Welcome** to the first PR for **Novacon 46**. Leading up to the convention it will be my pleasure to oversee the editing of the publications for **Novacon** this year.

Well, unless anything untoward happens to me in the meantime. I had a bit of a close call last week with a bunch of young lads causing a bit of a problem. I tried to get them to move on by showing them how street and ganster I was by threatening to "Put a cat up their ass". Needless to say they laughed, I've blown my street cred and I'm now on an RSPCA watch list.

But back to the convention; all we can say at this point is that we plan to give you the best **Novacon** experience we can. There will be clowns (there will not be clowns), there will be ponies (there will not be ponies), there will be helicopter rides (again... no) and there will be a free live baby panda for every attendee (subject to availability). So sit back, relax and let us do the work.

**Novacon 46**... you'll be able to say you were there..... unless you weren't.

### Chairman

Douglas Spencer.....fandom@dougs.org.uk

### Membership and Hotel Accommodation

Steve Lawson.....steve@altair-4.co.uk  
379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield. S2 3QH

### Treasurer

Eve Harvey.....eve@harveyconsultancy.co.uk

### Hotel Liason And Beer

Tony Berry.....tonyberry300@gmail.com

### Secretary

Cat Coast.....catdavefans@gmail.com

### Programme

Yvonne Rowse...yvonne@hallsfarm.demon.co.uk

### Social Media

Helena Bowles....helenalibriomancer@gmail.com

### Website

John Harvey.....john@harveyconsultancy.co.uk

### Publications

Gary Starr.....gary.starr@ntlworld.com

### Staff Members

Alice Lawson, Dave Hicks and Richard Standage

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Cartoons provided by Dave Hicks and Gary Starr

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# THE CHAIR SPEAKS



**Novacon 46** is on its way, preparations are... being prepared, and great things are afoot. In fact, everything was going smoothly, right up to just before Gary asked me to write something for PR1, like I don't have enough to do without writing things.

Right, so, here goes....

Well, we've had long and earnest conversations with the management at the Park Inn Hotel at Nottingham and they are determined to do a good job looking after us this year. We've fought long and hard to get the right deal for us. Read Tony's hotel page for more information.

Our Guest of Honour is **Juliet E. McKenna**. As well as writing more than a dozen novels and a bunch of shorter fiction, she is a regular at conventions, including chairing an Eastercon in 2013 and appearing as a Guest of Honour at Eastercon in 2014. She also collaborates in The Write Fantastic, campaigns against VAT on ebooks within the EU, and engages in martial arts. No doubt she's done various other things too, and I hope she might wish to talk about some of them while she's with us.

"**Novacon**", Tony writes in last year's PR1, "is a single-stream convention with a mix of serious and fannish items". In recent years we've been gradually evolving into a one-and-a-half-stream convention, with assorted tomfoolery taking place "off-piste" in a space distinct from the main programme stream. While I quite like the mix, I also quite like assorted tomfoolery, I'm sure you're the same.

Our social media team are caning it this season. If you didn't understand any of that sentence just go and read the Social Media page elsewhere in this PR1. You're in for a treat.

Oh, and there will be beer. See you all in November.

Douglas Spencer

Chairman

# N46





# park inn

by *Radisson*

Mansfield Road,  
Nottingham.  
NG5 2BT

**The** Park Inn Hotel is situated on the Mansfield Road, a mile from Nottingham city centre and about a mile and a half from the train and bus stations. It has 170 rooms, all double or twin, with a limited number of “family” rooms consisting of a double and twin with a connecting door (If you want one of these get in quick!).

Fresh from talks with the hotel to secure a favourable rate, I can now confirm the following Hotel room rates:

Double/twin room - £46.00 per person/per night.

Single room - £64.00 per night.

This rate also includes breakfast.

It also includes access to the privately run leisure centre, sited within the hotel, which boasts a pool, Jacuzzi, sauna and gym.

Most of the convention will take place on the ground floor of the hotel; here you will find the main programme room, bar, restaurant and dealers’ room. Downstairs is another bar (which may be open on Friday evening), the Art Show, Dave Lally’s Room of Delights (?!?), a small lounge and a couple of meeting rooms in which we will run any off-piste programming. Downstairs is accessible by lift from reception for anyone who has trouble with stairs.

Getting to the hotel is fairly simple. By train or bus it is a short taxi ride but quite a long walk through the city centre and mostly uphill.... You have been warned: Take the taxi. Nottingham also boasts a tram system – which is absolutely no good to you as it goes nowhere near the hotel that doesn’t involve quite a walk. If you are traveling by car there is plenty of parking at the hotel, but beware the ANPR system! If this is switched on you must enter your car registration when you check in so as to avoid a penalty notice arriving on your doormat.

I have talked to the hotel and I trust that the delays at check-in, which occurred last year, will not be repeated. To this end a member of the committee may stand behind reception with a pointed stick to encourage the staff.

Tony Berry



# OUR GUEST OF HONOUR

# JULIET E. MCKENNA



We'd like to take this opportunity to introduce and welcome our guest of honour for Novacon 46.

What can we say about Juliet E. McKenna that hasn't already been said? Cage fighter, Mountaineer, ex SAS... these are just some of the things that haven't been said about her.

Juliet is, however, one of Britain's foremost fantasy authors and, unless you've been marooned on a distant desert island for the past 20 years, you will probably have come across her works by now.

Her first novel, *The Thief's Gamble*, was published in 1999 to rave reviews and was the first of her *Tales of Einarinn* set of books. She has also written three other series *The Aldabreshin Compass*, *The Chronicles of the Lescari Revolution* and *The Hadrumel Crisis*, as well as numerous other short stories and articles.

Some of you will have already had the good fortune to have heard or met our guest before, as she is something of a regular on the fan circuit having run conventions of her own, namely **Eastercon 2013**. She has also been on many other committees, panels and given talks at various other events. This, I'm sure, will make her a great guest for this convention and we are very pleased to have her with us. I'm sure you will all make her most welcome.

As well as writing, Juliet is also an organiser of *The Write Fantastic* initiative, which was launched in 2005 by a group of fantasy authors, including herself, with the aim of promoting the fantasy genre. The initiative holds a range of events throughout the UK, discussing themes and influences in fantasy fiction.

She lives in West Oxfordshire with her husband and sons.



Thank you to Lou Abercrombie for the use of this photo



# The Thief's Gamble

by

**Juliet McKenna**

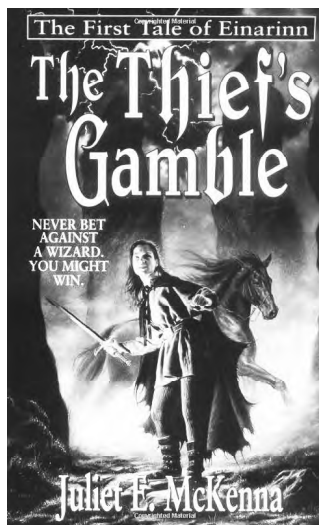
A Review By

Maggie Standage-Bowles

**In** a world where past mistakes and lost histories have forced wizards into self-imposed exile, with gifted children being taken from their families as soon as they are discovered, magic in McKenna's debut novel is uncommonly found and even more uncommonly understood. On the island of Hadrumal the highest in magical authority are on the hunt to recover the knowledge of their ancestors, theorising that ancient heirlooms retain trace memories that could help them. Into the midst of this stumbles Livak, a dishonest gambler by trade and a thief by occasional necessity, just looking to make some money but embroiling herself in a quest instead. Her ignorance about the magical world provides the window through which the politics and histories that drive the story are slowly revealed.

However, this isn't a novel willing to spoon-feed its readers. The sprawling first chapter introduces character after character, plunging straight into stories that started long before the opening page. Similarly, much of the story is told from the perspective of Livak who has spent her life travelling between cities and as such needs very little versing in the cultures she and her troupe encounter; if she doesn't get an explanation, then neither do we. At times this can make the story a little hard to keep up with (this is not a book that can be skimmed through) but it's a price worth paying for the effect of solid and complex world-building – the lands we follow the protagonists through are almost tangible and provide a solid foundation on which the plot is weaved.

Of course, no world can sustain itself without an enjoyable cast and on this front McKenna also delivers. Livak, with her grubby morals, dry wit and unapologetic sexuality is a character that demands to be rooted for. Her motivations are unquestionable all throughout the story, even when they begin to vacillate and her stubbornness in the face of terror makes her very easy to love. Her companions – Geris the good-hearted academic, Darni the tempestuous agent to the Arch-mage, Shivvalan the wizard just trying to do his duty, and sworn-swords Aiten and Ryshad – are varied in nature and sometimes not as fleshed-out but they all bounce off each other well; their interactions painting a picture of people who would not be together if circumstances hadn't forced their hands. Casuel and Allin, connected to the main plot but forging their own trail, are unfortunately less engaging and, for the most part, rather unlikeable. The narrative does suffer here with the classic fantasy pit-fall where not all perspectives are equally interesting and the impulse to skip sections to get back to the better characters does arise. Nevertheless, the convergence of all story lines at the end of the novel (if a little abrupt) is unhampered by this.



On the whole, *The Thief's Gamble* does little to subvert or revolutionise the Sword and Sorcery genre but it is clear it never had any intention to. It moves along at a swift pace, and refuses to pull its punches in many unexpected and emotional ways. The plot is a little muddled at times, however this has the effect of putting the reader through the same disorientation that the characters experience and commands an even greater pull for attention. It leaves off with plenty of questions about what must happen next and how all the characters we've come to root for will be a part of it.



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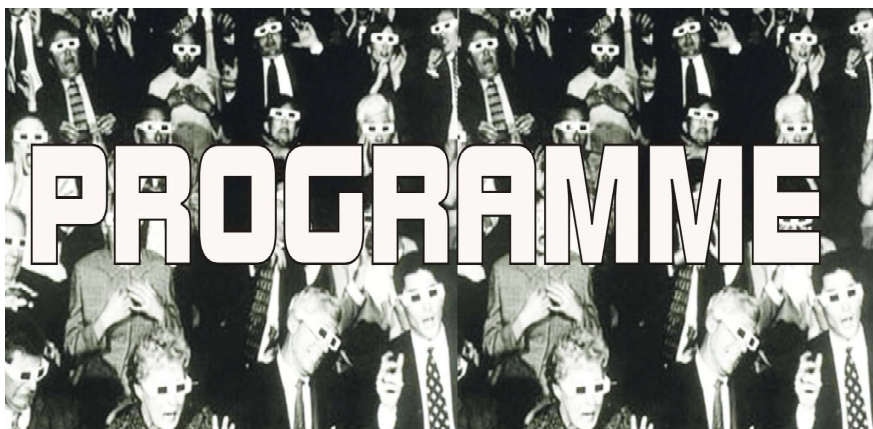
# NOVACON 46

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## MEMBERSHIP LIST MARCH 2016

1 Juliet McKenna	36 Steve Dunn	71 Luke Smith
2 Stan Nicholls	37 Pat Brown	72 James Odell
3 Anne Nicholls	38 Vernon Brown	73 Dave Hardy
4 Kari Sperring	39 Tobes Valois	74 Dave Lally
5 Phil Nanson	40 Dave Tompkins	75 Al Johnston
6 Brian Aldiss	41 Paul Dormer	76 Austin Benson
7 Douglas Spencer	42 Adrian Snowdon	77 Caro Wilson
8 Tony Berry	43 Niall Gordon	78 Arthur Cruttenden
9 Helena Bowles	44 Peter Wareham	79 Martin Hoare
10 Cat Coast	45 Gwen Funnell	80 Julia Daly
11 Eve Harvey	46 Roger Robinson	81 Barbara-Jane
12 John Harvey	47 George Ternent	82 Markus Thierstein
13 Alice Lawson	48 Linda Ternent	83 Vanessa May
14 Steve Lawson	49 Alice Ternent	84 Steven Cain
15 Yvonne Rowse	50 Neil Summerfield	85 Alison Scott
16 Gary Starr	51 Rob Jackson	86 Dave Langford
17 Dave Hicks	52 Mike Scott	87 Steve Davies
18 Penny Hicks	53 Flick	88 Giulia De Cesare
19 Richard Standage	54 Omega	89 Marcus Rowland
20 Sue Jones	55 Harry Payne	90 Laura Wheatly
21 Morag O'Neill	56 Hal Payne	91 Ian Sorensen
22 Tim Stannard	57 Jodie Payne	92 Peter Mabey
23 Harpal Singh	58 Mali Perera	93 Greg Pickersgill
24 Caroline Mullan	59 Gerry Webb	94 Catherine Pickersgill
25 Brian Ameringen	60 Alan Webb	95 Magdalen Standage-Bowles
26 Emjay Ameringen	61 Alexey Locktianov	96 Julian Heathcock
27 Chris Bell	62 Steve Jones	97 William Armitage
28 Pauline Morgan	63 Jamie Scott	98 Roger Earnshaw
29 Chris Morgan	64 Claire Brialey	99 Michael Davidson
30 Anne Woodford	65 Mark Plummer	100 Christine Davidson
31 Alan Woodford	66 Michael Abbott	101 David Cochrane
32 Sue Edwards	67 Anne Wilson	102 Ivaylo Shmilev
33 Simon Dearn	68 Sally Rowse	103 Geoff Winterman
34 Tony Rogers	69 Julian Headlong	104 David Redd
35 Tim Kirk	70 Bridget Wilkinson	





**So**, programme..... programme, programme, programme.... Oh yes. Well, there will be one. By November. Maybe even by October. But certainly by November.

As always, at PR1, we are still in the early stages of putting something together. We had our first committee meeting a short while ago and we *did* discuss programme but it was 7<sup>th</sup> on the Chairman's Agenda... and we were well into the beer and nibbles by that time.

As usual at **Novacon** our programme will include all the usual fannish stuff plus two science talks, all being well. We've had requests that one of the science talks has a bit of a biological theme. As our publications supremo noted, 'Not about the Birds and The Bees; anyone who needs that talk can get it from their parents like we had to and there will be no smut or giggling during our science talks, thank you very much.' As if you would.

Also we hope to throw in the usual 'Big Physics' talk as it makes us all look smart. Well not me. I finished my physics education with A Level and can't remember the maths for even simple harmonic motion. I understand there have been Discoveries discovered and Theories theorised since then.

As usual we go out of our way to have a great guest of honour and this year is no different. This guest not only writes great novels but, very fannishly, has run conventions too and we intend to make good use of her interests and knowledge. She also apparently has an interest in the martial arts, which might make managing the committee easier than usual.

There'll be an Opening Ceremony Friday night, and a Not-The-Closing Ceremony and the traditional beer tasting on Sunday night.

As we turned, tired and emotional from seven agenda points (and AOB) argued to exhaustion, and a number of bottles of beer, we fell to reminiscing about Novacons gone by and how some of us, including me, had used to put on our best clothes to party on a Saturday night. It would be lovely, someone suggested, if we did that again. Some of the more adventurous (youngsters) might even cosplay. So, for those who can stay up past dinner (I'll do my best), we would, in the gentlest way possible, encourage you to dress up. If you feel like it. But not if you don't.

See you there.



# Social Media 101



## What exactly is social media?

Social media refers to online platforms designed to facilitate communication and small scale blogging. It enables people interested in similar things to find each other, chat, have fun and share news.

## So now I have to use social media if I want to come to?

Not at all. You can still have the same experience at **Novacon** as you always did. Social media is an optional extra. Not remotely interested? No problem, just turn the page or skip to the next piece in this PR.

## OK, why are you bothering then?

Well, there a few reasons.

One is that it's an added extra for our members who want to follow us.

The second is that it's very good publicity both for us and our Guest of Honour.

For people who may have come to **Novacon** in the past but haven't been for a few years it's a reminder that we exist and maybe they might like to join us again this year. For people who have heard of **Novacon** but never been it may inspire them to give us a try. For people who have never heard of **Novacon**, perhaps because they're new to Fandom, or young, or both, it introduces our name attached to a lot of hopefully interesting material that may pique their interest enough to come along and find out if they like us.



## Alright, how does it work?

**Novacon** runs three social media platforms. All are free and two can be viewed without any registration process.

**Facebook** is the oldest of the platforms. If you want to you can create a page for yourself, "like" **Novacon 46** (all will become clear during the registration process) and then our posts will all appear on your "timeline" or homepage. Then you can comment on posts we make, get into conversations with other people and even send us posts. You don't have to do that. Of course, if you don't want to get that involved you can just view our posts at this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/Novacon46/>

**Twitter** and, yes, I can hear a few people grumbling that they really aren't interested in what we had for breakfast or how long we've been stuck in traffic. Well, that's good because that's not what we use **Twitter** for! Along with people tweeting about what they're having for tea, **Twitter** is a great way of getting news very quickly – usually far quicker than websites – and of finding out what article or piece of news people in fandom are talking about or interested in. You



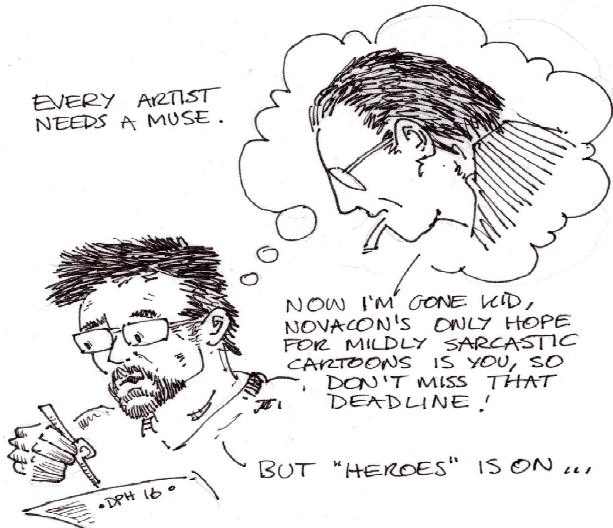
do have to sign up for a **Twitter** account to read our Tweets (messages directly from us) and retweets (resending someone else's tweet on our account because it's interesting, funny, outrageous, or breaking news etc.) It's a very quick process and once you've done it you don't have to do any tweeting yourself. You can just "follow" us and whomever else you want. There are science and publishing sites which tweet interesting news and article links as well as a lot of SF&F authors' personal accounts.

**Tumblr** (yes that is the right spelling!) is the newest of the platforms. It's very popular with the under-thirties and is the most light hearted and visually oriented. Like **Twitter**, you can set up an account and follow interesting people so that everything they post appears on your homepage or "dashboard". If you do that you just have to follow us at **Novaconblog**. If you'd prefer just to spectate you can view our posts at <http://novaconblog.tumblr.com/>

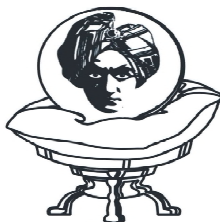
### **Hmmm, I might be interested... what sort of thing do you do?**

We post anything we think might be of interest to someone who comes to Novacon. There's a lot of science and technology news. We follow **NASA** and **ESA** on twitter and pass on their news and follow a lot of the astronaut feeds for their news and photographs of life on the ISS etc. We post about books, old and new, and the **NOVA CON REVIEW** is a semi-regular event on **Tumblr** and Facebook. We post other people's reviews of interesting books, TV and movies. We follow a lot of publishers and SF&F authors who blog regularly and link to their posts. Then there are commercial sites like **io9**, **Den of Geek**, and **The Mary Sue** all of whom link to their new articles and we repost/retweet the ones we think are the most interesting. We post links to material to do with **Juliet McKenna** – her blog, interviews, reviews of her work and so on. We flag up her new blog posts to our followers. And we tell you a bit about ourselves: who are your committee? What are we planning this year? That kind of thing. There are also jokes, gifs, vines (very short video clips) and picture sets on Tumblr that range from the hilarious to the terrifying.

So dust off the PC, Mac, laptop, tablet or phone and give us a look. At the very least we may make waiting for a bus slightly more interesting. At best you'll find a new book to read or a TV show you just have to watch. Even if we just make you laugh that's a win for us.



# THE ALL POWERFUL PAPA DOM TELLS YOUR FUTURE



ARIES

(Mar 20-Apr 18)

Uranus descending into Mars shows that lady luck is with you this week. If you play the lottery you can expect a windfall, if you don't perhaps you should. Lady Luck is blind but can see you when you sleep, she knows you cheated. She knows.



TAURUS

(Apr 19-May 19)

Good news this week for Taureans. As Pluto and Venus align a boy will be born. He will have golden hair and eyes and will refer to himself in the first person. He is the first of his name and will sit upon a throne of blood. If you get in quick this could be a fortunate development for you. Hang in there!



GEMINI

(May 20-Jun 20)

Anyone attending an Eleventy-First birthday party this week should be prepared for an unexpected disappearance.... And cake. Later in the week you should avoid talking to black-clad figures riding emaciated steeds, they probably don't have your best interests at heart.



CANCER

(Jun 21-Jul 21)

Your health could be a worry this month, especially for those of dragonkin. It's likely you will experience a loss but don't take this to heart as the stars show great ascendancy for you and your kind. Alleviate this stress by wearing red clothes, dyed with the blood of your enemies. Wednesday is a good day for shopping.



LEO

(Jul 22-Aug 21)

Tuesday marks the beginning of Hyborian New Year, and this year is the year of the Lion so your time has come at last. No matter how cowardly you feel you are, remember – true strength comes from within. The greatest weapon is not the one carried in the heart, it is the one used to slice your enemies heads from their shoulders.



VIRGO

(Aug 22-Sep 21)

An unexpected expedition leads you to a shining city deep beneath the surface of the Earth. Shamballa calls to you through your blood. Do not resist the call. In other regards you should avoid nuts this week. If you can't, at least make sure one of your friends knows the Heimlich manouever. Or failing that, the Corbomite manouever.



LIBRA

(Sep 22-Oct 22)

Libra is the sign of balance and all Librans out there will be feeling poised between two extremes this month. How you react will determine the outcome for us all. You hold such power in your hands. Don't botch it!





SCORPIO

(Oct 23-Nov 21)

Shibboleths scream through the ether DO YOU HEAR THEM? All the time the whispering, whispering voices talk and talk and talk and tell me your fates. Blood is pouring from my ears FROM MY EARS DO YOU HEAR THEM? The rasping voices. They tell me "have a go thinking outside the box now that Mars is sextile in Mercury". DO YOU UNDERSTAND? DO YOU!



SAGITTARIUS

(Nov 22-Dec 20)

Visitors might come to your home today to discuss business of some kind. They will be golden-eyed and shining. If you aren't careful however, you could be caught up in conversations that are deeper than you could possibly imagine. The fate of heaven and of hell may rest with you. Make sure you have an adequate supply of tea and biscuits. Don't buy any Double Glazing.



CAPRICORN

(Dec 21-Jan 18)

It's a godawful small affair to the girl with the mousy hair. But her mummy is yelling NO and her daddy has told her to go. But her friend is nowhere to be seen, now she walks through a sunken dream to the seat with the clearest view and she's hooked to the silver screen.



AQUARIUS

(Jan 19-Feb 17)

An impending visit from your master may have you running yourself ragged. Ensure that you buy plenty of turbans before beginning your new teaching job. You will probably need them. Also, don't make any long term plans, the spirits are hazy about the future after the school term has ended. It may indicate a big windfall.



PISCES

(Feb 19-Mar 19)

Try not to feel too down on yourself this month. Jupiter ascending into Mercury rising indicates that you are at risk of burning yourself out. Don't let others walk all over you – grab a little me time! Also don't eat fish. Fish is bad for you.... Weirdly.

The Great Papa Dom's wisdom made available by Simon Heldreich



**"MORSE NEVER GETS THESE TYPE OF CASES."**

