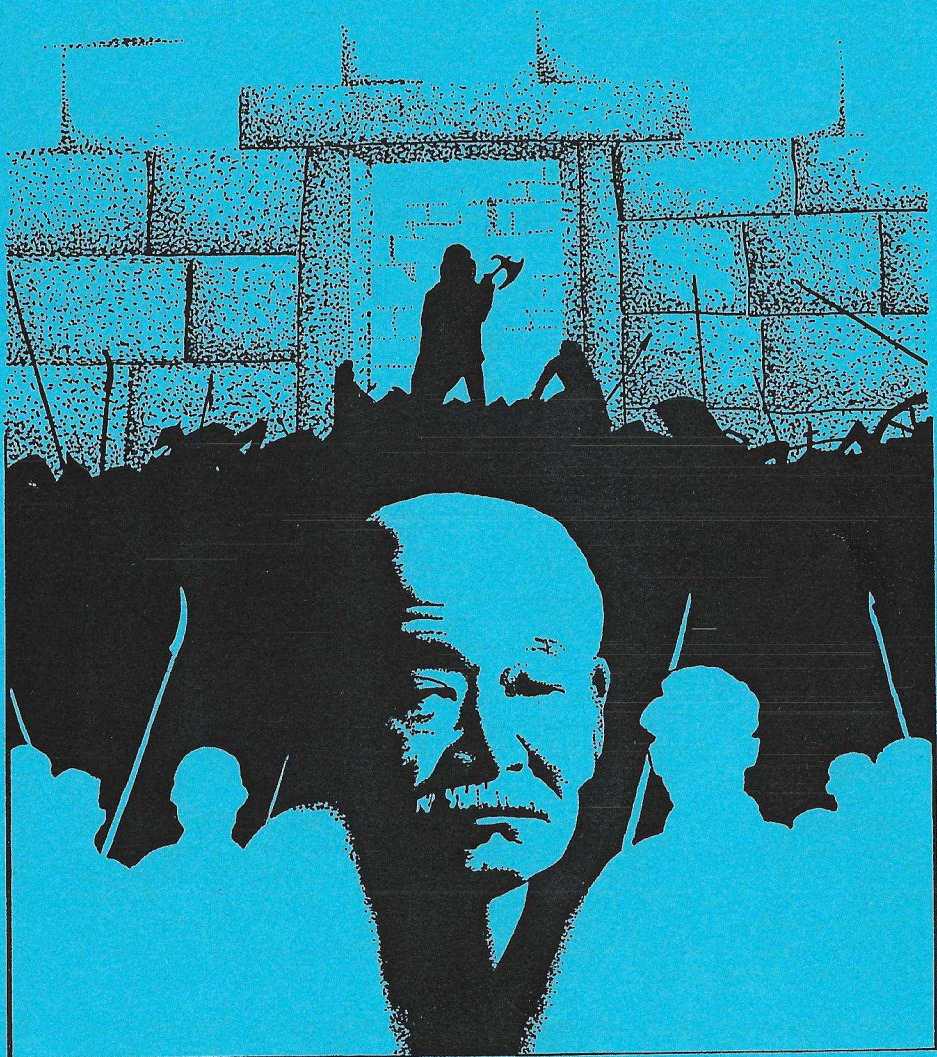


Novacon 26

Progress Report One



Novacon 26

Guest of Honour: David Gemmell.
The Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk, Birmingham, B5 4ST.
8th - 10th November 1996.

Membership & Enquiries: Attending membership costs £23.00 at Novacon 25, rising to £25.00 from 7th November 1995; this will be the rate until Easter after which it will probably increase. Supporting membership costs £10.50. Cheques should be made payable to "Novacon 26" and sent to Tony Morton at 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. General enquiries should be sent to Carol Morton at the same address or you can call her on 01384 825386 (before 9pm).

Room Rates: £21.00 per person per night for people sharing twin/double rooms and £39.00 per person per night for single rooms (inclusive of full English breakfast). *NB: Hotel booking forms, and deposits of the equivalent of one night's stay per person, must be received by Tony Morton no later than 17th September 1996. Cheques for room deposits should be made payable to "The Hotel Ibis".*

Advertising Rates: Advertising is welcome for both the next three Progress Reports and for the Programme Book. The rates are as follows (fan rates in brackets):

Progress Reports - Professional £23.00 (£12.50) full page, £13.50 (£7.00) half page, £7.50 (£4.00) quarter page.

Programme Book - Professional £45.00 (£22.50) full page, £25.00 (£12.50) half page, £15.00 (£7.50) quarter page.

Anyone interested in advertising should contact Martin Tudor at 845 Alum Rock Road Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG. Deadlines for camera-ready advertising copy are detailed below.

Deadlines:

Progress Report #2: 20th February 1996, to be mailed early April 1996.

Progress Report #3: 7th June 1996, to be mailed early July 1996.

Progress Report #4: 9th August 1996, to be mailed September 1996.

Programme Book: 27th September 1996, distributed at Novacon 26.

Bookroom Rates: Tables will cost £15.00 each for the whole weekend (each table is approximately 40" x 25"). To book a table (or tables) you must be a member of the convention and complete and return the booking form enclosed with this Progress Report.

Committee: Carol Morton (Chair) and Tony Morton (Registrations), 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY9 8SS. Sarah Freakley (Programme), 3 Tenby Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham, B13 9LZ. Chris Murphy (Operations), 7 Mullion Drive, Timperley, Nr Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 6SL. Richard Standage (Treasurer), 116 Shireland Road, Smethwick, Warley, West Midlands, B66 4QJ. Martin Tudor (Publications/Hotel Liaison), 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham, B8 2AG.

Acknowledgements: Dave Mooring for the cover and Pauline Morgan, Tony Berry, Sarah Freakley, Carol and Tony Morton for their articles. This Progress Report was printed on the CRITICAL WAVE photocopier, contact Martin Tudor at the above address for details of WAVE's competitive prices.

Chairman's Piece by Carol Morton

Yes, I know Novacon 25 is only just over, but it's time to think about next year and Novacon 26. So just to whet your appetite I'll give you a few brief facts about Novacon 26.

Once again Novacon has been playing "hotel hopscotch" all over Birmingham but we have finally landed at the Hotel Ibis which is an excellent hotel, Tony gives you more details in his piece below.

Our Guest of Honour, I am privileged to announce, will be David Gemmell. Now I have met, spoken to and listened to David on several occasions and he will be a wonderful GoH. Thanks David for agreeing to be our guest.

My committee is Tony Morton on Registrations, Richard Standage as Treasurer (what else?), Martin Tudor is doing Publications and Hotel Liaison (again), Sarah Freakley returns to Programme (after a year off) and Chris Murphy is back on Operations. A formidable team you'll agree and my thanks go to them for agreeing to be on the committee.

Also as you may know Novacon 26 is Novacon's 25th Anniversary and I'm sure that fact will be mentioned more than once in the programme and future publications.

That's about all I have to say for now except to ask you to come along to the con I'm sure it will be a good 'un.

Registrations by Tony Morton

Well, it befalls me to shout/plead/cajole your hotel forms out of you this year - there is one attached for your IMMEDIATE use. OK, so you're having/had a great Novacon 25 and 'it's too early to think about '26 yet'. Consider this carefully: After scouring the Midlands (well it felt like it), Carol and Martin finally found a hotel which met our requirements - The Hotel Ibis, slap bang in the middle of Birmingham's Chinese Quarter. Now, this hotel insists on: (1) allocating us just 100 rooms initially, (2) payment up front for the first night's accommodation.

So if you want a room - get in quick. Doing so will not only guarantee you a room, it may persuade the hotel to release some more rooms for your fellow fans!

The cost is £21.00 per person sharing a twin or double room and £39.00 for a single, all inclusive of English breakfast. So get those hotel forms filled in and enclose your cheque payable to "The Hotel Ibis" for £21.00 or £39.00 (as appropriate - you work it out!). (The hotel have also said that if you wish they will accept the relevant credit card details, ie number of account, name of account and expiry date of the card.) Return these to me soonest. You will be hearing from me if you fail!

The Programme by Sarah Freakley

Hello and welcome to next year's fun packed programme. The theme for the programme at Novacon 26 will be "Alternate Time Lines". At the moment the programme consists of the "usuals": some serious items, and some fun ones as well, the art auction, the book auction and Guest of Honour speech. However I am expecting a "serious" committee brain-storming session down the pub any weekend now.

If you have a good idea for a programme item, or something you would like to see included in a Novacon programme, (before the combined imaginative powers of the committee fill up the limited time space) please let me know. Send any ideas, love letters, abuse, or comments to: Sarah Freakley, 3 Tenby Road, Sparkhill (or Moseley, or Springfield, whichever you fancy), Birmingham, B13 9LZ. (Telephone: 0121-778-3174.)

DAVID GEMMELL, Drenai Bard by Pauline Morgan

Throughout history there have been travellers who have called on blustery winter's nights and have begged a roof and a bite to eat for the price of a tale or two. A bard's life was sacred; he was the depository of history. Kings took their favourites into battle, that their deeds might be extolled to future generations. The best of them were showered with gifts and their reputations were such that the wealthy vied for the honour to retain their services. David Gemmell is a story-teller who would have rivalled those of the past. He tells of war, of heroism, of romance, spinning a web about his audience which dispels only after the last page is turned. The world he walks through is that of the Drenai Empire.

Gemmell's debut novel, *LEGEND* (1984), introduces a pattern that he uses over and over again to good effect. His heroes tend to be older men, often past the prime of their life, sometimes surviving on memories of past deeds. They get themselves into wars where often it is experience that counts rather than fresh, youthful exuberance. The hero here is Druss. His prowess is legendary, his is the kind of name that mothers whisper to their daughters as an icon of the perfect man and whose sons seek to emulate. He sees himself as an old man with a swollen knee and an arthritic back. His fighting days are over and he has retired. Earl Delnar waits at Dros Delnoch for the massed armies of the Nadir to attack. Once, these nomadic tribes spent too much time squabbling amongst themselves to be much of a threat to the Drenai Empire. Now they are united under the leadership of Ulric (a Ghengis Khan figure) and are sweeping away everything in their path. Only Dros Delnoch stands between them and the pass through the mountains leading to the fertile lands beyond. Although no-one has ever taken the fortress, Earl Delnar knows that complacency has eaten into its strength and he needs all the help he can get. Druss may not be able to hold the walls alone but the boost to morale that his presence will have will make a deal of difference.

The strengths of this novel are the battle scenes, played for all they are worth, with no holds barred. The blood, gore, fatigue and stress of men literally fighting for their lives are what draws the reader in. This war is real and men get killed in it. There is no sense, as in so many other novels, that once the camera turns away the corpses will all get up and go to the pub. Characters spark off each other and if they do not form deep friendships it is because they do not know when their neighbour will die. The bonds are more those of knowing the same fate awaits all who do not stand together.

Bards always have a number of tales to draw on, heroes selected to suit the audience. Tenaka Khan is the hero of *THE KING BEYOND THE GATE* (1985). A century after the battle for Dros Delnoch, Tenaka holds the legacy of those times, being descended from both Ulric, Lord of the Nadir and Regnak, Earl Delnar. He fits with neither culture and for most of his life he has been a soldier. At the age of forty (he is another older warrior), when his wife is dead and his old companions treacherously killed, he vows vengeance. He will kill the mad emperor. He gathers to him old friends and new ones. In this novel Gemmell takes the opportunity to expand and explore the spiritual side of his creation in more detail. Everything comes from the Source but some people are more in touch with it than others and with training and discipline can harness mystical powers, taking the battle to another dimension.

WAYLANDER (1986) pre-dates the events in *LEGEND* by a century. Waylander is another of Gemmell's older heroes. He is cynical about life and tired of fighting but gets drawn into it against his better judgement. He rescues a priest of the Source and from that moment finds himself sucked into greater events. Like Druss and Tenaka Khan, Waylander is a man whom destiny has spared merely to accomplish a task that cannot be left to anyone else. In this case it is to find the legendary Armour of Bronze. The man who is to wear it is to become the first Earl of Bronze who built Dros Delnoch.

The fascination for these heroes spawned *WAYLANDER II: IN THE REALM OF THE WOLF* (1992). Fifteen years after Danyal disappeared taking with her the two girl children Miriel and Krylla we find that although Waylander has tried to fade from the memories of men he has failed totally. Karnak, who used to be his friend and is now king wants him dead. The country is still at war and the book has plenty of the things that Gemmell does best - large scale conflict, set piece battles and fast action scenes. There is however an assumption that the characters encountered six years before (in real time, fifteen in Drenai) will be clearly remembered and Gemmell doesn't take the time to re-introduce them properly, nor is there enough background to set them in their proper places in relation to each other. The story, while enjoyable is predictable. Death, as in all his other books is treated very casually, the descriptions are clinical and detached, detailed but unemotional. It reflects the attitude the characters are forced to adopt.

Sometime between the end of *THE KING BEYOND THE GATE* and the start of *QUEST FOR LOST HEROES* (1990) Tenaka Khan has stormed Dros Delnoch and the Nadir tribesmen have subjugated the Drenai people. The principal character is Kiall, who has grown up believing in heroes, so when his village is pillaged and the woman he idolises is abducted he vows to rescue her despite having no skill with weapons or any idea where to start looking. While Kiall is a departure from Gemmell's usual heroes the survivors of the battle of Bel-Azar are more typical. They are jaded, past their prime and join Kiall in his quest because they are bored and can't think of anything better to do. Compared with other books of the Drenai saga, *QUEST FOR LOST HEROES* lacks the scale of events that they encompass -

there are no massed siege armies except in the pasts of some of the characters - and it does not have the raw, unchannelled power of LEGEND. But by the time that Kiall has discovered that the great heroes are largely figments of the story-tellers imagination, he has achieved enough to be counted amongst them.

Always, the audience will demand more from their favourite bards, particularly about the heroes they most admire. When WAYLANDER, LEGEND and THE KING BEYOND THE GATE were gathered in the omnibus volume, DRENAI TALES (1991) - in chronological order - another tale was added. "Druss the Legend" is an incident in the life of Druss before the events of LEGEND. THE FIRST CHRONICLES OF DRUSS THE LEGEND (1994) relates adventures from his early life.

So, if you enjoy grand, heroic tales, shut the door on the winter winds, put another log on the fire, draw yourself another mug of ale and settle down. David Gemmell, master-bard, is about to enthrall you.

The Nova Awards by Tony Berry

New readers start here:

Originally created in 1973 by the late Gillon Field, the Nova Awards are presented annually for work in fanzines. Until 1981 only one award was presented, to "Best Fanzine" and decided by a committee of well-known fans. In 1977 voting was extended to all "Active Fans" who were members of Novacon, and then in 1981 two further awards were added: "Best Fanwriter" and "Best Fanartist".

For a fanzine to qualify for the 1996 award, one or more issues must have been published between 1st October 1995 and 30th September 1996. For a writer or artist to qualify, they must have had at least one piece of work published for the first time between those dates.

A "Fanzine" is defined as an amateur publication which is concerned with sf, fantasy, sf and fantasy fans and related subjects, copies of which may be obtained in exchange for other fanzines or in response to letters of comment. An "Active Fan" is defined as someone who has received six or more different fanzines during the year (different publications, not different issues of the same publication. The various official organs of a group, society or convention do not count as different fanzines).

Voting is open to full or supporting members of Novacon 26 who meet the requirements above, and can be made by post (ballots will go out with the fourth progress report) and at the convention itself.

[If you have any enquiries about the Novas or you want a copy of the Rules (50p to cover copying and postage), contact Tony Berry at 55 Seymour Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 4EP.]

Critical Wave

the European Science Fiction and Fantasy Review

Founded in 1987, Critical Wave has established a reputation for hard-hitting news coverage, perceptive essays and incisive reviews of the latest books, movies and comics. Published five times a year, its regular features include publishing news, market reports, art portfolios, fanzine reviews, author interviews and Britain's most comprehensive convention and mart listings section.

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ALTERNATE WORLDS,
ALTERNATE HISTORIES:
THE LEGENDS LIVE ON

Novacon 26

Guest of Honour
David Gemmell

8-10 November 1996

at the Hotel Ibis, Ladywell Walk
(off Hurst Street), Birmingham.

Attending Membership:

£23.00 until 6 November 1995,
then £25.00 until Easter 1996.

Supporting Membership: £10.50.

Contact: Carol Morton, 14 Park Street,
Lye, Stourbridge, West Mids, DY9 8SS.