

BRUM GROUP NEWS

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The monthly Newsletter of the BIRMINGHAM SCIENCE FICTION GROUP

(Honorary Presidents: Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison)

1991 Committee: Group Chairman – Chris Chivers Secretary – Helena Bowles
Treasurer – Richard Standage Newsletter Editor – Martin Tudor Reviews Editor –
Mick Evans Publicity Officer – Al Johnston Novacon 21 Chairman – Nick Mills

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAMME

Friday 19th April at 7.45pm
in the Royal Suite of the Midland Hotel

ROB GRANT AND DOUG NAYLOR

Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, better known perhaps as "Grant Naylor", are the writers of the successful BBC 2 tv series *RED DWARF*, the fourth season of which was recently screened. Rob and Doug spent three years in the mid-80s as head writers on *SPITTING IMAGE*, after which they worked together on the radio series *SON OF CLICHÉ*. A regular spot on the radio show, "Dave Hollins: Space Cadet", (a cross between *2001* and *ALIENS*) led to the creation of *RED DWARF*.

The first novelisation was published in 1989, the second (now available in paperback) last year. Like the first book *BETTER THAN LIFE* takes a "liberal" view of the continuity of the tv series, leading many of fans to view it as an alternate universe.

**PLEASE NOTE: CHANGE FROM USUAL VENUE
THE ABOVE MEETING WILL BE HELD IN
THE ROYAL SUITE OF THE MIDLAND HOTEL,
NEW STREET, BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE.**

The BSFG meets on the third Friday of every month (unless otherwise notified) at **THE IVY BUSH**, Hagley Road/Monument Road, Birmingham at 7.45pm.

Subscription Rates: £6.00 per person, or £9.00 for two members at same address.

Cheques etc. payable to the BSFG, via the Treasurer, **Richard Standage**, at meetings, or by post c/o **Mick Evans** (address below).

Book Reviews to **Mick Evans** at 121 Cape Hill, Smethwick, Warley B66 4SH (021 558 0997)

All other contributions and enquiries to: Martin Tudor, 845 Alum Rock Road, Ward End, Birmingham B8 2AG New telephone number – 021 327 3023.



by Martin Tudor.

As newsletter editor I wish to apologize for the fact that this issue is a mere 8 pages long and that it is being mailed later than usual. I'm afraid that I seriously misjudged the amount of time that several projects I had on hand would take, and so failed to leave myself enough time to complete a 12 page newsletter and mail it by the usual deadline. These are being mailed out first class (at my expense) on the Monday before the meeting so, hopefully, you will still be reading this by Wednesday.

There are no reports on either of last month's meetings this time around, instead our Chairman, Chris Chivers has a few words to say about the appalling attendance at our special meeting last month...

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CHAIRMAN'S BIT
by Chris Chivers.

The total apathy of many members of the Birmingham Science Fiction Group never ceases to amaze me. As Chairman of this group I was disgusted, at the Anne McCaffrey meeting, that more people from outside the group attended than BSGF members. For this calibre of guest I expected at least 60% of the membership present, rather than the paltry number who attended. Not only does such apathy indicate a lack of willingness to help the group, but it is an insult to our guest speaker.

Anne McCaffrey has a large following so we did expect quite a few non-members to attend the meeting. Because of this and our, not unreasonable, expectation that at least half of our members would attend a meeting with an internationally acclaimed writer as guest speaker, the meeting was moved to a room at the Midland Hotel. This larger venue obviously cost the group more than our usual room at the Ivy Bush, if a reasonable number of members had attended the meeting would have been a financial success, as it is we failed to recoup the cost of the room hire. Unfortunately, we had already committed ourselves to the Royal Suite for this month's meeting, but if in future we have a well-known guest speaker we will not move to a larger venue. If members are late arriving and the room at the Ivy Bush is full they will be refused entry.

I would like to thank personally all the members that made the effort to attend the Anne McCaffrey meeting and hope to see you all at the Rob Grant and Doug Naylor meeting on April 19th.

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The Jophan Report by Martin Tudor

The 40th *Jophan Report*
by Martin Tudor.
Thanks to both Steve Green
and *CRITICAL WAVE*
for the news in both this
and last issue's report.

Lisa Mortimer and Andromeda Bookshop manager Dave Holmes wish to announce the birth of their baby boy Joshua Bruce Wayne on Tuesday 2 April. Joshua was born at 18.40, weighing exactly 6lb, both he and Lisa are fine.

Colin Greenland followed his recent success in the 1991 Arthur C Clarke Award, by picking up the British Science Fiction Association's Award for Best Novel, with his "space extravaganza" from Unwin - *TAKE BACK PLENTY*. Greenland is the first British winner of the award and second Novacon Guest of Honour to win, the first was Geoff Ryman with *THE CHILD GARDEN*, last year could this be significant?

The other BSFA Awards presented by Terry Pratchett over the Easter weekend at Speculation, the 42nd Annual National British SF Convention, in Glasgow were: Best Short Fiction "The Original Dr Shade" by Kim Newman (*INTERZONE #36*); Best Dramatic Presentation *TWIN PEAKS*, the award being sent to "the relevant damned fine people"; Best Artwork Ian Miller for the covers of *THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE* and *INTERZONE #40*.

Following the presentation of the BSFA Awards Tim Illingworth presented the third Eastercon Awards. Best Long Text went to *GOOD OMENS* by Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. On accepting the award Pratchett announced that "Neil is far too cool to be here to collect this..." but added that Gaiman would be so over-joyed to receive the award "he might even take his shades off..."

Kathy Westhead collected the award for Best Dramatic Presentation on behalf of Bob Carter for the stage musical *RETURN TO THE FORBIDDEN PLANET*. The award for Best Graphic Art went to Sylvia Starshine's creation "Robert" - the collecting box for Fans Across the World, "Robert" in the hands of Roger Robinson collected the award on Starshine's behalf. The Confiction newsletter team received the award for Best Short Text, which was collected on their behalf by Caroline Mullan.

KIM Campbell presented the Doc Weir, which annually honours someone's work for

fandom would otherwise go unnoticed, to Pat Brown for her work in tech ops (David Barrett collected the award on Brown's behalf). Campbell revealed that this year there had been eleven names on the ballots received, which made counting difficult, but added that Brown was a clear winner.

The Ken McIntyre Award for the Best Fan Artwork went to Colin Johnston for his Illumination badge design. The judges this year were KIM Campbell (committee), Ethel Lindsey (Knights of St Antony) and Alistair Wheeler Reed (Artshow Organizer).

At the bidding session on Easter Sunday, at Speculation, Helicon the only serious bid for the 1993 Eastercon beat two joke bids by a clear margin. The joke bids were "Sarkasm in '93" (a bid to hold the con on the island of Sark, with the slogan "putting the Fiction back into Science Fiction") and "Hawaii in '93" (guess where...).

Helicon will be held over the Easter weekend, 8-12 April 1993, at the Hotel de France, St Helier, Jersey. The Guests of Honour are George RR Martin and John Brunner. The committee includes Tim Illingworth (chairman), Rob Meades (treasurer), Kathy Westhead, Chris Cooper, Steve Davies, Martin Easterbrook, Martin Hoare, John Richards and Mike Westhead.

Membership rates are £1.00 for soft toys, pets and children under 8; £10.00 supporting membership, family membership and children 8-14; £18.00 (before 8 May, £20.00 thereafter) for full attending membership. Children's rates are calculated by age on Good Friday 1993. Family members can use hotel and travel rates but cannot attend programme items. Pre-supporting members get £1.00 off the above rates. Contact Helicon'93, 63 Drake Road, Chessington, Surrey, KT9 1LQ.

Room rates at the Hotel de France will be: Single Room £32.00; Twin/Double £25.00; Triple Room £22.00; Quadruple Room £20.00. (All prices per person in the room.) In addition rooms are available in the Rosebank Hotel, on the same site, for £24.00 (single) and £19.00 (twin/double).

Those of you who attended either of last month's meetings will already have heard of the death of Sadie Shaw (the wife of author Bob Shaw). Sadie died in March from liver failure. The family have asked that, rather than sending flowers, fans and friends should donate money to a children's charity on Sadie's behalf.

Both *NEXUS* and the long-awaited *R.E.M.* are now available. *NEXUS* #1 (April 1991, £2.95) features fiction by Christina Lake and Geoff Ryman, a comic strip by T K Atherton, features by Diana Wynne Jones, Gwyneth Jones, Brian Ameringen, Keith Knight, Colin Greenland and Jonathan Cowie, and a full colour cover by Les Edwards. Subscriptions are £10.00 for four issues from: SF NEXUS Subscriptions, PO Box 1123, Brighton, BN1 6EX.

R.E.M. #1 (Spring / Summer 1991, £1.95) features a novella by Simon D Ings, features by Liz Holliday and Dave W Hughes and short fiction by Eric Brown, Keith Brooke, Matthew Dickens, Andrew Ferguson, William V Nicholson and Michael Cobley. £7.00 for four issues from: *R.E.M.*, 19 Sandringham Rd., London, NW2 5EP.

At first glance both of these look quite impressive, nicely produced, with clean, crisp, attractive layouts.

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS an omnibus of the writings of Harry Warner Jr. is now available from Chuck Connor, c/o Sildan House, Chediston Road, Wissett, Nr. Halesworth, Suffolk, IP19 0NF. Weighing in at approximately 216 duplicated pages - and VERY big staples, this is incredibly good value as well as being a daunting labour of love. The price is £4.50 which includes strong packing and binding, as well as postage.

Anne Rice, the bestselling author of such books as *THE MUMMY* and *THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES* (featuring the vampire Lestat) who cancelled a promotional tour due to fears of Gulf related terrorist activity has reportedly changed her mind. She will shortly be over here to promote *THE WITCHING HOUR*.

Out in paperback this month, from Headline, is *HYPERION* by Dan Simmons (£4.99) with *THE FALL OF HYPERION* in hardcover (£14.95) and trade paperback (£7.99). Also available in April is *THE OTHER SINBAD* by Craig Shaw Gardner (£13.95, £7.99).

In May Headline's paperback releases include *THE SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT* by Dean Koontz (£4.99) and *WHITE LIES* by Christopher Hyde (£4.99). June will see *THE STAKE* by Richard Laymon (£4.99), *PHASES OF GRAVITY* by Dan Simmons (£3.99) & *TARRA KHASH: HROSSAKI:*

TALES OF THE PRIMAL LAND Vol. 2 by Brian Lumley (£3.99).

Pan celebrates the first anniversary of their "New Force" launch by releasing the following books in May: *NIGHTFALL* by Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg (£7.99), *DREAMSIDE* by Graham Joyce (£4.50), *PRIME DIRECTIVE* by Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens (£4.99). They are followed, in June, by *THE SORCERESS AND THE CYGNET* by Patricia A McKillip (£7.99 and £15.99 in hardcover), *THE WARLOCK'S NIGHT OUT* by Christopher Stasheff (£4.99), *HIDE AND SEEK* by Paul Preuss (£3.99) and *THE EMPIRE OF FEAR* by Brian Stableford (£4.99). July sees *CLYPSIS*, Vol. 1 of Roger Zelazny's "Alien Speedway" series by Jeffrey A Carver (£3.99), *TALTOS AND THE PATHS OF THE DEAD* by Steven Brust (£4.99) and *SLICE* by Rex Miller (£3.99).

FIRST LIGHT: the Search for the Edge of the Universe, is available in April from Scribner (Macdonald hardback, £14.95). In it Richard Preston, who has a Ph.D in English from Princeton, tells the story of the "Big Eye", the Hale telescope, and the people behind it.

A short story entitled "Breakfast" appeared in the *SUNDAY PEOPLE MAGAZINE* on 17 March. Herbert, who's world sales reportedly exceed 26 million, spoke briefly of his childhood to *THE PEOPLE*: "A creepy house in a creepy street. Jack the Ripper killed someone nearby ... One of my friends was put inside for chopping some one up with an axe."

Although there were no genre movies in the running for this year's Oscars there were two awards to actresses for there performances in genre movies.

Kathy Bates picked up an Oscar for her portrayal of the homicidal nurse in *MISERY* the film based on Stephen King's novel of the same name. While Whoopi Goldberg scooped Best Supporting Actress for her performance in *GHOST*.

Pinewood studios have received yet another crippling blow. They were expecting bumper business this summer when the *BATMAN* crew arrived to make the sequel. But instead Warner Brothers executives have ordered staff at Pinewood to tear down the £3 million Gotham City set, despite having already spent £7 million maintaining it.

The new film, starring Michael Keaton as Batman, Danny DeVito as the Penguin and Cher as Catwoman, will now be made on location in the American desert and in Hollywood. Warners are still negotiating with Jack Nicholson to get him to return as the Joker.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

19 APRIL - Before talking to us the writers of the *RED DWARF* tv series, Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, will be signing copies of *BETTER THAN LIFE* (Penguin, £3.99) at Waterstone's Bookshop from 1.00pm to 2.00pm and at Andromeda Bookshop between 5.00pm and 6.00pm.

19-25 APRIL - The Midland Arts Centre, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, is showing several films worth catching during this period: *HARDWARE* (18) 19th at 3.30pm, 6pm, 8.30pm and 20th at 6pm and 8.30pm. *TOTAL RECALL* (18) 21st at 6pm and 8.30pm. *BLADE RUNNER* (15) 22nd at 8.30pm. *ROBOCOP* (18) on 25th at 6pm & 8.30pm.

1 MAY - *MEXICON IV* invites everyone to an evening to welcome Howard Waldrop to the UK. 7.00pm at the Cafe Munchen, St Giles High Street, (near Tottenham Court Road tube) London. £5.00 including buffet, all proceeds going to fannish charities. Call Dave Hodson on 081 801 4574 for details.

3-6 MAY - *MEXICON IV*, "an sf con for sf readers", at the Cairn Hotel, Harrogate. Guests include Howard Waldrop, Paul Williams and Iain Sinclair. Attending membership £15.00 contact Mike Ford, 27 Stanmore Crescent, Burley, Leeds, LS4 2RY.

3-6 MAY - *UFP'91*, the 31st British *STAR TREK* con, Grand Hotel, Birmingham. Attending membership is £25.00. Details from Kim Farey, 135 Greenstead Rd., Loughton, Essex, IG10 3DJ.

4 MAY - Birmingham Comic Mart, new ground floor venue at the Carrs Lane Church Centre, just off High Street near Marks & Spencers in the city centre. "A huge selection of comics, film/tv magazines, books, posters, models, games and sf/fantasy material." Opens midday. Details: Golden Orbit, 18 Nelson Street, York, YO3 7NJ.

4-17 MAY - The Birmingham Readers and Writers Festival runs from Saturday 4 May to Friday 17 May. Full details of the festival and free brochures are available from the Midland Arts Centre Ticket Office on 021 440 3838. A few of the items that might be of interest to BSFG members are listed below, call the MAC's Ticket Office for further details unless otherwise indicated.

8 MAY - "Publishers Reading": Chris Morgan on what happens to a novel when it is sent to a publisher. 7.30pm, free, at Harborne Hill Centre, call 021 427 3213 for details.

9 MAY - "Ghost Stories of Erdington": join local playwright Patrick Hayes for an evening of chilling suspense. 7.30pm at Stockland Green Leisure Centre, Slade Road, Erdington, £1.00. Call 021 377 7880.

10 MAY - "Obsession, Possession, Repression": Ramsey Campbell, Lisa Tuttle and Peter James "delve into the dark recesses of the genre". MAC Cinema, 8.00pm, discussion will be chaired by Chris Morgan. Price £3.00.

13 MAY - "An Explosion of Fantasy": award-winning novelist, Anthony Masters organises "a book explosion, opening up children's imagination through drama, dance, improvisation, etc". Stephen Thraives' latest adventure game book, *GHOSTLY TOWERS*, comes complete with spirit dice, ghost counters, maps and magic keys. Children can join him in a worksop session to construct their own fantasy game plot. 10am-3.15pm, the MAC, for children aged 7-11. £3.00.

15 MAY - "Young Readers and Writers Guide to the Galaxy": writing workshop on sf & fantasy, for the over 12's, with Chris Morgan. Free, 6.00pm-9.00pm at Small Heath Leisure Centre, Muntz Street. Call 021 359 4314 for details.

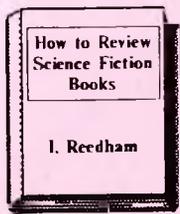
15 MAY - "Alien Worlds": create new and strange worlds in Pauline Dugate's workshop on sf & fantasy, for 10-11 year-olds. Free, 7.00pm at Holyhead School and Leisure Centre, Handsworth. Call 021 523 6141 for details.

16 MAY - "Chaos & Creation": how do you explain, let alone write about the biggest questions of all - where the world comes from? Non-scientist, John Hoyland, sub-editor at *NEW SCIENTIST*, talks to science writers Nina Hall and Bernard Dixon, about observing the unobservable, expressing the inexpressible and explaining the inexplicable. 7.30pm at the MAC Theatre, £3.00.

18 MAY - Steven Lawhead will be signing copies of *THE PARADISE WAR* at Andromeda Bookshop at 1.00pm. Call 021 643 1999 to confirm.

21 JUNE - PAUL McAULEY, author of the award winning *FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS* will be talking to the BSFG.

19-21 JULY - TWENTYCON, the 20th anniversary party of the BSFG, see page 8 for details.



Book Reviews

All books reviewed here by members were provided by the publishers, who receive a copy of this Newsletter. Members may keep review copies (or may donate them as Raffle or Auction items. . .)

Please keep reviews to under 150 words unless instructed otherwise. Deadline for reviews: at least two weeks before next Group meeting.

BETTER THAN LIFE by Grant Naylor
Penguin, £3.99,

Reviewed by Bernie Evans.

"It's not the ingredients that matter, it's what the cook does with them", I once read, although of course top class ingredients do help. The same applies to this book. Grant and Naylor have taken as their ingredients the characters from the tv series *RED DWARF*, and some of the situations we've seen therein. But instead of cooking up a re-hash of the tv scripts they've added a few extras, used a completely different recipe, and have served up a gastronome's delight of a book. It's as delightfully fresh as it would be if you'd never seen the TV series, and the familiarities that are there add to the enjoyment.

We are taken into the ultimate participatory computer game, to a black hole, to a planet which is completely covered in garbage (neatly sorted into glass, paper, aluminium etc), and with the coffee and After Eights we are treated to a backward trip through time. If you haven't seen the tv series, read this book as the zaniest treatment of (semi-)hard sf that you'll find anywhere. If you have seen the series, read it as a delicious extra serving. Whether you've seen it or not, READ THIS BOOK, it's great fun, I promise.

VOICE OF THE WHIRLWIND by Walter Jon Williams,
Orbit, 278 pp, £6.99 'C' format.

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

An excellent cyberpunk spy story, although the large format makes it rather pricey. Steward is a clone, a beta, brought to life when his alpha's insurance paid off for murder. The trouble is, his memories are fifteen years out of date, which doesn't help him as he seeks revenge and becomes entangled in a complex plot involving several policorps - sovereign company states - the mysterious alien Powers, and veterans from the Artifact Wars his alpha had fought on the Powers home world while the aliens were away. A gripping plot with a fascinating background. Recommended.

BAD VOLTAGE by Jonathan Littell
Orbit, 309 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Set in a future Paris and based around the youth cult dropouts living therein, this book explores a violent future. A mixture of drugs, music and 'runs' (raids) keeps the gangs presence and living mode norm until one such member 'meets' an upper class socialite and the story unfolds.

Computers dominate society, keeping a loose peace and the wealthy safe with well armed 'police' on the streets. The heiress, moneywise and bored, lives off new and exciting kicks - revolving around blood and violence (to others). Lynx, the streetwise, repelled by this voyeurism tries to return to his background, but Angelique, the heiress won't let it happen and has the power/money to always have her own way. The futuristic background works well, and the interplay between 'normal', streetwise and wealthy citizenry seem based on the author's post-punk ideologies. The rich get richer and the rest are left to toil while the kids rebel - not a hopeful outlook, even with the seeds sown in recent years to back it up. An interesting novel well worth reading.

DREAM MAKER by W.A. Harbinson
Orbit, 405 pp, £4.50 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Chivers.

Tony Rydell was one of NASA's top physicists, specialising in climatology, and working for NASA Tony took his work seriously so seriously that his wife couldn't take anymore. When Tony left for Punta Arenas in Chile as part of the National Ozone Expedition his wife left him. The outcome of his findings over Antarctica drove Tony's personal problems from his mind. The ozone layer problem is the subject of much controversy and W.A. Harbinson has interwoven fact and fiction to produce a very plausible story. The overall tone of the plotline is believable as the reader is taken through a world that is falling apart at the

seams. The character of Tony Rydell is portrayed as a somewhat eccentric but highly intelligent scientist who has not only to fight political dogma but come to terms with his own life. *DREAM MAKER* will hopefully stay in the realms of fiction and not become a horrifying reality.

GRASS by Sheri S. Tepper
Corgi, 540 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Pauline Morgan.

'Grass' was nominated for last year's Hugo award. It thoroughly deserves that acclamation. Grass is a planet where most of the indigenous vegetation resembles that plant. It is a very insular planet with the local aristocracy, the bons, resenting any intrusions from off-world. For devious reasons, Rodrigo Yrarier is sent as an ambassador. He believes the best way of accomplishing his mission is to integrate himself with the bons. His wife, Marjorie, is far more perceptive than he and recognises that the ordinary settlers are more in touch with their world even though most of them are confined to one area. The novel opens out into a magnificent panorama of intrigue. The planet itself slowly offers up its secrets to her, not only of the relationships of the alien species that dominate it, but of the demise of a space-faring race that became extinct millions of years ago and of the plague that is killing the human populations of other worlds. Everything is intricately and beautifully intermeshed. This book should be read by everyone who thinks they are true sf readers. There are delights in store here.

MYTH DIRECTIONS by Robert Asprin
Legend, 202 pp, £3.50 p/b
HIT OR MYTH by Robert Asprin
Legend, 170 pp, £3.50 p/b

Reviewed by Al Johnston.

Books three and four of a riotous trip into me-too Pratchett country, these ventures are brief, but good entertainment. *MYTH DIRECTIONS* involves the protagonists in a game resembling a cross between basketball, American football and all out mayhem. The game is the local replacement for civil war; and our hero's involvement stems from their attempt to steal the Trophy. In *HIT OR MYTH* court magician Skeeve is asked to impersonate the King for a day. The King then scarpers leaving Skeeve to cope with a psychopathic bride and heavy muscling from the Mob. Nothing startlingly original, but this series has much to recommend it; not least the misattributed

aphorisms that head each chapter and some truly outrageous puns. Now where can I get books one and two? (Rhetorical question Rog).

EIGHT SKILLED GENTLEMEN by Barry Hughart
Corgi, 256 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

The aged (but still highly intelligent) Master Li and his strong, but also clever assistant, Number Ten Ox, are back again with another unlikely adventure in ancient China. Following on from their successes in *BRIDGE OF BIRDS* and *THE STORY OF THE STONE*, they have another case to solve. A wandering ghoul, a stupid mandarin murdered by supernatural means, a smuggling conspiracy and some antique bird-cages lead our detective duo a merry dance across China and back before the convoluted mystery is solved. While *EIGHT SKILLED GENTLEMEN* is probably just as amusing and clever as its predecessors, its impact seems less. This is an unusual and much neglected fantasy series, and Barry Hughart would be well advised to find new subject matter for his next book before the novelty of this situation disappears entirely.

THE CYBERIAD by Stanislaw Lem
Mandarin, 295 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Carol Morton.

A series of short stories concerning constructor robots Trurl and Kapocucius who are both rivals and friends. The tales tell of their trials and tribulations as they stumble from one ill-fated experiment to the next. Some people consider Lem to be a genius, but maybe the Polish sense of humour (if there is such a thing) is too subtle and is lost in the translation because I found these tales anything but funny. However the stories are written in a most professional way so maybe his serious stories are better.

PHASES OF GRAVITY by Dan Simmons
Headline, 282 pp, £7.99 'C' format p/b

Reviewed by Mick Evans.

Richard Baedeker once walked on the Moon. In this book he goes on a different journey, more a journey within. The story begins in the slums of India where Baedeker's troubled young son Scott is a disciple of a guru (anyone who has read 'Song of Kali' will not need reminding of Simmons' incredibly vivid portrayal of that country). In India he meets up with Maggie, a friend of his son and on their return to America they become romantically involved. The book then shifts about

as Baedecker recalls excerpts from his past life and it revolves mainly around the death in a flying accident (?) of his best friend and fellow Apollo astronaut Dave Mulldorf. As with all Simmons' books there are some powerful scenes and anyone who enjoyed the Chuck Jaeger parts in *THE RIGHT STUFF* will probably enjoy the flying episodes. This is not a book with a straightforward storyline and if that's what you require perhaps you would be better off avoiding it. If however you enjoy powerful writing in much the same vein as Jonathan Carroll you will be well rewarded. Not a great book, but certainly a good one and it will do nothing to diminish his growing reputation.

ESCAPE FROM KATHMANDU by Kim Stanley Robinson
Unwin, 313 pp, £3.99 p/b

Reviewed by Tony Morton.

Not really a single novel, rather four stories based around the same locale and central characters. Told from the viewpoint of George Fergusson, a 'videotrekking' guide (well, three of the four stories are, the other is told by 'Fred's') we learn the inner secrets of Nepal, each tale revealing snippets used later in the narrative. Beginning with 'Escape from Kathmandu', a brief tale of how the two main characters get involved in helping a Yeti escape zoologists. 'Mother Goddess of the World' tells how George gets dragged by Freds into scaling Everest to help a friend - and the consequences. Followed by 'The True Nature of Shangri-La', really called Shambala this heaven on Earth does exist and needs saving from discovery by preventing a road being built. Finally 'The Kingdom Underground' as the title hints, links via underground tunnels provide 'opportunities' - of what kind, you'll have to read the book to discover, it's well worth it!

All well told, believable and tilted with a humour angle revealing KSR as having a wierd sense of same. I would expect to meet most of the characters in downtown Kathmandu and I would like to go see. Careering between hilarity, confusion and total yarn, with a background of mountainous beauty KSR has written a magnificent book.

PRENTICE ALVIN by Orson Scott Card
Legend, 436 pp, £4.99 p/b

Reviewed by Chris Morgan.

Here is, simply, the best SF novel of 1989, in UK small format for the first time. Don't be put off by the fact that it's the third volume of five - it stands on its own. The setting is an alternative America, at a stage of tech-

nology which suggests the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. But magic coexists with science and religion, and many people have special talents.

Alvin, a teenager, is apprenticed to a blacksmith, a harsh, unfair man who makes Alvin's life a misery. As Alvin uses his talent to produce really good metalwork supernaturally fast, the novel seems like fantasy, though the fact that one of the subplots concerns Alvin's theories about the structure of matter makes an sf classification more suitable. But that doesn't matter because the characters are so believable, so wonderfully well portrayed and so perceptively analysed that the book is a joy to read.

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TWENTYCON
the 20th
anniversary party
of the
Birmingham SF Group,
with HARRY HARRISON
as Guest of Honour,
will be held at
the Holiday Inn,
Birmingham
over the weekend
19-21 July 1991

Twentycon as the name suggests will be a weekend long mini-convention. Membership is limited to 250 people so register NOW by sending £15.00 to: CAROL MORTON, 14 Park Street, Lye, Stourbridge, W. Mids., DY9 8SS. Cheques or postal orders should be made payable to "Twentycon".

