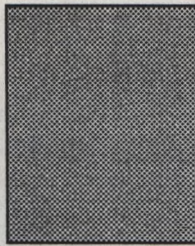


Ansible



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From Dave Langford, 94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5AU, UK. Fax 01734 689914. ISSN 0265-9816. E-mail ansible@cix.compulink.co.uk. Logo: Dan Steffan. Available for SAE, whimsy, or a counterexample to Goldbach's Conjecture.

R.I.P. BOB SHAW. Virtually everyone who reads this will know (because bad news travels too fast on Internet) that Bob Shaw died on 12 February. Following his health crisis in America, he returned to Manchester with his new wife Nancy, with a view to entering an NHS hospital (we were worried to hear they were both in wheelchairs at the US airport); he enjoyed a last dinner with son Ian and family, and a last drink with friends in the Red Lion pub, and died quietly in his sleep that night. The funeral was held in Stockton Heath, Warrington, on 19 February, with many fans in attendance despite snow—including Ray (Birmingham) Bradbury, whose eulogy was much praised, Pamela Buckmaster, Ramsey Campbell, Bernie Evans, David Hardy, Rog Peyton, and Chris Priest. Chris's own memories of Bob appear overleaf. I don't have any clever words to add. He was universally loved. Losing Bob Shaw really hurts.

The Cottage of Eternity

Forrest J. Ackerman (still reminding us that he received the first Hugo ever presented, as '#1 Fan Personality' in 1953) has resigned his editorial position with *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, which he founded in 1958. This followed disputes with the current publisher Ray Ferry, who allegedly spiked FJA's articles, slashed his fees and then left him unpaid for a year. Cruellest cut: Ferry's appropriation of Forry's long-time pseudonym Dr Acula, invented 'about the time Ferry was born'...

Iain M. Banks, it is rumoured, plans a major image overhaul with the reissue of his sf novels under the impenetrable pseudonym 'Iain Banks' already used for mainstream fiction.

Ellen Datlow assures us all that *Omni* continues to be strong and vital despite the mere incidental axing of its print edition even as the April issue was being put together. Circumventing rising paper prices, the whole operation has moved into cyberspace on the World Wide Web ... and features a 'lost' Fritz Leiber novella written in the 40s but never sold.

David Garnett gloats ("The pessimists were wrong. The optimists were right. Or is it the other way around?") that *New Worlds* will return yet again in 1997—published by White Wolf (Atlanta, Georgia, US), with Our David still its editor.

John Grant follows Banksy in making *nom-de-plume* history, reverting to his real name Paul Barnett for a coming space opera series—in hope of foxing mighty W.H. Smith computers which may have recorded that John Grant's *The World* didn't sell too well (being, for one thing, released in mid-December).

Ursula Le Guin has rumbled me after 16 years' misuse of the word she invented: 'Tell me what I can send in exchange for *Ansible*. In Oregon we grow many large fir trees; also we have fish. Please, Mr Pyrzqxl, tell me what you desire....'

Stephen Marley knows how to write a letter accepting a story of Lovecraftian pastiche (one of several to be adapted as a CDi game): 'I read it, first with unease, then a creeping sense of dread, and finally a black, clutching horror until I was reduced to a gibbering idiot mouthing primordial gobbledygook.' Similar symptoms are reliably generated by editorial work on the *Fantasy Encyclopaedia*.

Paul J. McAuley, desperate to get himself a plug, reports that despite Gollancz's careful placement of 'SF' on the spine, numberless hordes of readers have bought his world-famous novel *Fairyland* and complained bitterly about its not being fantasy. The paperback, he declares, may feature a gold embossed warning: THIS IS NOT A FANTASY NOVEL ABOUT INNER CITY CYBERPIXIES OR SPACESHIPS POWERED BY TELEPATHIC WIZARDS. (*Publicity Person*: 'Hey, can't we lose that not?')

Conchoid

23 Mar • **Bob Shaw**: A Celebration, Appleton Thorn Village Hall, noon-6pm. £5 cover charge; bar, buffet. Contact Henry Newton, 41 The Rock, Helsby, WA6 9AS; 01928 724576.

27 Mar • **BSFA** London meeting, Jubilee pub, York Rd, nr Waterloo. 7pm on. Plans to ensnare a hapless guest continue.

5-8 Apr • **Evolution** (Eastercon), Radisson Edwardian Hotel, near Heathrow. £32/\$48 reg; day rate £15 (£10 Mon). Contact 13 Lindfield Gdns, Hampstead, London, NW3 6PX.

6-8 Apr • **Generations II** (*Trek*), Albert Hall, London. £10-£45 daily, depending on seat poshness; 3-day bookings 10% off. Contact 4 Aspenwood Ho, Ipsley St, Redditch, B98 7AR.

12-14 Apr • **Accelerate** (*Quantum Leap*), Radisson again, £35 reg. Contact 78 Sterry Rd, Dagenham, Essex, RM10 8NT.

25-8 Apr • **Eurocon/Baltcon/Lituanicon**, Vilnius, Lithuania. Contact Gediminas Beresnevicius, PO Box 216, Vilnius 2040, Lithuania. Fax +3702 766578.

31 Aug • **Dangercon 666** (*Dangermouse*), Ruskin House, Croydon. £5 at door. Contact 37 Keens Rd, Croydon, CR0 1AH.

28-31 Mar 97 • **Intervention** (Eastercon), Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. £25 reg/£15 unwaged (£30/£20 after Easter); cheques to 'Wincon'. Contact 12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants, PO10 7TS.

29-30 Aug 98 • **Infinity** (film/TV sf), Angel Hotel, Cardiff. £30 or £17 each day (children £25/£15. Contact Swyn Nant, 12 Stuart St, Treherbert, Treorchy, CF42 5PR.

Rumblings • *Mis-Saigon*, third and last of the Burnham-on-Sea 'Misons', saw Martin Tudor convicted of witchcraft ('Burnham' people geographically cried) while Tony Berry flawlessly impersonated Robert Robinson's hairstyle for the searing panel game 'Call My Clute'. • *Dissection*: our informant's sole delirious memory was of a suggested Nick Park remake of 2001 ... 'By 'eck, Gromit, it's full of cheese!' [KO]

Infinitely Improbable

Nebula Awards. The novel shortlist comprises: John Barnes, *Mother of Storms*; Nancy Kress, *Beggars and Choosers*; Paul Park, *Coelestis*; Robert J. Sawyer, *Hobson's Choice* aka *The Terminal Experiment*; Walter Jon Williams, *Metropolitan*; Gene Wolfe, *Caldé of the Long Sun*. Also our very own Brian Stableford features on the novella shortlist for 'Mortimer Gray's *History of Death*' (*Asimov's*, April 95).

Really Old News. Once upon a time in 1922, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle exacted a gentle revenge for the deserved mockery he'd received from Houdini and other magicians after endorsing the faked 'Cottingley Fairies' pictures. He confronted the Society of American Magicians in New York with what he cagily called materialized pictures emanating from the human imagination: unprecedented movie scenes of dinosaurs which to Houdini & Co. (and the *New York Times*) seemed bafflingly, mindbogglingly lifelike. Only next day did Conan Doyle reveal that what they'd assumed was being offered as 'spirit photography' was in fact test special-effects footage for a forthcoming film called *The Lost World* (1925).... (*Skeptical Briefs*, 12/95)

Random Fandom. Steve Baxter reports from the frontiers of scientific research: 'Forehead bleeding as ever by lunch time today, I took a break and, as one does, tuned into Richard & Judy on "This Morning". And I was stunned to find their theme tune had been written by ... David Pringle.' • *Chris Cooper* 'is in dry dock following a hit-and-

run accident. His left leg is broken in 4 places (below the knee), but fortunately that's all. Anyone wanting to write can reach him at Ganderton Ward, Worcester Royal Infirmary, (Castle Street Branch), Worcester.... Anyone sighting a white Ford Escort with half the front bumper, headlights & indicators missing is advised to shoot first and worry about it afterwards.' [CS] • *Teddy Harvia* writes, prophetically, on 8 Feb: 'I disagree with "one fan" that your reporting is akin to "pouring gasoline". It is more like an oil spill which sends an endless stream of hideous globs of black tar washing up onto the beach. How about just one issue of *Ansible* without a single mention of the TAFF conflict?' Right you are! • *Martin Morse Wooster* grumps: 'About a year ago, you printed an item about a gentleman who allegedly hooked up a rocket to his sports cart and went splat in the Arizona desert at 300 mph. That story is an urban legend [clipping attached], so you might want to print a correction.' Bah. Never apologize, never explain....

Bob Shaw Speeches. Although their mere words are much lessened when not delivered in Bob's mournful Irish accent, most of those celebrated convention speeches are in print as *A Load of Old BoSh* from Becon Publications, 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex, RM3 ORG ... £5.50 (or call it \$10.00) post free, all profits to RNIB Talking Books.

Maison d'Ailleurs: this unique museum of sf in Switzerland, threatened by a 70% cut in local council funding, received a stay of execution pending further debate—thanks, in part, to 7,026 signatures on a worldwide petition of protest.

Fortean Phenomena. More worrying than a rain of blood or frogs is this communication from *Fortean Times*, which with its April 1996 switch to monthly publication is reduced to accepting articles from me: 'It may or may not amuse you to know that Etienne, our trusty Art Director, spent the best part of a day "making this Langford guy's hair look normal" before giving up in disgust. The man whose hair was too spooky for *Fortean Times* ... a rare accolade, that.' [JM] H'mm!

R.I.P. Other deaths in February or early March.... • *Shamus Culhane* (1908-96), a pioneer of movie animation, responsible for Disney's 1938 *Snow White*. • *Brian Daiey* (1947-96; died 11 Feb, of cancer), US writer whose debut was the science-fantasy *The Doomfarers of Coramonde* (1977) but who became best known for tie-ins based on *Star Wars* etc. • *H.L. Gold* (1914-96), founding editor of *Galaxy* magazine. • *Sam Merwin Jr* (1910-96), once editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Startling Stories*, etc. • *Lyle Talbot*, (born Lisle Henderson in 1902; died 3 Mar), remembered as 'the actor in *Plan 9 From Outer Space* who could act' [PB] as well as for many more prestigious appearances. • *Elsie Wollheim* (who didn't like her age to be printed), widow of the late Donald A. Wollheim of DAW fame, who was to be a GoH at LAcon III. • Still bad times....

Pulphouse Publishing (USA) is closing down. *Pulphouse* magazine is dead; scheduled books like *Ellison Under Glass* will not appear; editor/publisher Dean Wesley Smith wants to get back to full-time writing and—since 'in five years I will be of age to try the Seniors Professional Golf Tour'—golfing.

C.o.A. *Colin Harris & Nadja Tegen*, 103 Charlock Way, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 1XY.

Hazel's Language Lessons. Polymath *Ian Watson* unveils *A Dictionary of Turkish Proverbs*, acquired at Oxfam: '*Karina dişini saydırma*: Do not let your wife count your teeth. *İki çiplak bir hamamda yakışır*: For a couple without clothes the proper place is the public bath. *Kadının şamdani altın olsa, mumu dikecek erkektir*: Even if a woman's candlestick is made of gold, it takes a man to provide it with a candle.'

Plug. *Impacte Macabre*, 'stories of the metaphysical, maleficent, macabre' (sounds a lot like *Ansible*). A4 ill. mag; £2 to T. Gay, 8 Chamberlain St, Crawcrook, Tyne & Wear, NE40 4TZ.

Thog's Masterclass. Peter F. Hamilton, *Mindstar Rising*: 'The way he walked gave him the authority. Easy powerful strides, backed up by wide powerful shoulders and a deep chest.' ('If he doesn't need an orthopaedic surgeon, he will soon need a chiropractor'—*John Boston*.) And a golden oldie: 'She did not appear to be wearing perfume, yet there was a fragrance in the car that hadn't been there before. It made

him think of new mown hay or a freshly scrubbed dairy. It reminded him of violets and primroses, hiding under leaves. She made him think of amaranth and brambles, of burdock and clover, of dewberry and flax. Yet there was a strangeness about her wild freedom. She also made him think of wood anemones and enchanter's nightshade.' ('Lee Barton', *The Shadow Man*, 1966)

Bob Shaw, 1931-1996

Chris Priest writes ...

Suddenly, the laughter fades away; Bob Shaw has died.

Bob was born in Northern Ireland in 1931, one of three brothers. He trained as a structural engineer, but also worked as an aircraft designer and journalist. Although he and his first wife Sadie lived in a middle-class suburb of Belfast the political situation had adverse potential for their children, and he felt forced to move to England in the mid-1970s. The upheaval, together with his step into full-time authorship at about the same time, brought financial worries that never left him. Even so, over the next twenty years he continued to produce a stream of literate, original and superbly imagined novels and stories. Bob Shaw was the master of the telling detail. His fan-writing, which had earlier made his name in fan circles, was fluent, amusing, intelligent, personal and pertinent. As an attender of conventions Bob was always quite simply the most popular person there: habitually in the bar, surrounded by friends of every age and background, he endeared himself to all who spoke to him. These elements of his life came memorably together for a few seconds at the worldcon where he won his first Hugo: this large and ungainly man danced joyfully across the stage, and everyone cheered him to the rafters.

Bob and I became friends and sometimes visited each other's houses. We didn't spend as much time in bars as his reputation as a tippler would suggest, and maybe this let me see an extra side to him. I found him a thoughtful and rather melancholy man, a bemused observer of the world, wry in his comments, quizzical in his approach to life. His wit was legendary, but it was self-effacement revealed through quickness of the mind: not wildly funny, but extremely endearing.

This gentle and congenial man, who gave so much pleasure to everyone else, had to contend with the darker side. Although he later denied it, he divulged to me that he was an alcoholic and was unable to fight it. His 'serious scientific talks', so popular with convention fans, had a downside for Bob. He found the talks difficult to write, often struggled with them for weeks, and sometimes even hesitated to register for conventions, lest he be expected to perform his famous party-piece. After a serious eye-infection Bob developed a morbid fear of blindness which lasted for the rest of his life; he became afraid of the dark, and told me he always slept with a light on. Although he was older than me, and much larger, I often felt protective of him.

One cold day in Ulverston he took me for a long walk through the backstreets, ending up outside a nondescript terraced house. It was Stan Laurel's birthplace. 'The funniest man in the world,' Bob said sadly, 'and the people who live there don't know who he was and won't allow a plaque on the wall.' I don't think he was drawing a moral, but afterwards I could never hear people laughing at Bob's jokes without remembering that. Nothing I can say about him is equal to my feeling of loss at his death, and the knowledge that so many other people feel the same only makes it worse.

(Editorial footnote: Nancy Shaw returned to America in late February. Any further letters of condolence should go to her at 695 Judd Road, Saline, Michigan 48176, USA.)

Ansible 104 © Dave Langford, 1996. Thanks to Paul Barnett, John Clute, Matrix, Joe McNally, Keith Oborn, Pong, Andrew I. Porter, Chris Priest, Joyce Scrivner, Chris Suslowicz, Ron Tiner, Gordon Van Gelder, and our Hero Distributors: Janice Murray (NA), SCIS, Alan Stewart (Oz), Martin (For TAFFI) Tudor and Bridget Wilkinson (FATW). 7 Mar 96