

Ansible

GREETINGS, EARTHINGS!
WELCOME TO THE
GALACTIC FEDERATION!



Ansible 281½ Xmas 2010

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Thog's Christmas Special. All the finely-tuned quotations below appeared in 2010 issues of the infamous science fiction newsletter *Ansible* under the aegis of Thog's Masterclass, our regular department devoted to the more eccentric glories of genre prose. Go thou and please do not do likewise. Oh, and Happy New Year....

January. Simile Dept. 'They were lifted off the ground like salmon plucked out of the Kushiro River as they headed upstream to spawn in the mountains of Hokkaido.' (Alexander Beshar, *Rim*, 1994) 'Explosive shurikens flew like punctuation marks above Tomo's head.' (*Ibid*) 'Like dying spiders his fingers crawled over the control panel, smearing it with blood.' (Frank Schätzing, *The Swarm*, 2004; trans Sally-Ann Spencer, 2006) • **Dept of Terrifying Imagery.** 'He allowed a pregnant pause. "You see, Dr Roche, if tiny insects launched a concerted attack on your nostrils, your finely tuned, highly complex body would be in danger of collapse."' (*Ibid*) • **Very Like A Whale Dept.** 'Watching the oil-spattered Dean laugh and jump around reminded him of sitting on his grandfather's knee.' (*Ibid*) • **Dept of Higher Mathematics.** 'This is a ninety percent male society ... we outnumber our women two hundred to one.' (Jacquelyn Frank, *Hunting Julian*, January 2010) • **Said-Bookism Dept.** "'I was," he emanated darkly ...' (*Ibid*) • **Dept of Mathematics II.** '... there are twenty-one of us, including myself and the signal officer who is on the roof watching for the signal, which, being four squads of four, is exactly the number we ought to have ...' (Steven Brust, *Sethra Lavode*, 2004)

New Year Extra. Neat Tricks Dept. "It's that dragon," Jhai exclaimed, shading her hand with her eyes.' (Liz Williams, *Precious Dragon*, 2007) • **Dept of Extra-Dimensional Portals.** 'Two doors opened from the end of the lobby. One was occupied by a bed, a wardrobe and a dressing table.' (Ken MacLeod, *The Execution Channel*, 2007) • **Similes Revisited.** '... tears coursed hot streaks down his cheeks, falling like mercury snowdrops ...' (Andy Remic, *War Machine*, 2007)

February. Remote Throbbing Dept. 'The vial of blood in my hand seems to pound against my temples.' (Nancy Kress, 'The Battle of Long Island' in *The Aliens of Earth*, 1993) • **Dept of Flaunted Historical Research.** "'Just a minute, Mr. Todd, you're a shilling short here.'" / "Ah, terribly sorry, I must have dropped it." He laboriously counted out three pennies, a ha'penny, and six farthings.' (Laurie R. King, *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, 1994) • **Eyeballs in the Sky.** 'Her eyes swung an arc around the steaming pit of the world.' (Phyllis Gotlieb, *O Master Caliban*, 1976) • **Animal Husbandry Dept.** 'Horses are a kind of sentient motorbike.' (Frank Schätzing, *The Swarm*, 2004; trans Sally-Ann Spencer, 2006) • **Dept of Fearful Intimacy.** 'Linda felt her mouth dry up, and her tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth.' (Stephen King, *Under the Dome*, 2009)

March. Long Drop Dept. 'The screams of the injured man followed him as he fell to the concrete an infinite distance below' (E.C. Tubb, *Veruchia*, 1973) • **Still More Historical Research Dept.** It is 1889: "'You must give him this note ... He must hurry! ... And for your trouble—'" Irene produced a five-pence piece.' 'Irene was stuffing a formidable roll of pound notes into her reticule.' (both Carole Nelson Douglas, *Irene at Large*, 1993) • **Dept of Pointy Things.** 'Her interest was as pointed as the breasts on which she gently splashed cold water ...' (Robert Holdstock, *Merlin's Wood*, 1994) • **Violent Imagery Dept.** 'Gabriel didn't hear the shot, but he saw Carter's brains when they jumped from his skull onto the wall.' 'Lydia flapped around on the ground like a wounded fish as Flag tried to fry her.' 'Riel twirled like a helicopter that had gone out of control, destroying everything in his path.' (all Kris Greene, *The Dark Storm*, 2010) • **Erotica Dept.** 'My potential for ecstasy was such that the lightest touch of his fingertip on my nipple was pure rape!' 'Penway became keenly aware of his nakedness when he realized he had no place to carry the smallest scrap of food.' 'He sat in the roof garden deliberately training his mind on a chess problem,

but Jenka Wale's breasts kept blurring his mental vision. Her pubic mound was a glowing enticement on the visualised chessboard.' 'Why not lose himself in the ecstasy of her body? But then, realizing the trend of his thoughts, he stiffened and took hold of himself.' (all Paul W. Fairman, *I, The Machine*, 1968)

April. Dept of Alien Anatomy, or Arithmetic. 'Their four legs were all the same, the rear ones not specialized like, say, those of horses. Each leg folded in two places; the top and bottom bones went one way, the middle one the other.' Later: 'Their knees, all twelve per person, were bent into a kind of half crouch that left Ron towering over them.' (Mike Shepherd, *Kris Longknife: Undaunted*, 2009) • **Expletives Dept.** "'Dungheap!" one of the albino twins ejaculated. "Nothing goes to the waste lands!"' (Stephen King, *The Dark Tower 3: The Waste Lands*, 1991) • **Dept of Sexual Side-Effects.** 'Penway had no reflexes. He lay there helpless whilst wild, disjointed thoughts formed, vanished and reformed, hammered against his numbed consciousness, swirled and danced like paper bits in a high wind.' (Paul W. Fairman, *I, The Machine*, 1968) • **Metaphor Dept.** 'Pippa leapt from one metal stump to the next, her balance refined, arms outstretched a little, her face a Picasso of concentration.' (Andy Remic, *War Machine*, 2007)

May. Dept of How Else? 'The Marquis of London lifted his head a fraction of an inch and looked at Lord Darcy from beneath his brows.' (Randell Garrett, *Too Many Magicians*, 1966) • **Erudite Allusions Dept.** "'Where did you learn a distraction technique like that with the doors?" [...] "A long time ago, in a city far, far away, to paraphrase Star Trek."' (Gayle Lynds, *The Book of Spies*, 2010) • **Eyeballs [Not] in the Sky.** 'Afterward Lorimer can recall mostly eyes, bright curious eyes tugging his boots ...' (James Tiptree Jr, 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?', 1976) '... the very suggestion ... was enough to make them close their minds and occupy their eyes with their shoelaces' (Hilary Mantel, *Fludd*, 1989) • **Chronology Dept.** "'The twenty-first century," Kartan corrected her quietly. The blank fear he saw reflected in their eyes made him hesitate for a moment before he added, "This is the year 2179."' (Margaret J. Anderson, *In the Circle of Time*, 1979) • **Proverbial Wisdom.** 'A weeping woman is a bucket with no bottom.' (Robert Jordan, *The Shadow Rising*, 1992) 'Never prod at a woman unless you must.' 'The only man completely at peace is a man without a navel.' 'Caution once forgotten could be forgotten once too often.' 'The best way to apologize to a man is to trip him in a secluded part of the garden.' 'You put your cat in your hat and stuff it down your breeches.' (all Robert Jordan, *Lord of Chaos*, 1994)

Bonus: 2010 Election Masterclass. Gordon Brown, Zombie: 'A senior politician had a meeting with the Prime Minister shortly before the [2008] recess and was shocked by what he saw. "He looked absolutely terrible. The shoulders were hunched. The flesh was literally dripping off his face ..."' (Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, 2010) • But Lembit Opik sees his LibDem leader Nick Clegg in terms of high fantasy: 'He's like Frodo. He arrived in Middle Earth all innocent, but ready to take on the forces of evil. He is the only one capable of wearing the ring of power without being corrupted. Vince Cable is our very own Gandalf.' (Pandora column, *Independent*, 20 April) Which party leader is Sauron in this metaphor, and which is Saruman? Who is Gollum? • In France, *Le Monde*—led astray by blue-tribe connotations?—identified the UK Conservative leader as James Cameron. (*Ibid*, 28 April)

June. Crossing the Jordan Dept. 'Suddenly he pressed the looking glass to his eye as a woman galloped a tall black horse.' 'Worry [...] ate inside him like a ferret trying to burrow out of his middle.' 'Perrin shut out the rest, no easy task, with his ears.' 'That old woman reminded Sevenna of a landslide plunging down a mountain.' 'He sounded like a bumblebee the size of a cat instead of a mastiff.' 'The Ajas sent to the Keeper whatever dribbles from their own eyes-and-ears they were willing to share.' (all Robert Jordan, *A*

Crown of Swords, 1994) ‘Her eyebrows climbed as she directed her gaze back to them, eyes black as her white-winged hair, a demanding stare of impatience so loud she might as well have shouted.’ (Robert Jordan, *The Path of Daggers*, 1998) ‘The tea had gone cold, but honey exploded on her tongue.’ ‘After a moment, his chin moved, the vestige of a nod.’ ‘Loial’s ears trembled with caution, now.’ (all Robert Jordan, *Crossroads of Twilight*, 2003) ● *Shapeshifter Dept: The Final Frontier*. “Ling!” Meg snapped at one point. “Human beings have two ears, and each is at the side of the face. That’s better.” (H.J. Campbell, *Another Space—Another Time*, 1953) ● *Third Eye Dept*. “There was a long silence while Kitty, still with arms tightly folded, studied him from between narrowed eyes.” (John Dickson Carr, *The Devil in Velvet*, 1951)

July. *Neat Tricks Dept*. ‘Odan lifted his head so that it jutted from between his shoulder blades ...’ (Manning Norvil [Ken Bulmer], *Dream Chariots*, 1977) ● *Dept of Too Much Anatomical Information*. ‘With Mordred looking over his shoulder, and flanked by Arthur and Agravaire, Tich eased his bulk carefully onto a stool, rested his hands on his belly and puffed out his bulbous cheeks.’ (Alan Fenton, *The Hour of Camelot*, 2010) ● *Choice of Sense Organ Dept*. ‘Lili rested a hand on the head of the control divan and pressed her lips together and looked around at us, mostly with her eyes.’ (Fritz Leiber, *The Big Time*, 1961) ● *Crossing the Jordan*. ‘Romanda took a longer look, and nearly gasped herself.’ ‘They were disparate men, alike only in the way a leopard was like a lion.’ ‘His scowl deepened creases on his flushed face that needed no deepening.’ ‘They slept together like puppies of necessity.’ ‘Elayne laid one finger atop a bronze horseman less than a hand tall, standing a few leagues west of the city.’ ‘His ears quivered with embarrassment yet again.’ ‘He looked furious. And near to sicking up.’ ‘She tried to work moisture into her mouth, but it was thick.’ ‘She showed him her teeth, hoping he did not take it for a grin.’ ‘Before you can have eyeless prisoners, you need an eyeless victory. What we’ve had are a string of eyeless defeats.’ (all Robert Jordan, *Knife of Dreams*, 2005) ● *True Romance Dept*. ‘And so it was, with full belly and empty bladder, Fred plowed into Mary like a moose through a windshield.’ (David Marusek, *Mind Over Ship*, 2009)

Bonus Item. *Eyeballs in the Sky*. ‘Randori searched Morgan’s eyes and saw the wounds his words made.’ (John DeFrank, *Condemned To Freedom*, 2010)

August. *Strange Pleasures Dept*. ‘Half-heartedly, he unhinged the hand already soldered to his rigid member.’ (Maurice G. Dantec, *Babylon Babies*, 1999; trans Noura Wedell 2005) ● *One Two Many Dept*. ‘It was a thin but heavy book, almost the length of two of his hands ...’ (Bernard Knight in *The Lost Prophecies* by ‘The Medieval Murderers’, 2008) ● *Eyeballs in the Haberdashery*. ‘Detective O’Conner’s voice was a nasal bleat. His eyes bulged under the brim of his soft felt hat.’ (Paul Chadwick, ‘Doctor Zero’ in *Ten Detective Aces*, 1933) ● *Naughty Parts Dept*. ‘Still growling, Katov took a small tool from his groin pouch and dropped to his knees ...’ *Later*: ‘Penway longed for the tool Katov had carried in his groin pouch. Perhaps it would have sufficed.’ (Paul W. Fairman, *I, The Machine*, 1968) ● *Dept of Speech Therapy*. “Please forgive my voice, Denny,” his hoarse whisper came at last. “But once in the dungeon, when I was nearly dead with thirst and begging for anything to drink, Sorainya had molten metal poured down my throat.” “They found us on the ledge,” breathed the voiceless man.’ (both Jack Williamson, *The Legion of Time*, 1938) ● *Deep Throat Dept*. ‘She felt a scream curling somewhere down in her stomach, growing as it wormed its sick way around and around, working its way up her throat ...’ (Tony Ballantyne, *Divergence*, 2007)

Bonus: Science Masterclass. ‘The Selans’ invisibility is not quite perfect. Blue colour is not affected by their electronic fields. I got the idea that a pair of blue glasses would permit me to see them. So I took Ephony’s, poured common ink on them ...’ Instant success! (Clarence Granoski, ‘Ephony’s Spectacles’, *Science Fiction Quarterly*, 1941)

September. *Eyeballs in the Sky*. ‘Gazing up at his face, I saw a pair of beautiful blue eyes caressing my face.’ (Jocelynn Drake, *Wait for Dusk*, 2010) ● *Vindaloo Challenge Dept*. ‘Though his hunger is gone, Clay sucks at the tuber. / Some drops of a gritty juice enter his mouth. Instantly flames shoot through his skull and his soul withers.’ (Robert Silverberg, *Son of Man*, 1971) ● *Dept of Naughty Geometry*. ‘His thoughts did not even take dream shapes, but extended and protracted in Euclidean nakedness.’ (Phyllis Gotlieb, *O Master*

Caliban, 1976) ● *Collywobbles Dept*. ‘The upward motion of the lift in motion made my stomach quail.’ (Adam Roberts, *Yellow Blue Tibia*, 2009) ● *Dept of Personal Presence*. ‘She sat down in that earthy way that said she was all there.’ (L.E. Modesitt Jr, *The Fires of Paratime*, 1980) ● *Fins, Fins, Fins, Moving Up and Down Again Dept*. ‘... the pain marched across my shoulder like a shark army might have.’ (*Ibid*)

Bonus: Cosmology Masterclass. *Count Those Atoms Dept*. ‘And now the universe, from a physical standpoint, was approaching entropy, a state in which every atom in the universe—numbering one to the 420,000,000,000th—would be in a condition of stasis ...’ (Silas Water [Noel Loomis], *The Man with Absolute Motion*, 1955)

October. *Hot Action Dept*. ‘He rubbed her again to generate some calories.’ ‘Their cold-blooded organisms needed to absorb calories from the sun.’ (Bernard Werber trans Margaret Rocques, *Empire of the Ants*, 1996) ● *Dept of Slipstream Chemistry*. ‘As soon as he was again outside, he put a lit match to one of his methane soaked strings and they went up like tissue paper in the wind.’ (D.W. Green, ‘Nose Piercing’ in *Subtle Edens: An Anthology of Slipstream Fiction* ed. Allen Ashley, 2008) ● *Book of Lists Dept*. ‘Inside and among the stars, a montage, a collage, a kaleidoscope, a cacophony, a song, of colors, shapes, sounds, trees, flowers, stones, bricks, houses, horses, unicorns, dragons, lizards, eagles, sparrows, mollusks, whales, wasps, mosquitoes, fairies, changelings, humans, centaurs, the dead, the living, the unborn, the not yet born, the just conceived, until, until there was nothing and there was everything.’ (Warren Rochelle, *The Called*, 2010)

Bonus: Sibilant Susurrations. Kim Huett unearthed a 1943 fanzine (*The Reader and Collector*, vol III no 2) whose editor doubted that an S-free word like ‘Alger’ may be uttered with a hiss, and collected several examples: “‘Hoaka!’ I hissed desperately.” (David Wright O’Brien, ‘Hokum Hotel’, *Fantastic Adventures*, July 1942) “‘Come on!’ I hissed.” (Thorne Lee, ‘The Crooked House’, *Weird Tales*, November 1942) ‘He stopped, then hissed: “Wait here!”’ (E. Mayne Hull, ‘Abdication’, *Astounding*, April 1943) “‘You’d better not!’ I hissed.” (Paul Miles, ‘Bill Caldron Goes to the Future’, *Amazing*, March 1943) ‘Aieeee—no more!’ Langford hissed.

November. *Dept of Yes, But What Shape Was It?* ‘... near the bottom of the floor was a rectangular-sized hole ...’ (Chris Mooney [not the science journalist], *The Missing*, 2007) ● *Long Patient Vigil Dept*. ‘From the depths of the grotto came the sound of water, a single drop blepping into a pool. A week later, another blep. Then a month passed before three drops fell in as many seconds.’ (Troy Denning, *Star Wars Fate of the Jedi: Abyss*, 2009) ● *Dept of Existential Introspection*. ‘His tongue lay in his mouth like a raw sausage—swollen, numb and cold. [He had] a throbbing head that made him feel like he had died and just didn’t realise it yet.’ (*Ibid*) ● *Eyeballs in the Sky*. ‘You think you can pull the wool over everyone’s eyes ... but mine, you’ll find, are in the back of my head.’ (Martin Russell, *Mr T aka The Man Without a Name*, 1977) ● *Dept of Entire Entirety*. ‘It looked entirely normal, except that the sheath was made entirely of lead, and it covered the sword entirely ...’ (Brent Weeks, *The Way of Shadows*, 2008) ● *Equine Dexterity Dept*. ‘But with fire in one hand and a gleaming knife in the other, the horse was hardly calmed.’ (*Ibid*) ● *Dept of Workshop Romance*. ‘Her climax was a nail he was hammering repeatedly.’ (Emma Holly, *Angel at Dawn*, 2011)

December. *Untimely Dept*. ‘By Set, the enemy knew not the hour when he might awake at midnight to feel the taloned fingers ...’ (Robert E. Howard, ‘The Phoenix on the Sword’, *Weird Tales*, December 1932) ● *Dept of Impossible Feats*. “‘Mmmmmmm,” said Maginty. It was an unwriteable, unpronounceable burble.’ (John E. Muller, *Dark Continuum*, 1964) ● *Back-Story Dept*. Chronicler to action hero, on the latter’s previous adventures: ‘People believe I wrote them cynically for one reason or another—but we know that I did not, that you are real, that your exploits actually happened. One day they will realize this, when governments are prepared to release the information that confirms what you have told me. They will realize that you are no liar and that I am no crackpot—or worse, a commercial writer trying to write a science fiction novel.’ (‘Edward P. Bradbury’ [Michael Moorcock], *Barbarians of Mars*, 1965)