

CONFLUENCE REVISITED

By Brian Aldiss

When an Earth ship discovered the Myrinian system, the planet Myrin's civilization was already eleven million years old. The Myrinians traced their history back that far; they had erected a memorial of vertiginous beauty to the passing of the ages every million years, either in reverence or fun.

Most of that lengthy period was passed in what one Earth philosopher has termed 'fruitful stagnation'. Stagnant or not, the Myrinian cultural complex is to be envied for the general level of contentment in which its peoples live, referred to as *Bi Jo* (approximately, Stylized Submerged Individualism). The people eat moderately and sleep well at night.

Bringing back with it many records of the venerable Myrinian culture, the Tenth Research Fleet has just returned to Earth, android-manned, since the human crew in the main elected to remain on Myrin in the state referred to as First Lobby. Unfortunately it has not yet proved possible to receive a visitation here from representatives of the Myrinian system, despite many pressing invitations. Doubtless we may expect acceptances when levels of radiation decrease. Meanwhile, terrestrials must be grateful that Myrin does not ban all human visits. Even the unfortunate incident involving the Earth ship *Bombast* has been clemently overlooked.

The complexity of the chief Myrinian language, Confluence, has already been noted. That it is a language-cum-posture, or lingopost, was established by the Seventh Research Fleet, members of which were privileged to attend special lectures at the Oeldrid Stance Academy on Myrin Centre, in Sector Ten. Meanings in lingopost can be radically altered by the stance assumed by the speaker (or *S'lh Hin*, the Intoner, also a rather transparent curtain), or even by that of the listener. The positioning of a single finger can negate or reverse the meaning of several classes of lingopost words. It is clear that there is no possibility of compiling a dictionary within the ordinary meaning of the term.

The Tenth Research Fleet was confined to Sector Nine on the chief Myrinian planet. As is well known, the Myrinians have for convenience (or some say for amusement) divided their territories into squares, so that they resemble a gigantic checker-board. There the researchers spent considerable time investigating Confluence. Their special report on terms for wine will be published separately.

They also compiled a holographic record of various stances assumed in lingopost. Findings will be available shortly.

Meanwhile, the brief listing that follows displays something of the interest of a lingopost which far excels Solar English in its nuances. Definitions must be regarded as tentative.

The romanized phonetic system employed here is that suggested by the leader of the Etymological Division of the Seventh Research Fleet, Dr Rohan Harbottle.

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AH BLAK HOO Oblong eyes; the inhabitants of Sector Nine say that persons with oblong eyes live longest

AH SHEN SHI Having learnt any classical book by heart

AK IH WAN Courtesy to an old lady in cognizance of her previous beauty; an overcooked egg or fish

ANEY A place much used by great-grandfathers

ARP RUH HIG LO TON Being busy in an office after lunch; a dotard studying history; sounds of leaves falling in early autumn

ARTH Conversation; a cave with echoes

AS DIN A family holiday less than a complete success; a fever

BACH HOANG A machine factory; a long worm in a tiger's intestine

BA YEF NA One's recognizably second-rate thoughts

BAZ YEF HO Striving to better one's thoughts; restocking a lake with fish of improved quality

BI A reverie sustained for twenty years; crowing like a cockerel without making a sound

BI JOWA Ninety per cent contentment; half of a chocolate egg

BOL I PEIU Those who worship tigers; perhaps a ceiling with blood on it

CH'N DOGBA HAN The kind of conversation one expects between two robots; singing for the sake of it

CHUK CHEE Answering back to owls; laughing at one's own jokes; a concoction of raw egg and alcohol

CHU PAT A learned person in a low tavern

CUR Persistent attempts at flight; any hilarious suicide

DA EST KO A hypothetical form of reason which will reach to the roots of unreason, at present being developed by sages in Sector Nine

DI CHI'FAN I The laughter of women in the next room; restaurants with doubtful reputations

DOBGAT An irresistible tendency to laugh at what is not funny

FAN Beloved female

FANG TO A rarity; cream on mare's milk

FAN N'M A slightly less beloved female

FANOW A surprisingly pleasant female cousin; a miniature painting

FAN SEE KIT MEE An undiscovered continent; a well-cultivated female mind; cream

FEE MAABA An obsolete weapon once used for beheading robots; the shinbone

FEET A kind of hedgehog skilled at climbing trees; old hair brushes

FOH TAT A dog singing; laughter towards nightfall

HA LIT A special dish of jelly fish; jokes told to the wrong people

HANG TAK A robot which thinks it thinks

HE'CHI YAY Borrowing and not returning books; a certain smile

HE HANG TUK TI A robot which thinks it can walk straight but deviates to the left consistently

HI HANG TUK TIN A robot which thinks it can walk straight but deviates to the right consistently; a devious politician

HI IH HI Listening to choirs and similar activities

HI IH HU YA Making a habit of listening to choirs; conversation with a green bear

H'KAI TURK The malfunction of a semi-computer; a small child farting

HO HOO'FAN Dining on Farinese oysters and wine; having eyes only for the beloved

H'YA TO An unintended gesture; a posture; a furry type of fish from the Clement Sea

ICT P'EEM SHA To be pulled apart by four carthorses; any similar punishment

I JOW N'A Poor forms of contentment; on the Southern Continent, a game with fingers as counters, some say, cat's cradles

IMOO A kind of pudding; a planet

IMSK IMOOT Thinking of worse people

INA O YEF Achieving perfection of thought

JA A type of depraved underground mammal; mathematics; one's appearance on certain mornings

JA LULI Any depravity, especially if praised in brothels

JAL UM Standing in such a way as to annoy a mother-in-law; a pimple not concealed by garments; the young pig or eagle

J ALUM PI A preoccupation with money; an elusive ache; diseases of middle age

JIN PAH T'HA A waterwheel beginning to work again; kissing a lady on her private parts

JOW TSEE The division where soft ends and hard begins; a tiger's tale

KA'RENI Visiting a distant country; an assignation with a sister-in-law key hang
Annoying thoughts: robot with a conical head

KO HO LAM Two people looking sideways at each other

KOISAL T'PEEM The Four Realizations:

EEM AD AH The realization that one is eighteen and already a failure

EEM HA WAK The realization one is eighty and has achieved nothing

EEM YA AK The realization one is popular only in vulgar company

EE 'OH MOI The realization one is shunned by one's own family

LEONG M'BEE Congested bowels; an overpopulated city

LIEM TU'H Highest form of art; in Sector Nine, also the stories one tells children in
order to prepare them to conduct themselves wisely in adulthood

LI LIH JUH Superconductivity; an orgy; illicit communication with a female
prisoner

LUH PU SMAK TI Constant dripping of water; conversation in which one cannot
join; listening unwisely

MAK TI IH Talking only slightly to impress

M'BEE GOH General discourtesy to old ladies as a principle

M'BEE WA An old city; ancient thing; article; or a certain desolation which
descends when one sees a beloved house demolished

MEE KIT A well-cultivated mind; fatness; like a little continent men

TATI YI Discerning the differing qualities of each hour of darkness; 'parting the
night breeze'

M'FEE BAH An obsolete instrument used for giving exact measurements of

genitalia; any kind of one-armed lobster

MIN RETSO Thinking of someone dear but distant; a row of little houses, perhaps a village

M'KO HA BLIT Avoiding a friend who has written a book one has not read; bad sunrises

NAH Purity; blue sky before the eleventh hour

NA TAT MA DATO Divorce while one's partner is not looking; having a chimney relined

NIK TRIT A state between something and nothing; scarcity; abundance

NIN TU WOL Any form of behaviour lacking inward control; a child's toy

N'JAH TUR Mild depravity; a spring fair for children only

NUT IMG I Managing to die without causing inconvenience to others; cooling egg custard

NUTRED JOW Achieving death in an amused daydream

OI PAH SMA GEE A young lady seen through a looking glass; a little cress growing between storms

OPI NIN Any form of behaviour which improves on what has been before; a drink that wards off intoxication

ORAN BAL The uneasy feeling that change is on its way; death of the Ruler

OTA TI HA Gesturing circumspectly to the left; the picturesque

OTA TIN HI Gesturing circumspectly to the right; a mystery

OUTA Several feet washed under the same tap; a haul of squid; a parliament

PEET Four people sitting companionably round a table

PUH TIH Oh, hell!; also used for urine

QUAM Delicate feelings towards older persons; poetry of an especially obscure kind

REEN Getting in touch with a distant country

SHEN Any fruitless task undertaken through embarrassment

SHIN HOI BAA The toes; playing a musical instrument with strings, some say by blind musicians

SIN LIN H'KAY A robot pretending to belch; anything above its station; also, some say, low comedy, such as a custard pie about to be delivered

SMAK T'HAH A one-eyed fish; so that two have to swim close to see the way forward; the place; any silly behaviour by twins

SNI TO'SI Compulsory counting; 'he is adding up the stars'; any venerable astronomer

SZE PU LO LO An icicle of urine; cryonic superconductivity

TEI FEET PU Excessive hairiness; a great victory

THEE DO Examining three or more graduate-level students; an owl's nest

TH'HOW Boundless lapses of time since the universe began; what astronomers say

TIG TRAG Creature most resembling mankind, said to smile in its sleep; a rival imitating one's best garment

TRI H H 'YA A gesture with the fingers where one wishes to speak but cannot

TRIH YA An imaginary world where it is worse

T'SMAK TH'HOW CHE Rattling of reeds by a flooded lake; any northern breeze; useless thinking about boundless lapses of time

TU LA LAT Holding a high note in opera; letting sunshine into the back of the mouth; speaking purely to please; a lizard

TURK TOH A little child laughing; gutters; like firecrackers thrown into water

UK'WAN AS To hasten towards one's death; in general, to enjoy oneself

UK'WAN TA To hasten towards marriage

UK'WAN TAMA To hasten towards an unwelcome marriage

UN WAS Fasting; going a year without food

UNIMGAG BA A machine dream which takes some time to recall; a lethargic flea

URK AY A custard pie after delivery; a deficiency of wit

USANO NUTO A novel about love written by a computer; a vain thing

WAN A type of tortoise used in races

WOON HA Parking a chariot; the smell of over-heated horses

YAG ORN Passing on knowledge; the honourableness of passing on knowledge; a president (archaic)

YEP YAY DISILLUSION YEEF Any place more than a thousand miles from the ocean

YEEF N'YI One day in adolescence; a pale lemon

YUK NA Predicting the future; looking through a bamboo blind into the night; certain low autumn fogs

YU UZ'NIT A very large person who fails to realize he resembles his father

ZEI TAI' A short-haired dog with dignity