Light Traffic

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Dr. O. Lord and the Ten Radar Net

The Ideal: "The dream which preoccupies the tortuous mind of every palindromist is that somewhere within the confines of the language lurks the Great Palindrome, a nutshell which not only fulfills the intricate demands of the art, flowing sweetly in both directions, but which also contains the Final Truth of Things."

<div align="right">

Alastair Reid
</div>

The Achievable: "He goddam mad dog, eh?"

<div align="right">

James Thurber
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I was about to give up waiting for Dr. O. Lord when I saw the tall, silver-haired, radar-palindrome expert walk through the swinging doors of the hotel lounge. I had been waiting patiently for more than two hours in the hotel near the Toronto Airport, hoping for an exclusive interview with Dr. Otto Lord on the subject of his latest invention—a communication network of radars. While Otto was walking toward me, in his characteristic slow gait, most of the scanty information I knew about my tight-lipped friend flashed through my mind.

Otto Lord was born in a small town named New Owen on 21-9-1912. The palindromic significance of the birth date, the town's name and the boy's name did not escape the attention of Otto's parents, who encouraged him in the pursuit of palindromes. (A news item, vehemently denied by Otto's father, claims that "Pa's a sap" was the first palindrome to be coined by Otto.) When Otto joined an engineering school to specialize in electrical engineering, he was already a world-famous palindromist. Fascinated with the palindromes *rotor* and *rotator*, Otto started his graduate program in Electric Machines. Very soon, he got tired of that subject, walked up to the Chairman of the Department and said cryptically, "So many dynamos" and switched his allegiance to *radar*. Fortunately for the fields of radar and communications, Otto sustained his interest in the new field, got his Ph.D. and started his academic career. From that time onward, he began to insist that he be addressed either as Otto or as Dr. O. Lord. (Unconfirmed rumor, however, has it that due to Otto's sloppy dressing habit, his students refer to him more often as Dr. Awkward behind his back.)

Otto is credited with many fine palindromes. He led an anti-war movement in his college days with the slogan, "Snug and raw was I ere I saw war and guns," and his recent pronouncement on a space-related project, "Hell? A spacecraft farce caps all, eh?", is equally famous. Otto is consulted widely by many cities and countries who want innovative palindromes that can attract tourists. Some of his prescriptions such as "Airy Syria", "A Mild Lima", "Haiti, Ah" and "Reign at Tangier", were reasonable successes. However, a few of his suggestions such as "God, a slap! Paris, sir, appals a dog", "Boston, O do not sob", "I maim Miami", and "An aid nix Indiana" were not enthusiastically received. But all his efforts in Canada were unqualified successes. "Niagara, O roar again", "Megawatt Ottawa gem", and "Toronto got no rot", put many Canadian cities on the tourist map in the early fifties.

I was indeed fortunate that such a great man counted me among his friends. By this time, Otto had reached my sofa, and I got up to shake his hand. We stepped into a nearby restaurant and I began my interview.

"Thank-you, Otto, for promising me an interview on your latest invention. I hope that the cigarette smoke from the next table doesn't bother you."

"No, son."

"In that case, can I offer you a fine cigar presented by one of my Cuban friends?"

"Cigar? Toss it in a can, it is so tragic."

"Sorry. Can I at least buy you a drink?"

"I won't! O not now, I—."

"I believe this restaurant has very good rum . . ."

"Red rum, sir, is murder."

"How about some beer?"

"Lager, sir, is regal."

"Great . . . I believe that you are coming straight from an IEEE Conference held in Paris. You must have enjoyed the great food they serve in such conferences?"

"I saw desserts; I'd no lemons, alas no melon. Distressed was I."

"O, I forgot that you are on a diet . . . Shall we now turn to the main topic of this interview? I heard that you got the idea of the new invention from a palindrome. What is that palindrome?"

"Ten animals I slam in a net."

"How interesting. What is the name of the communication network of radars you have invented?"

"Ten Radar Net."

"A very appropriate name, indeed . . . I read the basic tenets of communication theory, you call A, B, C, on which the invention is based. I would like to clarify a few doubts about this net. May I?"

"To nets, ah, no son, haste not."

"Which, in your opinion, is the major principle behind your invention?"

"Tenet C is a basis, a basic tenet."

"Do the radars act in synchronism?"

"No, in uneven union."

"Is it a defensive-type of network?"

"No, it is opposition."

"How does one know if it is ready for action?"

"Yacht notes radar set on th'cay."

"Will the net go out of action in case of power failure?"

"No, it can assess an action."

"When switched off, is the entire radar network closed?"

"No, it is open on one position."

"Is the radar signal always transmitted under programmable software control?"

"No, it never propagates if I set a 'GAP' or 'PREVENTION'."

"Is the network now on?"

"Nets aft now. We fasten nets. A few won't fasten."

"Oh, won't that be unsafe?"

"Net safe. Rotten net to refasten."

"I *do* hope it is *safe*."

"Tide net safe, soon. Noose fastened it."

"To whom are you planning to sell the invention?"

"Must sell at tallest sum."

"Otto, I now have to ask you some delicate questions. I hope you won't get angry?"

"O stone me! Not so."

"Some leading researchers have claimed that your net is built on unsound principles."

"Oh, who—?"

"Some of these *are* very critical, I must say."
"God, a foeman, name of a dog."
"I hesitate to mention names . . ."
"Name of a foeman?"
"Well, I'm not sure whether I should really . . ."
"Name NOW one man!"
"Adam—"
"Mad Adam!"
"I believe Basil—also criticized your research."
"Basil is a b__!"
"Otto, you *must* agree that the critics have been very vocal."
"Liars, alas, rail."
"Their criticism is also being published in archival journals."
"Evil odes or prose do live."
"Well, Otto, I think I better change the topic. Whatever the merits of the invention, may I drink to continued success in your palindromic career?"
"Yo, Bottoms up, U.S. motto, boy."

Dr. O. Lord got up and prepared to leave. I hesitated; but I could not resist it. The question that was uppermost in everyone's mind recently was also troubling me. So I blurted it out.

"Otto, I heard a rumor that a major nuclear power is consulting you on the possible consequences arising from the fact that *Star War* reads *Raw Rats* backwards. Is it true? Can you confirm the story, and if so, can I quote you?"

Dr. O. Lord, on his way out, stopped, turned back and smiled enigmatically. He then said, "Rats live on no evil star." Then he left.

I am still trying to figure that one out.

Do you have an entertaining and/or educational item which is appropriate for the 'Light Traffic' feature. Send it in to: S. Pasupathy, Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada M5S 1A4.