



## The First Book of EPP

The foldout poster in this issue of *CrossTalk* based on Eric Levenez's research is a fascinating pedigree. Adding fruit to that tree, *BackTalk* offers the First Book of Etymology of Programming Patois (EPP).

1. In the beginning was the computer. The computer was void of instruction and darkness was upon the face of the screen.

2. Engineers said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Engineers saw the light and divided the light from the darkness. They called the light Software and the darkness Hardware.

3. The prophet Moore foretold of computing hardware whose capacity swelled as its size shrunk. Following Moore, the seer Parkinson dreamt of a growing cistern filled with software that incessantly replenished the cistern such that it was forever full. Engineers were perplexed and dismayed.

4. Assembly, the first to take on the paradoxical Goliath, was a young, brash, autodidact language. He was disdained by the scholars who thought him more idiom than language. Undeterred, his speed bridled the giant. While arduous to preserve, engineers swore their alliance to Assembly till the day their languages are without root or branch.

5. Fortran followed Assembly. Blessed with longevity and filled with virility Fortran begat Algol. Intelligent yet often misconstrued, Algol was a captivating mistress who brought forth several programming languages.

6. Algol's firstborn was CPL who begat BCPL who begat B who begat C who with his objective son C++ emerged as a fruitful and prominent language. A true blue-collar language, C was healthy, reticent, and, at times, explosive.

7. The malodorous language B-O begat Flow-Matic, of infomercial fame, who in turn begat COBOL, a lad who exited the womb in a three piece suit and briefcase in hand.

8. COBOL seized an incestuous opportunity to pair the mistress Algol and Fortran the IV, Fortran's great great grandson. The union engendered Algol's second language PL/I. Harsh to the eye and large in the thigh, suitors eschewed PL/I who languished in obscurity.

9. Algol's third language, Simula, was

ahead of her time and crowned the Princess of Objectivity. Simula was beguiled by Lisp, a parenthetical language from the League of Ivy, and they begat Smalltalk who was offered at the altar of Xerox. Several years later, Simula's daughter collaborated with C to begat C++, an objective, robust yet capricious language.

10. Lisp also beguiled Algol and her fourth language, Scheme, was born. Favoring elegance over practicality, Scheme had a proclivity for genetics but was a stranger to success. Scheme had a tryst with Sir Lambda of Calculus that produced Haskell. Haskell was a lazy polymorphic language who begat Eddie, the annoying friend of Wally who was the brother of Beaver.

11. Algol's fifth language, Pascal, resembled Algol's great great grandson C and had a penchant for higher learning. Pascal begat three daughters: Modula, who followed her father into education; Mesa, who dabbled in woodwork; and Ada, the love child of the Sirens of War who was reared to be the *only* language. In the right hands this well-defined, multitasking, polymorphic prodigy could be an industrious lady. Yet, in the wrong hands she was a fickle corpulent popinjay. The three sisters now languish in an old code home.

12. Algol's last progeny Algor, born with the mark of the ass, inspired the movie "Love Story" and invented the information superhighway on which all languages would, in time, journey. Algor, like his mother, fell from an ivory tower. Many blame the Earl of Chad, although suicide is a more likely suspect.

13. Prolog from Ether was a self-made language that preferred matching solutions to solving problems. For common users, Prolog induced recursive headaches and algorithmic nausea. For fuzzy addicts, he excelled in fabricating exquisite neural lattices.

14. In the Land of Ice, the language Snobol manipulated strings to scale Mount Data. This pioneer, now obsolete, journeyed on a virtual machine - a concept that would be instrumental in the navigation of Algor's superhighway.

15. Rooted in small towns and villages across the country, BASIC was the language of the mediocre. At an early age, BASIC shunned complexity and took a vow of isolation. BASIC was reincarnated

as Visual BASIC and pursued Nirvana, which disbanded after Cobain's grungy demise. Limited by scale, many discarded Visual BASIC as slang but his ubiquitous force continues to appeal to the masses.

16. C begat Awk and Awk begat Nawk and Nawk enticed Sh, the quiet interpreter, who begat Perl. A natural navigator, Perl toils on the River Script extracting, distributing, and dealing data. Often used but seldom loved, Perl is known as the Swiss Army Chainsaw for the callous methods she employs to extricate quandaries aptly referred to as Perl Jams.

17. Angered by his great-granddaughter's lack of classiness, C connived with ABC and Modula-3 to supplant and string up Perl. They hatched Python, a smooth broker who haunts the banks of the River Script constricting the interrupts of his rival Tcl; not to be confused with TLC who lost her left eye in Honduras.

18. In a defiant move, Perl collaborated with Python, Smalltalk, and Ada's towering daughter, Eiffel, to ameliorate their dominion of the River Script. The result was Ruby. Inheriting Perl's resiliency, Python's elegance, and Smalltalk's autonomy, Ruby traverses the River Script and Algor's Web-encrusted highway with ease.

19. During the French revolution ML begat SML, a nasty language who tortured his users to the delight of his father. While incarcerated in the Palace de Cristal, SML begat CAML. After contracting emphysema, CAML begat CAML Light who moved to Ireland and begat O'CAML who objectively surmounted his innate humps.

20. Mesa begat Cedar who joined with Scheme, Smalltalk, and C++ to harvest a solid language called Oak. Oak begat Java who was sun-roasted for mass distribution. Brewed in early popularity, Java has percolated through harsh rays of criticism on her way to maturity. Only time will tell if she will amount to a hill of beans.

21. And thus ended the first period of the proliferation of programming patois.

— Gary Petersen  
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