

POLYLOGUE with MYTHOKRATES

INTRODUCTIONS

Exodians comprising this extraordinary gathering—scientists, politicians, and elite of the Free Fleet selected for this special cruise to the TriAD—are finding it difficult to settle down. Despite Sentower’s exaggerated gestures, they will not be held to less than a loud murmur, forcing the moderator to shout his introductory remarks.

SENTOWER:

Ladies and gentlemen (*he waits a moment before continuing*); **scientists and philosophers** (*the audience noisiness diminishes*); **teachers and students** (*his volume descends toward normal speech*); **artists and technicians** (*at last the house is quiet*); **professionals in every field and dilettanti** of all persuasions and backgrounds throughout the reunited Fleet:

At the mention of reunification, someone from the rear of the hall shouts a supportive slogan. A smattering of applause follows. Others take up the positive response and the minor disturbance begets a tumult of clapping and bellowing.

‘Together again!’ rings out, and *‘Salvexodus!’* Close to the stage, just behind the panelists, a powerful voice adds *‘One Fleet, one Exodus!’* as the excitement mounts.

Sentower moves away from his lectern again and proceeds to center stage while waving his arms up and down in the familiar palms-out gesture universally recognized as a request for quiet. Order, however, is not so easily restored. The excited crowd continues its rowdiness until the stage director alertly orders the dousing of the main auditorium lights.

Calmed quickly by the unexpected shift to semi-darkness, their attention is concentrated on the bright ellipses formed by the stage floor and its unusual centerpiece. Sentower takes advantage of the sudden hush to resume his introduction without returning to the podium.

Hoping to hold the attention of the mob by staying in motion, he shuffles around the curious canister in his ‘attractive’ slippers while the stage itself, like an ancient music box, grandly rotates at approximately twenty degrees per minute in the opposite direction.

(SENTOWER, *cont.*):

We fortunate few – we who share these coordinates on this auspicious occasion bid all of our video guests a warm welcome to this wonderful theater, the Socratic Auditorium, on-board the pride of the Mercurian fleet of luxury liners: the awesome Gargantua.

Some scattered clapping ensues but, thankfully, dies quickly as he continues his remarks.

We are docked at Crucifixius, our first port-of-call in the new, portside segment of our Fleet, and we are the first non-military personnel to enter into this political sphere from the Fleet-proper – at least legitimately – for nearly seven-hundred annae: the better part of two isochrons.

More shouting occurs at his emphasis of the separation. The noise threatens to grow again into an uproar; but Sentower, quick to raise his arms for silence, manages to avoid a repeat of the former overwhelming eruption.

I can see you are anxious to get to the main event. Therefore, I will resist this opportunity for self-promotion – ‘basking in the limelight,’ as it were – and

immediately introduce the members of our distinguished panel. We have for you, here, an assembly of experts, all of them among the finest minds in our present world: scholars representing a wide variety of academic pursuits, and holding significantly differing opinions. *(As the crowd quiets, he returns to his lectern.)* Please withhold your applause until the entire panel has been introduced.

- Beginning on my far right – from Sector Fourteen, MERCURY, the mathematical wizard of our time: **Corona**.

As the Mercurian professor steps forward and just to the right of his note-stand, some applause begins; followed by laughter at those who paid no heed to Sentower's request for restraint. Corona bows slightly while holding up one hand for silence as Sentower continues:

- Next to Corona – acclaimed for his valuable work in the preservation and advancement of chemics, the reigning authority on the history of ancient 'classical' physics: **Therbon** [*THER-bahn*] of VULCAN.

Therbon follows Corona's lead, stepping forward to stand next to his stability rod—as will all the panelists as each is introduced.

- Next, we have Professor Emeritus in Formics, a towering figure in the theory and study of dissipative structures – also a teacher of mine, and now my dear friend and near neighbor at JUPITER: **Geos**. [*GEH-os*]
- And here *(gesturing toward the next panelist)*, we have the brilliant and creative cognologist and neurophysiologist: **Schylld** [*shilld*] of VENUS.
- Next to her, the Fleet's foremost psychologist and highly regarded psychonicist: **Rencyque** [*ren-SEEK*] of PROMETHEUS.
- And with her, on my immediate right – her compatriot – Promethean musician, cosmosonic theorist and prolific electronic composer: **Stromm**.
- To my immediate left – another dear friend – known far and wide for his massive intellect, the polestar of bio-organics: **Brahlli** [*BRAW-lee*] of JUNO.
- Along with him – an unexpected delight. Due to the ravages of the latest super-strain of larynx-constricting virus, effectively silencing Professor Brahlli at the most inconvenient moment imaginable – but *(he thrusts his arms upward)* not to worry! No bolting, please! *(scattered laughter ensues)* The tiny critters are – ship's medics assure me – completely wiped out. *(some cheers are heard amidst the clapping)* It's only that there has not been sufficient time for the besieged to recover his voice.

Inconvenience and pain aside, think of the humiliation to the King of Microbiology! *(more nervous laughter)* So, here to assist the professor during our conference, and at his special request, I am more than pleased to present an unscheduled participant in our program.

Please welcome Dr. Brahlli's younger colleague and former student – quite a lot younger, I'm sure you've noticed. – a brilliant geneticist and bio-engineer in her own right, presently working at GenLab Prime in Sector Six, and, just this past cycle, the recipient of the coveted Watson-Crick Memorial Fellowship in Genetic Research at MINERVA, our alternate panelist and angel of mercy:

Helenya.

Some applause breaks out; many members of the audience having forgotten Sentower's instructions to the contrary during his lengthy explanation of Helenya's presence. He quickly and silently reminds the rule-breakers with a 'decrecendo' hand signal, and continues the introductions as the noise subsides.

- To Helenya's left – also from the Minervan sector – acclaimed for his wide-ranging intellect, the celebrated philologist and controversial holistic theoretician – and renowned painter: **Unysseus**. [*oo-NEE-see-us*]
- Next to Unysseus is a major force in the continuing reconstruction of 'big physics' – the famous, or infamous, and outspoken post-neoquantian sub-nuclear theorist, the one-and-only: **Habnor** [*HAHB-nor*] of VULCAN.
- On Habnor's left – his colleague and close friend of many annae, founder and editor-in-chief of the well known periodical, *Popular Astronomy*, and a frequent contributor to that journal – the great astronomist-cosmologist from Sector Fifteen: **Nagask** [*nah-GAHSK*] of PLUTO.
- Finally – but certainly not last in attributes – 'Queen' of Politistics, the revered sociologist: **Illyana** [*il-YAH-nah*] of Sector Twelve, DIANA.
- And, I... (*he holds up his hand to curtail the premature applause*) I am **Sentower**, Doctor of Humanics at JUPITER, Fleet Historian and honorary Keeper of the Log – and I am very pleased to be the moderator.
Wish me luck! Thank you all.

He bows (panelists following suit) to a resounding ovation. The participants step back behind their narrow desks as Sentower speaks again over the noisy crowd:

Thank you... Thank you all very much. (*the audience is calmed at last*) Well... Thank you. This certainly is wonderful and very exciting for all of us, here on the panel. It almost makes one wish he had chosen a life of entertainment instead of academics – or maybe we have!

Now, it seems that every sector of the Free Fleet is represented here – except, of course, BACCHUS.

More cheers erupt, and shouts of **Mythokrates! ... Mythokrates!**

Yes... yes, but please... remember, Citizens, we are at a religious colony, here – in fact, a monastery – not Pete's Planetoid. (*The crowd noise only partially subsides.*) We must try to be more reserved, to appear more dignified. We are broadcasting to the whole Fleet.

Of course we are also aware that the one-time governor of that desolate asteroid, and the instigator and prime developer of BACCHUS, as we now know and love it – or hate it, according to individual moral precepts – and our all-time favorite among the exalted Elders, is our long-awaited guest of honor.

The cheering intensifies in anticipation of this famous visitor from the past. Sentower presses on, and the crowd quickly shushes itself to silence so his remarks concerning Mythokrates can be understood.

Crucifixius would seem an unlikely host for celebrations, other than the Holy Mass – and the Kharmalenes, understandably, in light of their strict vows, do not exactly encourage tourism. But this event is a very special case. For not only do we celebrate the return and the re-opening of the TriAD, we are also here at these remote coordinates for an equally exceptional occasion, one that we share with our silent, meditative kin – those who guard for us a unique and wonderful treasure of our past. For a beloved brother of theirs, and a great ancestor of ours: a legendary figure in our history, has rested here – except for some rare and much too brief waking interludes – for the most of seven centuries; a man to whom the entire Fleet owes a never ending debt of gratitude.

Rejoice, now, fellow travelers in this great and fortunate age. For our dearest super-great-grandparent, so long departed from the world of knowing and feeling and perceiving and partaking, lives again, and walks this very period among us.

Sentower ignores the diffuse clapping and spontaneous cheers, and the noise fades again as he continues. The spectators, sensing the end of his introduction, concentrate on the long anticipated moment of their idol's appearance.

It is with the very greatest imaginable pleasure – and with a hopefully forgivable sense of pride in the most cherished honor ever conferred upon me – that I take this singular and exalted opportunity to re-introduce the world to one of its most amazing natural productions.

I present to you, one and all, the entry of a major hero of the past, calling out the name by which we will always remember him in our hearts: a veritable harmonic structure in which his legendary deeds are encoded; a resonance in which our fears are resolved; a cheerful and familiar melody through which our hopes are ever raised. Fellow wanderers across the infinite void: gaze now, in wonder and respect, awe and admiration, upon the rekindled countenance of our beloved Elder – the magnificent, **Mythokrates**. [*mih-THOK-rah-teez*]

The audience erupts, releasing the tension that has been building since they entered the hall and expressing the love and admiration they have all been taught to feel for a great benefactor, though few have clarity as to the range and real value of his contributions.

His fame, it seems, has far overshadowed his deeds. While there are those who continue to root around in the past for a more realistic evaluation of his actions during his original era, and while they find evidence aplenty there: ammunition for their assaults upon the veracity of his much-inflated reputation, the attacks invariably backfire.

The public, in its need for heroes, has placed Mythokrates in a sacred niche from which no ordinary mortal (armed only with mundane facts, logical arguments, empirical evidence, and mathematical proofs) can dislodge him. His symbolic importance to the Fleet far exceeds all his tangible accomplishments, however wondrous many of them actually were. Most folks are pleased with his larger-than-life image and refuse to relinquish it.

The roar of excitement is subverted by confusion as the audience ascertains that, apparently, the long awaited one has not responded to Sentower's invocation. Heads twist and turn as anxious spectators glance from one entryway to another, but their reanimated ancestor is nowhere to be seen, and the jubilant welcoming ovation fades into discordant mumbling.

The moderator seems unconcerned, offering no indication that anything is wrong.

The stage lights fade and the ensuing darkness recaptures the attention of the befuddled crowd. Apprehensive murmuring gives way to distinct *oobs* and *abbs* from entranced individuals marveling at a softly luminous, seemingly transparent globe, about two-meters in diameter, just emerging from an opening in the drum-like housing at the ‘top’ of the theater.

As it drifts slowly downward, the large, acrylic ball appears to be filling with a silvery-gray mist. The hall grows even darker as the smoke thickens toward near-opacity, dimming the mysterious light emanating from within the capsule.

As quickly as they had developed, the swirling clouds begin to thin again, and a human form mysteriously appears inside the glowing enclosure. The vapors vanish, fully revealing the figure within: a man standing proudly upright beneath a great mane of chestnut hair, thick and full, falling past the shoulders of his gaily striped, full-sleeved robe—the very garment worn by the beloved Elder in his most famous portrait. It was a picture every schoolchild in the Fleet would immediately recognize as Mythokrates.

Stretching forth his arms, as if to embrace all present, he is slowly turned to face every side of the hall. He gazes hypnotically upon the audience while the curious conveyance continues its descent. Nearly halfway down and still turning, he raises his arms higher, as if acknowledging the growing applause.

As the globe comes to rest on its base at center stage, he lowers his arms and bows graciously. Again the thick clouds accumulate, obscuring the image in the bubble, and again they recede—but this time to reveal a wizened monk in plain brown coveralls of coarse-looking cloth and with hair of purest white.

This new human image grips a stabilizer rod, anchored apparently at the base of the silver canister upon which the ball has come to rest. Stage lights brighten, followed by gradual intensifying of the house lights to one-quarter power. The spectators settle themselves while, with a trace of a smile, directly facing Sentower and the panel of modern thinkers, the old man floats practically motionless in his transparent enclosure.

Hesitantly, the audience begins to applaud, a few cheers heralding the ovation. The tumult rises and tears fall freely with the release of overwhelming love and compassion. The actual presence of their honored guest, the sight of his true agedness, strikingly connects the beautiful, but remote myth of timeless imagination with the harsh reality of human frailty. He lives, indeed; he really *is*—yet he is hardly what he was—what he must have been. The outpouring of sympathy is deepened by their personal sense of loss over the obvious decline of that once incredible vitality.

These feelings are not confined in the auditorium. They are transmitted along with the show to invade every home and touch every heart in the Fleet. The confluence of such sudden sadness with the joy of the great occasion draws the tiny wandering worldlets emotionally together, stabilizing their divergent spiritual orbits about this living relic and their Sacred Mission, the Galactic Exodus that he has come to symbolize. The spectators’ reverence has increased, proportionally, as the once invincible giant of their fantasies has been reduced to flesh and blood before their eyes. Their hero has become their fellow, a neighbor, a friend showing them unmitigated respect by having returned from remote halls of glory to dwell among them, a saint allowing familiarity and willingly putting at risk whatever immortality he had attained through the passage of time, a freed philosopher returning to the cave.

After cheering and sobbing through nearly a full minute of thunderous applause, the audience responds to the Elder’s out-facing palms and regains composure.