What is the longest English word? That is a question which has always intrigued people interested in words. For a variety of peculiar reasons, it has, until recently, not been possible to give a simple, clear-cut answer. Should we restrict ourselves to "dictionary" words? If so, which dictionaries should we accept as admissible? Should we accept geographic names? If so, must such names be found in English-speaking countries, or is the entire world fair game? Should we accept biographical names? If so, must we restrict ourselves to names found in "standard" reference works, or are names in telephone directories equally acceptable? Should we accept coined words found in English literature? If so, do we limit ourselves to the classics, or is any published book whatever acceptable?

These and other problems have made it impossible, until the last few years, to give a direct answer to the question about the longest word. Yet, certain words and names have stood out in the minds of word devotees. Often cited, for instance, was the 27-letter HONORIFICABILITUDINITATIBUS, a Shakespearean term best translated into ordinary English as "with honorableness"; the 28-letter ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM (withdrawal of state patronage, support, or exclusive recognition from a church); and the 29-letter FIÖCCINHIHILLI-PILIFICATION (the action or habit of estimating something as worthless).

Somewhat more recently, longer words and names, representing a more sophisticated, second generation of word missiles, made their appearance on the language scene, and we began to hear about the 45-letter PNEUMONULTRAMICROSCOPICISILICOVOLCANOKONIOSIS (a lung disease, occurring especially in miners, caused by inhaling very fine silicate or quartz dust); about the 69-letter LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGERYDWHYNBYLLOGERBWBLYANTYSILLOGOGYCH (a village in the southeastern part of Anglesey Island, in northwestern Wales, on Menai Strait, the name of which means "St. Mary's white hazel pool, near the turning-pool, near the whirlpool, very near the pool by Llankilio, fronting the real rocky islet of Gogo"); and about

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a multitude of 100-letter words in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, words such as the weird-looking *

With the advent of the Space Age, life among the seqquipedalia quickened, and words began growing to utterly fantastic lengths. In a book published in September, 1965,* we were able to report that a gentleman living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania boasted a surname spelled with 666 letters. To make life easier for himself, he generally signed his name as "Hubert B. Wolfe + 666, Sr." At the time, this name far outstripped anything else in the realm of language.

In a subsequent book, published less than two years later—in May, 1967—we had to dismiss the 666-letter name as unworthy of attention and to crown as new champion the technical name for the protein part of the tobacco mosaic virus strain called dahlemense. This name was spelled with 1185 letters, racing into the wild blue yonder.

It is now less than a year later, and "1185" has already been consigned to oblivion. The champion of the moment is a 1913-letter monster, the chemical name for tryptophan synthetase A protein, an enzyme that the common intestinal bacteria *Escherichia coli* uses in synthesizing the amino acid tryptophan. The 267 amino acids in the structure of this enzyme translate into the following 1913-letter word:

METHIONYLGLUTAMINYLARGINYLTYROSYLGLUTANYLSERYLLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLCYSTEINYLGLUTAMYLARGINYLLEUCYLTYROSYLGLUTANYLSERYLLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLCYSTEINYLGLUTAMYLARGINYLLEUCYLTYROSYLGLUTANYLSERYLLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLCYSTEINYLGLUTAMYLARGINYLLEUCYLTYROSYLGLUTANYLSERYLLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLCYSTEINYLGLUTAMYLARGINYLLEUCYLTYROSYLGLUTANYLSERYLLEUCYLPHENYLALANYLVALYLCYSTEINYLGLUTAMYLARGINYLLEUCYL

negans Wake, words such as
Patzkatschhabata
Aiouithapludya-
esquipedalia quickened, and
a book published in Septem-
ber in Philadelphia,
eters. To make life easier for
Tolle + 666, Sr." At the time,
o acid ul'ptophan. The 267
had been consigned to ob-
the common intestinal bac-
to the following 1913-letter
GLUTAMYLSERYL-
LEUCYLLYSYLGLU-
ANYPHENYLALANYL-
LLYCEUCYLGLYC-
YLGLUTAMINYL-
REONYLLEUCYLISO-
PARTYLALANYLLEU-
OLYPHENYLALANYL-
RTYLGLYCLPROLYL-
LNALANYLTHREO-
LANTYLMETHONY-
LGUCLGLUTAMYLPRO-
LYLTHREONYLLEUCY-
LYLGLUTAMINYLALANYL-
LYLGLYCLVALYLLY-
LARGINYLALANYL-
NSERGLYCLTYROSYL-
LIROSYLLEUCYLLY-
LYSERYLTYRROSYL-
LYSERYLLEUCYLGLO-
GLUTAMYLSERYL-
YLSERGLYCLARGINY-
LYLGLYCLTYROSYL-
LIROSYLLEUCYL

The longest word

Ordinary words consist of units called letters—A, B, C, and so forth. The mon-
eter just presented consists of units that are letter groups—ALANYL, ISOLEUCYL, 
PROLYL, THREONYL, and so on.

The end is not in sight. Words are destined to leap ever onward, successively 
passing the 2000-barrier, the 5000-barrier, the 5000-barrier. It is our aim to keep abreast 
of this surge forward, and to report in WORD 
WAYS each advance of the tide. Readers are asked to cooperate in calling our at-
tention to the progressively longer words, as they come into existence, so that we 
may spread the word far and wide. Only a cooperative effort is now sufficient to 
cope with the fast accelerating onward sweep of words. The day of one man keep-
ting tab on the longest word is over, never to return.

The interrelatedness of all things

Zoologists inform us that the black-backed jackal is a common South African 
jackal, CANIS MESOMELAS, with a dark dorsal saddle mark. It is also known as 
the saddle-backed jackal.

Physicists inform us that a lead-lead acid cell is a storage cell in which the posi-
tive plate is lead dioxide, the negative plate is spongy lead, and the electrolyte 
is dilute sulfuric acid.

To the casual observer, there is not even a remote connection between these 
two sets of data. Yet, it is a profound philosophical truth that all things are inti-
mately interrelated, and it has remained for the word expert to discover just what 
that connection is in this particular instance.

Black-backed Jackal and Lead-Lead Acid Cell are the two longest 
terms in the English language spelled entirely with letters drawn from the first half of the alphabet!

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