

MEANINGFUL WORD LADDERS

ANIL

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Word ladders are strings of equal-length words that change one letter at each step. They have featured often in *Word Ways* since the first issue (Borgmann '68-27; Eckler '69-70, Corbin '88-103, Gordon '90-22,154, and especially Gooch '98-89 + '00-209,212,284). These references are the source of many of the word pairs and a few of the strings used here. But while their ladders often connected related words, the connecting words were generally irrelevant to the terminal pair. Here and in three accompanying articles I present cases in which the whole ladder makes some sort of coherent sense, a sentence or most commonly a definition or antonym of the first word. In a similar treatment of vowel movements ('02-53) I called meaningful examples vowel cascades.

This article covers traditional ladders, especially Lewis Carroll-type doublets connecting related word pairs, mainly antonyms. Doublets are denoted by unbold connecting words. Non-doublet ladders are all-bold. I aim for shortest path ladders but don't require it. Among the longest are **Mistress?** and **Sin** at 18 rungs (17 steps) each, but open-enders can run on almost indefinitely, as evidenced by the 127 rungs of **Time**. (It's not 127 different words: repeats are used as needed.) A ladder novel, anyone?

To enlarge the classic concept and enhance the message potential of ladders I include three grades:

1. **high crash** = classic or "perfect", each new letter is in the same position as the letter it replaces. Logologically speaking, each adjacent word pair crashes in all but one position.
2. **high chase** = also perfect or intact in that transposals are not allowed, but the new letter can "chase around the word" and be placed in any position it chooses.
3. **high techs** = 'advanced processing' Trans-substitutions, anagramming after a substitution, and charades, break up of words into phrases, are both allowed.

(Notice anything about these names, #1-3? Right, they themselves form a high-techs ladder.)

Ladders are further divided into four classes relating overall ladder to the first word--(1) definitive (synonym or strong affinity, + other matter occasionally), (2) antonym or complement, (3) "double", and (4) other. Doubles are puns: two readings of one ladder, or two ladders on one pair, are opposites (a+b) or are synonyms for different meanings of the first word (a+a'). Rarely the two terminal words are themselves "double synonyms" with two unrelated pairs of meanings, like the model case **train** = = coach. Antonym-terminal doublets that define the first word create a "resolution of opposites." Readers are urged to explore these forms.

Most words are in Random House Unabridged '66 (RH), most of the rest in Cassell Dictionary of Slang '98 (CDS). Single 'quotes' mark nonces (n/l, not listed in RH or CDS) *or* less common usages. To aid comprehension, verbs are punctuated as sentences, unless they also work as nouns.

1. HIGH CRASH LADDERS

Definitives:

aim aid and **end**

1. **cow** Low, 'mow', moo, poo ('loo'), low, mow, moo, loo, low, mow, moo, loo, **low**...
2. "**beer** peer": pees, pies, **piss**... | two simple life "cycles" / 2. beer mates/drinking buddies in an endless piss-piss (beer, pee) cycle, dotted with an occasional meat pie, traditional pub fare

Fib. Fub (fob); 'fog'; fox.

fright Flight? A light? A fight? | Three classic reactions to fright which help define it: flee, expose it as non-threatening, confront it head on. (charaded ladder)

kin sin 'Sib lib' lit, hit **hot cot.**

Longing. Langing, panging **panting.** | Pang = cram full of (Ulster slang) + 'pangs of desire'

Love. Lave late **hate.**

Peep. Peek, **keek.** | Same roots but interesting bridged-palindromes structure 1221-1223-3223.

Rest. Lest lost 'loft'--soft **sofa.** | 'High' on a comfy seat. (by Lewis Carroll, punctuation added)

slim shim-, shin-**thin**

Smile. Smite spite, spice space, spare (snare) **snarl.**

sports, shorts, shirts, skirts, shirts, shifts | Not synonyms but a rare ladder of six items (two different shirts!) from the same shop, all *c.* unrelated (shirt and skirt are distantly related).

untestable 1. **untastable**, 2. **unwastable** | 1. undetectable, 2. too precious to waste on tests

Antonyms:

black blank, *blanc* | Two opposites, English (+ German for white-bright) and French (white)

creating ...creaking, wreaking **wrecking.**

Heads? 'Heals' heel's Heils, hails **tails.** | This one naively assumes that flipping tails will cure (disprove) the heel-clicking Heiler's belief that Fuehrers (heads) always come out on top.

minor "man" or **major**

rain Fain **fair.**

Doubles

bale 1. ball 2. bail 3. Pail bail (4. pail = **bail**) | Three different synonyms of bale, including the double, bale = = bail. 1. bale = ball = a round thing. (Sounds farfetched, yet a bale [of cotton] has the same etymology as ball.), 2. bale = bail = a hoop, pail handle, roller bar, 3. Bale = Pail bail = to 'bucket' water out of a boat. (4. a bail or bailing bucket seems to have the same etymology as and is synonymous with pail. Hence the following "definition relay ladder" is possible, where each word is synonymous with its neighbour(s) but not with the other words: **ball = bale = bail = pail.** Although this ladder has a 'high chase' step, I find it more interesting than the 'high crash' ladder above. Is it a first, or can you think of other "definition relay ladders"?

Lust lost, lose **love.** | To the young, true, to the old, false. (?)

weal (**Well, 'wall' wale!**) | Triple synonyms, different meanings: (1) For well-being (weal), 'wall out' wales (welts, wheals), (2) Wall *in* wales (weal = wheal, alt. spelling); (3) material well-being as the collection of all one considers 'wale' (choice, best, N.Br.).

Other:

funny bunny bonny boney **bones** | This one makes a great chant. Try it out loud.

house horse **house** horse **house.** . . | "Going from house to house by horse." Pony express?

mistress "Ma stress!" **mattress** | Ma being the Mrs., not the mrs.

"**odd.** . ." (Add ". . .and **end**".) | Should be plural of course (can there be one odd and end?), but the singular has an additional, more ominous if familiar ring, "Do away with the odd!"

Sin **Gin-din den men met, set sex-'Mex' mix, 'mid mad sad sap saw law lay lax.** | Gin-din den = a rowdy club / Mex = Mexican drugs (CDS) / sap = dissipation

sober (Sorer?) "Surer, **purier!**"

Word-ward war's Ways | 'Warring' with words. A less violent but high chase alternative:

Wordward-wary Ways

Yet yen yon Yin jin-kin ken, key fey fly. | Still longing to know that old black magic.

"From Time to Time"

An Erratic Rime

TIME, tide bide,
 bade: "Wade wide,
 wife wide-side,
 ride nide-wide.
 Wine, cine, dine
 fine kine line,
 "live" dive, dice,
 nice vice vibe--
 "Vive!" Give hive
 hide, hike, bike
 tike-like, lime.
 Lame fame game
 gave wave. Rave!
 Rage-race face,
 fade. Fate-hate
 bate. Mate. Maze
 haze daze doze
 done, lone lope,
 lose nose-pose
 'Pope', pipe--ripe
 'rope dope'--cope,
 coke, toke, joke,
 poke. Yoke-yore-
 bore bare, dare
 rare fare. 'Fire'
 mire, more mope
 "nope", hope rope!
 Rove, move, love,
 live, jive. Rive
 ripe hipe, wipe
 "wise" rise, rase,
 rave, wave-wane
 "sane" lane bane--
 base case! Cage
 "sage, safe". Sane?
 Sate pate, mate!
 Male tale tame?
 Time-tide ride!
 Rife life live!"

(. . . Dive, hive-hide
 bide bode code:

"Come home to me" **TIME**.)

(This sometimes obscure piece was whipped up rather quickly and deserved a mellowing period. But for now it's a teaser hoping to entice others to explore meaningful long ladders. An aside: this might also set a record as the longest run of 4-letter words without a single dirty word. (Not counting implieds.) Decency lucked out for a change as these are all two-vowel CVCe pattern words while almost all English "4-letter words" are single vowel CVCC pattern, j'ever notice?)

help! (for emergency use only)

Erratic rime rhymes from time to time.

"While time remains,
 wander about,
 side-step wife,
 escape from the nest from time to time,
 divert and indulge yourself with moral
 or
 immoral
 activities.
 Put home and buzzing society out of sight,
 if just to get away from it all and be alone from time to time,
 or to relax quietly with friends [lime, West Indies slang].

(Let) fame and ego struggles abandon you.

Fade away from the raging race and the racing rage.

Quit bemoaning your lot.

Fornicate or make new friends.

After lazily 'sleeping off' the confusions and stuns of the time,
 trot off alone,

"lose" the blue nose (society, or wife, or self!),

with a pipe

of hemp mellow out,

party,

fornicate [again??]. Your old yoke

shed, explore

exciting things.

Dismiss the mire from you mind,

"Just say No" to quiet desperation, re-lasso hope.

Split, share yourself,

live it up.

Split from your "rotten hyped up programming" as well,

throw caution to the wind, raze it,

withdraw from

the curse of "sanity".

Eschew

social-ego safety.

"Head-on-ism" is the only sanity, pal.

Is your story dull?

Ride the crest!

Live a full life!"

(In heeding the above entreaty from Time from time to time, his
 excursions always presage an act of conscience
 drawing him back home afterwards.)

2. HIGH CHASE LADDERS

Definitives:

awe Owe "Wow!"

copters coppers' hoppers, "**chopper**"

IOU You, yon yen, ken key: "**Eye ewe owe.**" | Regarding that yen (¥, or yenned repayment),

land sand sans seas | know this: "IUO" [high crash except key-eye]

Antonyms:

East West

live 'Dive,' died **dead**.

New now. Nod... **old!** | Rip van Winkle syndrome, things changing "overnight".

Doubles:

lost Post past **path.** | synonym (past = beyond) v. antonym (past = previous, ie, familiar)

Other:

Birth. Berth. Earth (**death**). | a short "Life" / berth = station.

3. HIGH TECHS LADDERS

Definitives:

algae "Glean glare ray, Ge!" (Anger green-reign-ruing **fungi**?) | Ge = Earth, Gaia

blow "Low", I, wild **wind.** / **still** I lost stir o' **storm.** | atmospheric low, a cyclone

decease I ceased (**disease**).

feral Fled a meld, 'a-tamed'. | 'a-tamed' (n/l) = un- or de-tamed

give Gave gate: "**Take.**" / **loss** Logs long nil 'G' **gain.** \ Inflation makes a prolonged "no gain"

halt Hale? **lame** \ = a loss. / G = \$k

'**heavy**' heady (Ready-read / adore, tread later the la-la hit, **light**.)

native 'innate nation' notion (Tie "non" on, cite "Exit!" on **exotic:** "**Exotic**, I exact (evict) a **native.**") | native fauna and flora--which Oz is losing rapidly due to exotics, feral or cropped

slaves Vassal slave's values? Valet's Vaster **Master.**

town into tiny **city**

verge Merge-edger, 'edges ledge bleed-**blend.** \ A border or verge (h)edges against a bleed into

'**wild**' Lewd led, a 'lame **tame**'. \ or from an adjoining area. 'Ledge' = edge.

Antonyms:

Abide. a hied "**Adieu!**"

"**angel**" "Gland in lad! Deil, a **devil!**"

clean Uncle clued lucid "Lurid turd, I, **dirty.**"

fast Last, lost, **slow.**

Gold lode? **Lead!** | reverse alchemy (It's easy--I do it often in the stock market.)

Mistress? "**Stress my mystery's stymiers, 'Is mister!**" (Times, Sir.) **Misti**est, **musti**est, **muski**est, **huski**est, **hunki**est, **funki**est, **fucki**est **fun stick!**" "**Fucki**est? **Yucki**est!! **Mucki**est! **Murki**est!" | This antonym story owes most of its fun"-iest" words to Rex Gooch '00-286, but not the nonce "fuckiest". / Stress my mystery's stymiers. = My foes emphasise my 'closet' secret. ('stymiers', n/l, implied = blockers, persecutors)

molehill Hill dome model, a hi mode lain in/on, made in mound a **mountain!**

Notice. I get? No, **ignore.**

"**penis envy**" (Spite envy? Set-up envy! **Fetus envy!**) | men's envy of child-bearing

SERBS: "**Bless Serbs!**" "Ruses! **Curse!** Cause? Race's trace!"--CROAT. / Bless-curse = shortest

sober Bored, on red, 'under', **drunk.**

\ route, but a curse separates Serbs and Croat.

whole lower ower's wares--spare **parts** | lower ower = cheaper

Doubles:

as above So be a la (**as**) **below** | antonym, but in mystical parlance a synonym

1. '**Hide.**' Hies hits, ties best belt-**pelt.** | 1. (vb, syn.) Pelt, beat on, give a hiding to.

2. **hide** ("held" help) = 'peel' = **pelt** | 2. (n., syn.) skin--helps hold one together

3. **Hide** 'tied hide'? Heed heel, "**Peel!**" | 3. (vb, ant.) Hide one's hide v. heed the heel and "Take it off!" / 'tied' hide = clothed. / 2-3 exploit the synonym-cum-antonym pair hide-peel.

1. **knock** a conk on, '**cap**', tap on; **to rap** | Double definitives: (1, n.) a sharp tap or conk,

2. **Knock.** Con ka, '**cap**' on, tap "no"; **to rap.** | (2, vb) belittle a soul (ka), 'negate' / 'Cap' itself is doubly synonymous with knock/rap (1 punch, 2 disparage--CDS), making a triple double.

more > some > lose > **less** (Lose some **more.**) \ > = greater than (No pun, just a synonym posing

1. **train** I cart, chair, a chic **coach.** \ as an antonym, with a nice word reversal.)

2. **Train.** On art, a rote core, a reach-teach-chart-chat... (O, **coach!**)

works Words--'wad' or award drama--made a dream dame's deals/pleas **plays.**

Other:

book Boon (boor bore) 'bred' herd, hard draw drew word **worm.** | bred = 'cultivated'

Chaos (Chose chore, decor, **order?**) **Order?** Decor?? Chore!! Chose **chaos!** | True confession!

Chaos's ache so chases each. Is ache in niches, ache in inches, ache in chains. In each, chance change--a niche change--c. hangs, **chains.** | evolution through "chains" of chance changes

Folk, fork, **rock.** | How Bob Dylan 'betrayed' his folk.

Mother "At Home", heat me, fate me, fete me, feed me, fend me, me fond fine doer, fond

Friend. (In fare no fear, for tea = **Father.**) | fare, tea = "the bacon" / do|er = 2 rungs zipped

timid Rid it, rited bride, a red. I *bred* a **brave!** | rited = wed / red = Amerindian