



# In the Land of Invented Languages: Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to Build A Perfect Language

By Arika Okrent

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Here is the captivating story of humankind's enduring quest to build a better language—and overcome the curse of Babel. Just about everyone has heard of Esperanto, which was nothing less than one man's attempt to bring about world peace by means of linguistic solidarity. And every Star Trek fan knows about Klingon. But few people have heard of Babm, Blissymbolics, Loglan (not to be confused with Lojban), and the nearly nine hundred other invented languages that represent the hard work, high hopes, and full-blown delusions of so many misguided souls over the centuries. With intelligence and humor, Arika Okrent has written a truly original and enlightening book for all word freaks, grammar geeks, and plain old language lovers.

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Efforts to make language simpler, clearer, less divisive and more truthful have backfired spectacularly, to judge by this delightful tour of linguistic hubris. Linguist Okrent explores some of the themes and shortcomings of 900 years worth of artificial languages. She surveys philosophical languages that order all knowledge into self-evident systems that turn out to be bizarrely idiosyncratic; symbol languages of supposedly crystalline pictographs that are actually bafflingly opaque; basic languages that throw out all the fancy words and complicated idioms; rigorously logical languages so rule-bound that it's impossible to utter a correct sentence; international languages, like Esperanto, that unite different cultures into a single idealistic counterculture; and whimsical constructed languages that assert the unique culture and worldview of women, Klingons or chipmunks. Okrent gamely translates to and from these languages, with unspeakably hilarious results, and riffs on the colorful eccentricities of their megalomaniacal creators. Fortunately, her own prose is a model of clarity and grace; through it, she conveys fascinating insights into why natural language, with its corruptions, ambiguities and arbitrary conventions, trips so fluently off our tongues. (May 19)

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### Review

“Hats off to Okrent, who expertly exposes the history, culture, and preoccupations of this insular tribe who live among us. She rescues language inventors, or conlangers, from the oddball bin—utopianists all, they’re the first biotechnologists, trying to leapfrog evolution and improve human life. They’ll thank her but everyone else will, too, for finally making sense of the conlangers’ discontents.” —Michael Erard, author of *Um...: Slips, Stumbles, and Verbal Blunders, and What They Mean*

“A lively, informative, insightful examination of artificial languages—who invents them, why, and why most of them fail. I loved this book.”—Will Shortz, Crossword Editor, *New York Times*

“Linguist Okrent explores some of the themes and shortcomings of 900 years worth of artificial languages. ... Okrent gamely translates these languages with unspeakably hilarious results, and riffs on the colorful eccentricities of their megalomaniacal creators. Fortunately, her own prose is a model of clarity and grace; through it, she conveys fascinating insights into why natural language, with its corruptions, ambiguities and arbitrary conventions, trips so fluently off our tongues.” — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Arika Okrent is a linguist whose fascination with the “faded plastic flowers” in the “lush orchid garden of languages” is recounted to delightful, often comic effect in “In the Land of Invented Languages.” ... Okrent’s style is eminently suited to her approach, which is at once serious and playful, exemplified by her marvelous, snappy opening sentence: “Klingon speakers ... inhabit the lowest possible rung on the geek ladder.” — *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“The author...examines a variety of would-be languages and related philosophical tenets (there are no pure ideas, all signs depend on conventions) in ...

### About the Author

Arika Okrent received a joint Ph.D. in the Department of Linguistics and the Department of Psychology’s

Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience Program at the University of Chicago. She has also earned her first-level certification in Klingon. She lives in Philadelphia.

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