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SETI II - Interdisciplinary Aspects (2.)

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## A STUDY ON INTERSTELLAR STORYTELLING

### Abstract

A principal development criterion for the content of messages designed to respond to a signal from an extraterrestrial intelligence is that it encompass the human condition, providing: a kaleidoscopic view of intelligence, creativity, wit, custom, history, altruism, biology, technology, environment and a host of other traits, qualities and factors. We have long woven perceptions of our humanity into stories mediated by narrative, poetry, song, drama and dance, cave paintings, steles, print, tapestries and video as each new medium emerges. This study is based on mediation by cinematic, image-only, cartoon narratives with frame-by-frame progression.

The highest hurdle in formulating a strategy of interstellar cinematic storytelling is to define Rosetta elements estimated to enable extraterrestrials to render human stories intelligible. Message text includes a rich mix of representations of possibly-shared key signs, including: 1) physical observables such as terrain features, weather, shadows, state changes, fluid flow, buoyancy and wave motion; 2) simple machines and tools such as levers, wheels, pulleys, screws, hammers and saws; 3) physical activities such as walking, running, lifting, climbing, throwing, playing, eating and sleeping; 4) domestic pursuits such as erecting shelters, collecting, preparing and ingesting food and water, agriculture, animal husbandry and transporting by wheelbarrow, quadruped-drawn cart and boat.

Imagery, created frame by frame, is rendered with artistic economy. Initial sequences feature terrain and weather effects. Sunlit terrain with a mountainous background is supplanted stepwise by gathering clouds, lightning strokes, falling rain, splashing drops and liquid flowing into a depression. Human representations, called phoids, then appear and become involved in such activities as collecting and drinking liquid, wading into liquid and launching and rowing a boat. Such activities are enriched by associated physical phenomena: feet occulted and wakes emanating from legs while wading, air displacement from dipped containers filling with liquid, and fluid whorls about moving oars and boat.

Stories of human activities are initially illustrated by a band of phoids camped around a lake who then travel into desert terrain: building and striking encampments, loading carts, discovering and succoring a differently clad phoid found on a desert track and other tasks. The story of the phoid band is enriched by encounters with other phoid bands, physical challenges such as surmounting mountainous terrain and such complex activities as rescuing a phoid who has fallen off of a trail. Through these sequences, the story presents examples of both rudimentary human activities and such complex human qualities as species altruism.

Human storytelling allows unlimited flexibility in portraying in space, time and action a fully kaleidoscopic view of the human condition. Key icons present broad opportunities for target extraterrestrials to match their practices to those of phoids in settings with great

heuristic value. Story imagery is highly redundant in the interest of facilitating frame-to-frame progress. While the particular modality presented here is one of many that may be launched across the void, it is one with which human beings are quite comfortable. We suggest that extraterrestrials might not only be acquainted with storytelling, but also responsive to it.

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