

Alien Stones, base 12

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 Jun 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2702>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 28 Jun 2001, 16:14

Rostrum wrote:

Sorry I wasn't clear. I mentioned that more as the exception that proves your rule. It's a nifty engineer's spin on "solved by technological means" that I wouldn't have thought to describe that way if you hadn't used that phrase.

And, of course, the story's about more than a problem to be solved by technological means.

I didn't get the ending (particularly the bit about one's marital status in the resurrection) until I reread it after the whole Clinton/Lewinsky affair, which made me laugh when the aliens said "It depends on how you define 'is'" -- which made me pay more attention to the comment and realize what they were talking about.

Well hey, don't stop there--keep going!

And didja ever figure out the base 12 numbering system? We are given a few (3 numbers and the decimal point; there are 7 undefined), and told the system reads from right to left.

0 = ?
1 = "-"
2 = "S"
3 = ("S-barred," my guess)
4 = ?
5 = ?
6 = ?
7 = "="
8 = ?
9 = ?
A = ?
B = ?

decimal point = "|"

My guess at "3 = S-barred" is based on minus plus symbol equals number plus one. The symbols all seem to be in pairs of (symbol) and (symbol-barred), suggesting a progression of one. Graphically going from simple to complex? Or are they all historically based (text suggests that the 2s are similar, just mirror image).

Yet there's that odd symbol at place 7 (then again, we aren't given all symbols: make 6 one of the two we have no symbol for, and zero the other one--then they all march along).

If we reverse for our left to right reading, the sequences are:

2xx.xxx3
2xx1.xx7x

|
1728 column
|
144 column
|
12 column
|
1 column

so the first sequence begins with 2 times 144, and the second sequence begins with 2 times 1728

What does it all mean--I don't know! But Wolfe took the time to make the symbols, and discuss it in the text up to a point, and then leave off . . . at the very least it is a puzzle.

And their semi-Rosetta Stone (oo, another Stone) is a starmap, right? Including Sol on it. Hmm, a light year is specific to an Earth year, so distances wouldn't be "universal" (the aliens would need to have an Earth year to have a light year as a unit) . . . but then again, if the Earthers are analysing by ratios among known stars? No, that doesn't seem to fit what they did.

And Helen's note about stones, calculus, hmmm. Points to the importance of the numbering system, in a way.

=mantis=

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