

50th IAA SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) –
The Next Steps (A4)
SETI 2: SETI and Society (2)

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“THE READINESS IS ALL” - UNDERSTANDING POST-DETECTION DYNAMICS THROUGH LIVE
ACTION ROLE PLAY

Abstract

Confirmed detection of extraterrestrial life has the potential to generate considerable societal upheaval, and planning for post-detection scenarios should involve stakeholders from across human society, not just scientists and politicians.

We present transdisciplinary research that connects creative practice with the scientific search for extraterrestrial life, through designing post-detection participatory scenarios informed by current and emerging post-detection protocols. The co-authors collaborate to develop and prototype an online Live Action Role Play (LARP) across video conferencing platforms that simulates a contact scenario for diverse groups of people. The participatory LARP scenario is unique in creating novel insights into potential societal impacts of a confirmed detection. Using structured improvisation the game-play specifically explores how the communication about a discovery could be organised in today’s new media landscape.

Interactive story-telling techniques draw from a diverse range of sources on extraterrestrial signal detection, from contemporary research to imagined narratives in science fiction. The game design mobilises key work around xenolinguistics and zoology towards imagining communication with ET using specific scenario frameworks of digital LARP as a research tool innovated with Furtherfield Gallery UK.

The online game format brings SETI researchers together with a range of worlds of experience: cultural practitioners, journalists and politicians, humanities researchers and artists, policy specialists, and experts on risk management, law and technology, students and other interested parties. Through experiential and hybrid research techniques and the opportunity to play and re-play the LARP, it is possible to create unusual and meaningful data for further analysis by post-detection researchers. Creating fresh insights around how both the interdisciplinary boundaries of scientific endeavour interplay and the societal impact dynamics unfold, can significantly enhance our planning and understanding for such an event.

Our presentation will showcase the post-detection LARP itself, as well as techniques devised to share learning found through game-play towards creating an open source SETI experiment that can be staged and performed with multiple groups of people. We will also consider the issues of maintenance and the need to continually develop creative capacities for imagining post-detection in a manner that keeps pace with societal development over time.

Our final discussion will look at participatory experiments in the UKSRN’s Post-Detection group across recent years and other innovative examples in the field. We look to inspire and instigate fresh approaches and creative possibilities for this vital stream of SETI research.