

The Weekly WoKer

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1 Welcome to the Weekly WoKer

Welcome to Volume 3 of the weekly WoKer, the first weekly newspaper for WoK Forums. Inside this special holiday supplement you will find:

- A brief editorial piece offering my view of what has happened over the course of the break
- The first ‘Piet’s Page,’ a weekly column by forums mayor Piet Hut
- A summary and discussion of our activities over the break, including our continuing exploration of Second Life
- The announcement of our schedule for the new year

2 Letter from the Editor

While we were formally on break until today, activity continued and led to the development of strong programs to begin 2008. Of particular interest in this issue, then, are the announcement and explanation of our calendar for the upcoming months. The news stories serve primarily to explain the genesis of this program.

I would also call the reader’s attention to our new weekly column, Piet’s Page, which forums mayor Piet Hut will be penning each week. The WoKer is excited about this column, and the editor would also like to acknowledge Hut for this thorough reporting on WoK activity in Second Life over the break.

3 WoKers Continue Exploration of Second Life

A team of WoKers led by Second Life citizen Pema Pera (forums mayor Piet Hut) continued exploration of the virtual world Second Life while the forums were formally on break.

In addition to the meeting of Thursday, December 20 (covered in the previous edition of the WoKer), Pera, working with Second Life local Kat Lemieux (Katherine Prawl) held a series of meetings culminating in a tour of the International Spaceflight museum. Most of the regular meetings took place in Lemieux's underground living room.

On Friday, December 21, Pera and Lemieux were present. At the meeting Lemieux explained how to build a good profile, and showed various other tricks to becoming fluent in SL ways of living and interacting.

On Saturday, December 22 Lemieux, Edo Tigerpaw (Ed Turner), Doug Sosa (Doug Carmichael) and Pera were present. The meeting began in Lemieux's living room, but then but then moved to her more newly built 'sky box,' a roomy place high up in the sky, from which the participants could see the moon set and the sun come up . As in the previous meeting, Lemieux offered instruction in Second Life skills, in addition to sharing some useful tools and offering suggestions of interesting places to visit in Second Life.

Meetings continued in similar fashion, with varied participation, until Thursday, December 28th, when Lemieux gave a tour of the International Spaceflight Museum. Participants even made a trip to the surface of Mars (a voyage presently virtually impossible in the real world), where they looked at some of the landers there. Joining Lemieux were Pera, Sosa, Zenon Sideways (Zenon Pylyshyn), and several members of Hut's astronomy forums, as well as a previously unaffiliated pathologist who joined the group as a result of pleasant happenstance.

4 Qwaq-SL Liaison Established

In the aftermath of the meetings previously reported, Second Life citizen Pema Pera (forums mayor Piet Hut) decided to begin holding regular meetings in Second Life. In order to facilitate this purpose, Second Life's Kat Lemieux (Kathering Prawl) created a new group in Second Life called the 'Qwaq-SL Liaison.'

In order to better understand the situation the WoKer put together a special team of political analysts to discuss the establishment of the liaison. Their commentary was mixed. One analyst was concerned about possible imperialist motivation, 'every time in history, when we see these kinds of liaison's established, it usually

means that the establishing party has some kind of imperialistic, expansionistic motive. Second Life citizens should be profoundly suspicious of these WoKer's motives.' Another analyst agreed that the motive was expansionistic, but denied the charge of imperialism given the nature of virtual worlds, 'it's no doubt that the move is expansionistic. Hut clearly wants to move into new territory. But virtual worlds aren't like real worlds. It isn't like the influx of WoKers can hurt the existing citizens of Second Life. In fact, if anything, the liaison (and resulting WoK expansion) should do nothing but help both the existing WoK community and the existing Second Life community. This is a winning situation for everyone.' While the WoKer is not prescient, we are inclined to agree with the second analyst, though we are well aware that our current presentation of the two analysts is strongly reminiscent of the classic straw-man fallacy.

To join the liaison, please send an e-mail to Piet Hut at piet@ias.edu. You must first have a Second Life account, which you can obtain, along with the requisite software, at www.secondlife.com

5 Liaison Meetings Big Success

Qwaq-SL Liaison meetings began with the new year on Tuesday, January 1, sources say. The first meeting had four participants, and focused primarily on a discussion of the possibility of using Second Life as an education tool, in particular as a way of demonstrating the effects of various diseases using avatars. The second meeting, on Wednesday January 2, saw a visit to a model of the Lunar Lander on the moon, complete with a lunar landscape. Initially there were five participants, but some participants later left to see another group where someone had built a simulated asteroid impact on Mars.

6 German Language Meetings Continue

On Thursday, January 3 Piet Hut, Leonore Wigger, and Jan Schwindt gathered for a German language meeting in the garden.

At the meeting Hut first described his experiences in Second Life to Wigger and Schwindt. The three participants then went on to discuss the 'Arbeitshypothese' (Working Hypothesis). The discussion began with an analysis of the word 'Gegenwart' (presence, present (time)), which contains 'gegen' (contrary, against). After playful speculation about possible connections between 'gegen' and 'Gegenwart,' Hut talked about the idea of a 'fourth time.' The discussion then continued to inquire how

one might begin investigating these possibilities, and to whether such investigations are a ‘project.’

The WoKer would like to acknowledge Jan Schwindt for reporting on this event.

7 Announcement of the Calendar for the New Year

Now that WoK Forums has expanded to Second Life via the Qwaq-SL Liaison we will be having regular meetings in both virtual worlds. I have listed the schedules here separately for the sake of clarity:

7.1 Qwaq Meetings

- Steven Tainer’s Weekly Presentations on the Contemplative Background of the Working Hypothesis: Saturdays at 5PM EST in the Colloquium Room (topic for this week: ‘Challenges to Understanding the Attainment of Nirvana’)
- Sunday Guest Lectures: Sundays at 5PM EST in the Colloquium Room (topic for this week: WoK New Years Party. This will be an opportunity to get together again after our winter holiday break, and to exchange ideas on where to go next in our forum discussions and programs.)
- Reading Group: Mondays at 10PM EST in the Colloquium Room (this week Doug Carmichael and Steven Tainer will be leading a discussion of a few main points from *The Wisdom of the World*, by Remi Brague. This discussion will continue for several more weeks, then move on to another relevant book.
- Working Hypothesis Discussion: Tuesdays at 10 PM EST and Wednesdays at 5 PM EST

7.2 Second Life Meetings

- Monday 10am EST
- Tuesday 5pm EST
- Wednesday 10pm EST

Each of these meetings will convene at the following location:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20Bravo/163/187/59>

8 Piet's Page

Editor's Note: While 'Piet's Page' appears in the Weekly WoKer, the editor would like to emphasize that the views and opinions in this column are entirely those of its author, and in no way necessarily represent the views of our staff, subsidiaries, parent company, subcontractors, pets, relatives, former partners, or lobbyists at any point in the past, present, future, 'fourth-time' or any as yet unspecified temporal structure.

While wishing everyone a Happy New Year, it may be appropriate to look at how our life in Qwaq may be affected in the 'Year of the Mouse,' even though I prefer to move around by keyboard rather than mouse. Over the holidays, I had some nice chats with Greg Nuyens, CEO of Qwaq, and during one gettogether he showed me a test version of their use of streaming video. Instead of watching each other's still photographs, as we have been accustomed to doing, the test showed a couple avatars that showed live video pictures instead.

Watching this for a while, I had mixed reactions. On the one hand, this Skype-type way of showing more emotions definitely gave more of a sense of direct communication. On the other hand, and for me quite unexpectedly, it in some way diminished the sense of embodied presence, which is the core of what makes virtual meeting places so attractive. Right now, I have no idea whether to recommend in favor or against its use, which is a surprise: until I saw the demo I was convinced that it would be a great improvement. Perhaps it will be so, and we'll get used to it, since the advantages of streaming video are so obvious.

Among the not-at-all obvious disadvantages, two things stood out for me. One is that when an avatar walked across the room, the face kept moving and talking in what was clearly a rest position: there was a mismatch between the dynamics of walking and talking. Another was that the face on the avatar had head phones, as if the person you met were talking on the phone to someone else, outside the room! The one lesson to learn, over and over again in virtual spaces: until you try something new, you have no idea how it will actually work out.

9 Special Announcement

On Monday, January 7th at 10 AM EST Second Life's Emileigh Starbrook will give a demonstration of an asteroid impact on Mars—an event that may actually occur on January 30 (see <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/news.cfm?release=2007-152>).

10 Quote of the Week

There are two mistakes one can make along the road to truth...not going all the way, and not starting.

– Buddha