Lovely MIT
By the Sea

By Simcha Helendale, Virtual Correspondent

Some people in Cambridge spent January listening to jazz, belly dancing or learning how to operate a 767 cockpit simulator. I wanted something a little different.

One afternoon during IAP I hovered over the green lawns of MIT, surrounded by aqua oceans, and wide open spaces, peaceful except for a few strange characters wandering past, who suddenly launched off into space. I was visiting MIT’s virtual campus in the virtual world called Second Life—a free online environment created by San Francisco-based Linden Labs—where you can become an avatar and explore a simulated space by walking, jumping or flying around.

I went in search of a class. Evan Leek, a former animator and virtual designer who works with MIT’s Office of Educational Innovation and Technology (OEIT), had organized a three-session IAP course on virtual worlds. In the sessions, various (real world) speakers presented initiatives under way at

Virtual MIT has a lovely, green island campus, complete with a dome.

Advice for the Unpublished

By Rosalind Reid

It can happen to anyone. You wake up in a panic: How am I going to get funded? How am I going to get published? How am I going to get started on my career in science?

Yes, it’s time to schedule a good long talk with your mentor. But there are also baby steps you can take on your own. One organization interested in your plight is Sigma Xi, the venerable interdisciplinary honor society of science and engineering.

American Scientist has been published since 1913 by Sigma Xi.

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Trying to shake the winter blues? MIT’s Graduate Student Council is co-sponsoring the first-ever, official, joint MIT/BU party! See the date, time and location on page 4.
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MIT, by the Sea, cont.

MIT, Linden Labs and Sun Microsystems. I attended the third session, where Sun representatives presented their open source world called Wonderland. The presenters demonstrated how avatars can collaborate by moving around, changing their point of view and together examining an information visualization model, rendered in 3d, from all angles within a virtual meeting space.

Other initiatives are under way at MIT. The Media Lab’s Joe Paradiso is developing a cross-reality or X-Reality environment that imports real world data into Second Life, and connects events, media and people in the real and virtual worlds, using what he calls “Ubiquitous Sensor Portals.” The Media Lab’s site has an explanation of the project: http://www.media.mit.edu/resenv/portals/

MIT’s presence in Second Life is small and perhaps still evolving. Evan is working on organizing a group at MIT who are interested in hanging out in virtual worlds. So far, MIT’s virtual campus has a replica of buildings 1, 2, 3, 4 and 10. Nearly 300 other universities, including Harvard and Duke use Second Life to hold occasional classes or experimentation with educational events. Other companies such as Bank of America and Reuters news service have experimented with creating a virtual version of their businesses—though most have found it tough to prosper. The blog gawker.com, has written the world off entirely, saying a move to educational partnerships signals the death of Second Life.

Still, Evan has carefully crafted a virtual conference room with all the amenities on stilts behind the MIT campus. Once you have downloaded free SL software and created an avatar, you can fly over and check out content from his IAP courses. Kick back on a virtual Aeron chair and check out the videos that play on a virtual screen at the front of the room (after clicking on the screen to start the video). To take a look on the web, go to http://web.mit.edu/oeeit-projects/IAP-VW/index.html. Or visit http://secondlife.com to experiment with a virtual you.

Simcha Helendale, a SidPac and Second Life resident for about 2 years.
Behind the Scenes at the Officers’ Retreat

SidPac officers (and Joshua) worked hard over Super Bowl weekend, brainstorming ideas to improve life for residents. Their strategy sessions (which curiously, involved sticky marshmallows and geodesic structures) were captured on film.
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