Conference Entry Form

Name *
Jean-Paul DuQuette

Job Title *
Senior instructor

Company or Organization's Name and country *
University of Macau, Macau SAR (China)

Short bio
I received my B.A. in English from the University of California at Irvine, an M.A. in ESL from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and I am currently finishing my dissertation for my Ed.D from Temple University (Japan/Philadelphia). Since 2008, my research agenda has been focused on educational groups within Linden Labs' online virtual world, Second Life.

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Proposal Title *
The Companion's Guild: Role-play, education and spirituality in a Second Life community

Abstract (500 words). Abstracts will be published on the webpage before the conference. *
Linden Lab's online virtual world Second Life (SL) is well-known for its role-playing (RP) communities centered on science fiction and fantasy fandom. In this presentation, I use a primarily ethnographic methodology to examine The Companion’s Guild, a group loosely based on characters from Josh Whedon's 2002 television series, Firefly. Rather than take a strict "by the book" approach, the leaders of the group have customized their appeal for SL users and branched out, positing their existence as a nexus between different sci-fi role-play communities within SL. Additionally, the Guild sponsors a variety of events and provides classes open to all in many subjects unrelated to role-play, including scripting, philosophy, neo-paganism and Asian studies. Through participant observation and interviews with key members, the author hopes to explore the lasting appeal of the The Companion's Guild and break down preconceived notions about the limitations of RP groups within SL.

One specific focus will be the false dichotomy between immersionist and augmentationist paradigms within virtual worlds. Immersionists are seen as role-players first and foremost. They supposedly take on a persona (or multiple personae) entirely independent of their offline identity. They prefer interactions in text rather than in voice to maintain this anonymity. Augmentationists on the other hand are not known for being role-players. Their attitude towards the platform is primarily utilitarian; they play games, take classes and socialize with little reluctance about revealing facts about their offline identity. The Companion's Guild blurs the distinction, with formal guild events and rituals performed entirely in text (and in character), some seminars and speeches performed "out of character" (OOC) and informal activities like chatting or in-world gaming done in Voice chat. Rather than breaking the immersion of role-play, these different levels of interaction build group cohesion by providing educational content (and even spiritual guidance) enriching both members’ on and offline personae.

Session type
- Presentation

Short panel description

Additional Information
This Powerpoint presentation will utilize Wenger, White & Smith's (2009) concept of "digital habitats", and Celia Pearce's (2009) "communities of play" as perceptual frameworks.