

SAVE THE BEACONS



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Alternate Reality Game

Creating a fun and exciting alternate reality game for the students of MIT during the Independent Activities Period of January 2009.

Save the Beacons

ALTERNATE REALITY GAME

STORY

Following the release of his 2007 book *THE WOW CLIMAX: TRACING THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF POPULAR CULTURE*, Henry Jenkins has decided to begin work on a sequel, tentatively titled *THE WOAHH CLIMAX*, focusing on media's emotional impact on student culture. In order to gather the data necessary for the book, a joint venture between MIT's Comparative Media Studies, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, and Biology Departments has been launched. The resulting Bio-Sensor Group, or BS Group, will be utilizing MIT's privately developed emotion-vector bio-sensor, or BS chip, to better understand the roll of media and its influence on students.

The BS Group's work centers on implanting the BS chips into the brains of MIT student volunteers. Every two weeks the volunteers are recalled to the lab using the bio-sensor's built in homing device. In order to activate these devices the BS Group must simply place certain homing beacons in the location they wish the volunteers to go to and remotely trigger the homing beacons. Once all the students have checked in, the data is off-loaded from their bio-sensors onto a central storage device where it is then run through a large variety of programs to analyze its relevance. Finally, Henry Jenkins, in concert with various important BS Group members, reviews the results and uses them to draw conclusions for his forthcoming book.

In late 2008 Henry Jenkins uncovers a terrible secret: the BS Group has decided that using just volunteers is "not enough" and has begun taking more forceful measures to conscript MIT students into taking part in the bio-sensor survey. During the most recent recall of students, they installed an update to the bio-sensor in each student to make it so that they are, for all intents and purposes, being controlled by the BS Group with little to no free will of their own. The BS Group is now making plans involving the use of the controlled students to capture new "volunteers" for their program.

When Henry Jenkins discovers this development he is outraged. However, his confrontation of the leaders of the BS Group lead to him being chased into hiding by flocks of the bio-sensor controlled students. Out of fear for his life Henry Jenkins has remained in hiding and taken the name Jenry Henkins in the hopes that he may somehow warn the MIT student body of their peril. In the light of such overwhelming odds, Henry Jenkins holds the key to the defeat of the bio-sensors. During their development a small safe-guard was placed in the chip that, if activated, makes the bio-sensor shut down if the host student goes under direct sunlight. This safeguard is activated via a small handheld device that Henry Jenkins happened to be the in possession of at the time of his flight. As a result, as soon as he went into hiding he activated the safeguard - preventing all controlled students from going out into the daylight.

Henry Jenkins is now attempting to notify the student body of their peril and tell them, via various hints, clues, puzzles, etc, how they can help him defeat the BS Group using the built-in safeguard. However, there is not much time. The plan revolves around the student's participation in retrieving all of the bio-sensor homing-beacons and placing them in the Infinite Corridor at the time of MIThenge. Should they fail, it may prove the end of free will.

TIME FRAME

The ARG is planned to take place in January 2009 during MIT's Independent Activities Period. The game will commence on January 6th and end during one of the three days of MIThenge: Jan 27th, 28th, or 29th. The game will aim to end on the 27th, however, the extra days of MIThenge allow for a few days of flexibility within the game should extra time for various tasks be needed.

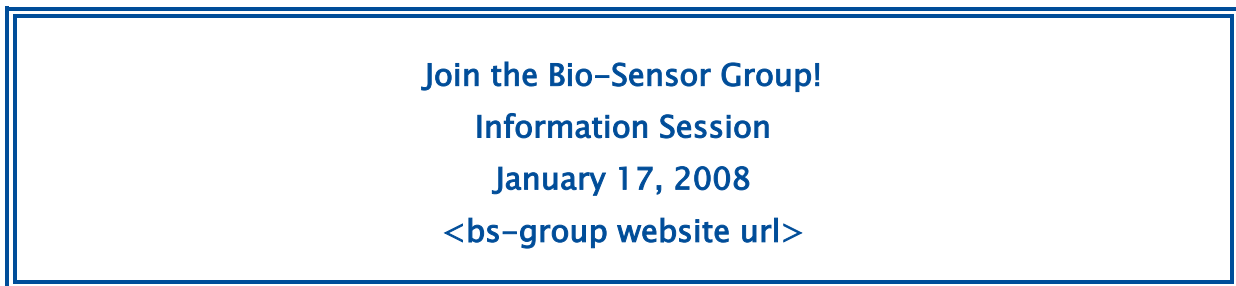
The first week of the ARG will focus primarily on propaganda for the ARG using a variety of available media. The second week will involve a raising number of hints and clues as well as more propaganda from the BS Group leading to their Information Session near the end of the week. The Information Session will also include imbedded hints and clues alerting the audience to a secret information session being held a few days later by Henry Jenkins. Finally, the last week of the ARG will involve a treasure hunt where the

goal of the student participants is to unravel Henry Jenkins' various clues to uncover the locations of the homing beacons and figure out what to do with them. Then, on MIThenge, a collection of NPCs, acting as the controlled students, will swarm the beacons and pretend to fall over as their bio-sensors malfunction.

ARG PLAN

JAN 6TH - LAUNCH DAY

Bio-Sensor Group posters advertising the BS Group and their information session being held on Jan 17th. Sample information on poster:



Pamphlets or small newspapers appear around campus with fake articles dedicated to the BS Group and/or Henry Jenkins. Ads within the article point to the BS Group's website, HJ's website, or are imbedded with clues about the situation at hand.

Small videos of a frantic Henry Jenkins in hiding begin to appear on the various monitors throughout campus. These videos include Henry Jenkins in some undefined small space holding up place cards asking for help and referring people to his website.

The Bio-Sensor Group website details the group's purpose as well as their brief history. It also includes an advertisement for their upcoming Information Session as well as a place where people can RSVP for the event. Anyone can also sign up for a membership on the site – doing so will place the person on a mailing-list that will be used by the BS Group for further advertisement. The puppet masters will also be monitoring this to get some sense of how many people are currently involved. The website will also have a variety of fake ads leading players a variety of different places or giving a variety of different clues should they look at them and/or click on them. At least one will be dedicated to Henry Jenkins' website and one, if clicked, will lead to a mysterious YouTube account where all of Henry Jenkins' videos are also located.

Henry Jenkins' website is actually a parody of the actual Henry Jenkins website. Since Henry Jenkins' is in hiding the website is actually a website for a "Jenry Henkins." The website contains most of the original content of the Henry Jenkins website (<http://www.henryjenkins.org/>) with a few differences. First of all, the picture of Henry

Jenkins has a black bar over his face to imply his hidden status. In addition, the blog posts on the site will be edited to add more information about the world and the research Henry Jenkins has been doing for the Bio-Sensor group. This blog will be a major source of future communication between Henry Jenkins and anyone playing the ARG because he will post clues on his blog throughout the game. Also, there will be a way to apply for membership to the site in the same way as the Bio-Sensor Group. In addition, there will be addition to the side bar listing his books to advertise his upcoming book *The Woah Climax*. Lastly, on the *links* page there should be a link to the Bio-Sensor Group website with a link also appearing within an earlier blog post about the group.

JANUARY 7TH THROUGH 12TH

Propaganda from launch day continues throughout the week to let the game soak in. Additional propaganda or ads can come into play near the end of the week. Potentially the use of incorrect formulas with imbedded hints placed throughout campus to build curiosity.

JANUARY 13TH

Henry Jenkins posters mocking the original Bio-Sensor Group posters appear right beside the originals. Posters imply something wrong with the group and point to Henry Jenkins' website instead of the BS Group website.

Small mini-game appears on the Lobby 7 Kiosk. Purpose of game is simply to imply that some certain students have problems going outside into the light. Hero character in the video game is a small parody of Henry Jenkins. Advertisements for Henry Jenkins' new website are also placed throughout the video game.

JANUARY 14TH

Henry Jenkins posts on Jenry Henkins' blog a long series of numbers. These numbers turn out to be a series of times, dates, and places that a series of other "events" will happen throughout campus.

JANUARY 15TH

Posters with the numbers that Henry Jenkins posted on his blog are littered throughout campus. In addition, the Bio-Sensor Group puts up a huge banner in Lobby 7 inviting people to come to their Information Session and pointing people to their website. Lastly, a bit of free swag (pens perhaps?) promoting either JH or BS appear in various places throughout campus. The some of the places the swag appears and the time/date at which they will be there is covered by some of the numbers in JH's blog post and the random flyers. Some places are in the open enough not to require additional hints.

JANUARY 16TH

The BS Group sends out a congratulations email to everyone that signed up on their website and urges participation in a "poll" on their website (another way to tell how many people are still active). The email also informs the students that the BS Group is so happy with their support that they have named them "premium members." In the long

run all this really means is that if those people come to the Information Session and declare that they are a “premium member” and show some form of identification they will a special name tag. The name tag will be simply composed of a folded sheet of paper within one of the stereotypical plastic name-tag holders. However, if the “premium members” open up the folded sheet of paper that has their name on it they will see a time, date, and location and the words “The truth will set you free!” The time, date, and location are for a special “secret” information session being hosted by Henry Jenkins shortly after the BS Group Information Session.

The BS Group also sends a blanket email to the majority of the talk lists throughout the campus to further promote their campaign and information session.

Henry Jenkins posts again on JH’s blog. The post is short and scrambled up. Unscrambling it reveals a simple statement revealing that all interested parties should be on the lookout for clues during the Bio-Sensor Group information session.

JANUARY 17TH – BIO-SENSOR GROUP INFORMATION SESSION

The Bio–Sensor Group hosts their information session during the afternoon of this day. The information session is hosted by the famous Professor N. E. Edsname, leader of the BS Research Group. The BS Group provides refreshments that turn out to be color coded indicating the amount of control that the BS Group has over the student body. In addition, the BS Group is handing out more of their BS Group pins to everyone who attends the session. The session itself is primarily composed of Professor Edsname talking along to a slide–show he prepared for the event. Throughout the slide–show various letters are bolded in a strange way. If all of these letters are written down they spell out a secret message from Henry Jenkins (Robots! Stop Them!).

JANUARY 18TH

All the website ads update with images hinting towards Jenry Henkin’s info session. In addition, a few posters pop up around campus promoting his information session. Henry Jenkins then posts a scrambled up hint on Jenry Henkin’s blog.

JANUARY 19TH

At the very end of the day Henry Jenkins secretly “hosts” an information session in one of the large lecture halls on campus. Since he is still in hiding, he hosts the session remotely via a series of videos projected onto the screen in the lecture hall. The videos are composed of Henry Jenkins holding up a series of cards reading:



In addition, pins with the words “Retrieve the beacons – Save the world” are scattered throughout the room to be picked up by the participating students.

JANUARY 20TH TO 27TH – SCAVENGER HUNT

The entire last week of the ARG is structured much like a scavenger hunt. The ultimate goal of the participants is to collect all of the homing beacons and bring them to MIThenge on the 27th. At a variety of points every day Henry Jenkins updates his blog to give beginning clues about how to find the next beacon. Each clue he posts points to another clue, which points to another clue, and so on until finally leading to the beacon.

None of the strings of clues are long enough to seem tedious and could even stop after two or three clues.

JANUARY 27TH TO 29TH - MITHENGE

MIThenge occurs once a day for three days. The scavenger hunt will intend to end on the 27th, however since there are three possibilities for MIThenge we can extend the ARG if participants need more time. The possibilities are:

Date	Time	Altitude
1-27-2009	4:50:28	3'
1-28-2009	4:49:33	22'
1-29-2009	4:48:35	41'

POTENTIAL SCAVENGER HUNT PUZZLES

SCAVENGER HUNT #1

The first use of a beacon on campus was on the third floor of Building 10 in the Infinite Corridor. After this installation, the BS group realized they wanted mobile beacons so they could make data acquisition as convenient as possible, but this first beacon was created to be permanent and has an elaborate theft-prevention system. This beacon will be revealed in a message from Jenry Henkins as an example of the items to collect.

BEACON - THE RADIO CALL

Students working the Building 56 cluster January 20-23 will receive a zephyr suggesting they listen to the campus' newest approved radio station. Tuning in there will be music playing extolling the virtues of the BS group. However, the music is broken up into beats which create Morse code. Decoding reveals a secret message from Jenry Henkins with the location of a beacon. As an added bonus, triangulating the source of

the signal will lead to the top of the Green Building – the top of the stairs there will have a note from Jenry hinting that he is safely hiding on the rooftops in daylight, along with a beacon for those who find it.

BEACON – PRINTOUT:

Students walk past various printers on campus during January 21–22. These printouts will be on BS Group letterhead and be addressed to particular "Experimental Subject #xxx" people. There will be instructions indicating that the latest beacon activation had difficulty and that the student should go to a location listed below for data uploading and a circuit repair. By doing so, participants will find a beacon.

CRYPTIC MICE

Henry Jenkins makes a cryptic remark about the cleanliness of the Athena clusters and how great they are. Going to one of the Athena clusters will reveal that all of the mice in the cluster have a piece of paper taped over the trackball. This clue, if decoded, takes the player to a certain row/chair in 10–250. Taped to the bottom of that chair is a phone number and a code. The code, when decrypted, reveals the time at which the

phone number should be called. If called at the correct time they get the beacon location. If they do not then they receive another clue to move on to a slightly longer hunt.

CHAT LOGS

The following clue is given to the players by Henry Jenkins:

“For far two long they have monitored my chat logs:

4209715251240961651216384128 – 8388608P”

These numbers are from a sequence of numbers that are all powers of 2. Sorting them out gives the list [4,2097152,512,4096,16,512,16384,128, 8388608,P]. Dividing by the log of each number by $\log(2)$ gives the list [2,21,9,12,4,9,14,7, P]. Matching these numbers with the alphabet give the list [b,u,i,l,d,i,n,g,P]. P is the 16th letter of the alphabet. The resulting answer is "building 16".

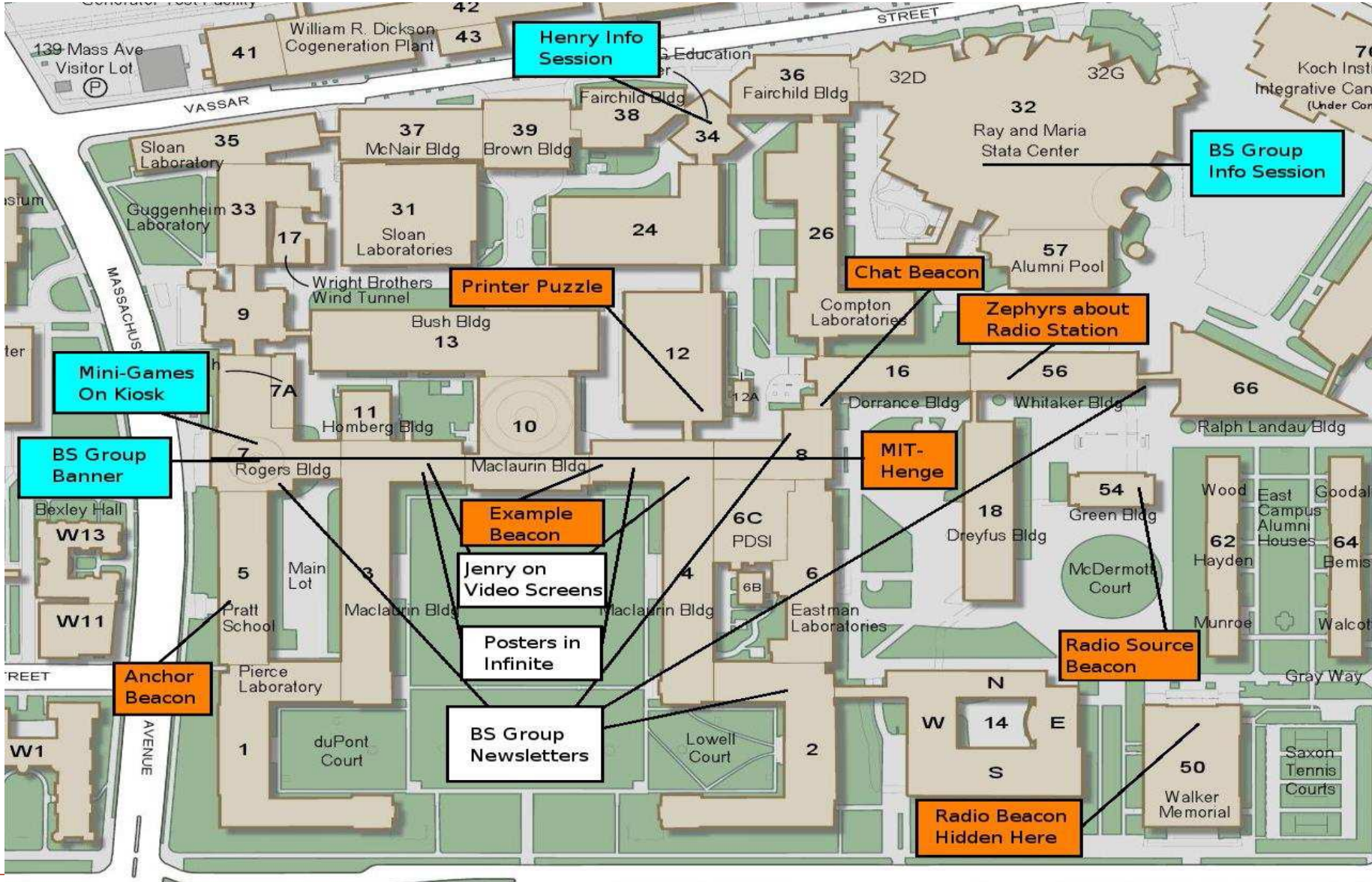
SADNESS

I am deeply troubled and saddened by the events concerning MIT's Bio-Sensor initiative. From the highs of when they first seduced me to write a new book, to the lows of the experimental aftermath, I find the phrase "Brutal-Sublime" to be a satisfactory description. Even right now, while filling out a Saturday sadoku, I cannot hold back the tears. I can't write anymore, I'm sorry. The underlined "sad" indicates a link to another page which gives the location of a beacon. Players suspicions would be aroused if they saw the saddness video or notice the misspellings within the entry. Also, posting this entry well after players have become aware of Henry's grievances would lead to additional suspicion about the motivation behind the entry.

PULLING A MUSCLE

It occurred to me last night that if my position were to be compromised, I would have to fight off the BS group with my bare hands. And since my wife isn't here to protect me, I figured I that needed to learn how to throw punches if I want to survive. That's when I decided bulk up and start pumping iron. Last night, I was lifting every I could find. I was an animal! Unfortunately, I overworked myself and pulled my anchor muscle. Could

someone please look around and find it for me? Anchor muscles are not real. A real anchor is heavy and made of iron/metal, like the one outside building 5. Henry happened to drop a Homing Beacon in the bushes around the building 5 anchor.



POTENTIAL COST

Primary costs will come from catering the Bio-Sensor Information Session, creating large drop posters, printing various paper fliers and newspapers, as well as producing the various videos.

FOOD

- Cupcakes → ~3.25 per 25 cupcakes
 - 2.19 per box (25 cupcakes)
 - 3 eggs per box
 - 1/3 cups of vegetable oil per box
- Icing → 2.19 per 12 cupcakes
- Drinks → 1.19 per 2 liter

VIDEOS

- MIT A/V can give us prices on projectors in W20 and the Infinite

PAPER

- CopyTech
 - 5.00 per 100 copies (black and white)
- APO
 - 0.10 per 100 copies of posters plus paper cost (3.00 setup fee)
 - 0.20 per 100 copies of pamphlets plus paper cost
 - 4.00 for a drop poster (plus paint)
- Cost of 1–2 banners (1 in student center or 1 in Lobby 7)

PINS / SWAG

- Cost of printing a few hundred pins

CREDITS

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