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Smithsonian American Art Museum Offers Largest Mission-Based Game Ever Designed through Its Luce Foundation Center

Game Launch Event Sept. 18

A new mission-based, alternate reality or “big” game, called *Pheon*, will debut in September at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. A variation on the classic game Capture the Flag, *Pheon* is a competition to obtain the game’s virtual talisman, the pheon, which will occur online and at live events during the course of a year. *Pheon*, like other mission-based games, revolves around the completion of tasks, the making of objects, discovery and documentation. It follows the successful run of the museum’s first alternate reality game, *Ghosts of a Chance*.

Pheon is innovative in that the narrative of the game will be written as it is played. The game is set in Terra Tectus, a virtual world in which two warring factions, Staves and Knaves, struggle to restore balance after the intrusion of Seers, people from the real world. Players will interact with scripted characters, and each player’s performance will help shape the storyline. To begin, individual players and teams must first determine whether they are Staves or Knaves, then complete various missions focused on the museum’s art collections, exhibitions and programs to earn points and propel the game. Missions exist on three levels—Neophyte, Acolyte and Lamplight Council—through which players must advance, reaching the final stage in which elite players “write” missions for those at lower levels. The ultimate goal is to attain the pheon, which promises to restore balance to Terra Tectus.

The game will use several popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which will be used to convey character plots. Players from all over the world are expected to participate. Fictional excerpts and game lore will be available for download as well. The museum is working with John Macabee of the San Francisco-based CityMystery and mission-based game expert Sean Mahan, creator of the popular game *SFO*, to develop *Pheon*, which will be accessed through a portal website, pheon.org. Additional information is available on the museum’s website, americanart.si.edu/pheon.

The launch event for *Pheon* is Saturday, Sept. 18, from noon until 6 p.m. at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Activities for players will include making objects, texting codes and finding clues in a belly-dance performance. The initial game will run for one year and, as with *Ghosts of a Chance*, the Luce Foundation Center will offer an abbreviated form of *Pheon* at the museum beginning Nov. 1.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum, located at 8th and F streets N.W., is open from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Follow the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, ArtBabble, iTunes and YouTube. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Website: americanart.si.edu.

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