

## Internet

### Do you have a Second Life?

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*The growing world of Second Life, and information sources within it*

June 23 saw the fourth birthday of Second Life<sup>1</sup>, but for those of us with hectic First Lives, this event may have passed us by. However, a growing number of individuals and organisations, including libraries and librarians, are exploring this virtual world. Second Life is described by its creators, Linden Lab, as a 3D-online digital world, imagined, created and owned by its residents. It is this aspect of the virtual being created by its inhabitants that distinguishes it from online virtual games, where the landscape is created by the owning company. It is being taken seriously by corporations, including Amazon, IBM, CISCO, and Reuters, who are developing a presence within the Second Life world. Here is a brief overview, with suggestions of other resources to look at if you want to delve a little deeper.

To enter the world of Second Life, an individual needs to download a piece of software and register themselves. You are represented online by an avatar, which can be configured as human or animal or abstract. Features and clothing can all be reconfigured and developed to reflect character or mood. It is possible to move around the world by walking, flying or teleporting to different locations. Sometimes links are given on real-life websites to take you to an 'in-world' location. A useful survival guide<sup>2</sup> has been put together by Aleks Krotoski to support visitors to the Guardian's SecondFest, a festival occurring within Second Life on June 29 - July 1. I wonder if they'll have virtual mud?

Librarians are actively following their users into this new and very different world. Perhaps, having cut their digital teeth on Web and Library 2.0 developments, the Second Life world is the next place to be seen. There is certainly plenty of discussion in the biblioblogosphere<sup>3 4</sup>, some of it reminiscent of the doubts raised about the wisdom of librarians engaging with Web 2.0 applications. Second Life is a very visual world and quite a contrast to the text-based world of traditional libraries, but many of the challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Second Life. Your World. Your Imagination. [online] Available at <http://secondlife.com> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

<sup>2</sup> Krotoski, A (2007) 'The Second Life survival guide' *Guardian Unlimited* [online] Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/secondfest/story/0,,2098676,00.html> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

<sup>3</sup> Greenhill, K (2007) 'Ten very good reasons why your librarians should be in Second Life' *Librarians Matter* [online] Available at <http://librariansmatter.com/blog/2007/04/30/ten-very-good-reasons-why-your-librarians-should-be-in-second-life/> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

<sup>4</sup> Greenhill, K (2007) 'Six very bad reasons to have a library branch in Second Life' *Librarians Matter* [online] Available at <http://librariansmatter.com/blog/2007/05/01/six-very-bad-reasons-to-have-a-library-branch-in-second-life/> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

of enabling users to identify, locate and use resources occur in this virtual world too. One place where many libraries and librarians have congregated is the Alliance Second Life Library<sup>1</sup>. This was created from land bought by Talis and handed over to the Alliance Library System, a regional library system in central Illinois, USA. It is particularly striking that healthcare information is represented there with both a Consumer Health Library and a medical library.

Several of the e-learning librarians at Kingston University have begun experimenting within Second Life, since the University is creating a presence there. Initial thoughts, after a week's experience, are that the concept is great and could provide an interesting way of enabling overseas students and distance learners to interact with the University. There are some problems: finding your way around can be challenging, and the level of computer power required, especially for rendering graphics and displaying all the communication modes, could present a very real barrier to participation. Other universities are already present in Second Life, including the University of Hertfordshire, who have a learning resource centre, and the University of Warwick. In the US, Ohio University has a Second Life Campus; you can watch their promotional video on YouTube<sup>2</sup>

Second Life may become a model of a new way to interface with the Web around the world. It is unlikely to go away soon, and engaging with a visual rather than textual representation of reality and knowledge space may unleash further and unexpected creativity within the library community.

#### Further Resources:

- Roush, W. (2007) 'Second Earth' *Technology Review* July/August 2007. [online] Available at <http://www.technologyreview.com/Infotech/18911/> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]
- Tebbutt, D. (2007) Is Second Life a brave new world? *Information World Review* 5 March 2007. [online] Available at <http://www.itweek.co.uk/information-world-review/features/2184795/second-life-brave-worlds> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]
- Pacific Rim Exchange – their Learning page aims to post links to videos, tutorials, wikis, programs, books and other useful tools for those new to Second Life. Available at <http://pacificrimx.wordpress.com/learning/> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

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<sup>1</sup> Their real world website is at Second Life Library. [online] Available at <http://www.infoisland.org> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]

<sup>2</sup> Ohio University Second Life Campus [online] Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFuNFRie8wA> [Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> June 2007]