



GOING VIRTUAL

Now, if you've stuck it out this far, good for you. You have reached the last and ultimate social media tool—virtual worlds. For now, this is the final destination of our journey. You can go forward with the conviction that everything you have accomplished so far will have helped prepare you for this step. Many of you will wonder if it really is worth it. And my answer to that is, yes, it can be more worth it than you can ever imagine. But, as in everything Web 2.0, and well, even in life, that will be up to you.

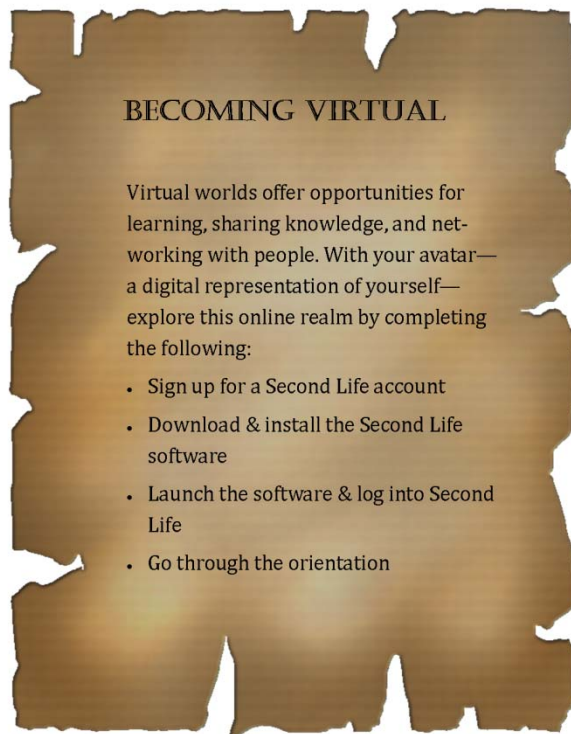
Some of you will be familiar with the movie, *The Matrix*, or with the book, *Snow Crash*. Others might never have even heard of terms like “virtual worlds” or the “metaverse.” But whether you think you

have an idea about virtual worlds or not, trying to prepare you for what you will eventually experience is just about impossible. This is one of those things you have to experience yourself to really understand. I can tell you the virtual world we will visit for this quest is Second Life because at the moment, this world is the most populated, stable, and diverse metaverse for adults.

Now, even though I don't like to have to pause here to address this, I will. There have been some stories about Second Life in the news that might have given some of you a negative impression—negative enough that you are now hesitating to go forward. While I cannot deny that there are probably places in Second Life that are not for the faint of heart, I will offer this analogy. (I know, not another story!)

Imagine that someone lives in a country other than the United States. You meet them in their own country and they say to you, "I would never go to the U.S.; there are people there who walk around with guns and shoot people. Kids are running loose in the streets stealing from everyone. Prostitutes walk along all the sidewalks, and drug dealers are constantly driving through neighborhoods. Buildings are

run down, and there is garbage in the street. Why in the world would I ever want to go there!?"



Now, if you live in the U.S., I really doubt you live or spend time in a place like that described above. But do they exist? Yes, I can imagine somewhere in the U.S. there is a place that might come cause someone to have that impression. Particularly for someone who might come upon it for the first time. But is this an accurate description of the entire U.S.? Of course not. Not even close. So why are we so ready to believe such horror stories about other places. Real or virtual? Think of the two sides to every story thing, and then read on.

Ok, so, we are going to use the Second Life experience to explore what it means to visit and

interact in a virtual world. Let's grab the quest and get started.

To get our account, we will begin by visiting the Second Life website at <http://www.secondlife.com>.

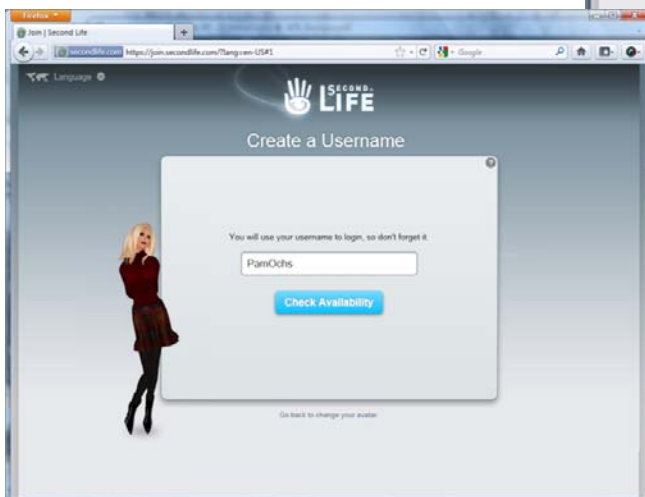
Once there try to find a big orange button that says: "Join Now." If you do manage to find it, (Ok, so



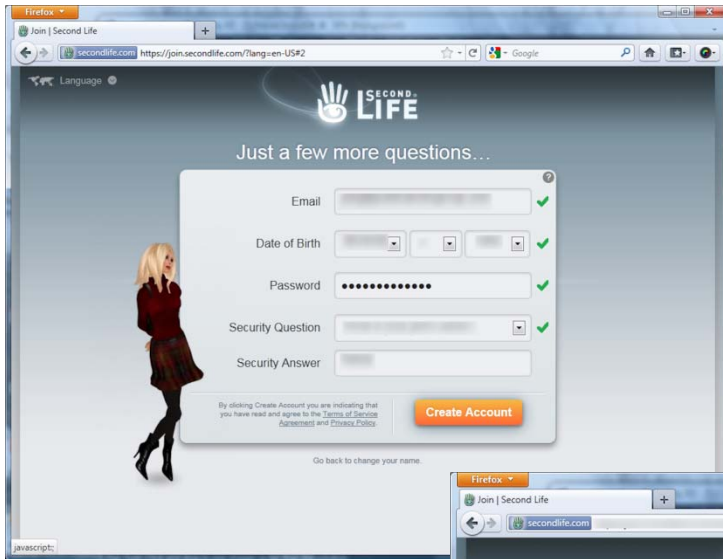
maybe it's not that hard to find!) click it and you'll find yourself at a site with a group of digital representations of humans, animals, and even robots and vehicles. (This will look similar to the screenshot below except this one was taken before they added non-human figures.) The way they are all standing around, it looks like they've been hanging out just waiting for you to show up and choose one of them to represent you in this new virtual environment. Don't worry if you don't like any of them because once you get in and

go through the orientation, you can go off and change yourself to look like just about anything you want. So cycle through them until the one you want to start with is standing over the "Choose This Avatar" button. Then click the button to go on.

Next, you'll find yourself at a screen where you are asked to pick a username. But you're not alone—your avatar is there waiting for you. And if yours looks anything like mine, they seem a little impatient with us. But they'll have to wait because you need to make sure to take time to remember your username

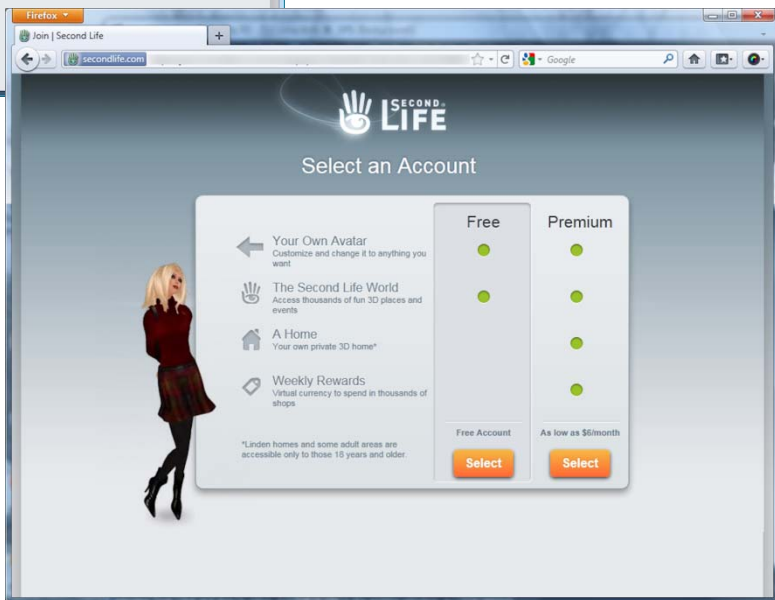


and then check to see if your username is available. So remember your username (write it down if necessary) and click the button to check to see if it's available. If everything is good to go, you'll get the happy text announcing "It's available!" and a new button that says, "Next Step."

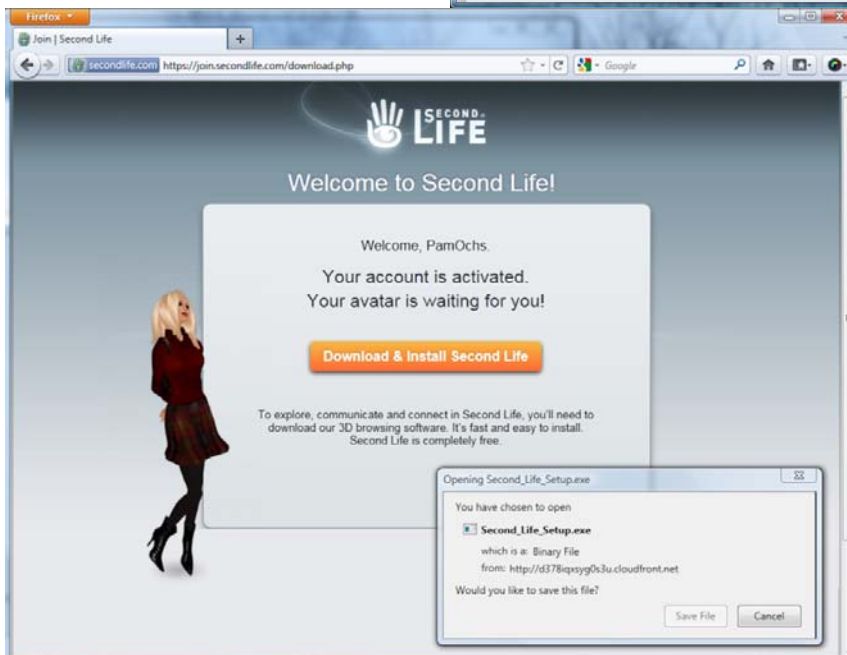


The next step ends up being filling out some contact information because even avatars need email addresses. So once you fill out an email, date of birth, password, and a security question and answer, you are finally allowed to “Create Account” by clicking the orange button. But before that account is

actually created, Second Life wants to know what kind of account you want. Well, because this is our first time trying it out, it’s best to choose the “Free” option. As you can see, this allows you to create your own avatar and enter the virtual world. Right now we aren’t interested in any other benefits. So



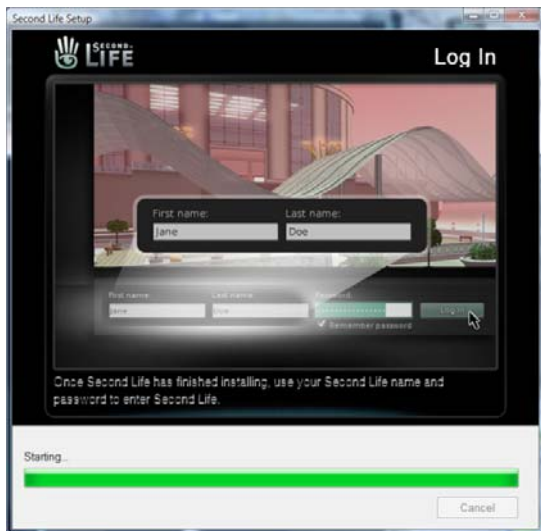
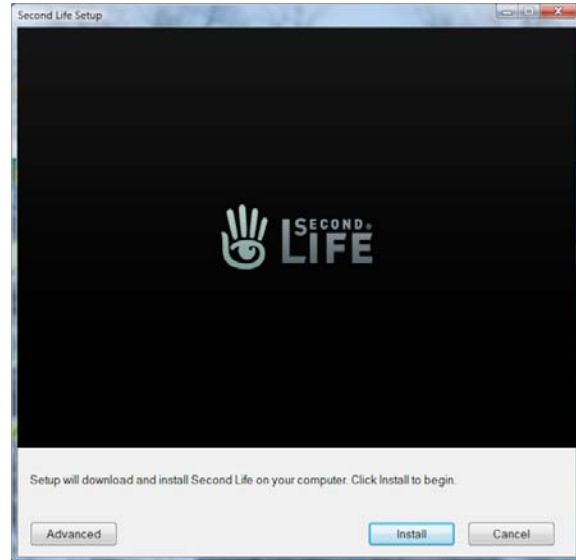
find the orange “Select” button at the bottom of the free column, and click it.



Finally we are at a page that announces your account has been officially activated and your avatar is waiting for you—as if they had to remind us! As you can see by the orange button, the next steps are to download and install

the Second Life software. So click the “Download and Install Second Life” button, and a setup window will pop up. This allows you to save the file. Once the file is downloaded on your computer, click it to launch the download and install process.

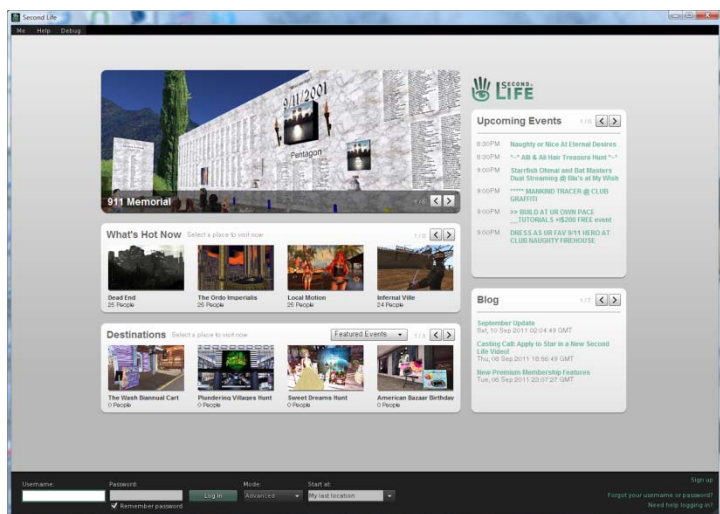
First you will see a window like the one to the right that asks you to “Click Install to begin.” And look, fortunately there’s an “Install” button just waiting for that click. As the install process runs, you’ll see some slides like the one below that offer helpful tips and hints to prepare you for your journey. They offer



information about communicating with others, attending events, logging in, moving around, shopping, and using your inventory. Finally as Second Life completes its installation on your computer, they show a screen welcoming you to Second Life and officially declaring you a resident.

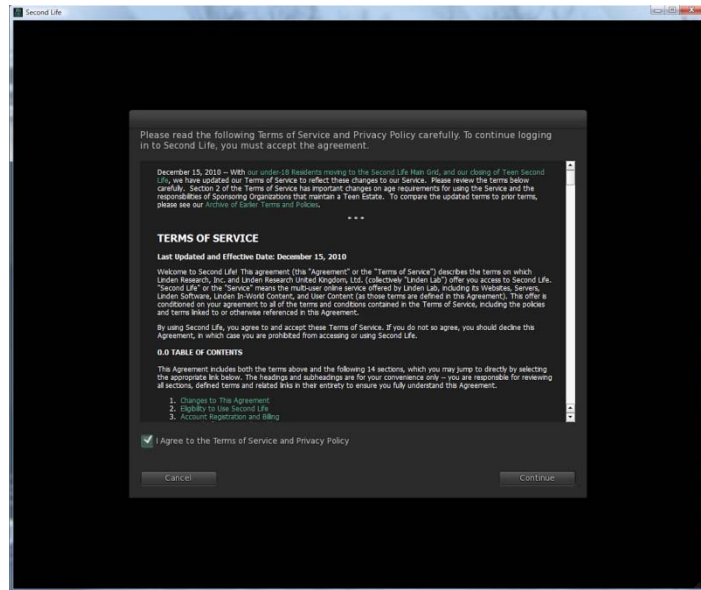
Now this is where it gets interesting. Look for the Second Life icon on your desktop, or look for the Second Life program in your program listing on your computer. Launch the software by clicking the icon or program

name. When the software starts, you should have a screen that looks like the one to the right. Well, I can’t be sure the screen will look exactly the same— Second Life seems to continue to mess around with its opening screen. But you can be sure there will be some photo that represents something in Second Life. The windows at the bottom are where you input your new name and password.



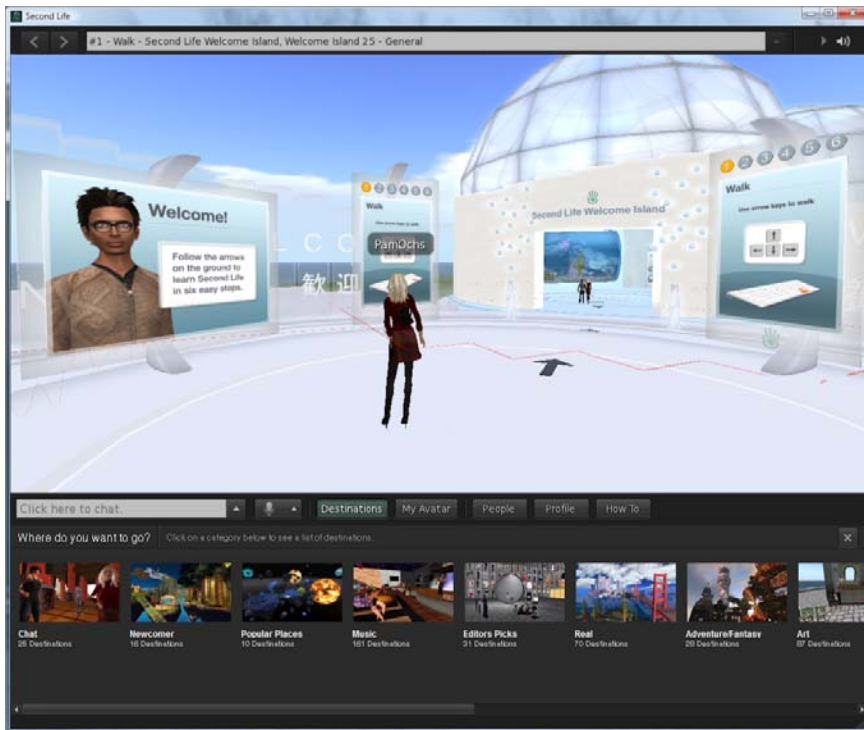
But before you do that, you might want to look around the page and get an idea of just what is going on in there at the moment.

So when you are ready, go ahead and put in your new name with your password, and hit the button that says “Login.” Oh, wow, just when you thought you were there, a new screen pops up. Linden Lab, the folks behind Second Life, want to make sure you understand the terms



under which you are allowed to use their software and enter their world. I encourage you to read these terms of service since being bad and not following these terms can result in you losing your privilege to enter Second Life. Kind of like losing recess privileges in grade school. If you are entering Second Life without any ill intention, and you agree to these terms, click the button indicating this and hit the

continue button.



Yay! You should be in. there you are standing in all your digital glory in the avatar form you chose with your unique name hovering above your head. Remember, everyone can see your name, and you will be able to see everyone else's (although there is a way in the preference menu to turn these off so you cannot see them).

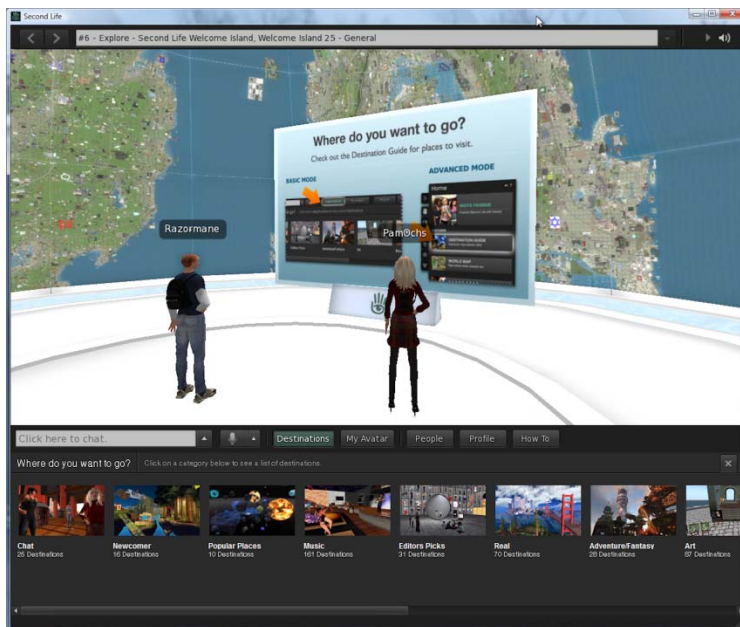
Second Life has placed you in an orientation area, posted a friendly “Welcome!” and offered some helpful guidance and tips to get you started. The first step is to learn how to walk and move or you’ll never make it into the building in

front of you. And get there you must, because that's where you'll find your next lesson—learning how to “Zoom” to get a closer look at things. Mastering this technique will help you better investigate all the wonders you will discover. But for now, you'll just be asked to try to explore the huge fish tank in the room (at least it was a fish tank when I went through.)

The third lesson introduces you to the chat function because really, how fun is it to wander around with other people if you can't talk to them. (But if, you're still a big believer in what mom always says: “don't talk to strangers,” then feel free to skip this step.) After you complete your meaningful conversation with the colorful parrot in this room, you can move onto the next where you'll learn how to sit. Finally in the last room, you'll discover the fine art of flying. This is important to learn because flying really is

faster than walking. And flying is sometimes the only way to reach objects lying above the ground.

Once you have finished all the lessons, you can start to look around this 3-D world. A billboard in the last room of the orientation center shows you how to check out the destination guide to find places to visit. There are also places shown at the bottom of the screen.



As you'll discover there are sites where you can get free things, and there are sites with cool places to explore. And that is that. You are now an official resident of a virtual world. But while exploring is fun and interesting, the best part of Second Life is meeting others from around the world. While you are exploring, remember that people want to talk. If you don't feel comfortable talking yet (or you skipped the lesson with the parrot), just say hello, and let them know you are new and still learning how to get around. You can always leave a conversation by telling the person you have to go, saying bye, and clicking the red “x” at the top right of the window to shut down and log out of Second Life. This should bring up a window asking you to confirm that you want to quit.

If you do decide to go explore any of the suggested destinations, take some time to walk around and check out everything. Many of the sites offer information that can be accessed by interacting with items and objects. You might hear music, an audio tape, watch a video, receive a link to a website, or receive a notecard with more information. Some places offer the chance to buy Second Life objects for free. If you are not interested in spending real money, make sure anytime you “buy” something, the price is listed as \$0L. And feel free to add me as a friend—my main avatar in Second Life is Pam Renoir.

And most importantly, remember to have fun while you explore!

Well, this is it, the end of our journey into social media. Congratulations on all your accomplishments—embracing new technology is no easy task, but with your new experiences, I am sure you can confidently log into anything they throw at you.

And thanks so much for spending time with me as we journeyed through the twisting and sometimes obscure path leading through the Web 2.0 or social media maze. I hope that you found some interesting resources and information, but more importantly that you found some friends along the way. So, this is not the end of the journey, but only the beginning. And if you see me hanging out online or flying around in some virtual world, stop by, and we can always trade some good wastewater stories.