March 2008

A Whole New World: Libraries and Education in Second Life

A Whole New World
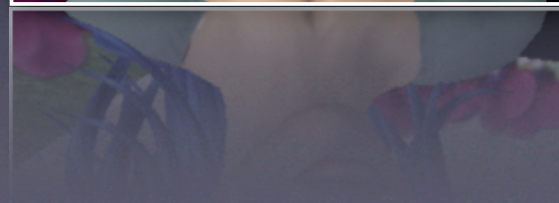
Libraries and Education in SL
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Why me?

- Danu Dahlstrom "born" in sl in July 2006

- created McMaster presence in Dec. 2006
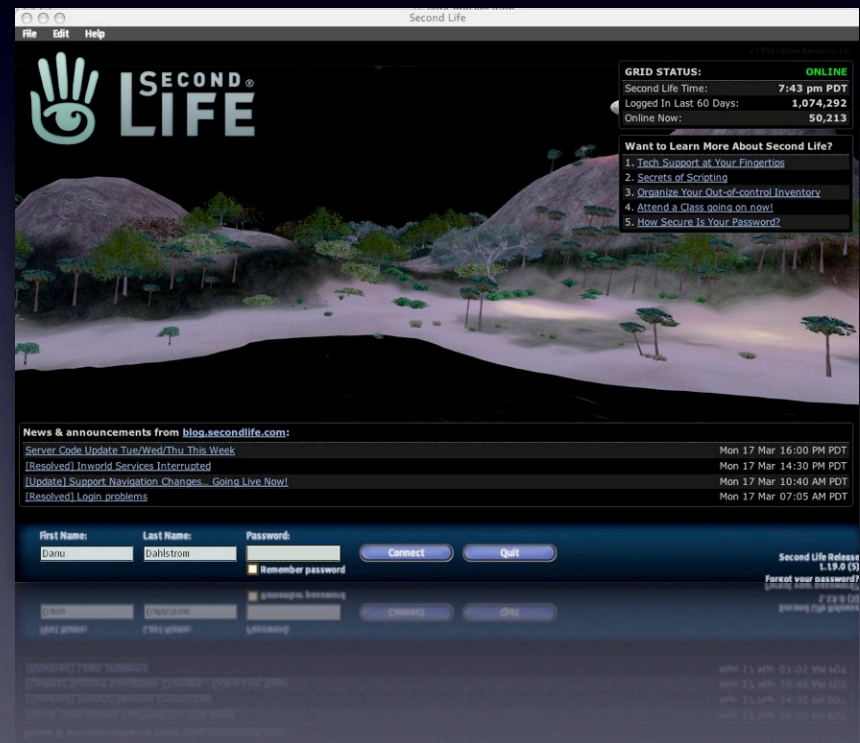
- co-chair InfoCan

The Plan

- What's Second Life all about?

- What are libraries doing in SL?

  - McMaster in SL

- Why is education interested?

- What's it all mean?

A Second Life for All

- Created by Linden Labs in 2003

- 3D virtual world - content created by "residents"

- over 7 million accounts created

- 2007 - open source, VOIP

- over $1.5 million US in business transactions

SL Basics

- create an avatar - virtual representation of yourself

- free or fee accounts - fees allow you to own land

- create objects, explore, socialize

Virtual Worlds

"computer-simulated environment intended for its users to inhabit and interact via avatars. This habitation is usually represented in the form of two or three-dimensional graphical representations of humanoids (or other graphical or text-based avatars). Some, but not all, virtual worlds allow for multiple users"
-Wikipedia

Virtual Worlds

- Besty Book's 6 aspects of virtual worlds:

    - shared space

    - graphical user interface

    - immediacy

    - interactivity

    - persistance

    - socialization/community

- SL is a hybrid virtual world (gaming and social)

Libraries in SL

- Alliance Library System led the way
  - small plot of land April 2006
  - 1st island May 2006 (Info Island)
  - now over 40 associated islands (Info Archipelago)
- Over 500 international librarians volunteering

Who's in SL: Libraries

- Academic Libraries

- Public Libraries

- Special Libraries

  - Business

  - Government

Library Services in SL

- Reference

- Links to Resources

- Guest Speakers/Lectures

- Book Talks/Discussions

- Exhibits

- Training

Why Offer Services?

- Empty world syndrome

- Important to have something new to draw people

- important to explore what services are possible in virtual worlds

- identify differences/ problems between real world and virtual world services
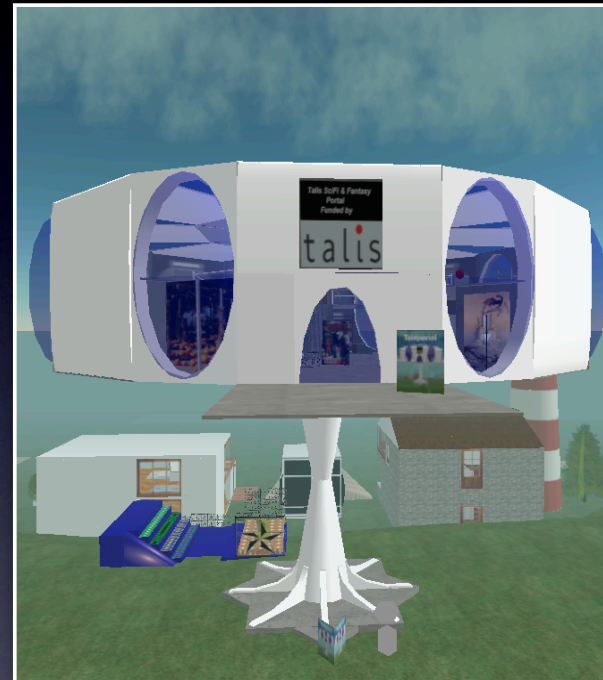
Reference in SL

- Main reference service on Info Island International

- over 6500 questions last year

  - over 186 real questions

  - nearly 2300 second life questions

- over 80 hours of service (2 hour shifts)

- Communication

  - chat, im

McMaster Reference Pilot

- Space on Cybrary City Dec 2006

- Started May 2007

- 6 hours of service, increased to 8 in Sept.

- 6 volunteers; now 12

- over 100 questions

Cybrary City Space

- Link to existing online library resources

  - catalogue

  - databases

  - digital collections

- Links to free resources

- Links to SL resources

Steel City Island

- Need room to grow

- Reference Service?

- Space for campus and community partners:

  - Multimedia class

  - Classroom audiovisual

  - Centre for Student Development

- Information literacy/teaching

- 3D exhibits/simulations
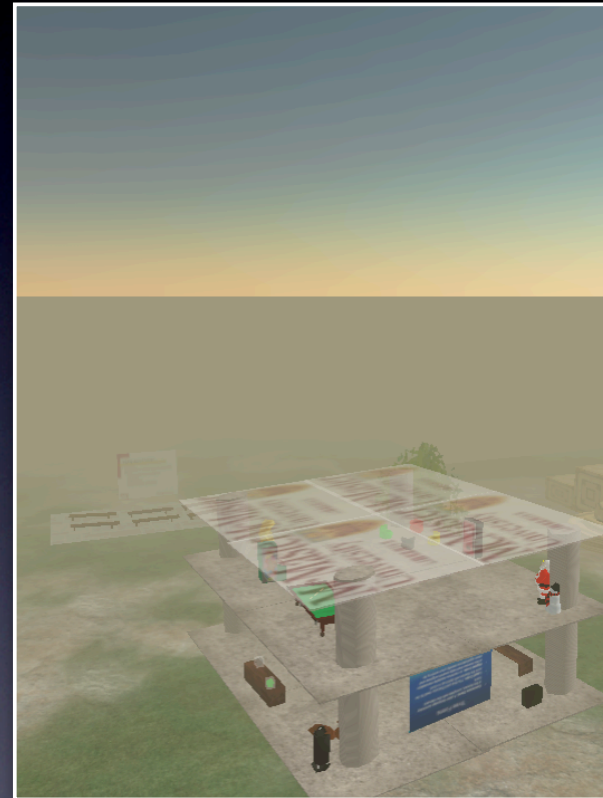
Who's in SL: Education

- Over 150 colleges/universities in SL
    - Harvard
    - Columbia
    - Duke
    - McGill
    - Mount Saint Vincent
    - McMaster

So What's the Big Deal?

- Second Life offers opportunities to create ideal learning settings

- Addresses many of the learning needs of the Millennial students

- Provides immersive, collaborative, creative learning experience

Education in Second Life

- Addresses many different learning styles

    - Visual

    - Kinesthetic

    - Constructivist/ Exploratory

Student Advantages

- Students comfortable with computers and gaming

- Learn through exploration, collaboration, creation and construct innovative solutions

- Anonymity takes away fear of failing, try until they get it right

- Increased motivation, become invested

- Learning becomes fun

What's in it for the profs?

- Create the ideal learning space - not limited by space or funding

- Outcomes immediate and visible

- Activity and impact can be recorded

- Students invested and involved

- Persistent space

Advantages

- Encourages student-faculty interaction

- Encourages cooperation among student

- Encourages active learning

- Provides prompt feedback

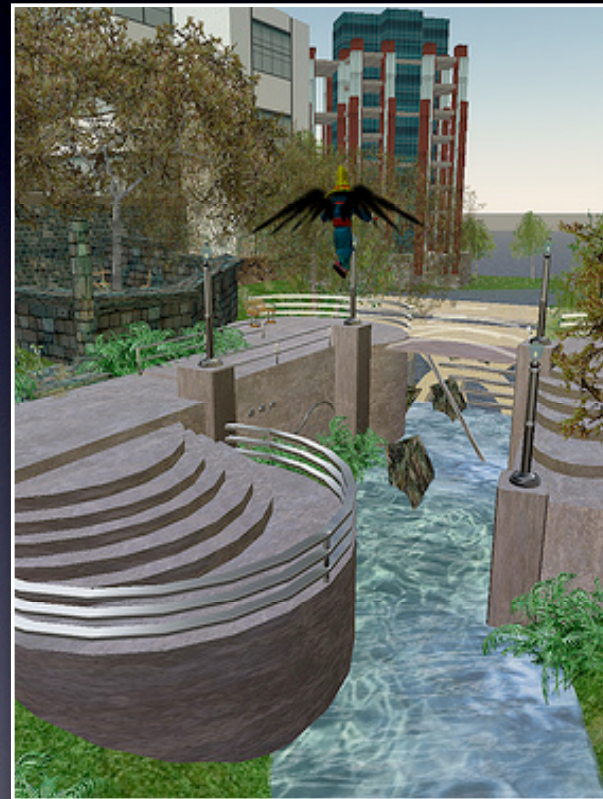- Respects diverse talents and ways of knowing

What can be done?

- Limited by imagination (and some skill)

- Applies to numerous fields
  - Economics
  - Engineering
  - Anthropology
  - Biology
  - English

An Ideal Learning Environment?

- Customized to specific student needs

- Immediate feedback

- Constructive

- Motivates beyond externally imposed requirements

- Builds enduring

Rose Coloured Glasses?

- High technical requirements

- Stability

- Griefers

- Ethical issues

- High Learning Curve

Why SL?
Libraries

- Point-of-need service

- Learning opportunities

- Proactive rather than reactive

- Help direct future services

- Amazing networking and collaboration opportunities

Why SL: Education

- Create your learning environment

- Meet learning needs of students

Final Thought

- Gartner Group predicts 80% of Internet users will have an avatar by 2011

- Something will replace SL

- Important to be prepared for what's next

- We can help direct the future