



A DAY

BY TONY MCNICOL

in the SECOND LIFE

Day in, day out at the same old office? Same commute? Same old job? Same old you? Now could be your chance to escape to a new Second Life. Why not join the 9.5 million people who have become residents of the 3D online world since 2003?

It's not too difficult to get started. The first thing to do is download the free client. Then you are ready to create the new you, i.e., an "avatar" in-world persona. You can modify everything from your gender and age, to the size of your shoes and the length of your sideburns.

Build your dream physique if you like. (I was pleased with a hunky version of my real self—until an avatar with digital legs up to her armpits greeted me with, "Hey, old man,") Once you have your alter ego up and running you can attend concerts, take classes, go to parties, shop for clothes, start relationships and even digitally consummate them. Fulfill any fantasy you wish.

And it's not all play either—at least not for the large numbers of companies and other groups that have set up in Second Life. They include multinationals, major media organizations and education institutions—from Harvard to Keio. Japanese companies are getting involved, too; Nissan and Toyota have rolled out digital cars for the online worlds. The SL economy is booming, not least real estate. In August 2007, about 2 million real U.S. dollars were spent on virtual land.

But is it over-hyped? Well, probably. The world is profoundly geeky, buggy and mostly an architectural chaos that makes expansive Tokyo look planned. The number of regular users is also much lower than the capital's almost 10-million residents. At 5 p.m. Friday, Japan time, there were 26,000 people logged on. There's always the nagging question, What does it have that Real Life doesn't? (Parody site, getafirstlife.com, makes the same point: "Access your closet to build your First Life look.")

Yet, it will be interesting to see what Japanese creators do with Second Life. After all, Japan already is the land of *otaku*, *manga* and *anime* universes, and labyrinthine computer role-playing games. A Japanese version of the SL client was launched in March. Shortly before, advertising agency Dentsu and digital creator school Digital Hollywood were setting up a "Second Life Study Association Laboratory." Next year, Sony will launch a rival virtual world, "Home," for its PlayStation 3 console.

Perhaps, it's a little early to fork out thousands of dollars for your very own SL island. But as many commentators have noted, just a few years ago people were dismissing the Internet as just a playground for techies and geeks.

Look what happened there. **K**



Tony McNicol is Burton Nozomi in his Second Life

Virtual Lines Second Life
<http://secondlife.com/>

Second Life (Japanese)
<http://jp.secondlife.com/>



Top left: "Come fly with me in Second Life," says Burton Nozomi.

Top right: Burton Nozomi visits a replica Heian Palace in the virtual world.

Center right: Pondering the meaning of Second Life at a replica of a Zen rock garden.

Bottom: Taking a break.