## Diary of An Avatar: Real Friends in a Virtual World – Lisa Schaefer

This is the first chapter. Prior to the chapter is an intro about what Second Life is and why I joined it. I don’t go into much detail, though because the story starts before I even knew what the heck Second Life was. So we figure it out along the way (although I suspect the main audience will be Second Life users.)

## Week 1

I was born a naked man in a desolate forest. All I saw in my view was my naked, penisless manbody amongst foliage. It was late at night, which may have explained why it was dark outside. At the bottom of my screen was a button that said ‘map.’ I clicked on it and a map with an aerial view of trees opened. As I pressed arrow keys to walk through foliage, I could see a yellow dot move along the map. I guess that was me.

There were two green dots nearby. Assuming they were other people, I clicked ‘fly’ and navigated toward them. I heard a whip crack and a woman moan. As I got closer, I saw a naked man and woman in the window of a house. The man held a whip, which cracked again, followed by the female moan.

“There’s a naked guy on the roof,” Naked Man said in the chat box on my screen.

“Go away,” Naked Woman said.

I flew toward another green dot on my map and landed near another house. The door was open, so I walked in.

“Get out of my house!” a woman shouted.

“I’m trying to figure out how I’m supposed to play Second Life,” I typed.

“Get off of my land!” the woman shouted.

“How?” I asked.

No need to explain. She ejected me from her land. The people in Second Life don’t seem very friendly.

I landed on a street in Korea. There were no cars anywhere, so people loitered in the street. On one side of the street, tall office buildings stood eerily vacant. On the other side, all sorts of odd characters – a spider, a pig, an alien, a few hookers, tattooed men, and a guy with a short woman’s body and a bald man’s face chatted by voice as they sat on park benches, lampposts, and the wall along the carless street.

Baldy came up and asked me, “Why don’t you have clothes?”

Hey, I just arrived in this world. I had no idea why I had arms, legs, or a head, much less clothes. “Why do you *have* clothes?” I asked. It’s a computer place. Why would anyone need clothes? The last people I met weren’t wearing any clothes.

“How do I get clothes?” I asked.

“There’s some in the library in your inventory,” the alien told me.

I found a box called ‘inventory.’ I searched the folders until I found one called ‘library,’ clicked on a gray t-shirt and a pair of jeans and selected ‘wear.’

“You look like a noob,” the spider told me.

“What makes me look like a noob?” I asked.

“Bad clothing,” the hooker said.

Bad? I thought their clothes looked horrible with spikes sticking out and half their ass or boobs showing.

I logged out and logged back in and realized why I had been born a naked man. Instead of logging in as Ruby, as I had signed up as on the Second Life web site, I had signed in as my husband. He had downloaded Second Life three years earlier and set the viewer software to save his password. He didn’t find anyone else around, thought it was boring, and never logged on again. Whatever clothing or other inventory items that may have come with an avatar back then had been deleted from the library database.

A boy invited me to fly around with him. We talked by voice. He probably thought I sounded strange for a man. He sounded awfully young to be hanging around hookers and thugs.

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Fourteen.”

This seemed like such a strange place for a fourteen year old to be. There wasn’t anyone else his age to play with. I imagine if he had asked Baldy or the spider to fly around with him, they would have told him to get lost in a way that no fourteen year old should hear.

A random person offered me, but not the boy, a teleport. I think it was because of my noob clothes. I accepted and landed in a strip club. Red carpeting, red flocked wallpaper, barstools with red seats pimped out the club. Chrome sparkled across the top edge of the bar. Lights spun around the ceiling and accented a few spindly female avatars slinking around poles on top of the bar. Men lurked below on the bar stools while the pole dancers said a few lame things in chat, such as, “Pookie slides her hands along her breasts and squeezes her nipples,” which Pookie was clearly not doing because her hands were around a pole.

Pookie and the other pole dancers asked for tips to be placed in their tip jars. I didn’t have any virtual money to put in their tip jars. But even if I had, this was certainly not the place where I would have spent it. The woman who teleported me probably thought she could get the newbie hooked on visiting this place. Sorry, but I didn’t find watching naked cartoon characters to be very erotic.

I have no idea why a business consultant recommended Second Life to me. Especially a game where you get invited to a strip club.

## Week 2

When I logged back on, I was in the park in Korea again. Seems it somehow got listed as my ‘home’ location. Not the kind of place I had hoped to call home. Eerie thugs, prostitutes, and other beasts milled among the trees, under a ramada, and on the street that seemed as though cars had been there at one time, but had dematerialized during an alien invasion or perhaps the apocalypse.

A woman stood alone on the sidewalk, carrying a baby.

“Where did that baby come from?” I asked her.

“You can get some sperm and a gray box will drop down and tell you if you’re pregnant.”

Get sperm and wait for a gray box? She asked if I wanted one.

“Uh, no thanks,” I answered.

I asked her how to change into a woman instead. She gave me some female clothes, hair, and skin, which I clicked to wear. Unreal breasts grew out of my torso. My legs lost half their diameter and my lips turned bright purple. Great. Now I’m a hooker.

“The guys really like this skin,” she said.

Who cares if guys like skin. What would they like about the skin anyway, the color of my arms? Maybe she was joking. As if anyone would care about avatar skin. Or care about what guys like.

I moved forward and walked head first into a guy who was talking out loud. I couldn’t pull my head out of his chest. The other guys standing around were teasing the guy. I got on my mic and said a few words. They seemed relieved that I really was female, not just some newbie guy asking how to change into a woman.

A woman in a formal gown wandered amongst the dregs. “Would anyone like to visit the House of Prayer with me?” she asked.

Anyplace where the women wear formal dresses seemed like a good place to go, so I volunteered to come along. She teleported me to the fellowship hall with a friendly man named Northern. He was also new to Second Life.

Staffers greeted the new people and offered us coffee. They showed us to gingham-covered buffet tables covered with a plentiful spread of cookies, brownies, pie, and ice cream. I clicked on a cookie and an item called ‘Cookie (wear)’ appeared in my inventory. I realize I’m a sloppy eater, but I don’t need to purposely wear a cookie. I clicked to ‘wear’ it anyway and a cookie appeared in my hand. My avatar moved it toward my open mouth and I chomped down on it and moved my hand away. I kept doing this in some sort of infinite loop because even though I kept biting the cookie as I continued to wear it on my hand, it never got smaller. Sort of the opposite of Cookie Monster.

On the opposite end of the room, guests watched a Christian video on a giant movie screen while lounging on plaid couches. Reminded me of my Catholic high school uniform. Northern discovered a baby crawling in the corner and asked me to come look at it.

“Whose baby is this?” I asked?

“Nobody’s,” the lady in the formal dress replied. “It just appeared here on its own and crawls around in the corner.”

Was it supposed to be a super-virgin-birth baby? Not only was it conceived from no father, it was born from no mother.

“I haven’t seen one of these in Second Life before,” Northern said.

“I just saw one!” I replied. “A woman was carrying it. I don’t understand where they come from. Something about a gray box.”

“I can show you. I’ll teleport you there.” He disappeared and about a minute later, he invited me to a new location. When I arrived, Northern was in an indoor hot tub smoking a cigarette and carrying a bottle of Jack Daniels.

“This place belongs to my friend Jack.” No, he didn’t mean Daniels. “He said I could use it.”

We got on voice chat and I told him my real name was Lisa. He put a huge penis on his avatar and asked if I could see it. “Yes. That’s ridiculous,” I said.

The hot tub had several pink and blue orbs. Northern told me to click on a pink ball and select ‘Sit here.’ My avatar popped into the tub fully clothed. All I could see was the wall. As I panned around, my viewer crashed. I logged in again and appeared by the tub.

“Are you mad?” he asked.

“No, why do you ask?”

“I thought maybe you were insulted by the hot tub. You logged off.”

“That wasn’t on purpose,” I explained.

“Good. Let’s check out the rest of this house,” he suggested.

He teleported me to a dungeon with a satiny red canopy bed and more pink and blue orbs.

“Sit on the pink ball,” Northern urged me. I did so and instead of sitting, I laid on my back with my legs in the air. Then he ‘sat’ on the blue orb. He landed on top of me.

These orbs are called pose balls. When you click on them, your avatar sits on them and does an animation like dancing. In this case, when I put my avatar on one of the pose balls, she did whatever sex animations I selected. It was quite comic. Someone had made animations that looked like sex, as a silly joke. Because they could. Like a parody of the dance animations in Second Life. If you can make avatars dance, you can make them do other animations, like put their fingers in their nose or spread their legs and wiggle. I wondered how Northern had even stumbled across these joke pose balls.

Northern and I laughed. “What am I supposed to be doing here?” he said. “Is my leg in your crotch?”

In the background I saw a medieval character hanging upside-down on a cross. I didn’t think I had seen it there earlier, but figured that it didn’t matter. After we had enough comedy on these pose balls, Northern moved our avatars underneath the cross. “What’s this face above mine?” I asked.

“Face?” Northern paused to pan his view. “Oh, that’s my friend Jack.”

“That’s your FRIEND?” I shouted. “Oh. Hi Jack.” I hadn’t realized that was an avatar. I thought he was part of the décor.

The next evening, Northern was online again when I logged on. He immediately sent me a message and asked if I was sore.

“Sore?” I asked.

“From having my leg in your crotch.”

We sat around at the House of Prayer playing with their movie clip viewer. I wanted to play clips from *Budget Justified* on it, but no such luck. I chatted out loud with another guy there who was also snowed in in Northern Virginia. I told him that my husband was out helping people stranded in the snow.

Northern was very quiet during this conversation. I think he was surprised to find out that I was married.

Northern’s friends invited him to play Greedy, a gambling game. He invited me to come along. I didn’t have any money to play, so one of the guys lent some to me, provided that the winner pay him back.

The unit of currency in Second Life, is called Linden dollars. One hundred Linden dollars is worth about forty cents. You can easily get by without money because many items, such as clothing, hair, furniture, cars, and houses are free. You can also make your own clothing, house, etc. although you can get by very well without most of these items, especially cars, since the main mode of transportation is either flying like superman or teleporting.

“You have to be topless if you want to play,” the owner of the Greedy table said. The graphics of all the avatars hadn’t loaded yet, instead my viewer displayed gray figures on my screen. I couldn’t tell if anyone else was wearing any clothing, so I took off my shirt.

“I was just kidding,” the table owner said.

“Makes no difference to me what my avatar wears,” I said.

We didn’t look at our avatars anyway. We all zoomed in on the greedy playing board. The board was an octagon, one side for each player. When you sat in a chair, your avatar name appeared on the board and you were signed up to play the game. Across the middle of the board were six dots with the words ‘roll’ and ‘stop’ underneath. We all chatted by voice and they taught me how to play. When it was your turn, you clicked to either roll the dice or stop your turn.

Northern won, so he had to pay the guy the money he had lent to me. I figured he would. He seems intelligent.

There was one other woman at the greedy table with us. She told me that the ‘problem’ with my clothing looking like a noob was that it was the standard clothing that new avatars are given when they are created. She gave me a landmark for a store that had thousands of items of free clothing.

I purchased a soccer shirt from the men’s department for L$0, or zero Linden dollars. Since you don’t have to get naked to try on clothing, I decided to try it on amongst the clothing displays. When I selected ‘Wear,’ a box with a picture of a soccer shirt became attached to my arm. That’s not useful. I wanted to wear the shirt, not the box. Turns out that I had to go somewhere else to open the box to access the clothes. Luckily I was able to correctly wear the next item of clothing I purchased without finding a place to open boxes.

I stumbled across a help facility and chatted with a guy who creates and sells virtual objects, such as furniture. Since my avatar had absolutely no money, he gave me L$100 so I could create my own group called BudgetJustified.com – my online community for the book and web series I created about being a female engineer.

Just outside the help facility, a bunch of guys were chatting and a slutty looking girl named Honi lurked in the background. I teleported Northern in to hang out with me. I don’t know what Northern had done, but the guys standing around started throwing toilet paper at him, shouting, “Great Northern!”

Northern got tired of them, so we teleported out of there to a pretty island. When I arrived, Honi was standing next to Northern.

Apparently he had been chatting with her through a private instant message. So I wandered off, looking for someone who might appreciate my company more.

“Come back,” Northern beckoned. “She’s just an empty head.” I wondered if she were actually a guy.

I lurked far in the background. Honi removed her clothes and they got on pink and blue pose balls that made their avatars kiss.

“Come over here and look at this,” Northern said.

I walked over there and saw Honi on her belly with her hands and feet tied together behind her back.

“I hogtied her,” he said.

Hogtied? Northern released her ropes and she gave him an animation object that allows you to offer a hug or a kiss. Northern offered her a kiss and she kissed him, embracing him with her arms, holding her face against his, and bending her knee to raise her foot in the air. Honi gave me a copy of the animation object too. I offered her a kiss and she gave me a big long smooch too, foot in the air.

A rock concert played nearby. Northern went over to listen, so we followed him. He and Honi danced close, gazing into each other’s eyes. I wanted to gag, but instead just teleported to Korea.

I needed to hang out with someone besides Northern, but didn’t know where to meet good people. I came across singles ads for avatars, but there weren’t many people to choose from. I teleported to an elegant ballroom affiliated with the singles ads.

I descended a golden staircase to a hall filled with avatars all dressed in huge formal gowns or tuxedos. I was wearing a ponytail, jeans and no shoes, so I changed into the only skirt I owned. It was a dowdy pink polka-dot skirt with matching blouse. I didn’t look like I belonged at a formal dance. I looked as though I belonged on Gilligan’s Island.

A gentleman played the piano and a bartender greeted me as I walked along a red carpet into the soiree. Several people perched on barstools along the curved bar as couples twirled on a sparkly dance floor. Beyond the dance floor, the club had parked a long, white yacht. In the distance, a large rectangular object floated down from the sky.

“Is someone wearing a house?” the dance club’s host asked.

“It’s the new fashion,” I replied.

I met a nice gentleman and we danced.

“This computer doesn’t have a microphone,” he said. “Will you be online tomorrow evening? We could chat tomorrow night.”

The next evening we found each other and went to a pretty island full of palm trees and flowers. We had a nice conversation about the places we lived. The next morning, he deleted me from his friend list and didn’t respond to a message I sent him. I was pretty sure I hadn’t offended him. Perhaps that was the problem. He may have wanted to chat with someone a little more offensive.

I went back to the ballroom dance club and another guy asked me if I’d go with him somewhere. Sure. I was eager to see new places.

He teleported me to the porch of a log cabin that sheltered a two-seated swing made of smaller logs. We went inside the unfinished wooden front door and found a pool table at the bottom of a staircase made of logs sawed in half lengthwise. Instead of pool balls, pink and blue pose balls hovered just above the green felt. I sat on the pink one to see if it would make me play pool. Instead, it made me do the same kind of ridiculous sex animations like the ones Northern showed me.

The guy got on the blue pose ball. “Take off your clothes,” he said.

Since when do I take orders from him? “Why are there so many of these ridiculous pose balls around here?” I said. “It was funny the first time I saw this, but now it’s getting old.”

“You’re supposed to get excited watching your avatar fuck and then you both jerk off in front of the computer,” he said.

“Are you kidding?” I asked. “This isn’t exciting. It’s a joke.”

The guy got mad and left. I guess he wasn’t kidding.

I figured the guy was just weird. Jerking off in front of a computer while you and some stranger watch avatars wiggling around is sad. As I found out later, there are an awful lot of weird people wiggling around online, jerking off in front of computers. Creeps me out.

## Week 3

Northern had mentioned a nude beach while talking to Jack. I was curious about why anyone would care about a beach with naked cartoon characters, so I searched for ‘nude beach’ and went to one of the many beaches that appeared in search.

Along the shoreline, bikini-clad avatars laid on beach chairs shaded by large umbrellas. Many other avatars in various stages of undress stood around on the sand. A woman with breasts as large as she was tall bounced from man to man. A man wearing nothing but a cobra slithered amongst the women.

One man’s penis told everyone within range who had touched his penis and in what way. Variations on “Jenny touched Joe’s penis with slow, deep strokes,” or “George massaged Joe’s penis with his wet, ravenous tongue,” appeared several times in chat. But of course, Jenny and George had done no such thing. Everyone who had the guy in their view clicked on the guys penis to see what offensive phrases it would come up with.

A nude bot avatar with giant breasts, spaghetti legs, and buttocks about the same width posed in a fountain. Palm-covered huts offered sexy skins and obscene penises for sale. Sprinkled amongst the scenery in plain sight, several kinds of pose balls teased visitors eager to find a cohort to use them. Labeled cuddling, kissing, or sex, pose balls awaited twosomes, threesomes, and for those not content with only one or two partners, tensomes.

There wasn’t much chat going on among the beach inhabitants. Presumably everyone was exchanging private messages. Fully clothed, I read the *Washington Post* out loud. A female voice on a nude beach! Guys with erect penises, some sticking straight out through their jeans, ran over to hear what was going on. Most of them left when they realized I wasn’t reading porn.

I set BudgetJustified.com as my ‘active’ group, which put the URL in a label above my head. I also uploaded graphics from the web series so I could put them on t-shirts and hand them out. Northern sent me a message asking me what I was up to. “Clothing the naked,” I replied.

I got harassed by a guy from Brazil, who kept telling me to take my shirt off. I teleported my friend Chandler, whom I know in real life. The Brazilian got all angry and let us know it by entering obscenities in chat and bumping into Chandler, backing up, then bumping into him repeatedly. “I’m punching you in the face,” he said.

I teleported Northern. He arrived just as the Brazilian disappeared. Northern thought Chandler was the one who had been harassing me, so Northern offered him a kiss. Chandler refused.

“Northern, meet Chandler, a friend of mine in real life,” I said.

“You know this guy?” Northern gasped. “Now he thinks I’m a freak.” Northern walked off.

Chandler took me to a clothing store and introduced me to a long-time online friend of his. She was the first overweight female avatar I had seen. Not just a few extra pounds, but really fat. She gave me some of her clothes, which, to my surprise, fit my thin avatar quite well. In fact, all clothing fits all avatars. The clothing data files have a design, but no shape. Clothes don’t take a size or shape until they’re attached to an avatar.

Chandler took me to his land to show me his house. “Why do you need a virtual house?” I asked. “It’s not like you get rained on here. And all your stuff is stored in an inventory.”

“People like to get creative and decorate their place,” Chandler explained. “Less expensive than decorating a house in real life. Plus it’s a venue where you can bring friends and hang out.”

I’m not sure why people would select a house as the thing they’d want to decorate. If you’re going to make something in a virtual world, make something you can’t have in real life, not the same thing everyone else has.

A sturdy maple tree with a tire swing guarded Chandler’s front lawn. Rocks lined a streambed that led to a trickling waterfall. We traipsed over a small wooden bridge and visited on his front porch.

New wicker chairs, which in a virtual world will never fade nor warp, invited us to relax while we took a sip from a pitcher of lemonade set out for us on a wicker table. When I say ‘invited,’ I mean with words. ‘ChairInviter says: LisaSchaefer Ruby, please have a seat and drink some lemonade,’ appeared in local chat. Gives new meaning to the concept of ‘inviting spaces.’

The home reminded me of a plush cabin in the woods, with cedar siding and shake shingles on a steeply-sloped split roof. Chandler entered a security code and the door opened.

Inside, a homey powder blue couch with white lace pillows bordered two sides of the single-roomed first story. I suppose there was no kitchen because there was no need to make food. Several large pieces of framed ‘artwork’ covered the walls – drawings of nude women.

“Why do you have these on the wall?” I asked.

“A neighbor of mine sells his drawings in a gallery nearby, so I bought a few.”

“So you could offend your female visitors?” I asked.

“They don’t mind,” he said.

What kind of women does he invite over?

Having seen the entire first floor, I walked up his stairs, only to fall off the side.

“You need handrails,” I said.

I attempted the stairs again. Upstairs, a circular area rug covered hardwood floors. Near the staircase, an end table covered with books sat next to chaise lounge. A few more ‘art pieces’ hung on the wall.

In the middle of the room, a tall, puffy king-sized purple bed topped with a variety of satin pillows loomed. I stood on his bed and jumped up and down on it. I don’t sleep online, so I saw no need to decorate a room with a pretty bed. Nor any need for nude drawings as decorations.

“Do you come here to stare at nude drawings?” I asked.

“Try out the chaise lounge,” Chandler changed the subject. I clicked to sit on the lounge and landed on my stomach, feet in the air crossed at the ankles, resting my chin in my hands. A book materialized in front of me, which I appeared to be reading.

“You know me well,” I said. “You invite me over to read books.” Just like when we were in college, hanging out in each other’s dorm rooms doing homework.

After Chandler logged off, I went to console, and laugh at, Northern.

“I found free apartments,” Northern said.

“Free apartments?” I asked. “What does that mean?”

He teleported me to a land called Noobieville. Fifty narrow buildings bordered four courtyards with shallow hills and streams, occupying an entire island. Each building had four stories with one apartment on each floor. Each apartment had two small rooms. Neighbors filled in quickly as word spread.

Northern clicked on a box outside the doorway of a top floor apartment, paid zero Linden dollars to the object, and moved in. I did the same with the apartment on the first floor. Cool! Now I have a place to ‘decorate.’

The first thing I set out was a school of fish swimming in a circle. I expanded the circle so the fish would swim around the perimeter of the apartment, going in and out of the walls at the corners of the building. I placed a flowering bush in the center of the back room and a large burning torch in the middle of the room that led out to my front porch. Outside, I placed a rug over one wall of my brick siding and a giant blue suede shoe on the porch. I sat on my shoe and watched as new neighbors moved in across the courtyard.

I teleported to a twelve-story freebie mall to shop for things to strew around my new apartment. The majority of the store gave away free clothing items. I tried on a skirt that looked like it belonged on a bride. Now I need a groom. I chased a newbie guy around the store. “Will you marry meeeeee?” He teleported out of there.

I went back to Noobieville to look for another potential groom. I went to the sandbox area where I found two women and an eggplant building a few small objects. “Eggplant, will you marry meeeee?”

“Eeeek!” Eggplant typed. “I’m an eggplant!”

Eggplant changed into a man in a suit. “Eggplant, you’re even dressed for a wedding!”

“No, I’m dressed for business, like I often am in real life.” So Eggplant *is* a man?

## Week 4

Noobieville management changed its mind and decided to charge $25L per week for apartment rent. Still very cheap compared to most places – about ten cents in American money. Cheap, that is, if you have a source of Linden dollars.

“What if you’re a genuine newbie and have no money?” I asked. Because I was a genuine newbie with no money.

Neighbors Chachi and an Asian woman sent me money (which I paid back later). Very generous of them.

The next day, the Asian woman sent me an invitation to join her at a Cum As You Are party. I should’ve looked at that title a little more closely before I invited Northern to join us. When I got there, Asian and several other women were pole dancing. I sent Northern an instant message. “Please disregard teleport invitation.”

Too late, he was already on his way. When he saw what was going on, he took off his clothes and walked around all the girls on the poles doing pelvic thrusts. Sorta funny, sorta awful. I chose to laugh about it.

One of the girls told Northern, “What you’re doing is bordering on harassment.”

Poledance club management gave him clothes and ejected him. If that had been a real club and he had touched real bodies, yeah. I would have agreed that was harassment. However, they invited us there without telling us what we were going to see when we got there. And they were skanky avatars dancing around on poles, so how was what Northern was doing any worse?

I wished they would eject me too and sent Northern a message. “Please teleport me to wherever you are.” I landed on an island where lots of newbies stopped by. I gave them shirts and invited them to my BudgetJustified.com group.

A vampire friended me there. He got back to me a few times over the next several days and invited me to tour his vampire land.

Hidden in a deep valley beneath a forest of majestic spruce, the vampires dwelled in an enormous black castle with tall spires flying vampire flags. A moat crept around its perimeter. The vampire had invited three other women for the tour. We crossed the drawbridge as two more women, with flowing hair, wearing circular metal shields over their breasts and metal underpants, departed the castle on galloping stallions.

I wasn’t sure why anyone would join a clan of vampires or why the group existed at all. “What’s the mission statement of the vampires,” I asked, but didn’t get a clear answer.

“We protect each other from harm in this world,” Vampire said. What was that supposed to mean? Protect each other from the pole dancers who eject you from strip clubs?

“Why do people join vampires?” I asked.

“To meet friends. Become part of a society.”

“Like a frat?” I imagined the vampires as boozed up avatar guys, kicked out of strip clubs, trolling the castle for drunk half naked chicks on horses. Was this tour for recruiting more potential metal-clad horse-riders?

The first floor of the castle was a ballroom lit by an enormous chandelier. The black and white checkerboard marble floor was set up with giant chess pieces arranged as a game in progress. Burgundy blood oozed down red Victorian wallpaper.

While Vampire and the other women ascended the curved staircase on the left side of the ballroom, I ascended the staircase on the right. When there’s two perfectly good staircases, we don’t all need to crowd onto the same one. A railing of candles prevented me from tumbling to the floor, as I had done when I walked up the stairs in the house of my real life friend, Chandler.

The indoor balcony housed a game room with several game tables – Greedy, Vampire Meltdown, SimBall, and several other games I had never heard of and didn’t know how to play.

“Can I come back and play these later?” I asked.

“You’ll automatically get ejected from this land if you come back after the end of the tour,” Vampire said. “The games are available only to members of the Clan.”

So that’s the reason to join vampires. Access to the game room.

We went up another floor and found a store to purchase vampire attire, skins, accessories, furniture, and animations. We followed Vampire through the store and exited through stained glass French doors to a golden veranda dripping with ivy. Vampire flew off the veranda and the rest of us trailed behind him to a village of mansions in the distance.

We landed on the clay tile roof of a mansion where a female vampire was giving a tour to several newbie men.

“This is my house,” Vampire said.

“Someone else is taking over your house,” I said.

“That’s my wife.”

According to the female vampire’s profile, she was partnered. But not to Vampire.

“Wife in real life?” I asked. “She’s partnered to someone else.”

“No, my real life wife isn’t in Second Life,” Vampire explained. “Vampira’s partner is my alt. I use this alt to find new recruits.”

Oh, I get it. Go around unpartnered, flirt, have some pixel sex, then the woman has to join vampire land in order to continue to have him around.

“What is the purpose of marriage in Second Life?” I asked.

Vampire ignored my question. “Let’s take a look around the place.”

We jumped off the roof onto the deck in the back yard. The house didn’t look very vampire-like. With stucco siding, palm trees, swimming pool, and lounge chairs shaded by umbrellas, it looked more like a Hollywood mansion.

We entered sliding glass doors to a bright yellow kitchen with stainless steel appliances and speckled granite countertop. A bowl of fruit gleamed on top of the kitchen island containing a wine rack underneath.

The wife and her male groupies entered the kitchen.

“What does it mean to have a vampire wife?” I asked.

“Feel free to grab a snack from the refrigerator,” Vampire said. Ignored again.

I clicked on the refrigerator. The door opened and a blue menu popped up asking me to select from a list of snacks. I took caviar and the refrigerator closed.

“Thanks for the snack,” I said.

A few of the other tourists also clicked on the refrigerator, causing the door to open and close several times. But nobody said anything, which was strange because people are usually fairly generous with please and thank you pleasantries in Second Life. In fact, except for a few acknowledgements that they didn’t have any questions, Vampire and I were the only ones chatting during the whole tour. I would have thought that their avatars had been abandoned, had they not been following us the whole time. Perhaps they weren’t smart enough to have anything to ask or say. Or they were busy with private messages.

I suppose this was the part of the tour where the potential new men and women meet each other and get excited about the possibilities of meeting new women or men. However since I was the only chattery one, that opportunity was lost.

The group walked across the midnight blue marble tile into the living room. Blue velvet curtains framed the view of a mountain valley out of the floor-to-ceiling windows. But nobody sat on the lemon yellow couches with floral embroidered pillows. We didn’t play any videos on the television or listen to music on the speakers of the mahogany entertainment center.

One of the tourists stepped onto the first rung of the carved ivory staircase. “We’re not going up there,” Vampire said.

Oh? What’s up there, I wondered. In a virtual world of course, you don’t have to send your avatar up the stairs to see what’s up there. I panned my viewer up to see a giant heart-shaped bed with pose balls. A bear-skin rug with pose balls. A reclining chair with pose balls. And a cross with pose balls.

I zoomed out to see what else we were missing. A four-car garage. With a Porsche, Lamborghini, Limousine, and Hummer. Each with pose balls in the back seat. Someone with a very expensive fantasy had obviously spent a lot of time decorating this mansion.

“Do all vampires get mansions like this?” I asked.

“No, Vampira and I pay extra to get this land.”

I still wasn’t understanding what this whole vampire husband and wife thing was for.

“If you want to get a mansion, do you have to have a partner?” No, that wasn’t the case either.

“So, it’s not like you’re raising vampire kids, or trying to get the government to grant you tax breaks. What do you have a vampire spouse for?”

“We’re near the end of the tour, so let’s go to our amusement park,” Vampire said. OK. Whatever his reason for having an online wife is, he doesn’t want to talk about it. Nor does he want to talk about why he doesn’t want to talk about it. Maybe people get married online because that’s what other people do here, sort of like why people get married and have babies in real life. Or perhaps he’s not clever enough to articulate his reasons.

We went out the front door and flew toward a Ferris wheel and merry-go-round. We landed near a roof decorated with crazy vampire characters dripping blood from their teeth. A lonely bumper car sat on the rink underneath. When Vampire sat in the car, another bumper car appeared.

“Hop in,” Vampire beckoned us.

I jumped in the other car and another bumper car appeared. As each person got in a car, another appeared until Vampire deleted the extra one. Then we were able to start driving with our arrow keys. I zoomed around and around the rink as the other cars blundered into each other, trapping themselves in a corner.

When time was up, scores appeared in local chat. Mine was the highest. Yea, I won at bumper cars!

I no longer heard from Vampire afterward. I think he was afraid of me because I asked too many questions.

In the Noobieville chat, a neighbor announced that she was at a sex toy store. What would a sex toy store for a virtual world be? Perhaps it’s a room with a bunch of phallus-shaped objects. What would be the purpose of having a virtual sex toy? I suppose you could put it in the middle of your apartment floor and carry it around to dance clubs. I wanted to find out what could possibly be there.

“Teleport me,” I asked her.

Someone named Phil sent me a teleport. I accepted, thinking he was at the store with the neighbor. But instead I arrived in the bedroom of a Noobieville apartment where a short, naked, penisless avatar wearing a flat mask made from a photo of Dr. Phil stood on top of a red bed.

I turned and walked out the door onto the balcony so I could fly away from that desperate scene. A sign that said, ‘Phil’s Boom Boom Room’ hung from the railing. Although all Noobieville apartment buildings were identical, the view of the landscape from his balcony looked too familiar.

I jumped off the balcony and landed in front of a giant blue suede shoe. My apartment. The Dr. Phil disguise was in my building? I would have noticed if there had been a Boom Boom Room sign there before. I floated up to see where he was. He wasn’t on the second floor. Nor the third. The Boom Boom Room was on the fourth floor.

Fourth floor? Northern’s apartment was on the fourth floor. I peered into Dr. Phil’s open door as I hovered just off his balcony. “Where’s Northern?” I asked.

I sent a private message to Northern. “Northern!!!!! A naked Dr. Phil just teleported me to your apartment and there’s a red bed in the middle of his Boom Boom Room!”

Northern teleported in from his WWII games, wearing his military combat fatigues, boondocker boots, and haversack, carrying a Browning Automatic Rifle and hand grenades.

“What are you doing here?” Northern asked him.

Panicked, Phil repeated, “I didn’t do anything, I swear it wasn’t me!” several times.

“This is my apartment!”

“LandLady told me to move into this apartment,” Phil said. “What’s going on? Why did they send the military in?”

Northern walked in and out of the rooms, onto the balcony, and flew around the building, searching for any of his items that may have been left behind.

“OK. This wasn’t your fault,” Northern said. “You can stay here and I’ll find a solution.”

After Northern had a talk with LandLady and moved into an apartment on the other side of Noobieville, I invited him to come country dancing at a saloon.

A battered double hinged pub door swung open and shut as I entered the barroom. Tumbleweeds blew across the gouged wooden dance floor. Three rows of couples, and a few singles, danced a synchronized line routine to a country song. Behind the bar, broken beer bottles were lined up along a shelf, along with liquor bottles with torn labels.

What was going on in the saloon’s chat was not conversation. Instead, it was a bunch of special characters that made pretty patterns. I didn’t know how these people were putting all these special characters into the chat, but they certainly weren’t typing the hearts, clovers, and diamonds that were arranged into twenty-line billboards that took on the shape of music notes, cowboy boots, or the naked woman silhouette you see on truck mudflaps. These wild text spams were accompanied by lots of unusual sounds, such as “Hoooo!” or a strange chipmunk voice saying, “I love this tuuuuune!” When someone did type in an actual sentence, you missed it because all these curly characters and exploding patterns kept scrolling up the entire chat screen.

Several whirligigs spun around on the ceiling. A few ceiling fans rotated in unison. In the middle was an orb covered with a red, white, and black logo that said, ‘Lagweiser, King of Jeers’ in curly script. Text above the orb said, ‘Saloon Sploder. Current pot is L$50.’ A Sploder is a raffle device. If you click on it and select ‘Pay,’ it takes some of your Linden dollars and enters you in a raffle.

Off to the side of the ceiling was a spinning pink and blue heart that said ‘Click me to dance.’ So I clicked on it and a blue menu popped up asking if I was male, female, or a couple. I clicked ‘male.’ If it needs me to tell it what gender I am, it doesn’t need me to be truthful.

While the other women did high kicks and crawled around on the floor doing splits, I joined the men in the line dance with my hands on my hips, jumping back and forth, occasionally marching in a small circle. I’m not sure which group looked more ridiculous.

When Northern arrived, he stretched his arm toward the ceiling, looking for the whirligig spinning heart that initiates dance moves. The text and logos probably hadn’t rezzed on his screen yet, so what he clicked on first was not the item that contained dance animations. ‘Rez,’ short for ‘resolve,’ is the Second Life term for graphics loading onto your screen. Northern jumped off my screen, although I knew he was still nearby because he was in my radar. I spun my view around the room to look for him, but no luck.

Then I saw his head fly by my view. Where was his head going? His head flew by a second and a third time. I panned up and saw him spinning around on a whirligig. Did he get caught in a ceiling fan? No, he was sitting on the Sploder! As the Sploder spun on a tilted axis, Northern dove face-first toward the floor, then hid on the back side of the orb, then zoomed toward the ceiling, then faced toward me again and nosedived toward the floor.

“Northern is on the Sploder!” the DJ shouted.

“He’s trying to break in and get the money out,” someone said.

“It’s full of beer. If he breaks it, we’ll all get drenched.”

I hopped onto the Sploder and joined Northern. My view of the whole room spun wildly – Ceiling. Wall. Floor. Dancers. Ceiling.

“Jane! Stop this crazy thing!” I shouted.

“Maybe if we all sit on it, it will get too heavy and fall off the ceiling,” the saloon owner said.

Then Northern started doing pelvic thrust animations, which stuck him out of the Sploder, hands behind his head, knees slightly bent, moving his rear forward and back like a bad ‘80’s dance. I was laughing so hard it hurt.

“He’s starting a new dance craze,” the DJ said.

Northern handed out his pelvic thrust animation and several people scooted across the wooden floor with their hands behind their heads, jerking their hips. A few other people sat on the ceiling fans and dance heart, spinning around the ceiling.

And just when I thought things couldn’t get any funnier, someone sent us a picture of me attached to the side of the Sploder with Northern floating next to me, hands behind his head, pelvis forward. I gave a copy of it to everyone.

The dance saloon was holding a voting contest. A large black electronic board hung on the back wall. Northern clicked on it and his name was added to the list of people to vote for. We all voted for best dancer, and of course Northern won. The prize was a couple hundred Linden dollars, about eighty American cents.

The saloon owner was missing a pant leg, exposing her thigh and most of her butt cheek. The rest of her jeans had flesh showing through several large slits cut into them. Unfortunately, Northern ruined the hilarity by shouting to her.

“I really like your jeans!”

I wondered if he had been sending private chats about lack of clothing to the rest of the women there.

While out browsing freebie stores, I found a pink jeep. So I took it back to Noobieville for a drive. The terrain was hilly and the jeep tended to roll downhill too easily. Using my arrow keys to steer against the hills, I hit every rock, tree, and apartment building in sight. A neighbor was standing on his balcony, so I flew past him in my jeep.

“Would you like a pink jeep tour?” I asked by voice. If he had been watching me, he’d know better than to ride while I’m behind the wheel.

He jumped in and I stayed on voice, laughing the whole while. After running over all the park benches and bushes, I drove straight into the lake and couldn’t find my way out. My neighbor teleported back to his apartment and took me with him. I flew around looking for the jeep, but couldn’t locate it.

So I announced a new contest in the Noobieville neighborhood chat.

“Whoever finds a pink jeep at the bottom of the lake wins a free pink jeep.”

Some of our more experienced neighbors offered to give a building class in the Noobieville sandbox. The landscapes and environments in Second Life weren’t created by a central corporation. Users – the general public roaming around – created the houses, trees, Sploders, clothing and other objects found all over this world.

Building is one of the most common reasons for spending time in Second Life. Artists come here to display work and develop three-dimensional environments for people to visit and explore. Programmers spend a lot of time writing scripts to create objects that are more than something to look at – they create objects that *do* something. They create vendors that give out freebies, mechanisms that invite people to join groups, crawling babies, or dance balls.

I thought it would be useful to know how to create my own items related to *Budget Justified*, besides the T-shirts I’d already made, so I could have a set of web-series-themed objects to hand out to people. So I went to the building class in the Noobieville sandbox, not only for a learning experience, but also to get to know the neighbors.

Three female instructors showed up. They put out some wooden boxes, elongated them, and arranged them into rows. The students started sitting on the rows of elongated boxes and the instructors sat on a long box in the front of the sandbox. It was like an outdoor classroom with students on benches and teachers in the front of the ‘room.’ Instead of walls and a blackboard, we had a white picket fence and a chat box open on our screens.

The first thing we learned was how to make our own wooden box. That’s the default building object. The students each scattered boxes anywhere in the sandbox where there was room. We learned how to change the size and color of the box, then put different pictures on it.

I uploaded a jpg of my *Budget Justified* DVD cover and put it on my box. Then I made my box large and flat, like a stiff poster. After class, I took it to my apartment and hung it like a flag from the roof of my porch. Kind of like an identifier, ‘Ruby lives here,’ instead of a house number, that people can see when they’re trolling the neighborhood looking for me.

Noobieville also put on a dance for everyone to hang out together. As the dance commenced, I looked at the map of the land I was on to figure out where the dance was being held. I found a spot where several avatars were gathered and teleported there. However I landed inside a giant aquarium and couldn’t fly out because there was a lid.

In Noobieville chat I said, “Hey, I just teleported into the aquarium at the dance.”

“Teleport me,” several of the people who hadn’t arrived yet requested. I teleported them, and one person turned into a dolphin avatar and swam around. We were three avatars trapped in an aquarium, peering out at our neighbors watching us like a dolphin exhibit at the zoo.

After a few laughs, our neighbors teleported us out of the aquarium and onto the dance floor. I danced with a few guys. After they left, I invited Northern to come. As I danced with him, I tried to chat about the building class he missed, but he didn’t respond to our conversation.

“Northern’s avatar is here, but nobody’s home,” I said to everyone at the dance.

So I stopped dancing and left his avatar standing there next to the pink dance pose ball I vacated. Seeing my dilemma, BeachHouse asked me to dance. Landlady got on the pink ball next to Northern and he came alive again.

“I’ll just put my hand down Northern’s pants while he’s away,” Landlady said.

“Oh, I’m not away,” Northern said. “But you can keep your hands there anyway.”

He responds about groping for everyone to read, but he doesn’t acknowledge messages about neighborhood classes. Was I not obscene enough to dance with?

After BeachHouse left, I was dancing alone. I approached Eggplant. “Eggplant, will you dance with me?”

He became a burning book and with pages fluttering, flew away from me. As he floated in the rafters, I flew over to him and danced in the air on top of him.

A neighbor complimented my dance moves. He gave me a dance animation and we played with the different commands. A neighbor dressed like Santa joined us. For one of the moves, we bounced back and forth like a slinky, alternately landing on our feet and our heads.

“I thought that was supposed to be a dance animation, not a Jack-in-the-Box animation,” onlooker Sweets said.

I tried another dance move called “clean.” I selected that one, imagining a dance a friend in real life made up that she called ‘Mopping the Floor’ where we pretended to grab a mop handle and rotated around the floor moving our arms in a churning motion. Instead, Santa and I started licking our own crotches. Next move, please.

“I thought that move was supposed to be CLEAN,” I said. “It looked pretty dirty to me.”

“Sorry about that,” my neighbor said. “Some of the dance moves are a bit distasteful.” Yeah, like everything else in this virtual world.

(This isn’t the end of the chapter, just the end of 20 pages.)