

What is Second Life®?¹

Nicola Marae Allain, PhD aka Ragitake Takakura

Technically speaking, Second Life® is a MUVE [Multi-user virtual environment], also known as a virtual world. Some people mistakenly think Second Life® is a MMORPG [massively multiplayer online role-playing game], which it is not, since Second Life® is not a game. People are represented by avatars in Second Life®, and are called “residents”.



Ragitake Takakura's Second Life® Avatars

This is where it can get complicated. Some people also call themselves players and treat Second Life® [SL™] as if it were a role-playing game. Though Second Life® does have worlds that are role-playing and in which Second Life® residents are players, they only represent a fraction of the worlds within the larger world of Second Life® .

Second Life® locations are either on the mainland continent or private island. The whole of Second Life® is sometimes called: *The Grid*. Individual mainland regions and private islands are also called: *sims* (short for simulator). Many of the best organized and beautifully built Second Life® worlds are on privately owned sims.

So if Second Life® is not a Game, What is it?

It might be helpful for you to think of Second Life® as if it were a very large, international, cosmopolitan city with various languages spoken in different neighborhoods, lots of different cultural groups represented, and a wide range of lifestyles, political inclinations, and economic values.

The primary difference in Second Life® is that though human beings are well represented amongst these communities, you might also encounter fantasy communities, with elves, dragons, and other mythical creatures; furry communities, with anthropomorphic animals and feral (four-legged) avatars; Neko (the cat people of Second Life®); cyborgs; and other types of life forms.

Real world businesses are represented, as are over 300 real world educational institutions, including Ivy League colleges, top research universities, and avant garde

¹ Second Life® and SL™ are trademarks of Linden Research, Inc.

teaching colleges. SUNY has a growing presence in Second Life®, and SUNY Empire State College has been present in SL™ since as early as 2004.



The Future of Being Human Project in Second Life®

So, while some avatars are busy being cyborgs on role-play sims, others are taking real world classes; interviewing for real life jobs; or very busy running their own Second Life® business. Shopping is a very popular Second Life® activity, since so many wonderful things are available for cheap. Often, one resident might do all of the above!

Oh, and the Second Life® economy is very real. The Linden dollar has been holding at about 250 Linden dollars to one US dollar for the past couple of years. At its peak, more than **\$1 Million US** were transacted in Second Life® **every 24 hours**.

Compare Second Life® to a Large Cosmopolitan Metropolis

Second Life® worlds differ greatly in their level of safety, culture, community, economic status, and environments. For example, in a big city you'll find neighborhoods with stately homes, gated communities with strict regulations and entry to members only, run down areas, high crime zones that you would never knowingly enter, a red light district filled with prostitutes soliciting clients and XXX adult cinemas.

You'll also find arts districts, the High Fashion areas, sports arenas, university and college campuses, beautiful parks and botanical gardens, museums and libraries. Second Life® is no different. Some communities have no rules and frankly, are very unpleasant. Other dark urban communities are actually well managed role play sims with strict rules and are safe to visit. Some are strictly PG with no mature themes allowed.

As you would plan areas to visit in a city, and avoid certain areas that conflict with your interests, safety needs, and values, you might want to do the same in Second Life®.

What Can I Do in Second Life®?

The beauty of Second Life® is that you can do anything, be anyone, and look anyway you want in Second Life® [studies show that most Second Life® residents choose to be mostly themselves, though]. Second Life® allows you to defy physics. You can fly, teleport anywhere in the world using teleporters and landmarks, and create anything you can imagine.

Visit organized communities to discover immersive environments with different world settings – as you make new friends. The Victorian Steampunk community of Caledon and the Isle of Wyrms community of dragons are two examples of beautifully designed worlds with active, friendly communities that welcome newcomers.² See the SL™ Destination Guide for a listing of excellent regions to visit: <http://secondlife.com/destinations/>.³

Be sure to check the maturity rating of a sim before visiting, and stay within the ratings that are comfortable for you. Also, most organized communities have covenants (rules) that are usually listed on the land tab (top middle menu bar of your viewer). Please read those carefully and abide by all community regulations.

How Can I Stay Safe in Second Life® ?

You can't get physically hurt in Second Life®, of course. You can always teleport home or X out of the program if you feel threatened. Although a rarity, sometimes people get grieved (harassed) by mischievous residents. Since newbies don't usually know how to avoid griefer locations, or handle griefers, they are usually the target of malicious residents. My advice for a safe, comfortable entry into Second Life®:

- (1) Choose an alternate orientation rather than the option offered to all newcomers. Caledon Oxbridge has a superb orientation program, and is a good place to start your Second Life® experience (if you enjoy immersion in the polite society of a Victorian-era world): <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife//92/198/28>.
- (2) If you do decide to do the regular orientation - as soon as you have finished the help island orientation, teleport out of newbie areas and avoid them. **Don't linger in Linden infohubs or any of the welcome areas.** That's where griefers look for easy targets. Exit help island by going to the Library, or one of the other alternate locations

² See <http://secondlife.com/destination/caledon> and <http://secondlife.com/destination/isle-of-wyrms>

³ Some of the best options are under the category *Adventure and Fantasy*: <http://secondlife.com/destinations/adventure>. You'll also find a listing of learning focused regions here: <http://secondlife.com/destinations/learning>.

listed on the orientation. Follow the directions to temporarily set that as home until you can join the Empire State College group and set our virtual campus as home.

(3) Send an IM to your instructor when you are in Second Life®, and s/he will invite you to join the esc space group. The Empire State College sim is located at the following URL. <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife//236/18/23>

(3) **If you'd like to get help and meet new people**, go to any NCI (New Citizen's Incorporated) Location. They offer avatar to avatar help in world [in Second Life®] as well as great free stuff and some of the best classes in Second Life®. My favorite NCI location is Fisherman's Cove.⁴ If you join their group (you'll see an option there near their landing hub), you can ask any of your questions and group members currently online will answer. It's a chatty group that often goes off topic, but a nice way to see that there are communities in Second Life® interested in all kinds of topics. By the way, joining groups is a wonderful way to meet people in Second Life®.

(4) **If you are offended by mature adult themed materials** – stay out of adult themed areas! Stick with PG sims, or mature sims that specifically state that nudity, obscenity, and public displays of sexuality are prohibited.

(5) **Pay attention to those dialog boxes!** Only accept: animations from dance objects you have clicked on or something you wish to use; items from people you know or that you have bought. Don't say yes to random requests to animate you and don't accept anything from someone you don't know or something you didn't request

(6) **I also recommend that you consider using an alternate viewer** (Third Party Viewer) such as Firestorm, which is consistently ranked as the most stable viewer. See my article on *Making Machinima* for a discussion of viewers.

(7) **One last tip:** if an avatar is annoying you, they can only do this verbally. Right-click on the name tag above their heads. You'll see a mute option. Select it, and you won't hear them again.

If you follow these guidelines, you should have a safe, enjoyable introduction to Second Life®. Happy Travels!

-- Nicola Marae Allain, PhD aka Ragitake Takakura <http://www.ragitake.com>



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⁴ If you are in Second Life® right now, you can teleport directly by clicking on this SLURL: <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Fishermans%20Cove/61/195/25>.