

Hides its Pixels Loosely: Flying on Second Life

Dorothy Howard



broomstick flight hobby, Sims 2

“Travel between the extremes,” Daedalus, creator of the Labyrinth told his son Icarus when he tried out the wings made of thread and beeswax before soaring to test the heavens.

He instructed the boy as well, saying ‘Let me warn you, Icarus, to take the middle way, in case the moisture weighs down your wings, if you fly too low, or if you go too high, the sun scorches them.

Airplanes have collapsed the world with flight, awakening strange billionaires, yet they maintain a slug-like choreography, pummeling in and out of the stately hexagons mainly without turbulence.

Flight in its many forms carries its association of testing fate. Flying in Second Life is a flight of the mind, an angelic association. In it, the demigods test their resemblance to god. In this case we test the borders of the worlds we ourselves create, virtual ones.

“If Second Life Isn’t a Game Then What Is It?” asks a 2007 headline. The question has also been asked also of The Sims. But I’ve found a prominent difference—in Second Life characters can easily take flight, while in the Sims flying is restricted to the acquisition of certain items like the *broomstick flight hobby* found at the Sims *sorcerous supplies store*.



Author’s own screenshot, Second Life

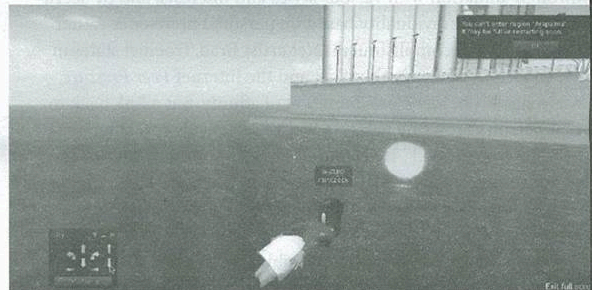
I sometimes ask friends to meet me in Second Life to go flying and sometimes I fly alone. Second Life is pretty empty now. Social media carried away the flame of “monopolized mindshare,” while Minecraft’s 16-bit was the most obvious exodus as it got into the kids market. But Second Life always was an adult world.

I can’t say I lived through its heydays in 2013—the protests against Linden Labs after it changed its terms of service and hiked up fees. The events reported tens of thousands of avatar protesters. “Some even set themselves on fire.”



Author’s own screenshot, Second Life
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XeC7blLpTE>

If you stay on the ground in any given Second Life location you might be turned off by the clutter of ads. It almost seems like there are more fake ads than real ones now. Some sell services bought and sold on Second Life others call to mind popular corporations. By taking flight you can abandon the dismal mall scenarios into the clear and open air and explore what seem like midday sunsets.



Author’s own screenshot, Second Life

I asked a friend I was talking to online who I hadn’t met IRL to fly with me on Second Life. Choosing one of the default characters, vampires, or people, to select. Some outfits also look better than others when flying. You first land in a place that hides its pixels loosely and sometimes delectably under motion.

Don’t forget to change your view as there may be a bunch of views you like to try out. Flying takes a bit of wobbling at first and you can’t fly in all parts of the map.

Take turns leading the way if you are flying with others. Flying in solitude also lends itself to a grandiose feedback loop for the senses.

To see buildings from above is to see yourself from above. It happened to me once: I was walking to buy some milk at the grocery store and I felt myself looking from above like a Sims diamond looking down.

These moments, hard to be stolen by anyone. I wonder what the guy watching me through my computer does when I’m playing Second Life.*~