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# Fresh Perspectives on Reference Work in Second Life

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Guest Columnists

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In the fall of 2007, an adventuresome group of MLIS students in an advanced reference class at San José State University set out to examine the current state and future potential of reference service in an immersive environment. After reviewing the literature on reference in Second Life (SL), they created avatars; explored numerous Second Life libraries; attended a guest lecture by an experienced SL librarian; and engaged in simulated reference interactions “in world.” Students were asked to describe and reflect upon their experiences, and to analyze the viability of Second Life as a platform for reference services, addressing the question, “Will librarians find the mother lode or fool’s gold in virtual environments?”<sup>1</sup>

Responses to Second Life varied greatly. Many students were concerned that the steep learning curve and technical requirements made SL reference a luxury that few librarians or patrons could currently afford; some saw it as a virtual waste of time. Others expressed great excitement over the possibilities for developing new types of reference tools, and found value in the visual and auditory components of SL virtual reference interactions. Emotional reactions ranged from exhilaration induced by flying and teleporting, to feelings of clumsiness, disorientation, and even nausea. Taken together, these students’ essays offered the collective insight of the next generation of reference librarians into what some see as the next generation of Web-based library services. This column presents three of their thoughtful assessments of Second Life’s pitfalls, as well as its potential for enhancing reference services.—*Guest Editor*

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## A NEW APPROACH TO REFERENCE

**JULIE GERARDIN**

When I first started exploring Second Life, it took awhile for me to catch on to the technology; even basic navigation proved challenging. I don’t blame the software, just my three-year-old computer and my novice status. The required tutorials were helpful when learning how to get around, and by the time I learned how to teleport to the San José State School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) location, thanks to the help of Second Life URLs (SLurls), I became more enthusiastic about the process.

Through SLurls and the search functionality, I was able to visit several islands in Second Life including Info Island International, Info Island 1, Health Info Island and Cybrary City 1 and 2.

The Alliance Library on Info Island 1 is set up like a real-life library. I was able to pick up notecards, free magazines, newspapers, and even a soda from the vending machine! I could also

link to external Web sites, search from kiosks, and see real-time news feeds from Reuters. I thought the Transgender Resource Center was unique. Nearby was an IBM display, and I find it noteworthy that corporations believe in this virtual world's potential impact enough to have a presence here.

At the Peace Park, I learned about different world religions and meditated, and the Reader's Garden advertised upcoming book discussions in which I felt welcome to participate. The Genealogical Research Center provided kiosks where I could link to related Web resources and I was invited to sign the guestbook.

One of my favorite places is Health Info Island. I took the tour, and I'm impressed at the variety of information available. There are varying levels of exhibits and resources, including medical research information, consumer health library classes, and support groups. Visitors can link to Web resources like PubMed and do further research.

In the Cybrary City Islands, I visited academic libraries, public libraries, a state library, and the Special Librarians of Second Life. The libraries resemble libraries I've seen in real life, and include lots of art and colors. I even visited a French library, *Bibliothèque Francophone*, which prominently features poetry and an art gallery.

While I had several opportunities to leave notecards for librarians who weren't on duty when I visited, I did have one real-time encounter at the Second Life Society Hill Library. I clicked a glowing sphere for assistance and was prompted to type a question into the chat box. I asked how to get to the Star Trek Museum of Science. The librarian responded at first by chat, and then provided a way for me to teleport with him to that location. He also gave me a landmark so I could return. I appreciated the personal service of being accompanied directly to the location, and receiving such a quick response to my query.

The reference experience with my partner was enjoyable. We met at the SJSU SLIS teleportation station, and then I followed her to a quiet area in another part of campus. We sat facing each other and used text-based chat to communicate. When my camera controls went haywire, I felt like I was missing our connection when I couldn't see her avatar's face. I can envision the use of chat, voice, or notecards to provide reference. The appropriate modality will vary depending on the patron, librarian, and the question.

## The Positive

Since libraries in Second Life are a relatively new phenomenon, there is great potential for unlimited growth and opportunities for librarians to serve new and existing patrons, and to also collaborate amongst themselves. In addition, Hurst-Wahl points out that since many colleges and universities are establishing a presence in Second Life, libraries have a supporting role to play to help their faculty, staff, and students navigate this new environment and to "help them connect their real-life library resources to their efforts in Second Life."<sup>2</sup>

During my travels, I saw a myriad of resources. Some were similar to other electronic resources I've accessed before

through the Internet. These included links to Web sites, electronic resources, electronic books, podcasts, library Web sites, and library catalogs. In one case I was able to type my search terms directly into the chat box to search Wikipedia and was provided with a link to the Web site. Resources new to me were books whose pages I could turn, glowing spheres that acted as liaisons to reference librarians, art galleries, special events, educational classes, informational exhibits, and the ability to click on objects and get notecards that I could read to learn more (and often get SLurls to new places). Attending class virtually was also a novel experience.

I believe that the visual aspect brings an added dimension and greater sense of connection that is missing on discussion boards, e-mail, and chat transactions. Several people chatted me up briefly, and I felt a sense of community during our class lecture.

The ability to go anywhere you want to with no physical limits, and move, fly, and teleport to new locations instantly provides a sense of freedom I haven't experienced online before. I watched a video of a news story on the CBS News Web site that showed people with learning disabilities taking great delight in creating a character and flying throughout Second Life.<sup>3</sup>

Second Life provides libraries with a new way to go where the users are and serve them there, and also to potentially bring new patrons to real-life libraries. From the professional perspective, Second Life provides librarians with the ability to join groups and meet others in the profession so they can share resources, network, and collaborate on projects in and outside of Second Life. It also helps librarians learn the technical skills required to navigate this world. Some library schools are even providing online courses in virtual librarianship for librarians and other information professionals. Finally, librarians have the ability to develop new ways to provide reference service to groups and individuals in this medium.

## The Challenging

Since I'm completely new to this interface, and my computer is sometimes slow to react, I found it tedious at times just moving around this virtual world. While this was frustrating, it is to be expected when learning a new technology. I would frequently walk into walls, have to retrace my steps, and when attempting to change my view, lose it entirely! I did end up spending more time than I'd intended, which was positive since I gained more exposure, but negative since some of the time was unproductive.

I was disappointed at the primitive look and feel of the world. Sometimes I would have to wait for quite awhile for objects to appear or words on signage to appear legibly. When using the map search function, sometimes I had to click the search button multiple times before it would respond. Parts of Second Life felt unintuitive—I wasn't sure how to create landmarks, although, if I read the documentation, I'm sure it's explained there. I also felt it difficult to become oriented. I know there is a map, but without labels I never quite knew where I was. These experiences won't dissuade me from using

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Second Life in the future, and as some have pointed out, it's like using the Web in the mid-1990s. If I view SL from that perspective, I have far more patience!

### Virtual Reference Modes Compared

Second Life has advantages over e-mail and chat reference. Unlike e-mail reference, it provides synchronous interaction and immediate feedback. Like chat reference, it provides the opportunity for real-time interaction between the librarian and patron. But Second Life has several differences and potential advantages over chat that make for more effective reference interviews.

Because there are avatars in Second Life, it is more like face-to-face communication, and there are some nonverbal cues available that make for a more personal transaction. Erdman defines this interaction as a merger between “the positive aspects of both real-world and virtual reference.”<sup>4</sup> A user can seek out the same librarian for future inquiries by going to the same library where he or she works. This is not possible through chat services like AskNow or e-mail services like the Internet Public Library (IPL).

The librarian can provide information to multiple users at once. This can be helpful in formalized library instruction sessions, or even if a study group of students decides to meet at a given time and visit a librarian, they can all participate in the information exchange.

A disadvantage of Second Life is the lack of privacy and confidentiality within this virtual world. Unless the user is directly instant messaging a librarian, the text is visible; if they are using voice, words are audible to other residents, unless one-to-one voice chat is utilized. Of course, the avatars do provide some cloak of anonymity as their real-life identities are unknown.

Another drawback is lack of accessibility to those with all but the most up-to-date systems and knowledge about Second Life. E-mail and chat reference don't require the same level of technical knowledge or software and hardware requirements. Libraries strive to provide equal access, and this is something to consider when determining which modes of reference service to make available to their patrons.

Finally, there will be more time spent on assisting patrons with the new technology. But librarians have always done this work, whether it was showing someone how to use a card catalog, microforms, CD-ROMs, electronic databases, or the Internet. Once users become more familiar with Second Life, I predict that the percentage of time spent in this area will diminish.

### Mother Lode or Fool's Gold?

I'm not sure that Second Life can provide an either/or answer to this question. For the moment, it is too early to label it. What we do know is that more people are becoming aware of this technology, and it provides a moment for libraries to step back and think about the definitions of libraries and reference. We have the opportunity to redefine and expand

what these words mean. How exciting for those who are open to these possibilities!

Regardless of whether Second Life turns out to be the next big thing or a stepping stone, it is essential for libraries to participate. As Grassian and Trueman ask, “What is the future of librarianship if we don't reach out to current and future generations and provide for their information needs and interests?”<sup>5</sup>

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## ANOTHER MODE OF SERVICE

MICHELLE YAMAMOTO

In my recent exploration of Second Life, I have found it to have great potential as a platform for providing reference service, but I have also encountered frustrations and limitations.

### Exciting and Intriguing Features

As I explored SL, I found notecards, displays, and exhibits and online librarians to offer particular potential for reference work in an immersive environment.

#### *Notecards*

Notecards in SL have potential as a reference tool, in my opinion. I found the notecards I collected to be great sources of information. At the Cleveland Public Library I was given a notecard explaining its presence in SL, and was offered notecards for each of their chess displays and their photo gallery. On Healthinfo Island, I picked up a notecard titled “Finding and Evaluating Health Information” that contained helpful tips. Other notecards on Healthinfo Island offered information related to specific displays, such as diabetes, AIDS, Alzheimer's, etc. An especially helpful Healthinfo Island notecard provided links to key locations on the island. Each of these notecards gave me helpful information for the moment, and I could save each one for future reference—which significantly added to their value. I did not have to go back to that location for the information, try to remember it, or write it down. I could even save interesting looking notecards to read more carefully or discard later.

During our class lecture, SL librarian Daisy Blueh said that she has thousands of notecards in her inventory. She organizes and categorizes them. Using the SL inventory search function, she can hand them out to SL residents as needed. When my partner and I conducted our reference interaction in SL, we answered each other's questions by quickly creating a notecard with links and a brief description of each source given. We then gave it to our “patron,” talked through the sources with them and could make revisions as needed. This provided an opportunity to instruct the patron as well as get feedback from them. The patron could then keep the notecard for future reference.

Using notecards for reference work in SL is like walking around with a whole bunch of library pathfinders in your pocket. A librarian could easily find or create notecards for commonly asked questions. With these cards at your finger-

tips, the search does not need to be recreated each time. A librarian could easily add to or personalize an existing note-card to fit a specific patron's information need.

### *Displays and Exhibits*

The use of displays and exhibits in SL also seems to have potential for reference work. These can be useful places to convey information: the Avian Influenza display on Healthinfo Island and the Anime/Manga exhibit inside the Alliance Library are good examples. Displays can also allow users to experience or "see" a collection that they may never have the opportunity to explore in person. For instance, the chess exhibits on Cleveland Public Library's island are based on actual physical collections of chess sets, and the Photo Gallery contains samples of a full exhibit in the physical library.

Many of the displays I encountered were essentially virtual pathfinders. The diabetes display on Healthinfo Island is just one example of many. In each case, information about a particular subject was carefully selected, organized, and displayed by librarians for the benefit and use of SL residents. What I found particularly compelling about these collections of information, resources, and links, is that the creators have so much room for creativity in how this information is displayed in SL. The ability to showcase this information in an almost infinite number of ways adds a great deal of interest and appeal for the users in my opinion.

### *Online Librarians*

In the Special Libraries of SL and the SL Society Hill Library 2.0, both in Cybrary City, I found objects indicating that I could touch them for assistance and that a librarian was currently online. Reference librarians can also be found in-world in places such as the reference desk on Info Island International, and there is a resident librarian on Caledon.

A librarian presence, either in-world or via online chat, has potential to provide residents with valuable, live, immediate, and synchronous reference assistance. I found it intriguing that Jacobson, the village librarian of Caledon, cannot be in-world without residents IMing him for assistance.<sup>6</sup> His knowledge and services are obviously valued and in demand. Personally, I had difficulty accessing the librarians who were supposedly online, and I did not encounter any avatar reference librarians roving or behind a desk. But I agree with Bell, Peters, and Pope: "Do people want and need libraries in virtual worlds? The answer is a resounding yes."<sup>7</sup> Many residents are asking questions of librarians in SL even if presently, these questions are primarily about SL technology and locations. As Grassian and Trueman articulate it, "we want to be where our users are, and, perhaps more importantly, we want to be where we can make library users out of non-users."<sup>8</sup>

### **Frustrations and Disappointments**

While I think that immersive environments have a great deal of potential for reference work, I definitely experienced

frustrations as I explored reference sources, services, and features in SL.

### *High Learning Curve*

The most frustrating aspect of using SL is the high learning curve involved. Every time I logged in, I learned something new and became a slightly more adept SL resident. But it took me a good deal of time to even learn how to walk in SL (I still do plenty of bumping into things!). Learning to fly, access my inventory, touch objects, edit my appearance, and sit were similarly challenging.

Every time I encountered a new reference service or feature, I had to spend what felt like an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out how to use or even access it. Much was not terribly intuitive for a nongamer like me. In some cases, I never figured out whether the feature or service was not working properly or if I just could not figure out how to use it correctly.

One particular difficulty I encountered is bringing printed text into focus. Sometimes I can read signs, displays, and billboards. Other times, no matter what I try, I cannot get the text to come into focus. This is something that I am sure I will learn to do adeptly in time, but for now it clearly limits my ability to fully access reference sources and services when they are presented as text in SL.

I am encouraged by my progress in using SL. But the high learning curve for using the technology presents a barrier to providing SL-based reference service to a broad audience.

### *Online Librarians*

As discussed above, I believe the presence of reference librarians in SL adds to its potential. My frustration was that I was unable to access the librarians who were supposedly available by touching objects in libraries in Cybrary City. Despite many attempts, I never did figure out if the librarian really wasn't online or if I just couldn't figure out how to access them correctly.

### *Navigating*

Navigation in SL is challenging and frustrating. I like the mini map and map features, but often wished they were labeled with place names. Without a useful roadmap to follow, I usually just wandered or flew around to explore my surroundings. The teleport boards on CPL's island and Info Island International were helpful in terms of arriving at a destination, but they did not give me a sense of where I was in the virtual space. While this may lessen with time, I currently feel a little lost and without much bearings in SL.

### **SL Virtual Reference Services**

There are some commonalities among virtual reference interactions using e-mail, chat, and SL. But I also found some

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marked differences between reference interactions in SL and other virtual environments.

Compared to both e-mail and chat reference, I found it helpful to be able to actually talk to one another in SL. It was much less cumbersome than typing everything. Enabling voice made the reference interaction with my partner a richer experience. Although we had communicated in a variety of ways during the semester, I did not realize until this interaction in SL how much I missed being able to communicate in virtual environments by using our voices.

Being able to “see” other people through their avatars also added a helpful dimension. Having both the librarian and the patron controlling avatars that were sitting across from each other in a virtual space added a more personal and “real” dynamic to the interaction. The combination of the ability to use voice, control avatars, and interact synchronously in SL was a welcome improvement compared to e-mail and chat reference interactions.

### Mother Lode or Fool’s Gold?

My opinion is that librarians will find something in between the mother lode and fool’s gold. I do see potential in SL as a platform for reference work, but I would not go so far as to call SL or immersive environments “the mother lode” for two reasons.

First, SL is still unstable, has a high learning curve, and is cumbersome to use. I think it likely that new immersive environments that are more stable, more user friendly, and more advanced will develop from the foundation of SL. The inability to run SL on older systems is a common complaint, but future ordinary computers are likely to have the technical specifications to run such software. SL does not currently seem to be easily accessible to many people. But I think it is similar to the Internet in the early days. Very few people used the Internet initially; few had computers that could take advantage of it and it was not very user-friendly. It has obviously developed dramatically, and has changed the way we use and access information as a society. My opinion is that immersive environments are likely to be similar because something more accessible will develop from the current environments. I agree with Hurst-Wahl:

Will Second Life last forever? I suspect the answer is “no”, but undoubtedly SL will spawn the development of other tools that libraries will be using. By being a part of SL now, librarians believe they are positioning themselves for the tools, services, and user environments that will come after it.<sup>9</sup>

Second, even if immersive environments become more commonplace and accessible, I think this will still be just one of many effective platforms in which to provide reference service. Libraries and librarians need to be able and willing to provide reference service to their users in places and using means that their users want and are most comfortable using.

Users’ preferences for reference service are likely to include immersive environments, e-mail, chat, accessing library resources online from a remote location, and in-person interactions. Libraries should provide reference service in all of these environments. As Erdman states, “Giving people access to information is the number one goal of any library. Creating a library within a virtual world, like SL, is a new access point for people.”<sup>10</sup>

Providing reference service in SL currently and in more developed immersive environments in the future is important and necessary. But reference service in immersive environments will always serve only a segment of the population. It is one access point, but it cannot be the only or primary access point. There will always be people who either choose not to use immersive environments or will not have access to them. I also do not think that it is necessarily the case that all libraries or librarians will need to provide service in immersive environments. Many libraries may best serve their users through other means. Collectively, however, the library community needs to continue to invest time, money, energy, and staff to provide as many access points to library and reference service as possible—including immersive environments.

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## ROOM TO GROW

### KELLY GORDON

I’m a Second Life novice, and I’ve only been “in world” in conjunction with my Advanced Information Resources and Services class at San José State’s SLIS location. I’ll readily confess that I haven’t even scratched the surface of what SL has to offer. My opinions about the potential of SL as a tool for the provision of reference services are those of a beginner, but I hope that the perceptions of a newcomer may at least provide some food for thought.

After an introduction to Second Life at Orientation Island, I began my Second Life by visiting the SLIS island. I also visited Info Island’s Bell Library, the Science Fiction area, and the main Alliance Library building. I went to Cybrary City 1, Health Info Island, and the Second Life Medical Library. I explored these places on foot and by air, examined signboards and posters, received notecards containing information that I could carry with me, and interacted with monitors that enabled me to link with the Web.

I also engaged in two interactive activities in Second Life in conjunction with our class: a guest lecture and tour given by one of the volunteer librarians at Info Island, and a very simple practice reference interaction with a SLIS classmate, wherein we took turns assuming the roles of librarian and patron to explore the potential of reference service in SL.

### Second Life: Potential Unfulfilled

Honestly, I’m underwhelmed by the library services currently on offer in SL. I see a lot of potential in SL as a platform for reference services, but it seems like that potential

is still very far from being realized. Here are some of the problems I encountered:

### *Lack of a reference presence, signage, or direction*

I wandered the halls of the SL library buildings for hours, and never encountered an actual librarian. The lack of human presence I found in SL, particularly of reference librarian presence, stood in stark contrast to the teeming librarian life I expected to encounter after reading Erdman's description of clearly marked reference librarians staffing desks and roaming library grounds.<sup>11</sup> Granted, I visited during nonworking hours; but I only saw two other avatars in all my explorations of SL libraries, and neither of these appeared to be staffing the libraries.

The most useful orientation feature I encountered was the flying car at the SL Medical Library and Health Info Island that gave guided tours of the facility. But, symptomatic of what seems to be a focus in SL libraries on structures and appearance rather than on services and content, the tour primarily provided information about the buildings and grounds. We spent a lot of time in the mountains surrounding the library, viewing meditation gardens and areas for support group meetings. Support group meetings—when? Where? For what sorts of groups? How do I learn more?

Many of the libraries I visited had automated greeters at their major teleport locations. These automatic greeters could offer maps of the facilities that actually label what information can be found where, overviews of the services offered, times and locations of classes or events, and hours that the reference desk is staffed, as soon as a patron teleports into the location. Second Life in general is somewhat notorious for its lack of directions, information, and support, but SL libraries should strive to be the exceptions to this trend.

### *Difficult-to-access, low-quality information*

I viewed exhibits on several different topics in the libraries I visited, but they were frequently difficult to read or out of focus, unless I stood in the exact correct spot. And, although most of the libraries had signboards providing some general direction, finding information on a specific topic seemed to be a matter of wandering around until I serendipitously stumbled on the appropriate display or monitor—quite inefficient for those with a specific information need.

The quality of information available in Second Life did not justify the inconvenience of accessing it. The information on signboards and notecards was shallow and scanty. Most of the resources offered pointed to information on the Web: why not just search the Web and eliminate the middleman? Even if I were already in SL recreationally, I would still find it easier to open a browser and perform a Web search to find what I need than to wander around these library ghost towns trying to figure out where the signboard on diabetes, for example, is located. To be viable information resources, SL libraries need to provide ways of accessing information that are both more convenient and more productive than what patrons can

already provide for themselves.

### *Lack of interactivity in in-world meetings*

Our in-world guest lecture seemed like another missed opportunity. The lecture itself could have been achieved just as effectively via podcast: there was no interactivity with the lecturer or between students in the class. After the lecture, our speaker led part of the class on the tour of Info Island, but I was so busy trying to navigate, keep up, and not bump into things that I didn't absorb very much of what she showed us—an SL tour bus would have been just the thing! But this experience may have been the exception to the rule; in general, Second Life seems like it would be a good place to foster group work, interaction, and collaboration, and indeed, several writers tout it as such.<sup>12</sup> How wonderful it would be to offer a bibliographic instruction session online, where distance students could work together with other students in the class on group activities and hands-on exercises! What potential SL has to help reduce the isolation that attends distance learning and foster interactions between classmates!

## Reference Service in SL Compared to Other Environments

My reference interaction with my classmate, though simple, illustrated the potential of SL as a platform for reference services. Technologies that are already in place in SL, particularly the use of avatars, voice chat, and notecards, lend themselves well to reference interactions. Second Life reference has some distinct advantages over other modes of virtual reference and over face-to-face reference.

Compared to other virtual reference modes, reference in SL can be more personal and less cumbersome. The use of avatars allows the creation of a personified "reference presence" that includes behaviors recommended by RUSA guidelines: the avatar can be poised and ready to answer questions, attending a desk or station that's clearly marked as the place to ask questions, engaging patrons with friendly greetings, or roving the area to help patrons as they move through the library.<sup>13</sup> Another advantage of SL is the ability to use voice chat, which is a more fluid, faster, and more natural way of interacting, and which allows more complex interchanges than typing into a chat box.

Compared to face-to-face reference, SL reference has advantages similar to other modes of virtual reference, including relative anonymity and the convenience of being able to seek help remotely. Since SL librarians can distribute notecards with information, reference in SL shares with other modes of virtual reference the feature of having a printed record of the resources used during the reference exchange.

## Prognosis: Second Life as a Reference Tool

I think SL has potential to be a good tool for the provision of reference and information services in its current incarna-

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tion, and a great tool two or three versions down the road. Librarians working and building in SL are frequently doing so on their own time, in previously uncharted territory. Given this situation, they've made great strides in creating a foundation for a library presence in SL. Nonetheless, based on my experiences I have a few suggestions for the present and for the future.

### *Possible improvements, now:*

- Focus less on the “gee-whiz” aspect of SL, like building neat-o buildings and fountains and exquisitely landscaped grounds with meditation gardens. What does it really mean, anyway, if my avatar is meditating?
- Focus more on what librarians do in real-world environments: providing high-quality information resources, and making those resources easy to access and use.
- Create a reference presence in SL libraries. When an individual teleports into a library, they should know where to go for help, immediately. If a live librarian isn't on duty, there should be some sort of indication of when one might expect a live librarian. Libraries should also offer alternate ways of getting help when the desk isn't staffed; for instance, a link to a chat or e-mail reference service.
- Fully exploit the tools for interactivity available in SL. An instruction session in SL can and should get the students involved, doing, thinking, and talking with the instructor and with each other. Using SL as just another lecture platform is a waste of potential.

### *Possible improvements, in future versions of SL:*

- Make the learning curve for entering SL less steep, so it's more like learning to use Flickr or Facebook. If entering SL is easy, then more people will start participating, and it will be more realistic to expect library patrons who aren't already familiar with SL to use it as a tool for finding information. If negotiating SL itself becomes more transparent, then perhaps reference services in SL will deal less with SL support and more with real-life information needs, which will make it easier to justify investment of valuable time and resources in further development of SL library services.
- Make interactivity between SL and other information technologies more seamless. If I click on a link, I want to be able to look at the Web page *in SL*, not be taken out to my browser. I want my avatar to be able to pull a book down from a shelf, sit down with it, open it up, and have it be displayed in front of me like a PDF document would be, for instance, opened from the Web.

- Providing some form of access control to certain areas of SL may be one way of alleviating the problems attendant upon interfacing with subscription databases in SL. There could, for instance, be an area of an SL university library that can only be entered by avatars of students of that university. These students could access university library resources from that area, and reference librarians working in these areas would be able to provide assistance to students using all available electronic resources, rather than relying solely on Web information.

Despite the suggestions above, I believe that immersive environments have a bright future in the library world, and I'm glad that librarians are diving into these new environments as pioneers rather than as followers. Right now there's a lot of hype about SL among librarians, and I feel that careful thinking about what we want to accomplish in SL has yet to catch up with the enthusiasm. But I think that's a symptom of the fact that we're still trying to find our feet in this new world. I'm excited to witness and perhaps participate in the refinement of SL as a tool for libraries and their patrons, and to see the potential that's there blossom into something that will probably differ greatly from anyone's current imaginings.

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13. Reference and User Services Association, “Guidelines for Behavioral Performance of Reference and Information Service Providers,” [www.ala.org/ala/rusa/protocols/referenceguide/guidelinesbehavioral.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/protocols/referenceguide/guidelinesbehavioral.cfm) (accessed Dec. 10, 2007).