Experiences in Second Life
By Clea Zolotow (zolo@us.ibm.com)

Second Life is a virtual world where Residents (one of the 20 million members) create avatars, create and build items, socialize, exchange services, and go shopping for everything from boats to shoes. Joining Second Life is free for a basic membership although there are also premium memberships for $72/year. Buying a premium membership gets you a virtual home, an immediate bonus of $1000 Linden dollars (the internal currency) and a weekly stipend of $300 Lindens, as well as immediate access to adult designated areas. The Second Life viewer can be downloaded at www.SecondLife.com.

Once you create your initial avatar, which can be non-human (such as a cyborg or kitty-cat), you land on Welcome Island. Here you learn the basic skills such as walking, flying, and teleporting. Advanced classes in building and scripting are available in-world.   You can experience Second Life without any money at all. Most things are available for free if you look and ask. Residents can be nice to new members ("noobs") and given them unwanted clothing, language translators, and help in finding areas of interest. There is a search bar located in the upper right hand side. Try searching for "IEEE" or "mainframe" or even better, "Computer Measurement Group."

There is a basic building capability that comes with the standard viewer. However, there is an advanced scripting facility, Linden Scripting Language (LSL). Be careful, this is addictive! More information, tutorials, and scripting tools are available here: http://wiki.SecondLife.com/wiki/LSL_Tutorial.

I started in Second Life on November 17, 2006. I was quite active for a few years and owned a series of virtual offices and datacenters. Recently, I decided to resurrect my virtual office in Second Life. I have a customized Second Life avatar who also happens to be the founder of the Rocky Mountain Computer Measurement Group (RM-CMG). I haven't been active in Second Life for over a year, and in looking around, I found that IBM's previously huge presence was dismantled. IBM has put their virtual worlds behind the firewall. There, virtual worlds are used quite successfully for large meetings and presentations, such as the Academy of Technology. This tends to work very well for bringing large groups of people together, but the avatars are not as customizable in IBM's virtual worlds. Further, there are no malls and therefore no shopping for clothes behind the firewall.

Since the IBM islands were gone, I decided that I needed a spot to "work" and to have meetings. In looking at my avatar, I realized that my hair needed a lot of work and my shoes didn't fit too well, but I decided to ignore all that and get an office first. Maybe there will be another article about my shoes and hair.

Figure 1: Clea Coronet

Previous to IBMs presence in Second Life, I would hold regular team meetings there. My 6-member teams of capacity planners would logon to Second Life while talking on an IBM-supplied bridge. A friend of mine had an auditorium that he would lend me for these meetings.   I would set up a PowerPoint presentation there and present current topics to the team. It worked really well and work-at-home people enjoyed the

camaraderie. At that time, the voice capability in Second Life wasn't very good. Today, voice works pretty well (although dependent on the user's throughput capability) and is much more scalable than the initial offering.

There were several glitches the team had to work through. While IBMers are allowed to install Second Life, the client will often freeze our IBM-issued laptops. I and most of my team installed the client on our home PCs. The next issue was getting everyone's clothing and hair configured correctly. I ended up passing out some free clothing and taking some time to show people how to dress. One team member somehow undressed completely and logged off in a rush as she was stark naked. Fortunately, I could walk her through going to another Second Life location and fixing her clothing.

Another team member built a flying board and zoomed around the auditorium quite happily during a few team meetings. This was a little like giving a presentation with a huge fly buzzing around. He eventually left to go build a flying motorcycle, much to the team's relief. Unfortunately, the auditorium was not located in the best neighborhood. After the team meetings, some of the team members wandered around and discovered a strip club. Like the internet Second Life can be a little nefarious.

One day, I thought I would build a datacenter. I collected pictures of equipment from the internet/intranet and ended up with rows of AIX p5 32-way machines as well as co-joined ESX hosts. Here, I could show before and after pictures of datacenter savings for footprint, space, and power pre- and post-virtualization. I also put offices for my friends in the datacenter and bought a case of virtual beer for our Friday afternoon club. One day, my friend who lent me the space for the datacenter asked me to move. I had to dismantle my datacenter quickly. I am looking forward to setting it back up again in my new location.

People did seem to enjoy the camaraderie of working together in Second Life. I wanted to open up Second Life again not only to my teammates at IBM, but also the presenters at the Rocky Mountain Computer Measurement Group where I am the co-chair (with David Halbig from First Data Corporation). That way, we could have presentations using the virtual world, take advantage of the voice capability, and would not have to open an IBM bridge. I thought that way people from around the world could see the presentations and present their own work without having to travel anywhere but the metaverse.

Figure 2: Office in a Box

With that aim, I decided to get an office that had at least one office and some cubes plus an area to handle at least 20 avatars in a presentation area. I looked at existing office spaces and decided they were just too boring, so I picked up some land from GDC Development Corporation at $2,547 Linden Dollar (LD) / week ($10.13USD). Then, I decided to buy a pre-fabricated office building. It would be easier than trying to make one from scratch. My office comes in a box, which I then have to "rezz." This means I have to unpack the box, take out the house, throw it on the ground, and watch it build itself. This was far easier than building it from scratch.

The new home of Second Life-CMG (SL-CMG)! Now, I have to customize it. I'll make a logo from the CMG website and put it on the front. This is a nice office building. It has a blank wall to the right where I can put a presentation viewer and enough room for about 10 benches, good for at least 20 people. Inside, on the first floor, I have room to put in my new datacenter and a reception area that I will probably end up taking out. The second floor has a conference room for 8 people as well as a 6-person cube farm. The executive office is small, but comfortable with a large desk and a computer. While I really need more artwork here as well as business card dispensers, it's a very good start.

Figure 3: The New Home of the SecondLife Computer Measurement Group

Well, here I am in my new office, about an hour after I started, working away!

Figure 4: Clea Coronet at Work

Now, I just have to invite some people over!   If you decide to visit me in-world, join the Rocky Mountain Computer Measurement Group or the Second Life Computer Measurement group. There is a SURL (a link) to the house. Feel free to grab a cube and see who drops by! On June 6, and again on June 20, 2011 at 3PM Mountain Time I will be presenting "z/Linux – Instrumentation, Tuning, and Management" as a trial run. All are welcome!