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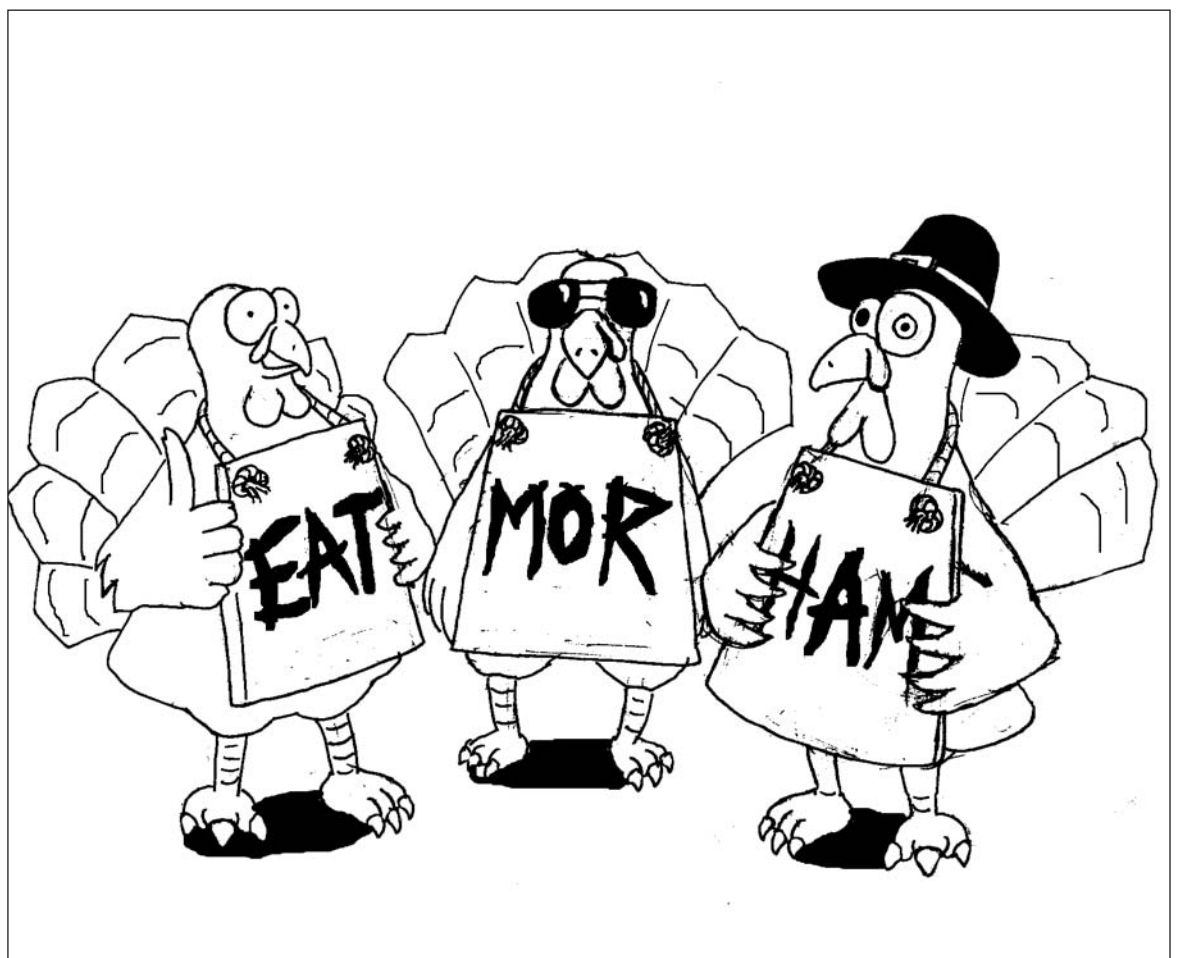


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OPINION

Second Life blurs line between reality, fantasy

By **BARRY KEARNS**
Staff writer

In a recent article in *Rolling Stone* magazine, author William Gibson predicted that future generations will find it quaint that we draw a distinction between the real and the virtual. Intrigued by this, I decided to try the one place that offers a virtual you... for free.

As I understand it, IBM is interviewing applicants and holding meetings in the virtual world of Second Life. I joined Second Life and bumped around their world for a bit. I quickly realized two things: that I might not fit in here and that there

are a lot of "furrries" in this virtual world. One of the default skins for the avatar is a furry costume.

It occurs to me, as I write this very line on a computer that is displaying a visual representation of my text on a piece of paper, that on another less fantastic level, we have blurred the worlds of matter and binary code.

In the world of office tasks, where hard copy and soft copy are separated by a minute or two on the printer, it's becoming more common to think of documents in two different states of being.

This same aspect goes for much of our entertainment now; in more

and more cases, there remains no physical remnant of the videos one watches or the music one listens to.

So fine, there are some things that can transcend our physical world, but can they replace everything?

So far, the litmus test for this seems to be sex; it is the ultimate human encounter and when you can get it from a computer, we might as well pack it all up and spend every waking moment online. We're not there yet, but we are running hell-bent for leather toward that goal with some laughable, and in some other cases, creepy results.

Still, I do believe that sex in

one form or another will soon be available through computers. As regarding the motivation for this, I can only hazard a guess that in these online worlds we are allowed to become idealized versions of ourselves.

I'll be honest and say that I was not displeased that my Second Life representation came gut-free automatically. There is also a new level of DIY glamour involved – you don't have to be rich to get everything that you want if you are willing to build it. Aside from some land sales, just about everything in Second Life is free to anyone who wants to take the time to build it.

But there is another aspect to a virtual world becoming real described in many of the books in the cyberpunk genre. That other aspect is that the real world goes to hell.

Sooner or later, the virtual world becomes the only place on earth where anyone would want to be, as outside is a sick world that we've turned our backs on. The line between the real and the virtual is blurring and will continue to distort as technology improves.

Yet, as we race toward this bright new world, we should be mindful that we're not abandoning the world we occupy while not in front of a computer.

Big Brother, bigger surveillance, less privacy

By **MICHAEL ABURAS**
Opinions editor

Fe Fi Fo Fum. The ubiquitous giant that is Big Brother has never been more prevalent in our everyday lives, thanks to the luxury and curse that is technology.

In the name of security, the American public has grown more accepting of being monitored by

their government, with NSA data mining, cameras on almost every street corner and now the great eye in the sky – satellites. The giant is everywhere. It's very disturbing to realize that the Fourth Amendment has disintegrated and there is no longer an area of the average person's life that is completely private.

Once upon a time, America, with all its faults, really was more free than the rest of the modern world. People travelling to London would

talk about how many cameras they saw compared to our cities, which, until the late '90s, had very few.

According to an article in *The Week* magazine, Britain has 4.2 million surveillance cameras, or about one for every 14 people. As of 2003, Homeland Security has given hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to cities for additional, upgraded camera systems.

As if Big Brother watching is not creepy enough, there's also the

manner in which the new technology will allow them to do so.

According to the *Washington Post*, these new camera systems have facial recognition systems and can record and store your behavior in a digital file that personally identifies you. If you act erratically in public, you could now be considered a drug dealer or terrorist.

What's most disturbing of all is that spy satellites have been used domestically. A CNN report states

that satellites have already been used to monitor Super Bowls and presidential inaugurations, but starting next year, law enforcement will also have access.

While someone can take a different route to avoid a street camera, there is NO escaping a satellite.

Lord of The Rings is art imitating life. However, it was Sauron using his power of the all-seeing eye to observe Frodo. He's evil. So what are we?

CAMPUS COMMENT >>> What do you have to be thankful for this year?



NOAH LEVIN
Journalism

"For the people who drive me everywhere since I lost my license."



JERRY BLANK
Fine Arts

"I'm not thankful, because my car was broken into."



YUYI YU
Business

"My parents, because they supported me a lot this semester."



CHESKA COLLANTES
Undeclared

"My family and loved ones."



KATE FLOWER
Undeclared

"Iguana food."