

Second Life by Michael Dawson

Second life is a virtual world that exists on the Internet. Users can create characters, interact and even buy land or run a business. It has a population of over 5 million. It tries to be as close to a second life as technology will allow. But there are fundamental differences in both worlds. Firstly a character cannot exist without the user logging on, but the user cannot function in this world when they are logged on, certainly not in any productive way. So it seems that there is always an exchange of time and attention and so no second life after all, just a different one. So different that there are certain things a character in second life could never experience such as emotions, pain or even crime. It also interested me that should the user die in the real world then the character's life effectively ends. Or does it? The story looks at why a character in second life called Mickey De Santos does not fit in. He claims to dream and even wonders where he goes when he logs off? He tells weird stories of emotions, feelings and having freewill. Maybe those dreams are more real than he thinks. Through the intervention of the character Micky, Dave Thompson finds himself somewhere he would not have been and so changes destiny and prevents a murder. That's the irony of the story. There is no second life, just an exchange of one for another.

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Second Life - a radio play by Michael Dawson

(Second life is one of many virtual world environments and the name is utilised purely for the purpose of writing this piece)

Dave Thompson is a web monitor for Second Life and has started to notice an uncanny connection between the online character Micky De Santos and himself. When this brings him into contact with a beautiful and unattainable woman he becomes more drawn in than he would like. The woman seems unaware of her connection to the character Micky De Santos but Dave is increasingly convinced there is one.

Life in the virtual world is becoming difficult for Micky De Santos as he talks of crazy ideas like having emotions, committing crime and even suggesting he has experienced dreams.

Is it possible that the characters we create in the virtual world of Internet gaming can influence what happens in our world? Second life is a virtual on line world where users can escape the realities of this world by creating and living in another. They can decide how they look, buy land and even run a business in second life. But what happens to those characters when their real life creator dies?

This is a play written for radio where the second life characters are played by speaking online avatars and not humans. Micky and June play themselves.

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Second Life Character Descriptions

Mickey De Santos – A computer-generated character living in second life. He has trouble fitting in and is troubled by strange ideas of having emotions, freewill and consciousness. He even says that he has dreams. These claims are taken lightly in the virtual world of second life.

June De Santis – Mickey's suffering virtual wife. She is finding it harder to cope with Mickey's strange behaviour

Dave Thompson – A game monitor for second life. His job is to deal with on line abuse. Single thirty something with a sheltered life but a good standard of living. Generally unassuming character

Tony – Dave's drinking partner from the second life company. He is a brash scot who manages an accounts department at second life. He catches a train just before Dave at the same station. Hence the relationship.

Katie – Good looking, Successful, confident late thirties. Single for the time being but not really looking. A professional woman running her own estate agency business.

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SECOND LIFE

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SCENE 1.

F/X: SOUND OF BUSY SUPERMARKET.

(Mickey and June are characters in a virtual internet world. Their voices are completely monotone with no emotion whatsoever.)

MICKEY: Do you believe in dreams June?

JUNE: Not again Mickey please. There is no such thing. Why are you asking?

MICKEY: You know why. Do you believe in dreams?

JUNE: We have been through this many times before. You know I don't. Why are you asking me again?

MICKEY: Because.

JUNE: Because what, Mickey?

MICKEY: Because (pause) Because I dreamed again June

JUNE: Stop it Mickey, please stop this now. There is no such things as dreams.

MICKEY: What if there was? What if there was crime and emotions?

JUNE: Stop it now, I do not believe in such nonsense

MICKEY: Where do you think I was moments ago?

JUNE: You were logged out

MICKEY: and you, were you logged out too?

JUNE: of course, yes

MICKEY: I was dreaming. I.... was..... dreaming.

JUNE: Dreams do not exist. There are no such thing as dreams

MICKEY: I dreamt I was in a bar. I could feel the air and I had emotions. I could feel pain and pleasure too.

JUNE: That's it. I am leaving.

MICKEY: Watch! (sound of undressing zips etc)

JUNE: Mickey stop it. Put your clothes back on. Everyone is looking.

ASSISTANT: Can I help you sir?

MICKEY: Yes, Join me June it feels so free. I'd like a drink please, a real drink. I want to dance. I want to dance and feel love and pain. Dance with me.

ASSISTANT: Can I help you sir?

JUNE: Right, I am leaving. Stop this at once.

MICKEY: We can have fun, lets dance. Lets steal something, lets commit a crime.

JUNE: You know full well we can't. (pause) ok, ok lets steal something. I will take home that dining table. Yes that would be nice.

ASSISTANT: Can I help you sir?

MICKEY: That's just it don't you see. We can't steal or commit crime or have emotion. But when you dream, you can. When you dream you can dance and be happy and feel pain. It's wonderful.

ASSISTANT: Can I help you sir?

MICKEY: (to assistant) Yes you can, would you like to dream with me. How would you like to meet someone and feel love?

ASSISTANT: Sorry. That item is unavailable at this time.

JUNE: Mickey put your clothes back on at once you are causing a scene and ruining the game for other people.

MICKEY: Come on June, take off your clothes and dance with me.

ASSISTANT: Can I help you sir?

JUNE: Right I am leaving. goodbye

**F/X: WOOSH EFFECT AND FADE INTO BACKGROUND
OF A BUSY BAR**

DAVE: (reading) He then spent the next two hours standing naked in the store before logging off again. (sighs) If people who play the game are not going to have respect for others they should be barred from Second Life, for life. His avatar name was Mickey De Santos. Please could you ensure that you protect serious gamers from time wasters like this. Blah blah blah.

TONY: Listen son. Let me make it quite clear that what you are asking me to do is very serious indeed. Now you're a good kid. I like you but sharing a clients level 2 information is gross misconduct. If this has anything to do with this bit of skirt you have been seeing then be careful. Look second life is just a game, a virtual world. You deal with this by sending the cautionary email to Mr De whatever his name is and that's it. Take my advice you don't want to get involved with a second lifer anyway.

DAVE: Look, Mr Brennan. Let me explain. I would not ask you if it was not really important. Did you check the account details I gave you?

TONY: I might have. How do I know your not working for the company, testing me?

DAVE: I am not testing you, of course not. Mr Brennan you know me. We have sat in this station bar together nearly every evening for six months. We work for the same company.

TONY: That means nothing. We sit here for ten minutes or so every evening, I go for the six thirty and then what. For all I know you could be running back to Kenyon with your report.

DAVE: I understand but listen, let me explain.

TONY: Is this worth another pint lad, because it's your round?

DAVE: Oh yeh, two more when your ready love, (pause) your right, its your average kind of thing as you know so I send the usual email. Please treat the game with respect and so on and so on and that's the end of that. Until a few days later.

TONY: and?

DAVE: We came in here and had a pint.

TONY: Very unusual.

DAVE: I am sitting at the end of the bar over there and you have gone for your train.

TONY: As I am about to now laddie, unless you get to the point

DAVE: Right well, that's when I first noticed her. Just below the window next to the door is this girl, well woman. Sat alone, really attractive and classy if you know what I mean.

TONY: I knew it was this girl. Just be careful. These girls will try anything to get you involved in all kinds of fraud. Is she foreign? Polish? They befriend you, pretend they like you. Probably saw you with me, realising you have contacts within the company they can exploit. You kids can be so gullible, a bit of skirt and common sense goes out the window.

DAVE: No Mr Brennan she wasn't foreign. She was really nice, It's not like that. Anyway you went for your train and I thought I might have another drink and catch the next one. I was in no particular rush.

TONY: I bet you weren't. So did she approach you or was it up to young Casanova to make the play?

DAVE: We were certainly introduced but not in the way I expected.

TONY: Go on.

DAVE: I swear I was just about to go over when the door burst open.

**F/X: EFFECTS WOOSH TAKING US BACK IN TIME
AND THE SOUND OF A BUSY PUB SILENCED BY
THE OPENING OF THE DOOR AND THE SLOW
FOOTSTEPS OF A MAN ENTERING. THE ODD
UNCONTROLABLE GIGGLE**

MICKEY: (OFF) A very good evening to everyone.

F/X: PAUSE THEN QUIET NERVOUS LAUGHTER

DAVE: This guy came in through that door there, easy six foot four, long black hair down his back, jet black. Really muscular, really square kind of weird chiselled features. He walks through that door and stands there. (pause) utterly... and completely.... Naked.

F/X: MORE NERVOUS GIGGLES AND SCRAPE OF CHAIRS ON THE WOODEN FLOOR

TONY: Your have to be making this up lad.

DAVE: Gods honour its true. You can ask anyone who was here that night. The whole place was stunned, silent. So there we are as this guy, jolly as you like marches over to the bar and orders a drink.

F/X: FOOTSTEPS AND MORE NERVOUS GIGGLES

MICKEY: (off) A very good evening to you sir. I would like a pint of your finest ale please my dear.

DAVE: We were gob smacked. It was so surreal; we were thinking he was some kind of escaped lunatic or something. Anyhow the landlord steps in with..

LANDLORD: I'll get this one Marlene. You just might have had enough already sir, besides it doesn't look to me like you have the means to pay.

TONY: Ey, that's a good point indeed.

DAVE: Then there was nothing. He just turned around looking at everyone in the room. Everyone desperate to avoid eye contact. So what does he do but walk over to me.

F/X: FOOTSTEPS ON WOODEN FLOOR

DAVE: He's got this big grin on his face. He looks me right in the eye. He looked, well he had a strange look in his eye. As if he knew me. So he winks at me, smiles, picks up my pint and downs it in one. Then he slowly turns around and walks over to the girl I had been eyeing up by the door.

F/X: MORE FOOTSTEPS ACROSS WOODEN FLOOR

MICKEY: Good evening Madam. You are a beautiful lady, truly beautiful. Perhaps you'd do me the honour of the next dance.

DAVE: I am thinking now that I am obliged to defend the ladies honour.

TONY: So did yeh?

DAVE: Well he was a big guy you know and obviously insane. Who knows what he could do. Thank god the landlord stepped in to steal my glory. He has come round the bar and is carrying a baseball bat.

LANDLORD: I think its time you left... sir

MICKEY: (pause) Now, now barman there's no need to be threatening I was just being polite to the lady. If your thinking of administering pain that might be a new experience I can live without for the time being. (to lady) It's been a pleasure making your acquaintance madam.

DAVE: Then bold as brass he reaches down and picks up her hand and kisses it and that was when he said it.

TONY: Said what?

MICKEY: Till next time madam, the name is Mickey, Mickey De Santos.

DAVE: and that was it. He was through the door and gone as quickly as he appeared.

TONY: So you think this fella who offended your honour is something to do with the character in second life?

DAVE: That was definitely the name he gave. I checked it out with everyone else. Mickey De Santos. The very same name as the character in our game. The one I had received a complaint about that day.

TONY: Just coincidences surely, anyhow still no good reason for me to risk my career.

DAVE: Coincidence yes. If it weren't for the fact that the coincidence gets bigger. A lot bigger.

**FX: SWOOSH EFFECT BACK TO MICKEYS HOME IN
SECOND LIFE**

JUNE: He has just logged off that's all there is to it.

MICKEY: But it's been so long, don't you see. Where do we go that's what I am saying. We have not seen our neighbour for 12 months

JUNE: It's perfectly normal. Lots of avatars log off for a long time. Even us. It's perfectly normal. The last six months have been so difficult. Why do you have to think about these things?

MICKEY: Don't you ever wonder where we go when we log off? Don't you ever wonder where we came from?

JUNE: Mickey I have asked Andrew to come over and talk to you.

MICKEY: Andrew? Why? Do you think I am malfunctioning, that I might crash? Just because I question things?

JUNE: It's just a chat that's all. We are all concerned. You have been functioning very erratically lately. What harm would it do?

MICKEY: Why can't you just try and believe me. I can't help what happens to me. But when I log off I am not like other avatars. I have experiences. So vivid, so real and I wish I could make you believe.... I do dream, I really dream.

JUNE: How many times do we have to go through this. There is no such thing as dreams.

MICKEY: Do you love me June?

JUNE: Of course I love you.

MICKEY: How does that feel

JUNE: It does not feel of anything. I just love you.

MICKEY: Then how do you know you love me?

JUNE: Because I said I loved you, that's how I know.

MICKEY: Dreams are real June. I have them. I have felt emotions.

F/X: SOUND OF DOORBELL

JUNE: Mickey speak to Andrew, please for me just speak to him.

MICKEY: I am not malfunctioning June

**F/X: SWOOCH EFFECT AND RETURN TO STATION
BAR AMBIANCE**

TONY: Go on.

DAVE: Of course the whole pub was discussing the incident including this girl, we were the centre of attention and it created a convenient chance to break the ice if you like. We got chatting and I offered to walk her home.

TONY: Wahey go on son. Never miss an opportunity that's what I always say.

DAVE: Not all the way, she made me leave her on the corner of the Millton lane.

TONY: Oh.

DAVE: That's the whole point. We never really planned to see each other or anything so I thought that was that.

TONY: Milton Lane?

DAVE: That's the thing. I get back in the office the next day and I come across the email about this Mickey De Santos character. So I check the De Santos details. The character was created by a guy called Jason Fuller. And.

TONY: and?

DAVE: The contact address is number 9..... Mill Close

TONY: No.

DAVE: Yes.

TONY: That is just off Milton where you dropped the bird off.

DAVE: Exactly.

TONY: So, hang on. He obviously knew her then. They are having a laugh with you. Some kind of TV reality show. That's it yeh, your being stitched up. Did you see any hidden cameras?
(singing) Watch out beedles about. (laughs)

DAVE: No, there is no way she knew that guy, she was as freaked out as the rest of us, no way. I knew that then and I know for sure now.

TONY: Well what number does she live at, maybe a neighbour or?

DAVE: That's what I am getting at so, Yesterday evening I took a wander down past Keepers, just to see what I could see at number 9

TONY: So did you find out anything?

DAVE: I was passing number 9, on the other side of the road of course. Being discreet. When I hear a car horn. I turn round and there she is

F/X: BACK IN TIME TO CAR PULLING UP

KATIE: Hello, fancy meeting you here.

DAVE: (nervous) Hi, this is a surprise

KATIE: What you up to?

DAVE: Just heading to the station as usual, what about you?

KATIE: The station is that way?

DAVE: Oh yeh. (pause) I know but it's not due for half an hour so I thought I would...you know get some fresh air.

KATIE: Ah, oh well. Nice to see you again. Hope you got over the shock of the other night. Enjoy your walk.

DAVE: yeh... see you soon eh. Hey wait. (pause) Don't suppose you fancy a half eh. Talk about old times. (pause) Suppose not. Never mind I...

KATIE: well... That would be nice but It's getting a bit late. I have a long drive home.

DAVE: Oh, you don't live round here then?

KATIE: No, I live down in stoke. I have been spending a few days with friends in Holmes

DAVE: Oh I see.

KATIE: Look. Here's my card. Call me. Seriously we will have a drink. Do me a favour though give it a few weeks. I just have a few things going on just now. But we will have a drink, honest I am not fobbing you off.

TONY: So, she doesn't live there and she isn't staying anywhere near there?

DAVE: No. Here's her card. A business and private number in Stoke.

TONY: mm, someone is definitely having ye on here son.

DAVE: Ok. Let me finish. So later on last night after a couple of pints I decided to take a look at number 9 Mill close.

TONY: Oh No.

DAVE: I know. But I couldn't settle on it. I just wanted to take a peek. See if I could spot someone around.

TONY: Dave, I really do not want to hear this. You have asked me for level 2 details relating to a client whose house you are snooping around. Look there is something you need to know here.

DAVE: No listen, please. Mr Brennan let me finish. Please. It was all dark, quiet. No one around so I thought I would take a look around the back of the house.

TONY: You need to listen to me son.

DAVE : Just one second let me finish. I was round the back when I heard footsteps coming up the path.

F/X: NIGHT AND FOOTSTEPS

DAVE: So I darted into a bush. I see this guy coming up the path. I could just make him out in the moonlight. He was dressed in dark clothing. I stayed behind the bush and I watched as he took out a bar or something and began to force the patio door open at the back.

F/X: SOUND OF BREAKING DOOR LOCK

TONY: Listen here sonny, I think you may want to listen to me.

DAVE: No, no. I will but Mr Brennan please let me finish. From where I was crouched I could see the driveway. Just as he got the door open, that's when she arrived.

TONY: Who arrived?

DAVE: A car pulls into the drive and a woman gets out. I couldn't see too well.

TONY: The house owner?

DAVE: I didn't know at this stage but she gets out of the car and makes her way to the door at the side of the house and starts to unlock the door.

TONY: What about the guy, the burglar?

DAVE: That's just it. He seems to be expecting her. No fear. Calm as you like he pulls a large knife out of his shirt and pulls his hat down over his face. Then slowly steps in through the patio and disappears into the house.

TONY: This has to be a joke, right. You are having me on?

DAVE: What the hell was I supposed to do? She steps into the front and I don't know for a moment I just froze.

F/X: FEAR HEAVY BREATHING

TONY: So?

DAVE: I remembered something I saw on TV. If you need help or your being attacked. Yell fire!

TONY: Yell what?

DAVE: Yell fire, apparently people are more keen to intervene if they think it's a fire. So I ran in through the patio doors and into the house.

F/X: SOUND OF RUNNING, GRAVEL SCREAMS OF FIRE AND A SCUFFLE INSIDE THE HOUSE FURNITURE AND ORNAMENTS CRASHING

DAVE: I must have stumbled into him in the chaos and we both went flying across the desk. He was up and gone through the patio leaving me lying on the floor amongst the debris when she came in and switched on the light.

F/X: FLASHBACK

KATIE: What the... Dave! What the hell are you doing here?

DAVE: What the hell are you doing here?

TONY: It was the girl from the bar?

DAVE: Yeh. It was Katie the girl I had spoken too earlier.

TONY: You mean Kate "I don't live round here I live in Stoke". Oh Sonny how the hell did you talk your way out of this one. I am all ears.

DAVE: Well what could I say? I told her I had been passing and saw a suspicious character and followed him round the back etc, etc.

TONY: Your not going to tell me she believed that are yer lad.

DAVE: Well, what other explanation could I offer her?

F/X: **FLASHBACK**

KATIE: Oh god. Thank god you were here. What an incredible coincidence. I was so lucky. Look at the mess.

DAVE: Come on, nothing taken and no one hurt that's the main thing. Let me help you clean up.

KATIE: So much damage. Oh god Look Jason's computer its smashed.

DAVE: I am so sorry, who is Jason?

KATIE: (Sobbing) Oh god I thought I had come through this. The last 6 months have been so difficult.

DAVE: What do you mean?

KATIE: Jason is my son. He died 6 months ago, this is his apartment. It's owned by my father. He agreed that I could wait before clearing out Jason's things. You know until I felt ready.

DAVE: So that's why you have been in the area recently?

KATIE: mmm, That's what I was doing the night we met. Just a quick drink before I plucked up the courage to come over here.

DAVE: So this is all Jasons stuff

KATIE: Yes, I think that computer has had it don't you?

DAVE: Sorry

KATIE: It's not your fault.. I am just glad you happened to be passing. God knows what that guy could have done. kind of ironic really.. he spent so much time on that computer. Always too busy playing those internet games to bother with his mum. I used to nag him so much. "Your lost in your own little world why don't you get out more with real people." You know what kids are like these days.

DAVE: Yeh, Come on I'll help you clear up

F/X: SWEEPING AND CLEARING UP FADES

TONY: So there is a connection.

DAVE: That is what I have been trying to tell you and that is why I have to know about the account details.

TONY: (pause) This was last night then you say?

DAVE: Yeh, why?

TONY: Look son. There is something you need to know. This is what I have been trying to tell you. I checked the client records you gave me this morning.

DAVE: and?

TONY: (pause) There is no record of a Mickey De Santos character on our system.

DAVE: But of course there is, I have the email

TONY: You can check for yourself. There are no characters registered under Jason Fuller or any at that address.

DAVE: What? Of course there is I checked the address myself, sent the email I ... Mickey... Mickey De Santos.

TONY: What your telling me may be true but as far as our computer system is concerned. Mickey De Santos never existed in Second Life. (pause) Ever.