

## Chapter 4

# Virtual Worlds: Future Life as Simulation

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter introduces the concept of the avatar as a human surrogate in a synthetic world, in which nearly all aspects of daily life are replicated. Further, one to a few virtual worlds have led to more than 100 virtual worlds, each catering to a variety of members, from children to senior adults as well as the physically challenged who are provided opportunities to work and play in this second space. In these worlds, meaningful communities are developed.*

### IMAGINE . . .

*Elizabeth, now a seasoned fashion journalist, began her career as a virtual-world blogger who found solace in journaling her experience inside New Life. After being a local model in college, Elizabeth covered New Life virtual fashion shows, and quickly discovered that many of the rituals and requirements for avatar modeling were similar to her real-life experiences. As trippy as this sounds, Elizabeth enrolled her avatar, not herself, in fashion school where she found 20 other real-life women who learned how to puppeteer their avatars better. The animations seemed simple enough, but oddly, it did take Elizabeth's physical dexterity and lots of practice for those with limited experience in massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG). Like people playing a first-person shooter game in VR like the popular Attack of the Nazi Zombies on the Moon, after her modeling sessions with her avatar, Elizabeth was exhausted.*

*Avatar models learned to properly “strike a pose” on the runway; some even danced and sang during major VR beauty pageants. This required the avatar's puppeteer to learn basic audio/video recording and editing skills for their roles as “VR pageant coaches.” During fashion school, each learned how to apply makeup, design and customize outfits, and how to choose and apply wigs. Many practiced long hours customizing their hair, clothes and even feet, particularly learning to adjust their shoes appropriately for*

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*the grueling runway work ahead. As much as this sounds similar to grown-women playing Barbie, these VR fashion models formed a large but strangely intimate community of women with similar interests in fashion, modeling and media. Elizabeth met many former real models who enjoyed this unique aspect of fashion, and through the process, she became an award-winning fashion blogger after several years of VR apprenticeship. Some of her associates launched their own fashion retail stores for avatars, with real-life versions as well.*

*With 3D printing, the same skills for design applied to real life clothes and products. One of her friends presented her ideas at a real-life fashion design conference in Milan, Italy. There were many stories on how virtual world jobs and hobbies turned into real-life opportunities. Elizabeth would later use her experiences in New Life to compete for a fashion writer position at a London fashion tabloid. She learned about the opening through one of her in-world journalist contacts. For several years, many forward-thinking journalists worked both in new and real life, especially during MMORPG's first decade of influence.*

*Elizabeth's writing career and her unique experience with technology gave her an edge. As it turns out, good writing is good writing in any dimension. She also had gained multimedia reporting skills, created video reels of the fashion shows and performers, stayed current on her own old modeling techniques through her avatar. Now a professional in both worlds, Elizabeth reported on non-fashion-related entertainment events which helped her build her unique portfolio. When asked to speak at both real-world and New Life events, Elizabeth always credits her career to her VR experiences and opportunities*

*Fast forward to 2045, after creating different avatars on more VR platforms than she can remember, Elizabeth finds it difficult to recommend any one simulation but believes those that provide casual, interactive socialization and networking are the most professionally productive. Elizabeth watches her school-age daughter choose among more than 500 virtual worlds, with several rising to the top for aspiring youth to get a jump on their passions and perhaps careers. Elizabeth noticed young people were more open to setting up online stores; many earned money for college in this way. She found digital natives like her daughter and her friends have definitely blurred the lines between gaming, VR, social media, and real life. The augmented worlds were much more sophisticated at integrating virtual and extended reality (XR) into life-size holographic dimensions that blended these experiences seamlessly. Her daughter attends weekly after-school virtual study sessions with many other students around her age so she is just as inclined to learn in a fun way on any platform. This group also attends summer virtual camps, that introduce them to other children from around the world; participants are split into interest groups. That never prevents her daughter from taking off her headset and enjoying real sunshine or kicking a real soccer ball with neighborhood kids. Yet, she still wonders whether her VR avatar can go somewhere and feel the weight of a real-life soccer ball on her cleats as she's scoring the winning goal.. As a mom, Elizabeth feels good that mandated media literacy classes at school have taught her daughter sufficiently that she can learn real life skills everywhere—even in real life!*

## **INTRODUCTION: TRAINING GROUND FOR THE FUTURE**

This little sci-fi vignette about Elizabeth and daughter illustrates how VR platforms can lead to real-life opportunities for participants who might have been intimidated to visit new career fields long before

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