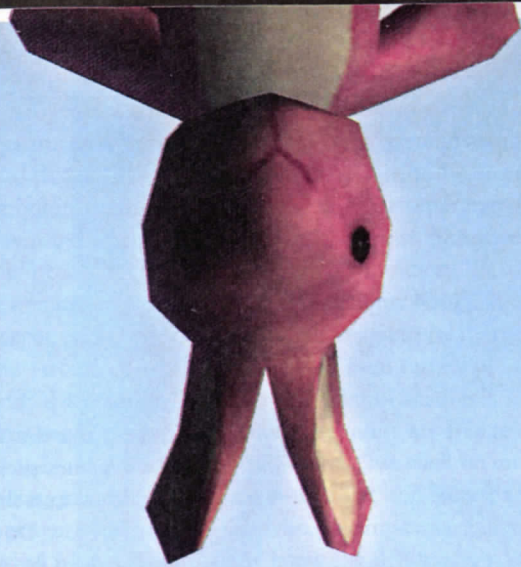


> MY AVATAR IS HOTTER THAN YOURS



| By Kimberly Turner



The **Virtual World of Kaneva** is described by creator Chris Klaus as a "social experiment." After spending a few weeks there, I'd say it's more like high school, where looks and popularity matter most and everyone hangs out at the mall.



A

shirtless man writhes in the mall's fountain while others rub their asses and swivel their hips. Like many who just arrived, I stand near the mall's help desk in a white tee and blue jeans, detached look on my face, spinning in circles. Four hallways, each lined with storefronts, jut from the central atrium. Shoppers sprint frantically through the hub, hurtling over the benches surrounding the fountain, dodging potted palm trees, and pushing through the throng of dancers near the Kaneva logo billboard, in a frenzy of retail therapy.

There'll be no sprinting, hurtling, or dodging in my near future. I haven't even figured out how to walk or stop this dizzying spin. Then again, I am less than an hour old. I've just created myself from scratch. Everyone does. That's why there are no ugly people in the online World of Kaneva. The "virtual" me watching the fella in the fountain with a mixture of bewilderment and disgust is called an avatar, and it's pretty good-looking if you don't mind my saying so. Lips? Full. Skin? Not too pasty. Height and weight? Tall and slim, of course. Eyes? Green, my favorite color. Hair? Maroon pig-tails—why not?

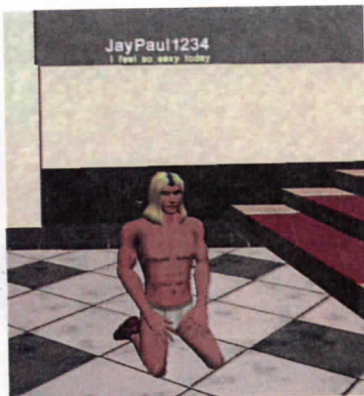
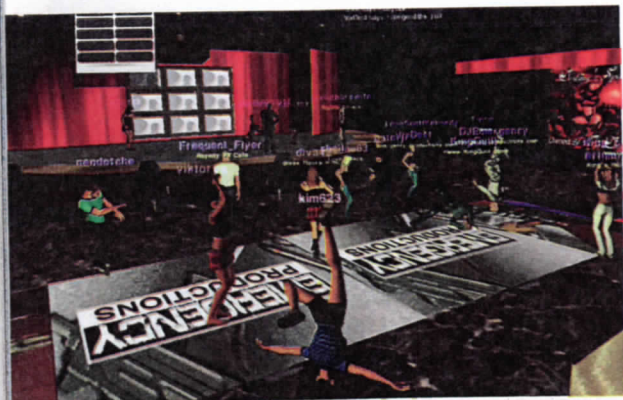
Kaneva, Latin for "blank canvas," is a 3-D online world where users socialize, share music and videos, decorate their homes, and visit community hangouts. I'm here testing the first incarnation of this digital uni-

verse. After the World has been up and running for a while, games such as chess, checkers, and baseball will be added, and there will be more events, such as last year's "How Down Is Your Sound?" music competition, judged by Atlanta hip-hop impresarios Ludacris and Dallas Austin.

But now is not the time to get carried away with dreams of shortstop stardom or rap VIP status. First I need to figure out what some of these buttons do. After a few minutes of experimentation and random clicking—tutorials are for wusses—I can walk forward (W key!) and backward (S!), jump (spacebar! spacebar!), and wave, smile, and nod (clicking the buttons on my "emote" toolbar).

I type in my little chat window, confidently striking up conversations with attractive passersby, until a sharply dressed blonde mocks my "noob clothes" (short for "newbie," "noob" is a derogatory term implying that you're a loser who spends too much time in the real world). I try to hang my head in shame but don't know how. It's time to stop gawking at the spectacle in the mall fountain and start shopping.

Chuck Norris lurks behind the counter of the shoe store—a Chuck Norris rug, that is. Kaneva users can apply nearly any "texture" to couches, rugs, dance floors, landscapes, walls, anything they own. Chuck just happens to be the texture chosen for this unfortunate rug. I'm trekking back and forth over Chuck's grimacing face, deciding between sneakers and boots, when I spot the "employees only" door. What's virtual life without a little rebellion? I aim my pixilated feet, now clad in non-newbie sneakers, toward the door and make a run for it. Slam! Into the wall. My newbie brain



has yet to figure out that many things in the Virtual World of Kaneva—even seemingly useful things such as doors and windows—are often nothing but images on a wall, the equivalent to a mouse hole drawn by a cartoon cat to lure his prey. I find myself wishing for a “sheepish grin” button for the second time in five minutes.

Hitting the tab key near any shopkeeper brings up a menu of wares that I can buy with the virtual dollars I was given when I came into this world. If I spend my initial free Kaneva bucks, I’ll need to buy more in order to keep shopping. Right now, the exchange rate is about 10 U.S. dollars to 1,500 Kaneva credits, making the shoes I just bought worth about 26 cents. Down the hall from the shoe store, I select a stylish blue-striped top and a pair of sporty black shorts from the women’s wear menu (\$73 Kaneva) then, head held high, charge back into the mall atrium.

“Raved u! Rave me back!!!”

Kaneva, like many online communities, has a language all its own. One woman told me, “my ffxi wuz down so i came here. the other mmorpg’s fixed but i’m still here lol.” I still have no clue what she was going on about. Users don’t have to know all the lingo, but “raves” are omnipresent, and you’re not getting far without them. It goes something like this: Having fun where you are? Rave the place! Enjoying the ubiquitous Will Smith videos? Rave them! Like the person you’re chatting with? Rave her! Want a total stranger to give you a rave? Rave him! Kaneva’s website posts rave leaderboards, and getting on them is like being prom queen for a day.

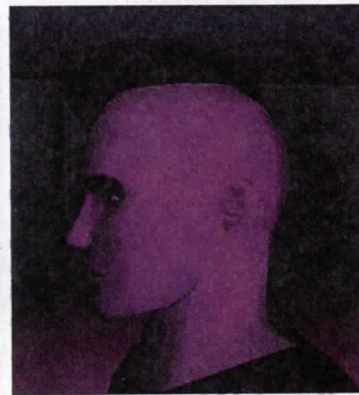
After returning all the raves bestowed upon me (basic Kaneva etiquette), I turn my attention to friend requests. Right-clicking a clean-cut, athletic-looking blond avatar called Teddybear reveals his decidedly uncuddly real-life mullet and fondness for MTV’s *Headbangers Ball*. Still, he’s requested to be my friend, and the cruel-looking “deny” button stirs memories of junior high rejection. Approved it is. Mulletman and I are officially friends.

I accept friend after friend until I’ve amassed a tribe

of 18 best buds, voyeuristically scoping the profiles of each. The connection between the real world and the electronic is what separates Kaneva from every other virtual environment. Simply clicking on someone’s in-world persona summons his or her online profile, which lists favorite films, books, and music; hobbies; sexual orientation; religion; relationship status; level of education; height; even family photos. A real-world version could save a lot of small talk at cocktail parties.

Of course, users are free to share as much or as little as they want. One click on an avatar wearing a modest button-up shirt and long pants reveals a 52-year-old man who, in embarrassing detail, divulges that he never truly knew the depth of his love for his wife until they had divorced. Though they are trapped in the same house for financial reasons, they live separate lives—his, very lonely. Other clicks disclose nothing more than an affinity for Johnny Cash or a love of *CSI: Miami*.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 123]



MY AVATAR IS HOTTER . . .

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85

But believing everything you read would be a mistake. "I'm 25 but i don't want people to know that so i say i'm 17," one avatar inadvertently announces to the entire mall. She's just committed the Kaneva equivalent of hitting "reply all" on an inappropriate e-mail. "Why'd you tell me then?" asks her conversation partner, also unknowingly speaking to the entire group. "Because u look trustworthy," says the girl. "Hope we ALL look trustworthy!" someone finally chimes in. The girl teleports to her home.

The profiles of many of my fellow mall patrons reveal that their real-life counterparts are middle-aged moms and dads. So why does it feel so much like high school, where wearing the wrong outfit earns a sneer from the cool girl, and public humiliation in the food court sends you fleeing in shame?

Ask founder Chris Klaus what Kaneva is and you'll hear phrases like "social entertainment experience" and "next big thing." Techies refer to it as a hybrid of MySpace, YouTube, and Second Life. If none of that means anything to you, don't worry. You're exactly the kind of user Kaneva wants.

Most people I encounter during my "in-world" experience are middle-aged women and older men. Kaneva's almost 300,000 members are housewives, computer execs, students, divorcees, Hells Angels, suburbanites—many of whom, according to Klaus, have never touched a video game in their lives. Everything about Kaneva is about ease of use. It attracts those who lack the patience, or desire, to sift through the 300-page guidebook for Second Life, the Internet's most popular virtual world.

Kaneva's Sandy Springs headquarters are still what you'd call start-up digs. Each time the cell phone sitting in front of Chris Klaus rings, a rockin' guitar riff echoes off the scuffed walls of the barren conference room. Klaus, known to some as the founder of Internet Security Systems and to others as that guy the Georgia Tech building is named after, grins a lot. And he should. As he solilo-

quizes about his background, he depicts a Disney-esque series of near-effortless successes and happy coincidences. Kaneva's PR manager nods enthusiastically, throwing in phrases like "Well, Chris is being humble" at regular intervals.

Klaus was at Georgia Tech, trying to "figure out how to scrounge 20 bucks to buy beer and ramen noodles," when his Internet security business took off—not like a bird, not even like a plane, but like a rocketship with a full fuel tank. He dropped out of Georgia Tech and set up shop in the spare bedroom of his grandma's Roswell home. So new to the world of big business and strings of zeroes was he that when Novell (owner of WordPerfect) inquired about using

The hottie I've been following around is a pasty, slightly pudgy Midwestern housewife wearing an embroidered sweater, eighties bangs, and heavy eyeliner.

his scanning software, he quoted them a price of \$20,000 rather than the \$20 million he had calculated the project was worth. "I didn't feel comfortable saying \$20 million over the phone, so I removed a few zeroes," he explains. "I was like 'Woohoo!' For \$20,000 it was the happiest moment of my life." Klaus, 33, recounts the \$19 million loss with the cheerful demeanor of someone recalling the time his house was TP'd by those meddlesome neighbor kids.

After IBM purchased ISS for \$1.3 billion last summer, Klaus had an urge to "get back into something small, start-up size." He'd grown up creating rudimentary computer games ("shoot-em-

ups" along the lines of Galaga), playing Dungeons & Dragons ("It was casual. I wasn't the guy in the sewer, all dressed up"), and chatting with people via early Internet bulletin board systems ("Holy cow, it was amazing! I'm talking to these guys in New Zealand or Australia, and it seems I should get a big bill, but that doesn't happen on the Internet"). So building a 3-D online world just made sense. "Chris has a talent and a gift for being visionary," Ms. PR assures me.

Kaneva may be a social experiment, but don't think Klaus is without a business plan. Virtual clothes, hairstyles, home furnishings, and body parts are big business. Cyworld, a virtual world based in South Korea, sells nearly \$300,000 worth of virtual items every day—\$100 million per year. Habbo Hotel, a teen world based in the UK, moved \$77 million worth of virtual gear last year. And the 3.8 million "residents" of Second Life, the world's most popular virtual world, have, as of this writing, dropped \$1,598,616 in the last 24 hours alone.

Selling virtual items will be Kaneva's main source of income. After all, keeping up with the virtual Joneses is vital to your avatar's self-esteem. In time, most of the shops will be branded with familiar company names and logos. It's another way Kaneva will generate revenue. Klaus insists that product placement will only enhance the virtual world, maintaining that, for the sake of realism, users would much rather sip a Diet Coke than a Brand X Cola.

So maybe the shrewd business plan, not the high school flashbacks, is why the mall is Kaneva's main gathering place. After all, it features cell phone shops, tanning beds, clothing boutiques, furniture outlets, a fast-food joint called McWilly's where a cashier named Ronald serves up pretend burgers, and even a real estate office where Harry Norman peddles deeds for apartments, nightclubs, and office space.

Klaus predicts there will come a day when you will be able to walk your virtual self into the virtual help center of a real-life company. "If you could have this avatar come out and say, 'Oh, what's the problem? Let me work with you,' you might feel a little less angry versus having some guy on the phone

who can't understand what you're saying," Klaus says. Noticing my skeptical expression, he adds, "Maybe you could allow people to kick and punch them, to let them vent a little."

I might not know how to smack the virtual salesclerks around, but I have mastered many niceties of Kaneva culture. I've discovered that all that ass-rubbing and hip-swiveling is Kaneva's version of "sexy dancing" and that I can banish my avatar's blank stare by clicking "Surprise," "Smile," or "Laugh" on my gestures menu. With experience on my side, the scene in the fountain is more predictable than bewildering.

An athletic, miniskirt-clad character called Jonathansgirl takes a break from "sexy dancing" to saunter over and invite me to her house. And while a real-world version of the tall, flowy-haired beauty in front of me would be intimidating as hell, I agree to check out her place.

Like a toddler on an obstacle course, I stumble around her home—falling off

ledges into dark crevices, flinging myself off the stairs, spastically spinning in circles. "Woo, this is embarrassing," I say, still using silly things like commas and appropriate spelling to chat with others. "I'm new. I'm sure I'll get the hang of this whole walking thing soon."

"No u won't," assures Jonathansgirl. "I still fall all the time."

"Come here," she says. I run off the edge of the world. She waits patiently. I drop out of the sky into her living room once again and carefully sidestep to where she's standing. "This is what I look like in real life," she says, gesturing to a framed photo on her wall. Kaneva doesn't have a "let your mouth hang open in shock" button, but if it did, I'd push it. The hottie I've been following around is a pasty, slightly pudgy Midwestern housewife wearing an embroidered sweater, eighties bangs, and heavy eyeliner. Things in Kaneva are rarely what they seem.

Oddly, walking through Jonathansgirl's virtual bedroom seems even more intrusive than viewing her family photos or reading her real-world profile. There's

something about seeing the place where a person sleeps that's exceedingly personal—even if it is just a square of pixels on a screen. Accidentally waltzing across a person's pillows, as my klutzy avatar did, seems worse yet.

At the pinnacle of the climb, on her rooftop, I am rewarded with a cityscape and giant screens playing Justin Timberlake's "Sexyback." When she starts to dance, the chubby housewife fades from my mind and I see, once again, the gorgeous, stylish girl I met at the mall.

No one selects pudgy, short, or balding avatar options. Just as there are no ugly people in Kaneva, there are no homeless people. Along with your newbie uniform of white tee and jeans, your apartment is your first possession. Decorate it, furnish it, display photos and videos, or do what I did: Wait until you have company coming in half an hour, then rush to the mall, grab the first couch you find, a pillow or two, and a floor lamp. Haphazardly throw it all into place, then add, for a touch of class, a floating pink bunny that was a virtual gift.

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"Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."
- Sigmund Freud



My avatar is in the apartment awaiting a visit from Lulu, a 40-year-old married woman with five cats and two dogs, who is one of Kaneva's most popular residents. She runs the most raved nightclub in the World—though she never visits actual clubs or bars—and boasts more than 1,100 virtual friends, many of whom she's "gotten really close to"—though she has met none of them in the real world. When she arrives at my stark apartment, she's gracious enough to comment on what I have done, rather than what I haven't. After a random visitor shows up uninvited and comments, "Ooooh I smell fresh paint!" Lulu shows me how to prevent such intrusions by changing my privacy settings in the onscreen menus. She's likeable on one level, unnerving on another.

Anyone who's ever tried to have a conversation with someone wearing dark sunglasses can attest that the lack of eye contact lends an awkward disconnect to an otherwise mundane situation. Not only is Lulu's avatar wearing sunglasses, she is also facing slightly away from me, at an angle that wouldn't be acceptable in an interaction with your least favorite coworker, much less someone attempting to make pleasant conversation with you. When she LOLs, her electronic representation just stands there, hands at its sides, with the same blank look on its face.

It's enough to make me doubt Chris Klaus' assertion that avatars add "a whole new human element to interacting in a way that's more spatially connected to how we interact in the real world." He says that using 2-D communication methods like e-mail are not only less likely to yield good conversation, they're also less enjoyable. "I've never felt, on a Friday night, I'm gonna jump on e-mail with my buddies and consider that a fun night," he says. True. But I don't have to clean my apartment—virtual or otherwise—before sending an e-mail either. He calls "raves" a sign of "collective wisdom," but they feel more like votes for student council.

Lulu, still angled away from me, claims she spends 20 hours a day in the Virtual World of Kaneva. It's hard to tell whether she's joking. Most users are in the virtual world for an average of about four hours a week, but some have spent

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400 to 500 hours in-world during a single month. It's no wonder companies such as Coca-Cola and The Weather Channel have recently developed virtual world presences (at mycoke.com and in Second Life, respectively).

Can spending that much time in-world really be healthy? Dr. Kimberly S. Young, director of the Center for Online Addiction Recovery and one of the world's foremost experts on online addiction, explains, "It isn't about counting the number of hours spent in the virtual world—that would be like diagnosing alcoholism based solely on the number of drinks someone has. The issue is really how much it's impacting your life. If you're not sleeping, not eating, and your hygiene is suffering, it's a problem. I've talked with people who keep a bottle next to their computers so they don't have to get up to use the bathroom."

But that's the rare, dark, extreme side of virtual worlds. Most users are well-groomed, well-rested, well-fed people like you and me. "It's a human experience, and

you actually feel emotion from engaging with others," says Klaus. "If everybody's like, 'Hey Chris, welcome back!' it's like *Cheers*. You feel good. Everybody knows you. You now have an online family of friends. That's powerful."

My "online family of friends"—all 33 of 'em—are mostly strangers who have added me to make themselves appear more well-liked and established. Lulu, on the other hand, talks fondly about virtual pals who have so much loyalty—or so much desire for popularity through proximity—that they've changed the slogan beneath their screen name to read "Lulu's slave" or "Lulu's body guard" or "Lulu's secret agent." When she leaves my apartment to meet her buddies in the mall, I stand alone near my new sofa, gazing out over the virtual skyline and wondering whether I'll ever make it to 50 friends.

I promised that I'd visit Lulu's nightclub, but I certainly can't go dressed like this. Sure, my outfit is just fine under

the bright lights of the mall or in the privacy of friends' homes, but I'm going *out* for heaven's sake. Hitting the town.

Since the Virtual World of Kaneva just opened to the public on March 21, new spots sprout up every day. Today, it's a shop labeled "Goth Clothing." The clerk is wearing more buckles than *Thriller*-era Michael Jackson, and the clientele looks appropriately surly in head-to-toe black. I amble in, bouncing pigtailed, bright sneakers—and a jaunty wave just to twist the knife. They stare. At least I think they're staring. It's hard to say. For all I know, the humans behind these avatars could be in the kitchen, making mac and cheese for their 5-year-olds.

Inspired by my newly purchased goth corset and boots, I take a detour from my trip to Lulu's, clicking my "Go Places" menu to teleport to a club called Metal-Mania. Seconds later, I'm in an entryway plastered with Anthrax and Pantera posters, being accosted by the sound of screams. I run toward a giant skull and down a hall wallpapered with photos of

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big-haired eighties rockers. On the dance floor, a group of headbangers welcomes me. The conversation, set to the tune of songs like "Death Trap" and "When Demons Awake," goes something like this:

"Bang them heads!!"
 "Yeah!"
 "I'm ready 2 party hard!"
 "This shit rocks."

I don't have much along those lines to contribute, so I start clicking on my fellow headbangers' avatars and discover, to my surprise, that most are, in real life, long-haired, tattooed, pale, and draped in dark clothing. They are the first people I've met in Kaneva who are satisfied enough with their real lives to replicate them online. As the screaming reaches a crescendo and images of demons fill the video screens, I teleport . . .

"You are the wiiiiinnnd beneath my wings," sings Bette Midler. I am surrounded by stuffed animals, each with its own little chair. The lifeless elephants,

frogs, puppies, and kittens stare from all sides as Bette croons on. This is Lulu's much-raved club. A hallway leads to an enormous dance floor and walls of television screens, all playing the same music video. As "Heaven Isn't Too Far Away" begins playing, I notice that, aside from me and 27 alarmingly large images of the Warrant lead singer's head of feathered blond hair, the club is empty. I decide to do some exploring and try Lulu's hyped club again later.

I teleport.

The Kaneva Cemetery is divided into Heaven and Hell. Heaven, as you'd expect, is decorated with cloud patterns, stained-glass images of Jesus, and benches for sitting and reflecting, which would be fine if Kaneva avatars could sit. Not a soul is present. Next door, Hell, as you might also expect, features demonic wallpaper, pentagrams, freaks, and Lynyrd Skynyrd videos. It seems as good a place as any to try out the newest option on the "emote" panel: "rude gesture." It amounts to pointing angrily, kissing your hand, slapping your ass,

then doing a primitive gorilla impersonation—hardly threatening. "Cool . . . howd u do that?!" asks one hellspawn.

Teleport.

Another "friend," Kylie, sends me a message asking me to visit her hang-out. She proudly shows me around her dolphin-themed room interspersed with Tweety Bird "art" while we make polite conversation about movies and music. Her television is showing—what else?—a damned Will Smith video. I vow then and there to buy a Kaneva TV, if for no other reason than to show something other than eighties and nineties hair bands, Kid Rock, and Will Smith videos.

Teleport.

I visit the movie theater, the beach, a pizza place. Each looks like the real thing—at least in the way a Smurf house looks like a real mushroom. Unlike online worlds like Second Life, Kaneva doesn't have castles, giant robots, or flying avatars with cat heads. No fairies. No elves. If you can't find it in the real world, you won't find it in Kaneva.

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ship, and she builds a Dr. Seuss park, and next thing you know, we're all on the same island together, there's no consistency to the reality," says Klaus, who obviously has an interesting interpretation of the word "reality." "If I was playing in a fantasy world, fighting a dragon, and spaceships came down and shot me with alien lasers, that would ruin my experience. You're not gonna see a dragon in our mall."

One of Kaneva's biggest draws, I'm told, is finding like-minded people who are into similar art, music, movies, and hobbies. Online communities break down the geographical boundaries of the physical world, letting users in Georgia "hang out" with users in France, Japan, or Ecuador. Which sounds good, if you can find it.

I scan the list of hangouts. Oh, Club Quill! At last, a place where I might find some like-minded writerly types. I teleport . . . into a room plastered with photos of scandalously clad women with ample booty. Hip-hop music pumps through the virtual speakers. Rather than the literary oasis I'd hoped for, I have stumbled into the lair of King Quill of Atlanta's Big Oomp Records. The local connection is comforting but I'm less enthused about the decor, so I try Club ATL.

On the dance floor, the avatars at Club ATL are dancing not to Dirty South Rap, Elton John, or Cartel but to the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive." Still, what better place to bust out my fallow dance moves? Hitting the "sexy dance" button would prompt that rubbing-my-own-ass move, so I try "country dance." It causes me to fall to my knees and remain motionless; clearly, one of the Kaneva developers has a less than positive opinion of country music. The "breakdance" button whips my legs into the air a la helicopter blades and spins me around on my head. They must be some pretty hot moves because I'm approached by a tall, handsome guy in a button-up shirt. He's doing the men's version of the "sexy dance," which looks less like an itchy rear end and more like disco dancing with the occasional thrust thrown in for good measure. My spinning foot sails through his neck. He's unconcerned. "Your a

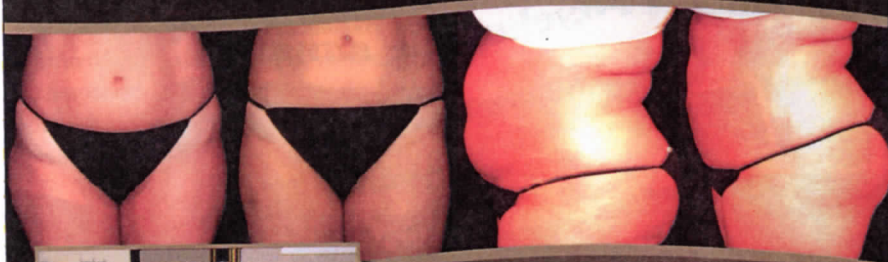
great dancer," he says. "Want 2 come 2 my place?"

Now, I'm not here to hook up, but some are. And it does happen. The World, technically R-rated at worst, is described as "tightly controlled." Pornography is forbidden, as is the deviant, kinky stuff that's prevalent in many other virtual worlds. This level of censorship is part of what makes Kaneva appealing to mild-mannered housewives, older users, and, yes, advertisers who are considering product placement. But controlling content is a far easier task than controlling what people talk about or what they do when they visit each other's virtual homes. And what some Kaneva residents talk about is sex. Search the hangouts list for the word, and you'll get 45 hits, places like Let's Have Sex, Come Get UR Sex On, Sexville, Sexland, and Sextown. Only one of the 45 is occupied. Against my better judgment and in the name of research, I teleport in for a peek at The Sex Club. "How do i take my clothes off?" a newbie is asking a blonde who's already standing in her bra and panties—the most you can show in Kaneva. I'm just standing there, within earshot, trying hard to look nonchalant (there is no button for that). I can't repeat what she said to him next, but I teleported the hell out of there.

Not all single (or attached) folks in Kaneva's World are after meaningless trysts. "I've had people e-mailing me and asking, 'Can we get married in your virtual world? If so, can we share an apartment?'" says Klaus. "I haven't quite figured out the answer to that. I don't know if that's legally binding or not, but I think we'll see more of that in the future."

But Klaus' confusion over the issue hasn't stopped Natasha_Blue and Steam-Train, who got "married" online in a chapel they built themselves. "While looking around for chapels," Natasha_Blue writes, "we found a few very nice ones, but none that really fit our style. In keeping with our obsession for building, we set out to start our own." The happy couple posted wedding "photos" on Kaneva's website and notes thanking the photographer, wedding official, and Lulu, who donated her club for the reception. Which reminds me, I've got somewhere to be.

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When I arrive at Lulu's club the second time, there are so many people dancing and chatting that it's hard to tell who's talking to whom (a common problem in public chats). Timing can be the difference between making small talk and coming across as a callous jerk. An actual conversation to illustrate:

T: I was @ the hospital all day. Someone on my baseball team got hit by a semi.
C: Cool TV wall.
S: that's so sad
J: I'm so very very sorry how is he
T: oh hes fine
C: i imagine that was expensive
J: it was
T: other then the fractured knee & broken leg

You can see how this could cause problems.

On the light-up dance floor, a stranger strips to his tighty whities and is scolded. Several women stop their itchy-bum dancing and recoil in disgust. Still sporting nothing but his briefs, the man wanders toward the most offended of the group and apologizes. She continues to freak out, screeching electronically and generally acting as if she's never seen a cartoon man in his drawn-on underpants before. "Whoa!" says Mr. Underwear. "I'm new. I was only trying to apologize."

"Well apologize without getting in my space!!" she snarls, and I realize she is honestly, sincerely upset that virtual Underpants Dude invaded the virtual personal bubble of her virtual self. She continues ranting about her feelings of violation. No one but me seems to find that excessive. Lulu boots Tighty Whities McGee from the club.

Somewhere along the line, this woman, like so many online world residents, has blurred the line between virtual and real until it is nothing more than a faded gray smudge. Here, she is beautiful and slender. Here, she is fashionable and popular. Here, she dances the night away at a nightclub full of friends—all while sitting in faded pajamas with her children asleep in the next room. Is it any wonder she'll be back tomorrow night? ❖