GameFile: Chamillionaire's Ridin' Virtual, 'Saint's Row' Has A Surprise, Anti-Game Laws Gain Steam And More

06.20.2006

Grab your virtual ticket: Cham's taking a stroll through 'Second Life.'

Chamillionaire's avatar in "Second Life"
Photo: Universal Motown Records Group

June 16 was just another average Friday in the virtual world of "Second Life."

Jordan Bigel, who calls himself Dire Lobo, was heralding the first virtual-world appearance of Chamillionaire. Elsewhere in "Second Life," Kansas dweller Wes Keltner was preparing for the opening of an American Apparel clothing store he dreamed up — a store that doesn't really exist.

Sometimes entering a virtual world is like falling down a rabbit hole. Plunge into Azeroth from the 6-million-strong "World of Warcraft" and the world you knew is left behind, replaced by tunnel vision that focuses on hunting the beasts of Azeroth rather than going outside and getting some sun.

But while some games have one eye on the real world and the other on the virtual, "Second Life" never lets you forget that real people are behind the game's carnival of wild sights. Only the terrain in "Second Life," a smaller world with about 200,000 members, is built by the program's developers. Everything upon those polygonal plots — the characters, the buildings and the crazy dance moves available for purchase in the floating disco — is engineered by the "Second Life" players. The real world and the virtual mingle in full view.
On Friday that crossover involved the final preparations for a virtual American Apparel store that would soon open on "Second Life"’s Lerappa Island and that any wandering "SL" resident can walk through. The store was modeled off an American Apparel store in Tokyo but was the brainchild of Keltner, a young ad agent who read an article about "Second Life" a couple of months ago and thought that the no-sweatshop company should take its progressive values to this strange new world rife with possibilities.

"This is Web 2.0 right here," Keltner said. "You're walking through Web sites."

The AA virtual store will allow "Second Life" players to click on digital versions of the brand's shirts and dresses and buy them for pennies so their character can wear them. The store also links to the company Web site, facilitating real purchases. But there's a hitch with selling the simple styles of American Apparel in a video-game-like world where you can wear any kind of shoes, hairstyles or even bodies that you want. "Everyone else has wings and devil horns and all the rest," said Raz Schionning, director of Web services at American Apparel. "So it'll be curious to see if a red T-shirt makes sense."

Still, Schionning said the project is designed to test the idea of a virtual store, not necessarily to make big money.

Also trying to figure out what makes sense on Friday was Bigel, who lives on a boat in Marina del Rey, California. He has a special acre of virtual land in "Second Life" on which he has constructed a concert stage and some space-age buildings dedicated to artists from Universal Music. On Sunday, he explained, the real Chamillionaire would be ridin' on through — in a virtual Cham body, that is.

Bigel said he'd like to be the pre-eminent in-world planner of real-world-related events in "Second Life." In February, he decided that the virtual world needed real-world musicians who would hang out and maybe even perform in the digital world. This wasn't a brand new idea: "SL" musicians like folkie Frogg Marlowe already perform in real life and pipe the audio into virtual performances that other players can attend.

But Bigel was thinking really big. He went to Universal Music, home to Daddy Yankee, Gwen Stefani and Fall Out Boy, and told them he wanted to showcase their artists. All of them. Universal bit and offered him the rock band Hinder for starters.

In early May, Bigel finished the virtual construction. It includes a concert stage, exhibition room — where players can steer their character to photos — and a wall-sized interactive track list of Hinder songs. There's a store where people can buy real or virtual Hinder merchandise — virtual Hinder jackets for your character cost 500 Linden dollars, the game's currency, or less than $2. There's also a virtual reality chamber inside this already virtual reality.

Universal apparently felt so good about the project that they let Bigel start setting up a similar space for Chamillionaire. Currently there's a massive interactive Cham jukebox, with more items to come. On Sunday, Cham will take a virtual stroll through the place and chat with fans, so long as they've nabbed a ticket by visiting the area in advance. To avoid overflow, Universal is giving out tickets and putting some bouncers in. But it's just for show — there's nothing those guys can really do.

Bigel has a special plan for July, when he intends to do the first-ever concert performed in-world and in real life simultaneously. The idea is for Hinder to play a tour date and funnel the audio of that live performance into "Second Life," where "SL" players controlling avatars of the members of Hinder will "perform" to that audio feed.

It's the real world mashed right up with the virtual, and pity to those who can't keep up. Hey, Chamillionaire, prepare to get your head spun, too. See you Sunday. Sort of.

More from the world of video games:

Just when you think a game isn't going to offer any surprises, it throws one out there. A recent demo of the fall Xbox 360 game "Saint's Row" initially showed what was the expected: free-range mayhem in a wide-open city, lots of cars to be jacked and a satirical view of the world all consistent with a game that looks quite a bit like a next-generation "Grand Theft Auto." The twist? It's multiplayer, a mode barely dabbed with in the "GTA" games. Not only does "Saint's Row" offer a variety of modes that involve scrambling to have the most pimped ride and a team-based competition that actually involves protecting one team's "pimp," but it also has a truly revolutionary twist: a playable lobby. Multiplayer games usually force gamers to stare at a text-based menu screen "lobby" while they wait for their online buddies to link up. Not so with "Saint's Row," which re-imagines such lobbies and an actual factory warehouse where waiting players can steer their characters into shootouts against the rest of the assembling group. It's a game before the game really starts, and a sign that fresh thinking can emerge where one least expects it. ...
check the legislation tracker at GamePolitics.com.

Recent video game stories from MTV News:

"Whack Or Be Whacked In 'Sopranos' Video Game"

— Stephen Totilo

For more on Chamillionaire, check out the MTV News Archive
What do you think of this story? You Tell Us
E-Mail this story to a friend
Back to News Archive: Chamillionaire

Related Stories

Chamillionaire Headlines

Ciara Dances In The Dark With Chamillionaire In 'Get Up' Video
Chamillionaire Says Cops Still Try To Catch Him Ridin' Dirty
Mixtape Monday: LL Cool J Stays Hungry, Cam'ron Delivers A Preview
For The Record: Quick News On Shakira, Diddy, Jack White, Nick Lachey, Michael Jackson, Paul Wall & More
New Releases: Jack Johnson, Dem Franchise Boyz, Sly And The Family Stone, Remy Ma, Chamillionaire & More

More Chamillionaire Headlines

© 2006 MTV Networks, © and TM MTV Networks, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.