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Second Life avatar able to think

Virtual world used to test Artificial Intelligence tech

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Scientists in the US are using the virtual world, Second Life, to test the latest developments in Artificial Intelligence.

The team at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute have created Edd Hifeng - an avatar alike most in Second Life, but with a key difference - the steel-grey robot is not powered by a person at a keyboard but by AI.

Edd is controlled by a computer and is unique in having his own powers of reason (akin to those of a 4-year-old) and the ability to converse.

Selmer Bringsjord, director of the Rensselaer Artificial Intelligence and Reasoning Laboratory, says that Second Life is perfect as a "very inexpensive way to test out technologies right now".

Bringsjord adds that Edd could be a forerunner to more sophisticated avatar creations that could interact with people inside virtual worlds either like Second Life, or those created in the future to train people - for example - virtual worlds mimicking tube stations to help emergency staff train.

At the moment, Edd goes where the team send him and he can answer questions like "Where are you from?" but understands only English that has previously been translated into mathematical logic.

And the Linden Lab team - who created Second Life - are supporting the project.

John Lester, Boston operations manager for Linden Lab, told Associated Press: "I think the real future for this is when people take these AI-controlled avatars and let them free in Second Life".

