

**Masonry in Second Life**  
**by**  
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Hello! My names is Biff Garfield. I am the avatar of Brother William F. Lott. I represent Brother Lott in the realm of Second Life. In this paper, Brother Lott and I are going to discuss Second Life and the role of Freemasonry within Second Life.



## **I. Second Life**

An article on Wikipedia describes Second Life in the following manner:

**Second Life** (abbreviated as **SL**) is an Internet-based virtual world which came to international attention via mainstream news media in late 2006 and early 2007.[4][5] Developed by Linden Labs, a downloadable client program enables its users, called “Residents”, to interact with each other through motional avatars, providing an advanced level of a social network service combined with general aspects of a metaverse. Residents can explore, meet other Residents, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, create and trade items (virtual property) and services from one another.<sup>1</sup>

Today Second Life has roughly 5.9 million residents. Each resident is represented by his or her own personal avatar. The standard avatar that is closest to the character the subscriber wishes to portray on Second Life is originally selected. Subscribers are free to modify their avatar to make it better represent the character and personality they want to portray by adding clothing that has been collected from free sources or purchased with Linden dollars; by changing the height, weight and facial appearance of the avatar; and/or by

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<sup>1</sup> “Second Life”, *Wikipedia*, April 27, 2007.

substituting something other than a human figure to be the subscriber's avatar in Second Life. Birds, dragons, dogs, cats, fuzz ball and many other things have been selected and imported as individual's personal avatars. A meaningful share of individuals select to spend their time in Second Life as a member of the opposite sex. This latter behavior raises serious issues as we discuss Freemasonry within Second Life.

Second Life is a fully functional economy. There are items to buy and one can produce goods or services to sell. Items are purchase or sold for Linden dollars. One can obtain Linden dollars by engaging in commerce and earning them or one can purchase them at the Linden Exchange for U.S. dollars. The Linden Exchange is a fully functional foreign exchange market where Linden dollars can be bought or sold. At the time of the writing of this article, the current exchange rate of the Linden dollar was L\$267 / U.S.\$1.00.

In addition to buying items, subscribers can own property and construct buildings along with other items on that property. What you actually can do on your land is determined by where you buy it. Private communities, of which there are a number, have restrictions on what can be on one's property and whether one can sell that property. Property for sale is bought and sold in a real estate transaction just as one would sell property in the real world.

Normally, one travels about Second Life via foot in order to see the sites or get to an engagement. Foot travel is accomplished by using the up, down, left and right arrows on the computer's keyboard. In addition to walking, there is ground transportation on which one can ride or another option is to flying. If one

wishes to make a major move from one region of Second Life to another, one can teleport.

Most people join Second Life to engage in social interactions. These interactions can be as simple as entering a conversation via the chat mode with another avatar on the sidewalks or at a bar or as complex as enrolling in an university class that is being taught in Second Life.

In order to encourage interactions, multi-interest groups have been formed in Second Life. One is able to define a group that has a special social purpose and invite others, either for free or fee, to join the group. The founder of a group is the owner of the group. Group participation enhances the Second Life experience.

## **II. Masonic Groups**

When I first came to Second Life, I was interested in the question whether Masonry had found its way to this virtual world. It had. At the writing of this article, there are 8 clearly defined Masonic groups in Second Life. These current groups are:

1. SL Masonic Lodge – Blue Lodge
2. Second Light Masonic Lodge #1
3. Grand Lodge of Free Masons, S.L.
4. Caledon Lodge #1 – F&AM
5. Esoterika Lodge No.316, Freemason
6. Freemason
7. Freemasons
8. Duke of Freemasons

A search of Second Life using the search term “Masonic Lodge” lists two other groups that may or may not be Masonic groups. These are Knights of the

Seal and Lone Wolf Lodge.

Membership in these Masonic groups varies in size. The smallest membership is three and the largest is Freemasons with 32 members. To join a group, one submits an application to join and the owner determines whether to let you join. To date, I have not joined any of the Masonic group although I have been in contact with a number of their members.

Most, but not all, of these groups appear to be populated with what we would call regular Masons. Within one group, I discovered a member of the group that was not even a Mason. I suggested to him how he could remedy that fact. None of the groups that I have contacted hold tiled sessions. Freemason, a discussion group, clearly indicates in their description that they do not hold tiled meetings. Maklin Deckard the owner of Caledon Lodge #1 F&AM also indicates on his notecard at the entrance to Caledon Lodge #1 that it would be a violation of his obligation as a Freemason to hold a tiled session where Masonic secrets were conveyed, "This lodge is strictly **for** show, to fit the Victorian theme of Caledon. It is NOT a working lodge and will never be used as such. To **do** so would violate Masonic Law in my local jurisdiction and my obligation."<sup>2</sup>

The Ancient Shriner, owner of Second Light Masonic Lodge #1, put it this way in an instant message when indicating why he had selected nontraditional titles for the officers of Second Light Lodge,

The reason we do this is so we will not inadvertently reveal something private or secret to non-members, also, it's an obvious pointer to the fact that we are a 'Clandestine' lodge, as we have no charter nor could we get one as we need to commit all ritual and ceremony to typed

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<sup>2</sup> "Caledon Lodge Notecard", *Second Life*, 2007.

chat, which as you know, is a no-no.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that not all members of Masonic groups on Second Life are Mason or members of what we would label regular lodges (lodges under Grand Lodges with which we have fraternal relations). In fact, on 13 March, 2007 Monos Gemini advised me via instant message of the formation of clandestine Masonic group with the following message:

I just was informed that there is a fourth lodge in sl, a 'La Droit Humain' lodge. I was very disappointed by this because until now, there had not be the kind of divisions that plague real world freemasonry. However, the cat is now out of the bag. (La Droit Humain is very political, leftist, and unrecognized by any American, Canadian, Australian or British grand lodges.<sup>4</sup>

Two of the Masonic groups on Second Life have gone beyond the process of creating a group for social interaction to the creation of Masonic buildings. Caledon Lodge #1, F&AM has a beautiful building in the independent state of Caledon (see picture). The interior of this building has a vestibule, ballroom, library, preparation room and lodge room (see picture). The basic characteristics of the lodge room are best described in the words of its owner and builder, Maklin Deckard, "The lodge room (upstairs) is based on a midwestern US



<sup>3</sup> Recorded instant message with Ancient Shriner of February 4, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Recorded instant message with Monos Gemini of March 13, 2007.



jurisdiction, and is arranged in closed / at ease format.”<sup>5</sup>

The second building is the home of Second Light Masonic Lodge #1. This structure clearly displays the Masonic square and compass to the outside world (see picture). The pyramid building is impressive and very prominent within its area. On climbing the steps to the pyramid, one discovers the door opening for you and inviting you to enter. On passing through the door, one is acknowledged by an

automated greeter and observes a partial lodge room. A Masonic East is clearly seen with a Masonic altar in the center of the room (see picture). There is no west or south. At the top of the pyramid, Ancient Shriner has his personal office. It was within this room, that he and I held our discussion on Masonry.

### **III Masons within Second Life**

Clearly, a question that every Mason might have about Second Life and its Masonic groups is “why would a brother involve himself in Masonic activities within Second Life and what does he hope to obtain from these activities?” To ascertain answers to this question and several others, I asked members of these Masonic group to answer a questionnaire that I had prepared or agree to meet for a face to face chat.

<sup>5</sup> *Caledon Lodge #1 Notecard*, 2007.

The simplest answer to “why would a Masonic Brother involve himself in the activities of Second Life?” was given by Monos Gemini when he said, “To meet other Freemasons in Second Life.”<sup>6</sup> In response to my inquiry about what activities he or the Masonic group he belonged to were involved in on Second Life, Monos Gemini responded:

We have not begun any public activities for the promotion of Freemasonry. In part this has to do with the nature of Second Life. There is no real press in the real world sense here, so getting good press is not really an option. (Although there are some things that claim to be magazines or such, they really are just personal blogs. Anything that would be centralized 'news' is still controlled by Linden Labs.)

Likewise, there are few charitable activities on Second Life. There are no poor in the real world sense, nor elderly, nor disabled.

You have to understand, all of this currently is rather tentative. This is a world we are all unfamiliar with and it is hard to say what will develop. In many ways, Second Life, as far as social interaction is concerned, is just a series of chatrooms. Sure, they look like a three-dimensional space, and you can do things in and alter that space, but social interaction is on a chatroom basis nevertheless. Whether or not Freemasonry, (as say, the Lodge room experience), translates into a chatroom format is, at best, still unclear.

Actually, there are charities on Second Life. There a number of places and activities where you can donate Linden dollars to Second Life representatives of real life charities. The owners of these Second Life charities collect Linden dollar donations and convert them into U.S. Dollars at the Linden Dollar Exchange and given the U.S. Dollars to the real life charity.

Master Knibber a member of Esoterika Lodge No.316, Freemason which is also the name and number of his real world lodge in Seattle, Washington, was more positive about the prospect of Masons involvement within Second Life.

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<sup>6</sup> Monos Gemini, *MonosGeminiResponse*, Feb. 15, 2007.

Esoterika Lodge No. 316 is a specialty lodge under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Washington. Master Knibber and I met in front of Caledon Lodge #1, F&AM on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 to chat. When we meet, I realized immediately that Master Knibber was dressed in accordance to the real world protocol of Esoterika Lodge #316. He was clothed entirely in black. When I asked Master Knibber, "How do you see Second Life as advancing the ideas of Esoterika Lodge?", he responded, "Think about it, if half are men, the demographic would indicate that these are the men we have been focusing on trying to contact so they are aware of Masonry."<sup>7</sup> He went on to say, "Our lodge would like to have a presence at this time to promote Masonry. Not second life Masonry – although that exists and has very little to do with RL Masonry...By having some fun, but keeping our presence and image out there...."<sup>8</sup>

Master Knibber has gone the extra step to promote Masonry in Second Life. As you move about in Second Life, each avatar you meet has its name above it in a small balloon. You may add a moniker to your name within the balloon in order to convey to people you meet a special interest you may have. Master Knibber's balloon reads, "Freemason Master Knibber." As a result of having "Freemason" as a moniker, Master Knibber was able to say, "many people stop and ask me about "that Mason" thing. We have been able to answer questions and in a few instances so far, steer potential candidates to a local lodge."<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that the Freemasons within Second Life for the most part are

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7 From a recorded chat session with Master Knibber on February 22, 2007.

8 From a recorded chat session with Master Knibber on February 22, 2007.

9 From a recorded chat session with Master Knibber on February 22, 2007.

promoting Freemasonry by various means. Some advertise that they are Masons, other provide information on Freemason by making the interior of a Masonic Lodge accessible to public view, and final others provide discussion groups within Second Life to discuss Freemasonry. Clearly, not all opportunities to promote Freemasonry in Second Life have been discovered, but ways are evolving every day.

#### **IV Masonic Concerns to Freemasonry within Second Life**

At this time, there are no working lodges within Second Life and those Masons that I have so far met within Second Life realize it would be a violation of their obligations as a Mason to create or participate within a Second Life Lodge. But, I see a day when some brother believes he has the authority to create a working lodge and make Masons. I see serious problems if this happens. From the Entered Apprentice degree, we know that for a person to be a Mason they must be be a man of lawful age and well recommended. All three of these requirements can come into question in Second Life. As indicated earlier, a number of people choose to be of the opposite sex when they select their avatar within Second Life. Therefore, one could be approached by a male appearing avatar asking to join a Masonic Lodge, when in fact, the person behind the avatar will be a women. Although you pledge when you join the adult version of Second Life that you are at least 18 years of age, there is no guarantee that this is in fact the case. Therefore, an underage person could seek and become a Mason. Finally, how are you going to investigate the background of a person requesting membership within a Masonic Lodge. Your Second Life

person is the fictional character you desire to be and whose life you would like to live. There is no guarantee that the real life person behind the avatar lives a moral life or is free of a criminal record. Finally, we can not be any more certain in Second Life that a professed belief in a deity is anymore true there as here in the real world.

A second concern is that the secrets of Masonry might be obtained unlawfully. Avatars communicate by visual chat. This visual chat if done at normal voice may be view for nearly sixty Second Life feet. It would be possible for a person to place their avatar near the building or place where a Masonic degree was being conferred and listen to (see) the entire text of the ritual.

Second Life also provides an outlet for the disgruntled Mason, the clandestine Mason and anti-Masonic groups. In my discussion with the Ancient Shriner, I discovered a brother that was disillusioned with Masonry and its organizational structure as it was practiced in his real life jurisdiction. He had a number of less than flattering remarks to make about the leadership of his lodge and his grand lodge. As mentioned earlier, Second Light Masonic Lodge officers do not have the titles of regular lodge officers. The Ancient Shriner says this was done to avoid potentially revealing secrets of Masonry, but one wonders if it was his way of redefining Masonry to his own vision. More disturbing than his attitude is some of the false impressions of Masonry he may give with parts of his Second Light Masonic



Lodge building. I discovered above the main floor, the “Chamber of Oaths” (see picture at right). What image of Masonry might you have gotten if you had visited this oath chamber with a skull and cross bones and a picture of a coiled snake prior to joining your real world lodge?

At present, most Freemasons on Second Life question how they would convey the signs and grips of a Freemason to a candidate assuming they were certain that the person behind the avatar was entitled to be made a Mason. While the moves of the grips and signs are not presently programmed, this is not a problem that can't be overcome. Currently, you can obtain for money the movements to add to your avatar to permit it to engage in sexual activities. Clearly, if intercourse can be programmed, then the simple signs and grips of Freemasonry can be programmed and provided to the Masonic officer and to the candidate.

A more fundamental question is who did you make a Mason? Was it the avatar or the real world person behind the avatar? If it is the real world person behind the avatar, does that person have the right to travel and receive wages as Master Mason in real life? The degree was conferred on the avatar by avatars, not the real world person.

More fundamentally, one has to ask themselves what Grand Lodge has jurisdiction over Second Life and its avatars? Is it California where Linden Lab is located? Will a true separate recognized Grand Lodge be formed within Second Life to govern the craft within this virtual reality? The real life person behind the avatar comes from all over the globe and therefore the jurisdiction

over that person is varied. Will real life Grand Lodge grant waivers of jurisdiction to the Second Life Grand Lodge for the person behind the avatar?

## **V Conclusions**

There are many fundamental questions and problems that must be faced and solved before Masonry as a functioning lodge can exist within Second Life. Until brighter and more imaginative people come along within Masonry and Second Life, functioning lodges will not exist within Second Life. But until then, there is a place for Freemasonry within Second Life. We who are brothers within Second Life have a key role to play. We must be a source of information to the uninitiated. We must provide them with what they need to know so that they will seek their light in Masonry within the real world.