HOW TO CRASH THE FREEMASONS

By Klark of the Kent Team

Masonry swears its members to secrecy with grisly, anatomically explicit oaths. A Master Freemason must "promise and swear, that I will not write, print, stamp, stain, hew, cut, carve, indent, paint, or engrave" the mysteries of his order "under no less penalty than to have my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by the roots, and my body buried in the rough sands of the sea," according to one version of the oath. Tenth- degree Masons "consent to have my body openedperpendicularly, and to be exposed for eight hours in the open air, that the venomous flies may eat my entrails" if they talk. Even the Shriners, a "fun" order, may incur "the fearful penalty of having my eyeballs pierced to the center with a three-edged blade."

Be that as it may, the secrets of the Masons are preserved in certain arcane tracts, pamphlets, and books. These are sold only by Masonic supply houses - the firms that sell fezzes, banners, plaques, jewels, and other regalia to lodges. The supply houses take the secrecy seriously. Most will not sell booklets containing club secrets to anyone who cannot show a Masonic ID. BIG SECRETS came across a Chicago firm, however, that works by mail order. The Geo. Lauterer Corporation publishes an illustrated catalog of lodge gear. It offers over a hundred Masonic and other fraternal manuscripts. We obtained a sampling of titles.

American Masonry differs in certain particulars from British or Continental Masonry. Rituals may vary from lodge to lodge. Masonic tracts do not always agree. Except where noted, the information below is taken from two of Lauterer's titles, RICHARDSON'S MONITOR OF FREEMASONRY by a pseudonymous Benjamin Henry Day, and INITIATION STUNTS by Lieutenant Beale Cormack.

The Secret Handshake

It's a regular handshake, except that you press your forefinger hard into the other's palm. The thumb presses against the base joints of the second and third fingers. It looks pretty much like any other handshake; only the person shaking hands can feel the difference.

The Secret Password

"Tubal-Cain" is the secret password of a Master Mason. But some lodges have their own passwords.

The Secret Word

Not to be confused with the password. The Word (always capitalized) is so secret that initiates are taught it one letter at a time. First they learn A, then O, then M, and finally I. The Word is IAOM.

You never get a straight story as to what it means. As best as anyone can figure, it is the ineffable name of God, or some approximation thereof. The Word (or Name) is a tongue-twister. It takes some practice to get it right. The following pronunciation guide is from MASONRY AND ITS SYMBOLS IN THE LIGHT OF THINKING AND DESTINY by Harold Waldwin Percival:

The Name is pronounced as follows: It is started by opening the lips with an "ee" sound graduating into a broad "a" as the mouth opens wider with lips forming an oval shape and then graduating the sound to "o" as the lips form a circle, and again modulating to an "m" sound as the lips close to a point. This point resolves itself to a point within the head.

Expressed phonetically the Name is "EE-Ah-Oh- Mmm" and is pronounced with one continuous out- breathing with a slight nasal tone in the manner described above. It can be correct and properly expressed with its full power only by one who has brought his physical body to a state of perfection...

The Shriners' Recognition Test

According to a Lauterer manuscript, this is how two Shriners recognize each other:

Q: Then I presume you are a Noble? A: I am so accepted by all men of noble birth.

Q: Have you traveled any?

A: I have.

Q: From where to what place have you traveled?

A: Traveled east over the hot burning sands of the desert.

Q: Where were you stopped at?

A: At the devil's pass.

Q: What were you requested to do?

A: I was requested to contribute a few drops of urine.

Q: Why were you requested to do this?

A: As a token of my renouncing the wiles and evils of the world and granted permission to worship at the Shrine.

Q: At what Shrine did you worship?

A: At the Shrine of Islam.

Q: Did you ride?

A: Yes, I rode a camel until I paused to dismount.

Q: Then what did you do with your camel?

A: I tied him.

Q: Where did you tie him?

A: I tied him to a date tree, where all True Shriners should do so.

BOTH: Yes, I pulled the Cord, rode the hump, I have traversed the hot arid sands of the desert to find Peace and rest in the quiet shades of the Oasis.

Initiation

There are two sides to Freemason initiations - one a standardized, sedate ritual; the other a highly variable set of hazing stunts.

Prospective Masons must apply of their own free will. Masons may not recruit friends at least not in theory. Proposed members are investigated by a committee of lodge members. This is often just a formality but may include, for instance, a credit report. The committee reports on the candidate at a lodge meeting. Members then vote.

The ballot box is the Lauterer catalog uses white balls and black cubes. (Losers are blackcubed, not blackballed.) If there is a single negative vote, the ballot is declared foul. The lodgemaster (who sees how each member voted) may try to convince dissenting members to reconsider. A negative verdict on the second ballot is final.

Successful candidates are invited to the lodge for initiation. There are three basic degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. Each has its own ritual.

Entered Apprentice candidates begin by taking off their clothes to prove their gender (women may not become Masons). In practice, this means taking off the pants and any jacket. Underwear and shirt are kept on, but the shirt is unbuttoned and pulled down to bare the left arm, shoulder, and breast.

The candidate is hoodwinked (blindfolded). A cabletow (rope) is placed around the neck. (The Lauterer catalog's hoodwink is simply a standard, black satin half-face mask -- without eyeholes -- secured with an elastic string. The cabletow is a heavy blue rayon cord with tassels at both ends.) Ideally, the cabletow is supposed to have four strands to symbolize the four senses (they don't count touch). The candidate is escorted to a room where three candles are burning. One of the lodge members takes a mason's compass or other sharp instrument and pricks the candidate's bared skin. The candidate is instructed to recite a formula to the effect that what he desires most is light. The other lodge members remove his hoodwink and cabletow. Before the candidate are three candles. He is told that the candles represent the sun, the moon, and the master of the lodge.

The candidate gets a lecture on the symbolism of Masonry. Visual aids are used (Lauterer sells a set of three lecture charts and a set of 188 35-millimeter slides). He is given a "lambskin," a white apron. Lauterer's lambskins are indeed genuine lambskin, lined with cotton. They measure 13 inches by 15 inches or 14 inches by 16 inches. A triangular flap folds down like the flap of an envelope. The lambskin is worn in front, and a tie (tape or cord with tassels) fastens behind the back.

A member of the lodge pretends to be a collector for a needy cause and asks the candidate to donate. Lacking his wallet, the candidate must refuse. The moral: Help the less fortunate. Then the candidate is allowed to put his clothes back on. He is taken before the master of the lodge. The master tells him that he is now a Mason. The candidate is given the working tools of the Apprentice, a twenty-four-inch gauge and a gavel.

The second and third degrees follow a similar pattern. Both repeat the business with the hoodwink and the cabletow. For the Fellow Craft initiation, the right shoulder is bared, and the cabletow is tied around the right biceps. In the Master Mason initiation, the cabletow is wound around the body three times. Each degree has its own lecture on symbolism.

Then there are the optional degrees. Their initiation rituals take the form of short plays starring the candidate and other lodge members. The playlets deal with incidents from the mythic history of the Masons, such as the building of King Solomon's Temple and the murder of Temple architect Hiram Abiff. These initiations cost the candidate about \$150 a pop, so any thirty-second-degree Mason has dropped over \$4,000. Once a Mason has completed the twenty-nine optional degrees of the Scottish rite or the six optional degrees of the York rite, he is eligible to become a Shriner -- which means still another initiation.

Depending on the whim of the other lodge members, initiations may include a set of burlesque tests to prove a candidate's mettle. These blend sophomoric practical jokes, soft S&M, an an electric carpet (the latter "just the item for initiations," touts the Lauterer catalog, at \$4.75 a square foot; jump spark battery extra). Lauterer's INITIATION STUNTS booklet describes over thirty tests judged suitable for fraternal orders, of which the following is a sample. In all cases, candidates are blindfolded. Here's how the Masons keep out the wimps:

"Chewing the Rag"

A lodge member criticizes two candidates for speaking: "They both talk too much and I fear they will someday betray the secrets of our brotherhood." As a lesson, the candidates must "chew the rag." The member says that he has a six-foot length of string with a raisin tied in the middle. Each candidate gets an end of the string. The member instructs the candidates to chew the string from their respective ends: The one who gets the raisin will be excused from "The Test of the Drowning Man." They chew. The "raisin" is really a piece of candy coated with Epsom salts. There is no "Test of the Drowning Man."

"Oriental Dance"

Lodge members strip a candidate and put a skirt on him. As Oriental music is played, he is forced to dance on the electric carpet. This is one of several uses of the carpet, all of which are deemed more effective if the candidate does not know about the carpet. The electric-shock sensation is not immediately identifiable as such, or so the semiwarped reasoning goes. Members may warn the blindfolded candidate to "step high" to avoid burning desert sands, barbed wire, or snakebites.

A member raps his gavel and orders all to be seated. A second member replies that there is no seat for himself and one of the candidates. They are told to sit on the floor. They sit on a spread blanket. As soon as the candidate is seated, the second member steps off the blanket. The candidate is told to sing a song. The lodge members protest his singing and demand that he be punished. All quietly grab the ends of the blanket and toss the candidate in the air.

"The Barber Shop"

A member feels a candidate's chin and calls for a barber. The "barber" lathers the candidate, getting foam in his mouth. He shaves him with what feels like a very, very rough blade. It's a shingle.

"Boxing Match"

Two candidates are selected for a boxing match. Belts are strapped around their waists. A six-foot rope connects the belts so that candidates do not wander blindly off. The boxers are given gloves. Unknown to the candidates, a member also puts on gloves and gives them occasional jabs from unexpected directions.

"Tug-of-War"

Two candidates or groups of candidates play tug-of-war. An unseen member sets the rope afire in the middle. It burns in two, and all fall down – on the electric carpet, if desired.

"The Thirst"

"This neophyte has asked for a drink of water," a member says. Another member replies that there is no water. "Then we must make water," says the first. Several members urinate in a bowl, making sure that the candidate hears. "It is ready," says a member. "Drink, and quench thy thirst." The candidate is handed a bowlful of warm water and forced to drink it.

"Punkin Pie"

This is just a forced pie-eating race, with the candidates' hands bound behind their backs. Other gustatory stunts involve making the blindfolded candidates eat various non- and quasi- edible materials: INITIATION

STUNTS suggests ginger ale containing frankfurters and toilet-paper squares.

"The Shampoo"

A candidate is told that he must possess three essentials to be a member: keen vision, a sensitive touch, and an acute sense of smell. An egg is placed in his hand. "What is in your hand?" he is asked. The candidate replies, "An egg." "Correct. Now to test your sense of smell – is it a good egg or a bad egg?" The candidate answers. "We'll see if you are correct," the member says. He crushes an empty eggshell on the candidate's head and pours some water on it. He rubs the "egg" in the candidate's hair. Another member evil- smelling substance under the candidate's nose.

"The Trained Dog"

A candidate is told that he must meet Fido, the trained dog. An authentic dog is brought in. "Fido snarls at neophytes and sometimes bites them in the calf of the leg," a member warns. Another pinches the candidate's leg. The dog is placed in the candidate's lap. The initiation ceremony proceeds with another candidate so that the first believes that attention has shifted from him. A member sneaks up on the candidate with the dog and trickles some warm water in his lap. He may also hold a smell bottle under the candidate's nose. "Naughty Fido!" all scold.

A variation is the "Bung Hole Test," a standard feature of Shriner initiations. No dog is required. Two blindfolded candidates are directed to opposite ends of a barrel or large metal cylinder lying on its side. They are told to crawl into the barrel or cylinder. The candidates bump heads in the middle. Outside, a lodge member yelps like a dog. Someone sprinkles warm water on the candidates' faces through a hole. A member yells, "Get that dog out of there! It just pissed in his face.!"

"The Sacred Stone"

The candidate is told that a "sacred stone" is near his feet. He must make a sign of deference by bending over and placing his forehead as close to the ground as possible. When the candidate bends over, a member paddles him with a paddle containing an exploding cartridge. "The Little Rose" test is the same thing, only the candidate is told to pick a flower.

Candidates are forced to climb a greased pole while members paddle them. Afterward, a member hands a candidate a piece of ice: "Here is your share of the North Pole. Hold on to it as long as you can, and pass it on."

"Molten Lead Test"

A member warns the candidate that the next test may be dangerous if not performed carefully. Proof of a candidate's courage and faith in the order is required, the member explains. "Is the lead good and hot?" he asks another member. "Yes, red hot," he replies. "If you are not a coward, you must plunge your hands into a caldron of red-hot molten lead," the member tells the candidate. A large pot is set before the candidate. It contains any reasonably humane substitution for molten lead. If the candidate refuses to put his hands in the pot, the others force him.