

An interview with: Chez Nabob

Organizer of the “naked avatar” campaign

by Dreamingen Writer, Correspondent



Chez Nabob of CHEZ-Fine Clothing for Men in Second Life.

An intellectual property rights awareness campaign launched in March features some of Second Life’s most well-known content creators posing in the buff. Certainly an attention getter, the idea is to educate as many residents as possible about the issues, effects and consequences surrounding the theft of intellectual property in Second Life (SL).

Chez Nabob, the campaign’s organizer, runs a virtual business in SL called CHEZ - Fine Clothing for Men. His passion for virtual property rights and performance art belies his SL profile: “SL is strictly for fun and relaxation. It’s a game for Pete’s sake. Let’s keep that in perspective.” As you’ll see from this interview, intellectual property rights cross the line between SL and real life.

According to a recent press release, Chez got tired of hearing from friends who’d had something stolen about how frustrating the process was for them. He started thinking about a more offensive strategy, one that would allow content creators to take charge, rather than constantly being victimized. He decided to take the real-world People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) anti-fur campaigns as a model, “...parodying those ads would be an effective way to shed more light on the issue among the broader population of SL.”

Dreamingen Writer: Thank you for meeting with me today.

Chez Nabob: My pleasure.

Dreamingen Writer: And thank you more for your work for artist and intellectual property rights.

Chez Nabob: Well, I haven’t really done anything. I just want to see a stronger system of protection for IP rights.

I don’t know that it’s any different from

real life (RL). Anyone creating anything in RL is expected to defend their IP rights —no one acts as a security blanket for them, and I think the same applies here. Content creators should bear the responsibility, with Linden Lab providing better tools that allow them to do so.

Dreamingen Writer: Linden Lab must be careful not to lose their service provider independence. If they take too much of a role, they will be held liable for everything that happens here.

Chez Nabob: Yes, they tread a very thin line. I understand their plight – but by trying not to be liable, they make themselves liable. By not following through completely with Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) takedowns, they become liable to content creators.

Dreamingen Writer: Exactly. I think that it might be that we are stretching the meaning of words too far. What would you call “property” in a virtual world? Real property? Personal Property?

Chez Nabob: That’s a hard one to define.

One could argue that anything someone owns in a virtual world is property. But for me, I think certainly the ideas behind the virtual/digital representation are property.

Dreamingen Writer: A topic that I have much fascination with.

Chez Nabob: Well, I guess I would say that the most important thing for me is that theft (and I know, yes, legally it is not theft) is illegal regardless of whether it happens here in a “game,” or in the real world.

I told someone yesterday: the Internet has made everyone an expert on fair use. The problem is that 99% have no clue what they’re talking about. Many think that because it costs nothing to

make a digital copy of something, that they should get that copy for free—as though the value is in the manufacturing process—when in reality what they are paying for is the skill, talent, ability, time and effort, plus all the other intangibles that go into the creation.

Dreamingen Writer: Right, and all the products that did not make it to get to the one that did.

Chez Nabob: Exactly. And I understand the point of those who say that. Content creators should embrace this and look for alternatives to methods of compensation. I’m all for exploring new ways to compensate creators, but until someone gives me a concrete way of doing that, I’ll stick with the “old” system.

The idea that content wants to be free is...well... naive. My content wants to pay my bills.

Dreamingen Writer: Is there an association of digital designers?

Chez Nabob: There are several content creator groups in SL.

Dreamingen Writer: I did not know if there was a body that has emerged as over the others—like a governing body of sorts.

Chez Nabob: No, and I think that this is part of the problem for creatives in SL. All the groups serve wonderful purposes, but they also serve to fracture the collective. No one group knows what the other is doing and they may be duplicating their efforts. It was my hope that this campaign would help unite content creators.

Dreamingen Writer: That would be a wonderful thing for everyone.

Chez Nabob: Yes, I think a collective is critical.

Dreamingen Writer: Was it sort of volunteer basis for this project? How did you find the people that wanted to help?

Chez Nabob: Absolutely, it was voluntary. I just got tired of hearing from friends who had been victimized. I felt as though there needed to be a better strategy to deal with the problem—an offensive strategy as opposed to the defensive one most creators had been playing.

Dreamingen Writer: I have heard talk of a class action.

Chez Nabob: It wasn't hard to find creators who wanted to be part of the project. I looked as far as my friends list to start with, and then expanded to friends of friends.

Dreamingen Writer: That is one of the most powerful tools here in SL—friends.

Chez Nabob: Yes. Class action has been thrown around, but I'm not sure

that will happen. I do believe that it is only a matter of time before a creator or group of creators sues Linden Lab.

Dreamingen Writer: I would like to see it happen on a digital bill of rights or something like that—there are some cases being taken to the real court system.

Chez Nabob: Well, I think there are grounds in some cases for not completing the DMCA process.

Dreamingen Writer: Right.

Chez Nabob: The other problem Linden Lab faces on the legal front is that there are game production houses combing SL looking for ripped content. I have been told from people in the know that they are finding hundreds of IP violations. They are not happy.

Dreamingen Writer: I bet not—and they are a powerful group of people.

Chez Nabob: Yes, with deep pockets.

Dreamingen Writer: As long as Linden Lab can stay a service provider... this is an interesting time to be a law student for sure.

Chez Nabob: Yeah.

Dreamingen Writer: Do you think there would be anyone else instrumental to this project that I could talk with?

Chez Nabob: I think certainly all of the people involved in the ads. Stroker Serpentine for sure. He has been through the legal process a couple of times. If you haven't seen Kit Meredith's blog <http://less-than-3.blogspot.com/>, you should check it out. I met her as a result of the campaign, and she has some fascinating thoughts on IP rights in SL.

Dreamingen Writer: Thanks for your time, Chez. ☼



I.P. rights are worth protecting

Support Second Life's content creators by not patronizing the stores of thieves who rip textures, copy prims and steal intellectual property.

Stand with us and lobby Linden Labs for security measures that protect the I.P. rights of your favorite scripters, builders, fashion designers and jewelry makers.

**Don't buy stolen content.
Report content you suspect is stolen.
Please.**

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