

YOU TAKE MY PAW AND I'LL TAKE YOUR HAND:

AN EXPLORATION OF THE FURRY COMMUNITY

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The Furry community is a sub-culture of the Science Fiction and Fantasy fandoms whose members generally self-identify with fictional anthropomorphic animal characters with human personalities and characteristics. Furry community members often interact and participate in online Internet-based communities or real world conventions and other informal meetings; the former being the dominant method of interaction for the community where social interaction, role-play, art creation, and other user-created content is shared.

The purpose of this case study research is to investigate how members of the furry community self-identify and interact with one another through the use of personal avatars, or 'fursonas,' construct self-identify as a member of the furry fandom, and interact with other furies in this participant culture. This research makes use of voluntary interviews conducted from members among the University of Idaho population, personal digital correspondence with furry historians and artists, and participant-observation research at a furry convention in Seattle, Washington, to provide additional academic insight and knowledge on the subculture onto the spaces created and occupied by the furry fandom.

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Roll 20s.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was October 1996 and I was furiously scratching out a fictional story with a blue Bic rollerball pen in the multi-purpose room before the lunch hour ended. The cacophony of student voices, janitor sopping up two pints spilled 2% milk via squeaky metal-headed mop, and the clatter of made-in-China stamped steel utensils upon faded red plastic compartmentalized trays obfuscated the approach of my friend Harvey. He saddled the Virco folding cafeteria table bench across from me, shaking the entire fixture and skewing my script. He had often taken an interest in the stories I wrote for myself, so when he asked to read what I was scribbling on that day I willingly handed over my college-ruled spiral notebook for him to inspect. Harvey flipped through the prose I had fashioned with his long fingers.



Figure 1: Screenshot from *Inherit the Earth: Quest for the Orb* single-player adventure computer game.

It was an adventure story set in New World Computing's *Inherit the Earth: Quest for the Orb* universe, a game I had played through the month prior. My story followed an anthropomorphic wolf spending his days among timbered mountains as he investigated human artifacts similar to those in the game's world. In the distant future of New World Computing's *Inherit the Earth: Quest for the Orb* universe, all humans had mysteriously disappeared and their anthropomorphic animal creations with human intelligence and speech known as "Morph" had inherited the Earth. The Morph existed in a feudal-like society and explored the human ruins and advanced futuristic technology left behind, deifying their creators in the process.



Figure 2: Two screenshots from Inherit the Earth's opening narration, showing Morph created pictographic scenes from the game's universe establishing the origin of the anthropomorphic animal Morphs and their reverence for the vanished humans.

I thought Harvey would like it as we had previously enjoyed similar games together, watched Warner Brother's cartoons, and discussed other animated shows and video games centered on anthropomorphized animal characters such as *Sonic the Hedgehog* or the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in our earlier years. He pushed the notebook back at me

after thumbing the last page. His face soured into a scowl. “You’re not a furry, are you?”

The disdainful tone he took and his dour expression guided me to respond

overenthusiastically in the negative. I had never heard the term before but received the

impression that it wasn’t something with which I ought to associate. His nod of approval

and recommendation that I “stay that way from that stuff” pushed me toward keeping any

future writings about anthropomorphic animals to myself. It also prompted me to find out

more about this “furry” thing.

Using the then-new-to-me Internet at 14.4 kbit/s I learned that there were many

other people besides myself from all age groups and walks of life that were interested in

“funny animals” and anthropomorphics. There were people like me, who enjoyed books

like Brian Jacques’ *Redwall*, games like *Inherit the Earth*, or animated shows featuring

anthropomorphic animal characters and even discussed their plots and characters on

message boards or E-mail lists. There were writers composing their own stories and

fanfictions of popular shows, posting them to the same boards and lists for others to read

and critique. There were artists who uploaded their crafts, comics, and characters to

display to the community on image hosting sites. There was even a Massively Multiplayer

Online Social Game (MMOSG) created by Dragon’s Eye Productions called *Furcadia* I joined

where one could socialize or role-play with other users, and create virtual world content.

Even though many of those who I visited or role-played with during my more active years

in *Furcadia* never claimed or identified themselves as furies, they helped explain to me

how some people “took it a little farther.” To some ‘taking it farther’ could mean the

creation and wearing of customized mascot-like animal costumes, a fetish for fur,

homosexuality, bestiality, zoophilia, or believing that they were actually animals trapped in human bodies – which helped explain to me some of the cultural baggage that the term ‘furry’ carries and why there were some people who were so aggressively opposed to it. Outsiders to the community could witness a small portion of the population, or even a skewed satire of it, and then believe it to be the representative whole. This polarization on the subject encouraged me to explore the fandom academically and help offer up clarifying information on what the subculture consists of at this particular juncture in time.

There are many tiers and degrees of “furry-ness” and perhaps someone can develop a codified spectrum or continuum in the future if one is not already in development by other independent researchers or those working for the International Anthropomorphic Research Project, a multidisciplinary team of scientists currently studying the furry fandom.

For this thesis project, I decided to focus on local furies and the annual convention held in Seattle, Washington since 2007 – Rainfurrest, as part of my research work with the furry community. I selected Rainfurrest because it was a relatively local convention for me to explore coming from north Idaho. Furies primarily communicate, coordinate, and connect using the Internet where user created content, community information, message boards, and specialized websites that focus on furry related news are the primary methods for maintaining and perpetuating the global fandom. I felt that exploring “real world” spaces that furies navigate would allow me to document the extension of their virtual conduct into the physical realm. I decided to use thick description and participant observation to narrate my navigation of Rainfurrest, a northwest furry convention, during

the 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 years to provide non-furries and academics researching similar sub-cultures a glimpse into furry convention culture through the lens of an insider, a member of the fandom, and provide an emic perspective on the day to day events one could witness at convention. To augment the work I did during this time, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the furry community who were students at the University of Idaho in 2011 and 2012, as well as some furries outside of the Pacific Northwest region who are artists and fandom historians, to provide insight from active members on how they engage with the fandom and how they navigate their identities within the subculture. We explored their experiences through semi-structured interviews, their convention experiences and my own participant observations as recorded in my field notes as part of my research work.

I have set this thesis into chapters, attempting to provide a general introduction and background on the furry community, provide detailed information into what a larger furry convention is like to non-participants from an insider's perspective, and highlight some notable cultural artifacts of the fandom. As the fandom changes this document will also serve to capture a specific point in time for the community. The first chapter discusses the methodologies I employed for this project. I focus on reflexivity in creating a document about furries as a researcher and my own involvement with the fandom as a self-identified furry, as well as my desire to enlist the aid of other furries to contribute an emic perspective to the academy's knowledge. Their general thoughts on what it means to be a furry, how they interact with the fandom and self-identify, as well as how they interact with the furry community and what role they feel they play within the group. I also note

the challenges I encountered in collecting interviews for my work which was related to the hesitancy of some furry participants to interact with members of academia or members of the press which could perhaps provide insight to other future researchers who interact with similarly stigmatized groups.

The second chapter provides a brief history and overview of the fandom for readers who may not be familiar with this particular sub-culture.

The third chapter examines furry identity and communication within the group through the use of fandom specific avatars called fursonas. While not required for navigating one's way through the fandom, fursonas have become an important component for socializing, commerce, and personal identity within the furry community.

Chapter four focuses on fandom specific cultural artifacts such as conbadges and perhaps the most recognized signifier of furrydom, the "Fursuit."

Chapter five is an amalgamation of field research conducted over several years' attendance of Rainfurrest, giving readers a glimpse into different sections of a multi-day furry convention. I believe that this chapter may assist non-furries to obtain a better bearing and perspective on what occurs at a real-world meet up which isn't stereotyped or hyped up by external media reports, fictionalizations, or anti-furry groups.

The concluding sixth chapter is a summary of my research and information gained as a "native anthropologist" performing work with a sub-culture to which I claim identity and some of the shared perspectives of other participants in this research project. The importance of being an "insider" performing research amongst peers and fellows as

opposed to the “outsider” was always foremost on my mind, especially on the occasion when I found myself interacting with members of the Furry community.

CHAPTER TWO - METHODOLOGY

ETHICS

Before beginning work on this project I obtained a certificate of completion form from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research for completing their web-based course on Protecting Human Research Participants and submitted a University of Idaho Internal Review Board (IRB) form for review and approval. The IRB form was approved on November 9, 2011, and renewed in 2012 and 2013.

Prior to interviewing any member of the furry community, an Informed Consent form was provided (see Appendix E) outlining the project's scope, potential risks, and steps taken to mitigate those risks. Interviews were conducted in person when possible, recorded with a digital audio recorder, and notes were written in my research book throughout the interview. Some interviews were conducted via E-mail or Facebook messenger since some participants (selected via snowball sampling) were out of my immediate geographic area and these were their preferred methods for correspondence. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to guide discussions and volunteer information as they desired on topics they felt comfortable engaging. This also helped me identify key informants (furry historians, furry artists, and fursuiters) which provided a diversified realization and sampling of community participation. I included full transcriptions of my interviews to allow the revisiting of the interviews which helped develop new interview questions, identify new approaches for future research, and reveal information on paralanguage (pauses, stuttering, etc.) which can be an indicator of comfort or discomfort in relationship to particular topics (Murchison 2010, 74-75). These

transcribed, coded interviews are included in the appendices of this document with permission from interviewees.

While collecting interviews with furry participants, I attempted to remain aware of their 'positionality' and 'situatedness'--that is, the power and position in which a person or group is situated socially as well as the specific privileges and disadvantages inherent in an individual's social role or status (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 30-32) as members of the furry community as well as members of other communities to which they belong. Furry historians, writers, artists, musicians, and fursuiters each have their own levels of participation, contribution, status, and agency within the furry community. They are also connected and concerned with their status as members of the larger non-furry community, their professional lives, and social standing among peers and family members in groups that are not related or sometimes hostile to the furry sub-culture and could potentially be affected, especially if they are "outed" as a member of this stigmatized community. I am aware of my own positionality and situatedness and how these could frame my writing and presentation of the information coming from a position of power as an anthropologist and researcher. I am also aware of how I would take into account the effect my participation as a non-content producing consumer and member of the furry community might have over my interpretations of what I witness or how it could vary from someone else's interpretations or engagement with the community, my engagement with the group as a heterosexual half-Asian male who doesn't think he is an animal trapped in a human body. I am also aware of how my association with those who do might affect my future interactions and interpretations with fellow furries, academics, and professionals in the

non-fandom communities I also operate within outside of my research and personal interests. “You don’t want to be known as ‘the furry anthropologist,’ it might kill your future academic career” a faculty member at the University of Idaho warned me. While the extended conversation that birthed that warning did give me pause to reconsider my thesis topic for a few weeks’ time, I realized that I should include that comment in my methodology section as part of my acknowledgement of self-reflexive writing. Furry, and what people think it to be, seemed to me a topic which was worth exploring in a constructivist paradigm. Interpretivist anthropologists believe that cultural beliefs and meanings are socially constructed, situations and therefore relative to a specific context, not fixed, are negotiated, multiple-voiced, and participatory (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 70). I aimed to incorporate self-reflexive writing to reveal how I thought and engaged with what I was experiencing as a participant, as a writer, and reveal my thoughts I had about how I constructed the framework for viewing the community (Goodall Jr. 2000, 147-148) both as an anthropologist and as a participant member of the furry community composing a research document about said community, incorporating what I was experiencing first hand in a descriptive manner, and the voices and insights from my guides in the community who were helping to build the information I am presenting in this document.

As the researcher who has the privilege of composing and editing this document, I am bringing my selected experiences and perspectives forward as well as those shared by this work’s participants, I am presenting perspectives on the subject of being furry and interacting with the furry community and not holding these accounts as ‘truer’ or ‘more correct’ than what other sources might produce. They are a result of a specific set of

experiences, interpretations, interviews, and fixed points in time. I am attempting to provide one set of perspectives with no superior claim to validity while acknowledging their subjective nature as one piece to an overall picture (Davies 2008, 16). I am also aware that as the researcher I am using my interactions, collected writings, and accounts of people's life histories and cultural performances with the community I am studying to advance my own academic career (Goodall Jr. 2000, 110). I am aware that this document can be interpreted as a selfish act in furthering that academic career, but it simultaneously to the understudied field. It is especially important to counter the dismissive and negative comments by writing a positive contribution of work as a member of the furry community which countered some of the negative media documents (Gurley 2001) (Gimmell 2001) (Castro 2002) (Stahl 2004) (Moghe 2005) (Limbaugh 2005) that exist and are often pointed to by furry and non-furry alike as points of reference when the fandom's stigmatization is brought up for discussion.

Openness and honesty with research participants leads to better ethnography (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 310) and with that in mind, I made the effort to communicate and identify myself as a furry researcher and a furry participant. This approach ended up opening up opportunities as well as closing others.

PARTICIPANTS

In my original research design, I had intended to conduct an Internet ethnography of the furry community and interview furries located in Moscow, Idaho, particularly from the local college student population. Initial participants and key informants answered fliers

I had posted on the University of Idaho campus. Other participants were selected via snowball sampling technique as some members of the local furry community identified others in the Moscow area or surrounding geographical region of the Pacific Northwest who I might wish to approach and invite to participate. Some of my early participants, after discussing my research plans with their friends online, decided to remove themselves from the project and asked I remove their collected interviews out of concerns that the research might portray the furry community negatively or impact them directly once the thesis was made available for public viewing even though pseudonyms would be utilized and other potential identifying information altered. I respected their wishes, though it forced me to remove some of the material I had intended to use in this document, changed my research plans, caused some delays as I needed to re-structure my approach to this document to repair gaps created, and find other guides and sources of information to augment my field work.

Of those participants who remained or were recruited as replacements were Elise, a female furry artist from California whose fursona is a rat, Tasha; a female furry artist from Oregon whose fursona is a mountain lion, John; a male fursuiter from Ohio whose fursona is a kitsune, Eddie; a male fursuiter from Idaho whose fursona is a gryphon, Hector; a fursuiter from Washington state whose fursona is a custom species he invented; and Abe, a male crafter and fursuiter from Idaho whose fursona is a grey wolf. Augmenting these interviews were an E-mail conversation I began with science fiction, fantasy, anime, manga and furry historian, Fred Patten, following the suggestion of a guide at the 2013 Rainfurrest convention.

REFLEXIVITY

I entered this writing with the understanding that people who identify themselves as furies are often ridiculed for their association with this particular fandom. Most of the negative view on the furry fandom and the mainstream conceptions on what it is about perhaps stem from popular culture outlets such as a 2001 *Vanity Fair* article (Gurley 2001), an MTV's *Sex 2K* episode (Castro 2002), and fictional portrayals on the television shows *ER* (Gimmell 2001), *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (Stahl 2004), certain interviews with members of the furry community (BBC *Nightlife* 2001) (*The Tyra Banks Show* 2009) (Dr. Phil 2014) or satire content written by internet humorists (Parsons 2009) which continue to form, reinforce, and perpetuate unflattering ideas and opinions about what exactly comprises the furry fandom. There have been other mainstream introductions made about the furry community (Fox 2008) (Winterman 2009) (Pehrson 2011) (Hardie 2012) and what comprises the fandom which do not cast it solely as a sexual fetish (Meinzer 2006).

Having been on the receiving end of negative comments and treatment for interest with this fandom, I distanced my association with it myself for many years before returning to it again as a participant. I was aware that some members of the furry community are cloistered individuals, perceiving themselves stigmatized for their alignment with the furry fandom, and do not wish their participation directly linked or revealed while others are open about their ties and participation with the furry community at large. People hide their involvement with the furry community for various reasons – the perception that liking animal characters was something which should have been abandoned with childhood, the spiritual aspects not aligning with a hegemonic cultural norm, or the associated incorrect

umbrella implications and associations of being labelled as a furry directly meaning one is a proponent of bestiality, pedophilia, homosexuality, or other type of sexual deviant by non-furries. “They think that being furry means you’re into all that stuff,” one individual who requested to remain unidentified stated to me at Rainfurrest 2011. “That’s really not true at all. Some furs are that way, sure, but most of us aren’t into that. It’s about more than sex.”

I decided that to protect those who desire to keep their identities and connection to the fandom private, I would utilize pseudonyms for everyone I directly interviewed for my research. This would help mitigate any vulnerabilities exposed by those who voluntarily chose to participate in my work.

One panel I attended at Rainfurrest 2011 was titled “Hiding and Coming Out as a Furry,” which addressed scenarios and concerns members of the fandom might have about openly declaring association with furries. Best ways to come out to parents as being furry, explaining furry interests and conventions to non-furry friends or roommates at college, or openly identifying as a furry to co-workers and the general public were main topics. The subject of hiding and coming out as a furry was something which I had wanted to explore but proved too large of a topic to cover effectively in this project. The topic of coming out to family and friends was also sometimes discussed as one might discuss coming out as a homosexual in a heteronormative group. This may have a correlation with the LGBTQ community as the furry fandom and community is often one where the LGBTQ population is in the majority (Crowder 2009) or at least represents a considerable size of the population compared to non-furry demographic as they tend to be about twice as likely as

non-furries to be exclusively homosexual or bisexual (Plante 2012). One former member of the United States military attending the panel said that he kept being a furry private due to concerns about how his fellow soldiers or superior officers might use it as a subject to harass him. "...here [in the furry community] I am free to be myself. Everyone accepts me as I am," he said. Other groups and entities do not always seem as accepting. It is my assumption that this is due to the negative perceptions of the furry community in general.

Internet humorist Lore Sjöberg's *The Geek Hierarchy Chart* (Appendix P), while comedic in nature, depicts an arbitrary positioning of certain fandoms and groups in relation to other 'geek' groups, all of which are perceived to hold an elevated position in status compared to those listed below them – furries seemingly ranking close to the lowest position both on Lore Sjöberg's satirical chart and in passing conversations I had with students and staff around the University of Idaho Campus, local hobby and game stores, and science fiction and anime convention attendees who "knew about" furries and who generally seemed to hold them in low regard for a variety of reasons. Having branched out of the science fiction and fantasy genres doesn't keep furries from being relegated to a low tier on the stratigraphic composition of science fiction and fantasy communities even though their participants' interests sometimes overlap, fitting in as a sub-genre of other communities such as the anime fandom (Winge 2006, 70). Fan bases do co-mingle, of course, with a person able to be a fan of Dr. Who (known as 'Whovians'), Warhammer 40K, Star Wars, furry, and so on without finding themselves excluded from other groups. Some popular culture characters such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, DC Comic's Batman, Rankin/Bass Productions' ThunderCats or Marvel's The Wolverine might be perceived to

simultaneously qualify as furry and non-furry in various fandoms, for example, increasing overlap and contention of their liminal existence in the various fan communities. Are Batman and The Wolverine any more or less furry than Marvel Comics' Squirrel Girl? Does being classified as a mutant or a genetically engineered being in the Marvel Comics universe exempt Rocket the Raccoon from classification as a furry? The separation of fandom and policing of the imagined borders characters may occupy or transgress can be enthusiastically contested by various fandom members.

At PacCon 2014 in Spokane, Washington, an individual cosplaying as Marvel Comics' Rocket the Raccoon was congratulated for his costume by some who praised his sewing ability and material workmanship. He was called a furry in jest by others in a hotel hallway. This caused a reaction on the part of the person inside the Rocket costume, who defiantly declared "I'm not a furry! I'm Rocket the Raccoon from Guardians of the Galaxy!" to those around him. Later in the day when I encountered a group of three fursuits around the convention hall as their fursonas received some jeers and negative comments after their passing such as "Oh great, fursuits," and "fursuits ruin everything." These negative positioning examples of furry are also worth exploring as they reveal the other voices present in an exploration of the furry fandom, that of the biased outsiders which furry community members find themselves judged and in turn against which they react and adapt.

Abe said of his time deployed as a soldier that he "...still talked to furs when I was overseas. But I made a point to keep it private. You know, no outward signs,

no...discussions...with other soldiers. Not even so much as a, um, desktop background, that had furries on it.”



Figure 3 Original Bruce the Bat watercolor art in author's personal collection from Brian Root's web comic The Dawn Chapel. From Mr. Root's comment on his artwork: "...it honestly sometimes baffles me how pervasive the nerdhate on the furry community is, given that some of the comic book world's most celebrated figures themselves like to dress up like animals for recreational purposes." (Root 2010)

For my work in examining a small piece of the furry community, I used qualitative research to study a real world convention, furry ideas of self and group identity, how they

act as a part of the community, and what they gain from their interactions. I examined online materials and information produced by the furry community, their conventions, as well as drawing from my own personal experiences attending other non-furry science fiction conventions. This assisted me in triangulating a base concept of real world 'meetups' and conventions valuable to a community that seems to primarily operate in cyberspace.

I decided that the best way to approach talking about the furry community and their conventions was to use thick description and participant observation. Thick description, as an anthropological theory popularized by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* 1973), focuses on explaining the behaviors of human beings and then placing them within a context which an outsider interacting with the information can then gain an understanding of what has transpired. I emphasize the key dynamics of what is occurring and allow the participants' voices to augment the text. Thick description would help non-furries, or those who have access only to furry online communities and content, obtain immersive details on furry community interactions which take place outside the landscape of the Internet. Walking amongst fellow furries, watching their activities, participating in convention programming, socializing, and building new connections allowed me to present a better slice-of-life highlight in this document and anchor myself within the work.

Participant observation is the technique of learning people's culture through social participation and personal observation within a community being studied (W. A. Haviland, H. E. Prins, et al. 2008, 9) and was promoted by 20th century anthropologists Franz Boas

and Bronislaw Malinowski. Prior to beginning this research, I had never attended a furry convention and I was aware that my interactions with the furry community had been limited to relatively anonymous online activities (message boards, writing groups, E-mail lists, art hosting sites, and the Massively Multiplayer Online Social Game *Furcadia*). I felt it was necessary to this ethnographic research for me to participate in real world furry culture, in addition to those constrained to the online interactions, to share in the vulnerability of being “outed” as a member of this sometimes controversial subculture. This would provide for a better sense of concerns being expressed in my collected interviews by more cloistered members of the furry community. I might encounter and also capture genuine interactions and effective descriptions of the spaces the furry community occupies and takes temporary ownership over during a convention as their sanctioned real world space. These observations build off my previous participation within the furry community to provide the emic perspective of the group as I navigate the space shared by furry and non-furry community members. The latter included hotel staff, curious non-furry registered convention attendees, excited onlookers, and hapless hotel guests finding themselves suddenly thrust in the midst of costumed weirdos.

While conducting research I kept field notes and a personal journal. The former kept my notes consolidated, recorded informal statements made by convention attendees, held coded contact information for research participants and interviewees, and documented items brought up in discussion that I wished to revisit in future work. The latter allowed me the opportunity for reflexive writing on the research work I was undertaking, an opportunity to view how I engaged with aspects of the furry community

which were new experiences--some disturbing, some insightful--and my reflections upon fully engaging as a participant observer in what was going on at the conventions and following interviews. As both a participant and observer, examining my notes from both documents was necessary to pull out details to share in my final ethnographic work with nonparticipants which they may find relevant and interesting (Murchison 2010, 88).

My participant observations and field work consisted of four trips to the annual *Rainfurrest* convention in Seattle, Washington, where I interacted as a new-to-furry-Convention attendee with high level access in 2011, a returning attendee with high level access in 2012, and participated as a panelist, and a Dealer's Den assistant in 2013. Each convention experience lasted approximately 3-4 days. The narratives I provide in this document are an amalgamation from my own observations and experiences navigating different points and periods of my field work.

I attempted to determine what other genres and areas of interest that furies I spoke with identified holding an interest or participated with when possible to note what other spheres of influence and participation they claimed as their own, such as sports, anime, or Star Wars fandoms. This allowed me to examine their diversity of interests from the overlap, how being a furry affected their everyday life, and how they might share or express their furry interests with non-furry parties or situations. Some individuals interviewed expressed a desire to fully conceal their furry interests and affiliation from non-furry friends or groups, to remain cloistered, out of concern for the stigma that is often leveled at the furry community in general and wished to avoid having negative perceptions in turn placed on them.

I was able to understand when participants wished to remove themselves from this study after discussing the potential fall-out with their comrades in the fandom community who have had previous poor experiences with media or academia. When I self-identify as a furry, I, too, choose my situations with care and cannot fault them for wanting to protect their built reputations. Some individuals will treat it like any other interest or hobby. Others will decide they need make pejorative remarks or begin to treat individuals differently once this information is revealed as it makes them uncomfortable or they associate with an individual or experience in their personal past, making the assumption that we are no different – “one of them” – guilty by association. I self-identify as furry in this research to build rapport with my interviewees and solidify my insider status as a member of the community, part of the narrative constructed in this document. Whatever I write about them is also true of me, the researcher (Messerschmidt 1981, 18). However, self-identifying as a researcher had also set me into a liminal state at times where people were interested in discussing my research interests but not willing to commit to going on record or leading individuals to ponder whether I am speaking to them as myself or as a researcher.

I acknowledge this and other challenges of performing research within one’s own community. Perhaps most especially a potential bias of desiring to conduct research which helps portray the furry fandom in a more positive light, exploring a real-world convention and obtaining community guidance on my ethnographic contribution about this group. I am also interested in providing a case study as a native anthropologist studying his own

internet based culture which bridges both real world and online environment participation in pursuit of a more holistic lens through which to view this fandom.

The goal is to describe to readers using these tools of participant observation and thick description an authentic representation of a furry convention and inside perspective on this community.

CHAPTER 3: BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FURRY FANDOM

“Yeah, I know what they are, they were on that episode of CSI.”

~University of Idaho anthropology department professor, 2011

DEFINING FURRY

What is a furry? I have received this question myself several times and have asked it in turn. There is no standard or agreed upon definition but some general definitions of the term have been published (Gerbasi, Paolone, et al., *Furries from A to Z (Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism)* 2008) (Carlson 2011) (Howl 2015) or produced by the furry community’s largest convention, Anthrocon, in their informational brochure (Anthrocon Inc. 2006). The Gerbasi document stating that:

“A furry is a person who identifies with the furry fandom culture. Furry Fandom is the collective name given to individuals who have a distinct interest in anthropomorphic animals such as cartoon characters. Many, but not all, furries strongly identify with, or view themselves as, one (or more) species of animal other than human. Common furry identities (‘fursonas’) are dragon, feline (cat, lion, tiger), and canine (wolf, fox, domestic dog) species. Some furries create mixed species such as a “folf” (fox and wolf) or “cabbit” (cat and rabbit). Furries rarely, if ever, identify with a nonhuman primate species. Many furries congregate in cyberspace, enjoy artwork depicting anthropomorphized animals, and attend Furry Fandom conventions.”

The Carlson document explains furries are:

“...people who enjoy anthropomorphic art and fiction, even taking on animal identities themselves; some are involved in role-playing games; many use online avatars to

perform in virtual space, and then sometimes perform in actual space by donning ears, tails, or complete fur suits at fan conventions.”

The Anthrocon “What is Furry?” brochure makes for a broad inclusion when defining the furry fandom:

The word “anthropomorphic” (literally “human-shaped”) refers to animals or objects given human characteristics. Anthropomorphic animals include everything from the gods of ancient Egypt with their dog, cat, and crocodile heads, to the tool-using characters of the Sonic the Hedgehog video games, to the talking ponies of the My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic television series. Only within the last three decades has this enthusiasm for anthropomorphic animals coalesced into its own distinct entity, known as furry fandom. Fans are found in all corners of the world, and come from all races, ages, and creeds. We are bound together across the most daunting barriers by our mutual admiration for these creatures of myth and legend who, by simple reflection, grant us a better window into understanding our own natures. A large number of furry fans are employed in the scientific or technical fields. A significant percentage have college diplomas and many hold advanced degrees. This perhaps is why many casual observers may raise an eyebrow. “Why would someone like this be interested in cartoon animals? Isn’t that unusual?” If we look at the world around us, we will see that anthropomorphized animals are an integral part of our culture. We use them to represent our political parties, our insurance companies, and even our sports teams. We talk to our dogs (and sometimes even imagine that they talk back [in their own way of course]). We put a “tiger” in our [fuel] tank. We cheer for mascots at our favorite sporting events. A casual observer may simply be unaware that it is only in the last forty years that cartoons and cartoon animals have been relegated to the world of children. Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and their ilk were once primarily targeted to an adult audience, their productions filled with innuendo and biting political satire. Furry fans today simply have not forgotten those roots. The average furry fan is cast from the same mold as the science-fiction or sword-and-sorcery fan; all of us imagine strange and thrilling worlds and try to picture ourselves living in those worlds. Today, furry fandom is a distinct artistic and literary genre that is enjoyed by tens of thousands worldwide. We count among our ranks professional sports mascots, animators, cartoonists, puppeteers, artists, illustrators, and writers, as well as those who think that it would be a wonderful thing if animals could walk or talk like we do.”

The International Anthropomorphics Research Project and its co-founder, Dr. Courtney Plante (also known in the furry fandom as Nuka), use the following definition in this chapter contained in the Thurston Howl publication:

...self-identified fans of anthropomorphism – the ascription of human traits to animals – or zoomorphism- the ascription of animal traits to humans. This definition has several important implications. First, it makes no assumptions about any one attitude, belief, or action being, in and of itself, definitively furry. Put another way: no one behavior or belief objectively and certainly makes a person a furry. For example, one could wear a fursuit, but nevertheless not call themselves a furry (they may be a sporting team mascot). Secondly, our definition suggests that furry is a self-imposed label, comparable to other labels people use to identify themselves (i.e. – liberal, running enthusiast). As such, while others may apply the “furry” label to someone, our definition emphasizes the psychological effects of internalizing and integrating “furry” into one’s own identity – of applying the label to oneself.

The general consensus I received in my formal and informal interviews with furies as well as seeking out what others have posted on their personal webpages, blogs, community posts is that defining ‘what is a furry?’ depends largely on individual interpretation and choice. Let us now hear from the voices of three of my interviewees how they define being a furry.

Elise said that “A furry is someone who really enjoys anthropomorphic characters. And, when asked what an anthropomorphic character is, I tell them a character more like Goofy than Pluto. An animal person. Like Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Disney’s Robin Hood.” (Elise. Interview with the author. 03 14, 2014.)

John stated: “The furry fandom is a bit different depending on who you ask. Being a furry is defined as having an interest about animals with human characteristics, but for me, being a furry is a way to express my interest for foxes.”

Tasha defined being a furry as "...having an affinity to animals and identifying, usually, with a specific kind of animal."

For me, being a furry is just having an appreciation for stories and artwork which feature anthropomorphic animals or characters. I don't believe I have a connection to an animal spirit, I don't howl at the moon, bark at strangers, or emulate other canid traits simply because the avatar I use to represent myself in the community is a wolf. I don't dress in an animal mascot costume, nor do I desire to ridicule those who do. How I define being a furry for myself will be different from how another furry might define it for themselves, thus establishing that there is no single 'correct' generalized definition. How an individual engages with self-identify as members of the furry community, and defines furry, is up to them. The furry community seems to me to be quite tolerant and inclusive of differences amongst its members, and allows for the flexibility of varied definitions and states of involvement and performance in the fandom to co-exist. For my research I went forward operating with the broad definition of furies as fans of anthropomorphic animals and characters in literature, art, animation, and other media as this seems to be a generally accepted definition from within the community.

HISTORY

"Unfortunately, there are not as many individuals interested in the history of the furry fandom as I would like. I have taken on several personal projects over the years -- I have one today to record the events of the furry conventions such as how many people attended each one, who the guests of honor have been, who the chairmen have been, and so on -- and while there has been some cooperation, there are a disappointing number of people who say, "Who cares?"

- Fred Patten (furry historian), correspondence with Dusty Fleener.

Anthropomorphic animal characters appear in the art and stories of many ancient cultures' such as those of the Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Australian Aborigines, Aztec, Japanese, and First Peoples. The oldest known anthropomorphic art in the world is The Lion Man of the Hohlenstein-Stadel (Lobell 2012) (Bailey 2013). As this sculpture was carbon dated to around 30,000 B.C.E. it is reasonable to believe that human interest in anthropomorphic animals may have been with us since these early times.

On occasion members of the modern furry fandom or those researching them will reference the past practice of anthropomorphizing animals as signs of influence or a human predisposition for the development of the contemporary fandom (Patten, File 770 1998) (Staeger and Suburban 2001) (Boellstorff 2008) (Furseum 2012). The topic of humans mimicking animal traits or behaviors through recorded history is often brought up by furry community members at conventions and panels which cover the history of furry. By citing historical links between humans and their affinity, reverence, or worship toward animals and anthropomorphic creations the fandom seeks to legitimize the contemporary community as a natural outgrowth of human interests. Fandom members will cite proto-fandom influences for the development of modern furies such as Aesop's Fables, and writers such as Felix Salten and Lewis Carroll (Belser 2006) (Furseum 2012). Illustration artists such as Palmer Cox and Howard Roger Garis are also cited as early influences on the development of the contemporary furry community, the former being given credit for coining the term of "funny animals" (Furseum 2012), a precursor to contemporary furry characters and artistic renderings. The contemporary fandom is generally recognized as

having formed in the 1980s as an outgrowth of the science fiction and fantasy fandoms (Patten, File 770 1998) (Caudron 2006, 186) (Winterman 2009) (Dobre 2012, 11) (Howl 2015, 7).

For the purpose of this thesis, I am limiting my study of furry history to 20th – 21st century developments rather than take on an inclusive history of global anthropomorphism. It should be noted sometimes this larger connection to the pre-20th century history and global cultures are brought up within the furry community at convention panels, online discussions, and in general dialogues amongst interested parties attempting to make connections or find origins for the modern interest in animal anthropomorphism in humans or as inclusion of a furry history. Historical information recorded by members of the furry community tend to focus on the contemporary 20th century and onward developments of the fandom and rarely see it directly linked to pre-20th century influences (Simo 2009) (Patten 2012).

Furries, being an internet community, rely on online resources such as the user-editable content site WikiFur to provide accessible information on the history of the fandom. This seems to be especially true for individuals such as myself who were not wholly involved in the larger network of the fandom due to rural location, technology limitations, or being within the generational age range and means to participate in early fandom activities or events and have no direct knowledge of the fandom's evolution other than what has been documented and shared by others.

In trying to consolidate a brief history of the furry fandom for this document, it should be noted that until recently, there were very few published documents that detail

19th – 21st century furry history. Many of those are self-published work using digital print-on-demand resources such as those provided through Amazon.com. The majority of sources are digital, which presents its own issues as Furry community member Simo explains on their *An Informal History of Furry Fandom* webpage:

Now, I don't claim to have the definitive history of furrydom down pat. Such a thing is not possible, in that as events unfold no one is aware of what is important, and what is not. During the course of events, there simply may be no one there who thinks to keep a record. Much of this history is preserved in the form of Internet caches of old web sites and Usenet posts. Some has already been lost. Furry-dom has largely come of age on the Internet, and therefore, has left little by way of a "paper trail". Digital data is very fragile. When a web site is either taken down, or expires from lack of use, it is up to the admin of that web server to decide if the contents are to be preserved. Portions of our history has been blown away with the click of a mouse. (Simo 2009)

Fred Patten, who I corresponded with via E-mail, is a science fiction, fantasy, manga, anime, and furry fandom historian. He has worked to provide a detailed history with the furry community's assistance (Appendix O) but a stroke he suffered in 2006 has waylaid his formal continuation on this work. Fred Patten's work, as an early participant member of the furry fandom, documents the pre-fandom influences and development of the fandom into the mid-1990s. Originating from small gatherings and fanzines in the 1980s, the furry fandom increased in popularity and participation expanding into its own standalone conventions, the first being Confurence 0 held in 1989. The fandom's growth out of early meetups and independent comics and fanzines was facilitated by the advent and use of the Internet (Kratina 2007) (Tepfer 2009) (Ahearn 2011) (Erbenraut 2014) and furry culture has long been incorporated into virtual worlds (Boellstorff 2008, 184), with many members connecting to it first through other interest groups' message boards, art hosting services, and online social communities and from influences like comic books,

video games, Disney films or Warner Bros. television series (Larson 2003) (Irwin and Watterson 2002) (Lovering 2011).

Furry historian and essayist Simo documents on his website a complimentary track of furry history which covers a period of 1996 to 2009 and tracks the growth and expansion of the fandom as it integrates into the Internet. Simo's writings and documentation of digital sources from the years covered detail some of the schisms, factions, and struggles for identity and control over defining the sub-culture that the fandom faced from the mid-1990s and into the early 21st century. Movements such as "Burned Furs," increased negative external attention on the group by media, stigmatization by other subcultures, and in-fighting over how the furry fandom is comprised and represented. These are the growing pains that still shadow the fandom and its identity construction today.

CHAPTER 4 – FURSONAS AND IDENTITY

“Being a furry is all about claiming your identity...when you choose a fursona or totem, you are choosing a more acceptable representation of who you really are...”

- Mark Merlino (Caudron 2006, 189)

Fursonas, portmanteau of furry and persona, are identities of individual participants in the Furry community. Like avatars, they allow community members to know and interact with one another at events or in online communication. They also provide a certain extent of anonymity within the furry fandom for those who do not wish to openly acknowledge their participation. Fursonas are also used as personal representations of individuals within virtual communities, in role-playing games, and commissioned art. The fursona, as an avatar, can be a simple place holder for an individual’s virtual self or even a more accurate and intimate reflection of an individual’s idealization of self – being portrayed as more outgoing, athletic, playful, or talkative than the individual may perceive themselves to be in real life.

I asked the furies I interviewed their opinion on fursonas and how they felt they others utilized fursonas as part of their interactions with the furry community and they had these observations to share. Abe said: “...it always seemed to me that your fursona is your alter ego. It’s how you connect with the world. It’s the way that you see yourself.”

Elise explained that:

It can either be based on how you really are or how you want to be. It can be realistic or fantastical. It’s how you want to be represented online. My fursona is a character that I use to represent myself online and in the community. If I draw myself, it's usually as a rodent. This is partially because I'm not very good at drawing people and I find animal people much more interesting. But she is a very important character to me, I've even tried weaving her into some of the stories that I write up

involving my other furry characters. I think that fursonas are an important part of being a furry. Because this is a fandom about the love of anthropomorphic characters, we create characters for ourselves. Much like a Harry Potter fan creating a wizard character for themselves. I think that it is possible to be a furry and not have a fursona but I think that if you do that you are missing out on a large part of the fandom. Most of us create, and want, artwork of our characters with other peoples' [characters], sort of like photographs of what we do. And, if you don't have a fursona, there isn't a way for you to participate in that way.

John said:

To some people, a fursona is an animalistic version of themselves. To others a fursona could be who they want to be. To some people a fursona could just be a character they wanted to have and have to real relationship with the character... My fursona is a mix of who I am mixed with who I want to be. His appearance goes along with my interests and personality.

Having a fursona is not required for an individual to participate or interact with the furry fandom. A quick check of most furry forums, webpages, and art hosting sites indicate most furies do seem to have them, though early members of the fandom did not possess them. A reason for was offered by furry historian Fred Patten:

At first, the furry fans of the 1980s used their real names. Then around 1992 and 1993, furry activities were joined by many adolescents who did not come from s-f fandom or comic-book fandom. They discovered furry fandom over the Internet. Many of them were already fans of role-playing games where it was common to adopt an obvious persona like a warrior or an elf name, so they adopted a fursona for furry fandom.

Having a fursona appears to make social interactions, acceptance as a furry, and participation within the furry fandom online and off-line easier for an individual who possesses one. It gives a visual legitimacy to interactions with this subculture and marks one with an insider status. Based on my own observations from Rainfurrest 2013 and Biggest Little Fur Con 2015, an individual can walk into a convention, engage with furies at a meetup, or even engage in the digital spaces furies inhabit within the Internet without a

fursona and still engage as a member of the community whether they are just getting oriented with the furry community as a newcomer to the fandom, “just seeing what [a furry convention] is about,” or hanging out with a social group that includes furies. John, who formally began identifying as a furry in 2011 shared that “having a fursona helps a lot in the fandom. A fursona puts a face behind the screen name, even if it’s imaginary. Also, you have art done of your character to make it known to others.”

Furies will often hire furry artists to create artwork of their fursonas. This will sometimes begin with the commissioning of a character sheet of their fursona(s). This aids in not only the visual representation of their fursona to other members of the community but also in commissioning additional art of their characters. Having a character sheet, or “ref sheet,” eliminates miscommunications and streamlines the dialogue over character appearance and design in commissioned artwork, roleplaying games, or written stories. These sheets often feature multiple views of the character as well as coloration, distinguishing traits, clothing, detailed headshots, and sometimes personal information about the character such as personality traits, like and dislikes, and sometimes a fictional backstory or real life background history inserts further linking fursona and the person represented.

Commissioned artwork of fursonas can be done without a reference sheet but most of the artists I spoke with prefer some form of visual guide instead of a written description of the character to work from when creating art for customers. Tasha, speaking as an artist working with commissioners, told me: “It’s difficult...if they want artwork done and they don’t have a fursona, because if they don’t have one then I am flying in the dark trying to

create artwork...they can say 'I'm a fox' and then you have a little easier time interacting with them in your head."

Custom artwork commissions can take many forms such as simple \$5.00 rough pencil sketches of the person's fursona in a sketch book to individual pieces of artwork costing several hundred dollars, depending on the artist, complexity of commission, and medium being used. The themes of artwork are broad and the ratings can be from G to Adult. Fursonas seem to be the focus of most commissioned artwork in the furry community and most commissioned fursuits tend to be based off of an individual's character(s). Some people will fursuit as their main fursona or will have a fursona specifically for fursuiting at conventions or in public. This observation is based off informal dialogues I had with furry community members at the Rainfurrest convention who have main fursonas that would be difficult to render as a fursuit such as cyborgs, hybrids, winged creatures or heavily ornate fursonas which would prove too expensive to commission a fursuit maker to build with currently available materials and fabrication techniques. Fursuits will be discussed later in the furry material culture section of this document.

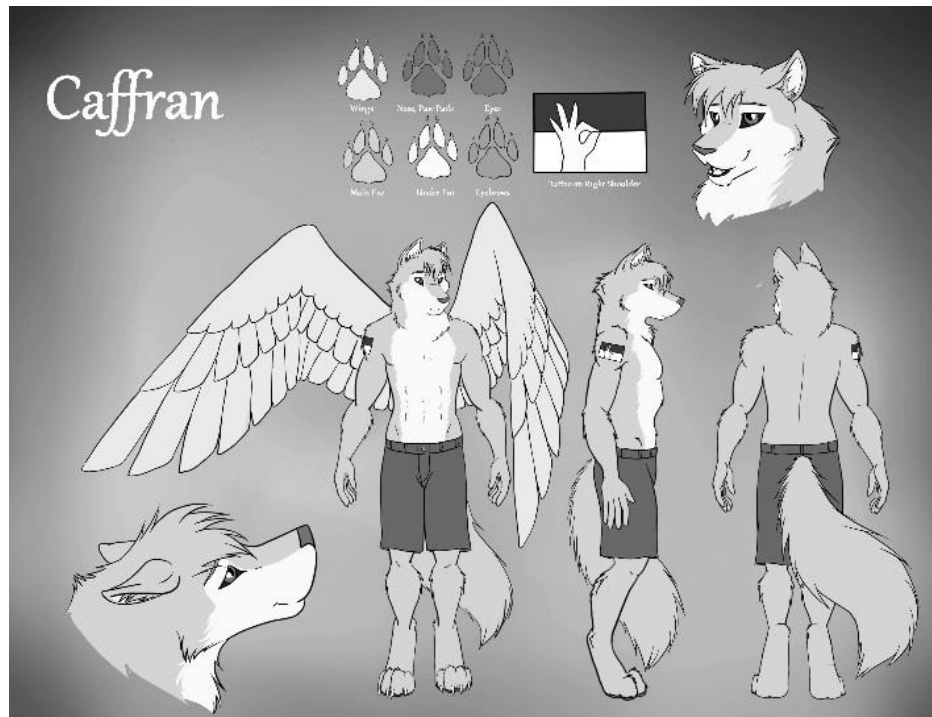


Figure 4: An example fursona character sheet (often referred to as a model sheet, reference sheet, or 'ref sheet') of the principal researcher's fursona. This provides artists and other furry community members with a detailed visual representation of an individual's fursona. Character sheets are typically full-color.

There are no formal rules or guidelines to fursona creation as the very exercise involved in their formation is a personal exercise in creativity. Species choice, fur coloration and patterns, accessories, and other details of a fursona all can have meaning to an individual and can convey personality traits (self-assigned or aspired), reflect a personal individual's history, gender identity, or other affiliations, passions, or interests. Sometimes individuals will select a particular species for their persona based on perceived or ascribed traits of an animal to emulate as a basis for the selection, such as a feline representing grace or pride, or a canid representing loyalty. These traits may be something the individual creating a fursona sees in themselves or desires to gain in taking them on in their

fursona. Some furies base their fursonas off of pets, favorite real-life animals, anthropomorphic cartoon characters, or even original content creations from their own fictional works.

Most fursonas are based off of land mammals like wolves, bears, and foxes (and rarer are animals with scales such as crocodiles, snakes, or lizards) while others are from fantasy and lore like dragons, griffins, or unicorns. Additionally, fursuits may be based on dinosaurs, aquatic creatures like orcas or sharks, and even fictional furies such as the Crux species from Second Life. Some furies have a spiritual connection to their fursonas and practice spiritual Therianthropy, totemic beliefs, or are into the furry lifestyle movement which can influence the generation of a fursona and species selection. When I asked John about his fursona, he shared that his:

...fursona is a mix of who I am mixed with who I want to be. His appearance goes along with my interests and personality. He has a tattoo on his arm, the same place I plan to get my first tattoo, with the kanji for dream. He wears a kimono to show my interest in Japanese culture. And his weapon is an indestructible bokken, the sword representing my interest in swordsmanship, while it being wooden makes it more of a defensive weapon to show that I want to protect more than fight...From the prototype to the final project my character has changed a lot. It started out as an anthropomorphic fox in blue jeans.

While sometimes certain animal species are attributed traits assigned by the furry community which might reflect in a person's fursona, such as otters being playful or foxes being sly, this doesn't mean that a person needs to follow these informal codifications with their fursonas and be bound to interact with other furry community members in a certain manner. A person may be an otter that is stoic, or a fox with altruistic tendencies. An individual's agency in regard to their fursona is their own to draft and act upon within the fandom.

Fursonas can evolve from their original inception and creation or be abandoned all together if a person elects to “leave the fandom.” On occasion, a person may wish to pursue a fresh start within the fandom operating under the guise of a new fursona. This may be due to a faux pas committed (real or perceived), desire to separate from a certain furry community reputation (real or perceived), a change in personal identity or sense of self in their real world lives that then causes a disconnect from their fursona, or simply an aesthetical desire to change species and/or gender or other traits.

When I asked Elise if her fursona had changed since she first engaged with the furry fandom she agreed that it had.

When I created [my main fursona] I was 16, and I was a very different person than I am today. So it only makes sense that she would change as I have. My first fursona was a wolf because, at the time, wolves were what I was best at drawing. I had also been a fan of wolves for years. But, as I started drawing more and getting better at drawing other sorts of animals, I reevaluated myself and found that I was more like a rat than a wolf. So I made the change.

CHAPTER 5 – FURRY MATERIAL CULTURE: FURSUIITS, CONDADGES, AND FURRY ART

“Fursuiters get priority.” That was the first thing that the volunteer manning the hotel’s convention center elevators told us. Twisting my head around, I looked back down to see the velociraptor fursuit stalking up the steps behind me. I made way for him to pass and received a bob from the reptilian’s head in return. Some fursuiters won’t talk at all while performing, remaining “in character.” He was followed by a brace of other fursuiters. The first, a white rabbit wearing goggles, Victorian style pants, and a dapper vest, and right behind him a vixen dressed in belly dancer attire.

“Fursuiters coming through! Fursuits go first, then others if there is room! Do not overload the elevators!” The three fursuiters and their spotters entered the first elevator as the doors opened with a chime. The vixen gave a flirtatious wave of her paw as the doors closed. The other elevator door slid open soon after and the contingent of convention attendees who had been denied a ride in the previous car awkwardly pressed forward all at once. Friendly chuckles and guffawing occurred as some elected to step back while others moved around them. One lanky individual darted into the elevator at the last second as the doors closed, reminiscent of the moves a Hollywood action hero might make while escaping pursuit. This maneuver first set off the door blockage sensor bell, causing the doors to open back up and the car to remain on the ground floor. Then the ‘over weight limit’ bell cried out. His companions were not amused. Especially as he delayed stepping off the lift. The volunteer had to intervene in the ousting.

The attendees reformed themselves into a crowd to await the return of the elevators. With more attendees fast approaching from the hotel toward the elevator’s micro-lobby I decided that taking the stairwell up to the convention center might be the better option.

(~Recollections from the field notes of Dusty Fleener, 2013)

FURSUIITS

The term, “fursuit” was coined by then-amateur costumer Robert King in 1993 as a portmanteau of ‘fur’ and ‘suit,’ as well as a pun on the word ‘pursuit,’ meaning hobby (Riggs 2004). King was brainstorming a name for the nascent mailing list being created for a group of amateur costumers with a friend when the name coalesced. It has since been adopted as the slang term people use today when referencing the anthropomorphic animal

costumes associated with the fandom today. The act of wearing a fursuit is called 'fursuiting.' They are very similar to the costumes worn by professional performers working for athletic teams or recreational theme parks.

A fursuit is often based upon an individual's main fursona, or a secondary one developed specifically for the activity of fursuiting, and incorporates many of that fursona's distinctive physical features. Some furies prefer a cartoon like, or 'toony,' appearance to their fursuit. Other furies, such as some Otherkin and Therianthropes, may view fursuits as a physical manifestation of their inner animal self and attempt to make them as 'realistic' as possible. This is not to say that all fursuiters aiming for a realistic appearance in their fursuits are Otherkin or Therianthropes, they may simply prefer a realistic over a more toony appearance.

Fursuits are often made from a variety of materials, usually comprised of faux fur and upholstery foam. There are many different techniques available for creating fursuits. Several members of the furry community post webpages or video tutorials detailing construction methods and how-to explanations or trouble-shooting guides for fellow fursuit makers to reference (Nowak 2011) (Fursuit-Tutorials n.d.) (TaniDaReal 2007) (Howard 2013). Being an internet community, this allows fellow fandom members the opportunity to gain access to new ideas and improve skill levels in fursuit construction methods which they might not have had access to in their home communities where such interests in this craft of the furry community are not nurtured or present. Not all tutorials are in-depth and are generally basic in nature, prompting amateur fursuit makers to

experiment in construction techniques or purchase pre-made pieces from fursuit artists or parts vendors.

Fursuits come in a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors and are often modeled on a particular fursuiter's fursona. If an individual lacks the artistic or creative skill set to create their own fursuit, they can reach out to other members of the furry community. Fursuit makers such as MadeFurYou, One Fur All, Beetlecat Originals, and BNCreation work with fursuit commissioners to bring their ideas for fursuits into existence. Fursuits can be customized by a fursuit maker to meet a client's desired appearance. Each fursuit maker has their own artistic style which can often be distinguished by members of the furry community. Commissioning a fursuit is often an expensive investment with prices ranging between twenty five dollars for a simple tail to over two thousand dollars for a full suit depending on complexity of the design, material costs, and the artist's own labor fees. Construction of a fursuit can take several weeks and final delivery sometimes can occur up to a year later if the fursuit maker's production queue is filled to capacity.

There are two basic categories of fursuits: partials and full-body. A partial fursuit covers a range of furry accouterments which do not cover the entire body of the furry. Partial suits are as simple as just hanging a yarn tail from the back of a pants belt loop or wearing faux cat ears on one's head, to the wearing of a full fursuit head with matching 'sleeves' and/or gloves and feet coverings. The wearer's body is covered with regular clothing articles. Full-body fursuits are just that: fur suits which cover the entire performer's body. Full-body fursuits come in bipedal and quad-suit versions, with a further

distinction being made in the shape of the bipedal version's legs to be digitigrade or plantigrade. Style of fursuits range from cartoonish to more realistic patterns.



Figure 5: A partial fursuit consisting of a full coverage head, tail, $\frac{3}{4}$ glove and sleeves (forepaws), and feet coverings (hind paws). Photo used with permission from fursuit maker XariaWolf.



Figure 6: Comparison of full body fursuits from different fursuit makers. Images taken by the principal researcher while attending the Rainfurrest convention. Photos taken in September 2012 and September 2014 by Dusty Fleener.

The reason fursuits get priority is that they get hot. Just wearing a fursuit for a few minutes' time is often enough to get the wearer sweating, and prolonged wear can lead to heat exhaustion. There are some universal signs which fursuiters use to communicate discomfort or emergency. Waving a hand before the face in a fan-like motion indicates that the fursuiter is overheating. They will attempt to make their way to the fursuit lounge or their hotel room where they can change out of their fursuit.

A fursuit lounge, or 'headless lounge,' is a designated space most conventions establish where fursuiters can 'break character.' Here they are free to remove the head from their fursuits, cool down, rehydrate, and visit amongst their fellow fursuiters. Usually these areas are off limits to non-fursuiters, with exceptions made to fursuit handlers/spotters. This limits the exposure of the performers from other convention

attendees. It is considered bad etiquette to photograph a fursuiter when they are not entirely suited up without their consent. Some fursuits are of a different gender or sex than that of the performer wearing them and fursuiters (male, female, and transgender) do not wish this information revealed. Some fursuiters like to maintain a modicum of privacy of their participation within the furry fandom and do not wish to be identified publicly. 'Beau,' a United States soldier, told me that

...some people work in jobs where such interests aren't understood or welcome...they don't want it getting out they dress up as a bear named Claude on the weekend...it's [furry fandom] not the kind of interest that can be understood or dismissed easily. Not like working on cars or brewing beer...saying you're a furry makes people stop and go: 'what?'

Other fursuiters just don't want to 'ruin the magic' by revealing who they are underneath the foam and faux fur. The appeal of bringing a character to life through public fursuit performance is something some fursuiters cherish and don't want to break character while suited. Some fursuiters I spoke with share similar sentiment to athletic team mascots, such as the person who played Eastern Washington University's 'Swoop' and was interviewed in a 2011 article of *The Inlander*. "Revealing a mascot...it goes from 'Swoop' to 'Uncle Fred,' and then it's no longer a bird, it's just a guy in a costume acting strange" (Byrd 2011).

Space and sometimes supplies are made available for emergency fursuit repair in the headless lounge. Repairs can include stitching torn seams in fursuits, or using hot glue guns to repair damaged foam or physical accessories – reattaching plastic horns or latex paw pads.

I overheard some of the fursuiters mention that Rainfurrest staff had set up a “head drying rack” which seemed to be a novel item for them to encounter inside a fursuit lounge. It was constructed of PVC tubing in the form of a sort of coat tree. The air forced through the PVC tubing and out through the drying ports and was powered by either a floor dryer or a shop vac, depending on which conversation I overheard. Again, as I was not a fursuiter nor a handler/spotter for one, I was unable to enter the fursuit lounge and see the apparatus for myself.

Some fursuiters who perform for extended periods of time outside or indoors but away from rest areas may don cooling vests with pockets for ice packs to keep their body temperatures down. Others modify the heads of their costumes to include small fans, pulling body heat away from the performer and venting it out through concealed vents in the head.

Fursuiters attending furry conventions may participate in a variety of programming aimed at their interests. There is almost always a fursuit parade, where attending fursuiters walk together along a pre-planned route to show off their suits and interact with other convention participants. Photographs and videos of the various fursuits are most often taken during this event and shared with other community members. There are hosted informational panels that cover fursuit construction, performance, etiquette, safety training for performers and their spotters/handlers, and fursuit games.

A fursuiter’s vision, dexterity, and mobility can be hampered by a fursuit’s design. Most fursuits have a limited field of vision and so fursuiters will often rely on the assistance of a friend or other volunteer who will act as a spotter/handler. These individuals are often

plain-clothed, assisting the fursuiter in navigating around obstacles and through crowded areas. They will identify hazards which the fursuiter may not be able to discern for themselves as they move about a space or interact with onlookers. This can include climbing up or down stairs, avoiding a chair pulled out too far, or a small child running up beside to hug the fursuiter. Spotters can aid in the donning and removal of a fursuit, and assist in ensuring that it has been adjusted properly to the performer's body and that the fursuiters they are working with do not succumb to heat exhaustion. Fursuit spotters also guide interactions between fursuiters and others wishing to interact with the fursuiter, and intervene as necessary for safety purposes. When fursuiters participate in organized parades or fursuit games, there is often a 'fursuit wrangler' on hand to manage and assist the larger group of performers much in the same manner as a spotter (WikiFur - Fursuit Handler 2014).

Fursuit games are where participants wear fursuits while competing in team-based or individual events. Fursuit games often include charades, relay races, musical chairs, Pictionary, and other active events.

I would posit that fursuits are perhaps the most recognizable aspect of furry fandom today to the general public, as there are few pieces of journalistic literature, creative media, or documentaries produced which do not place fursuits as the core (or sole focus) of the fandom. Most non-furries seem to have some familiarity with this part of furry culture. While all fursuiters are furries, not all furries are fursuiters. When people discover I am a member of the furry fandom, the first question asked is often "do you have a fursuit?" Many seem disappointed when I say 'no.'

While fursuiting is not a requisite part of being considered furry, some community members do note that there are occasions it is used as a sign of status. Furry historian Fred Patten told me through our E-mail correspondence that he has been told he "...is not a real furry fan because I use my real name and do not wear a fursuit." Most furries wear ordinary clothing, even when attending conventions, and if removed from the setting of a formal convention (and are divested of any furry-themed paraphernalia) are nearly indistinguishable from the average non-furry.

One panel which I attended at Rainfurrest 2011 was titled, "Do You Need to Wear Synthetic Fur to be a Furry?" This presentation outlined the different roles furries play as part of the community (artists, art commissioners and fans, writers, crafters, socializers, lurkers, performers, and fursuiters) and how there is no one definition or pre-requisite for being considered a furry other than to voluntarily claim association with the fandom.

My first experience with fursuiters was at a convention as I did not understand that dressing up in a customized mascot suit was truly a 'thing' in the fandom. In that environment, where almost all the participants were furries, it was not unusual to see some people walking about in partial and full-body fursuits. For me, it was an uneasy experience. This was an area of the fandom that I had not encountered before in person and I was unsure of how to deal with what I was experiencing. While I knew that the large unicorn wearing a Hawaiian shirt coming down the hallway toward me alongside a black and white wild-eyed Crux (a furry mutant from the online virtual world of Second Life), and a black wolf with a snarling face following up close behind them were just people in costumes the experience was quite unnerving. I didn't know if they'd try to interact with

me, or how I should respond if they did. Was I supposed to acknowledge their presence? Or walk by them without looking at them directly? Should I compliment them on their fursuits? Or just smile and wave? In the end, the problem solved itself. The Unicorn gave me a thumbs up, the Crux crooked its head and waved as it dropped its jaw open at me, and the snarling black wolf stumbled clumsily as he clipped the corner of a stanchion outside the convention's registration room.

Going forward from that experience, I have done my best to become more comfortable with fursuiters. Their "Otherness" still is unsettling to me. I know that it is just another human being, overheating inside the layers of foam and faux fur, but they do not look human. Their face, and often their bodies, have been transformed into something distorted from the natural human frame to which I am accustomed with interacting on a daily basis. The hardest part for me has been knowing where to look when interacting with or speaking to fursuiters. Most fursuits have vision slits for the performers camouflaged within the tear duct area of the costume's head. I know that is where I should be attempting to make eye contact with the fursuiter, that is, the person within the suit, but often make contact with the fursuiter's eyes and finding myself reacting to their eyes rather than to the person bringing the suit to life. And for fursuiters, that is perhaps the way things ought to be. Fursuiting exists in the same vein as traditional human mask wearing and performance. "Masks function simultaneously to obscure a person's face and to create a new identity" (Edson 2005, 47). As material possessions, masks "create the stage" of a person's life and carry markers of "status, gender relations, and so on" (Morphy and Perkins 2006, 10). I am not interacting with 'Judd' the aviation mechanic from Seattle,

but 'Ayoc' the ferret. The former is timid and reserved, while Ayoc is playful, exuberant, and outgoing. And though Ayoc only wants a hug or to give a high five, I find myself wanting to fursuit as well, if only to take away the power they have over me by becoming like those who wear the masks, and hide my discomfort by becoming one of the fursuiters.

People fursuit for various reasons. The mask of a fursuit frees the performer to engage in behaviors or take on traits that they might not normally express without the transformation from 'same' to 'the Other.' One furry I visited with admitted to normally being very nervous around people. But when she put on her fursuit, she could interact with other convention attendees and perform in public without any kind of fear. She was able to interact comfortably with other people, something she felt she was unable to do while outside of the fursuit and so it is liberating to have a mask between her and what she dislikes to face without it. People will also fursuit outside the fandom for charity efforts or for their own amusement. "You can get away with a lot of silly things while wearing a fursuit that you couldn't do otherwise," one veteran fursuit performer stated at a convention panel about fursuiting outside of the fandom. Making people smile and bringing some joy into a stranger's day were among the reasons he fursuited.

I arrived at the top of the stairwell and was greeted by another of the convention's volunteer staff who looked menacing. He had a black leather biker vest with a radio clipped to one of the front pockets. His eyes were narrowed as they peered out from beneath a black leather slouch hat.

"Stop. Let me see your badge." He said.

I smiled, fumbling to present my lanyard with the attached identification badge issued by Rainfurrest's registration desk.

He studied it, then nodded and leaned back on his chair. "Okay, you're good." I proceeded on into the convention center.

“Hey Caffran, you dropped this,” someone said.

I turned to look at the speaker. He was another volunteer, a “Gofer” (so called because they are ‘runners’ used by other convention staff to “go for this or that” as needed – though sometimes I have known furrries to spell the name ‘gopher’), one of whom I met the previous day. In jostling my lanyard to present my convention attendee badge, I had disconnected the fursona Conbadge I had commissioned from a furry artist a month before the convention and did not notice it fell to the floor. I thanked the fellow, and proceeded along with him onto the Dealer’s Den where he was delivering some food to an artist working at one of the tables.

(Recollections from the field journal of Dusty Fleener, 2013)

CONBADGES

Convention badges, or ‘Conbadges,’ usually come in two types at furry conventions. A Conbadge can refer to the *membership* or *official badges* which are issued by the convention hosts or it can refer to the *artist badges*, or *fursona*, badges which are usually obtained as special forms of art commissions (WikiFur - Conbadge 2015). The former are paid for as part of the fees for attending a convention and grant access to convention spaces, and into areas where non-attendee access is restricted such as the dealer’s den, art show, panels, guest of honor events, or dances. These badges can also be used to denote under-age convention participants and special guests. When furs talk about Conbadges they most often refer to the second type.

One interviewee, John, explained to me that a Conbadge:

...is really no different than a name tag at work or event. They are used to identify who the person is in the fandom if they do not have a fursuit or [if] they are not wearing one, or they can be a name tag for a fursuiter to make it easier to call out to him or her, or find them online later. Some people badges just show their character, others show the character doing something that pertains to their personality or interests.

Conbadges featuring a furry's fursona come in a variety of styles. Commissioned Conbadges typically start at around \$10.00 and increase in price depending on the complexity of the fursona, material costs involved, and fees charged by the furry artist for commissions. They may be crafted in a variety of mediums such as acrylic inks, colored pencils, markers, sculpture clay, or digitally produced art. Many Conbadges are also commissioned to match a convention's theme. As examples – Post-apocalyptic, Steampunk, Pirates, Disco, Safari, Camping, Superhero, and so forth.

Typically furies will commission artists to create Conbadges for a convention in advance. Artists attending conventions will often offer deals or promotions in advance of the convention, to attract customers, and often have commissioned Conbadges available for pick-up at the convention. Artists may also produce a limited number of Conbadges on-site at conventions as part of their convention commission sales or as gift art for friends and colleagues. Artists will often do Conbadges as a way to advertise their art, increase their notoriety among fans, and entice customers for repeat business or to invest in more expensive commissions. Some furies collect Conbadges from as many artists as possible. There are no formal rules of etiquette when it comes to wearing Conbadges for furies, though I was informed by one interviewee that the wearing of 'too many' badges can sometimes result in accidental loss or damage of the badges. One individual I encountered wore over twenty badges on his person, hanging from his shirt sleeves, shirt collar, convention lanyard, belt loops, suspenders, and backpack webbing.



Figure 7: Example of a furry convention attendee, Orion, with a large collection of artist badges at Rainfurrest. He is known in the furry fandom for this collection. Image taken by Dusty Fleener in September 2014.



Figure 8: Principal researcher's scanned black and white images of some of his own fursona's con badges (also known as artist badges or fursona badges. Con badges can be commissioned from different furry community artists (Left badge created by furry artist Likeshine, right badge created by furry artist Kitsumi) either at furry conventions or from the artists via their personal websites. Conbadges are often an affordable option for purchasing custom artwork from a favorite artist.

When it came to obtaining my own Conbadges, I was pretty excited. I had never had a need for one before, having never attended a furry convention until 2011. A fursona was something that I developed as a participant of the furry community. It was a depiction of myself that, reflexively discussed elsewhere in this document, was necessary to navigate furry spaces on the Internet. While Conbadges are not a requirement to participate at conventions, I felt they were an integral part of the experience as they allow a different level of participation within the community. You can introduce yourself by your real name or your fursona name, but the little image associated with you hanging from your lanyard or shirt pocket often seemed to give people the best representative impression of yourself (or your idealized self) to others when attending a real world event. It helps them 'visualize' you. The Conbadge, like the Fursona, gave me a legitimacy to move through the Furry space as a participant, not just an observer. People would address me and come to

know me as 'Caffran' rather than 'Dusty.' When I walked off site from the convention and headed into the Denny's restaurant up the street to meet my brother and his wife for lunch, I was identified as belonging with the other furies not because I had on ears or a tail, but because of my Conbadge. The waitress who came to the table to wait on us spent some time visiting and commenting on how she loved the artwork of my badge. She was also quite enamored with the costumes (fursuits) which people had worn. She had been working at that particular Denny's for two years and this was the second time she had exposure to furies. "I don't see or hear about them any other time," she said.

It seems to be good etiquette to address people by their fursona names when encountering them at a convention, rather than by their real names. Most people I met prefer that their fursona names are utilized in place of their actual names unless they are close friends, non-fandom vendors who have no fursona name or pre-existing fandom name (i.e. Ferengi Bob), or individuals who prefer being addressed by their actual names.

In commissioning artists for artwork, it is often useful to have a reference sheet of one's character. Having never needed to commission artwork before, I was unprepared. Fortunately, I was able to find an artist who was willing to draw my fursona for the first time, working from a written character description. As mentioned earlier, while some artists do work from written character descriptions, a prepared visual reference is the preferred method as there is less chance of miscommunication when it comes to detail work. Some furry artists offer customized character reference sheets for sale to customers in the fandom which may be done in digital or traditional mediums.

Reference sheets, or 'ref sheets,' are typically full body renderings of an individual's fursona. Most reference sheets will include a character's color palette, fur or marking patterns, and sometimes clothing or accessory information.

My fursona has remained mostly unchanged in fifteen years and is still based on my Furcadian avatar. A fairly recent update has been an emblem added from a fictional unit in the science fiction *BattleTech* universe (see Figure 4). This emblem has personal meaning to me and so was added to my fursona and included in my sheet. Fursonas do not have to remain static and can be updated and altered overtime, dropped entirely, or 'modernized' to reflect changes in the owner's life.

CHAPTER 6 – CONVENTION ORIENTATION

CONVENTION ORGANIZATION

Furry conventions are like other fandom conventions in that they are often orchestrated and operated by the fans themselves. The largest is of the current furry conventions is Anthrocon, held each year in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and there are several other growing conventions and meetups around the world. A partial list of currently operating and defunct furry conventions has been provided in Appendix M as reference to the global expansion from the first furry convention held in California in the 1980s.

Most conventions serve regional populations and grow in attendance over time as they become more well-known. Rainfurrest was known for its literature and writing programming and could be considered a furry writer's convention.

Because of the negative history the furry fandom has had with media over the last two decades their access is controlled. At Rainfurrest there were rules set into place by the convention staff which requested members of the press identify themselves and be accompanied into the convention spaces by appropriate convention staff, with some areas designated as off limits.

Conventions utilize membership badges, which are issued to convention participants for a fee usually in advance or when registering to participate at the convention, and denote membership levels and access to restricted areas. Often the badges will have special markings to identify minors, sponsors, convention staff, artists, dealers or those who only are paying to attend the convention for a specific day of a multi-

day convention. Membership badges are often worn concurrently with conbadges and will often feature themed artwork from the convention's artist guest of honor.

THEMES

Conventions often have themes selected to help drive the artwork, stories, panel content, and other programming for their members. The theme of a convention usually provides the fandom's community with an opportunity for creative endeavors such as themed artwork or badges, themed stories submitted to the convention's conbook, or additional costuming added to a participant's attire help add to the "feel" of the convention.

The successful implementation of a convention's theme is dependent both upon the participation level of the attendees and the preparation of the convention staff. RainFurrest 2011's theme was Furry Camping and the staff did a large amount of prep work, including rustic signs one might expect to see at a national park, setting up camp themed entertainment such as sing-alongs, camp games, ghost story telling sessions, and other camping themed activities. The artist guest of honor for RF2011, TaniDaReal, created themed artwork for the RF2011 conbook and website as well as designed art memes which were distributed to fellow artists and attendees to encourage convention theme interaction.



RAINFURREST

Seattle, WA

For More info:

www.rainfurrest.org

Name: _____

Species: _____

Website: _____

**Draw
Your
Character:**

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Jump in a Lake!

Roasting Marshmallows!

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

First Aid!

Hiking

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Making Fire!

Your Favorite Camping Activity!

Submit your finished meme to Rainfurrest at
www.rainfurrest.org/flyermeme.php and use the code **3698287**

Figure 9: Copy of TaniDaReal's flyer meme for RainFurrest 2011 procured from a public area table. Convention attendees were encouraged to draw their character enacting the listed prompts. Some completed meme fliers were shared via digital media while others were taped to room doors or left in public areas for other convention attendees to find and enjoy.



Figure 10: Rainfurrest 2011 conbook cover by their guest of honor artist for that year, TaniDaReal. The theme of 'furry camping' was very popular with attendees. Image used with artist's permission.

At the 2015 Biggest Little Fur Con in Reno, Nevada, the convention hung propaganda posters in all the main convention spaces; however, they were vandalized and counter-vandalized by attendees. The convention went on, played cheerful yet ominous friendly reminders and announcements over the PA system, and had convention staff carry a large flower wreathed portrait of the fictional antagonist (or protagonist, depending on which side attendees were rooting for), Brometheus T. Bear, presented throughout the convention.

of his head. I interpreted it to mean he was asking what I thought of the piece – good or so-so. Sometimes, interpreting what fursuiters are trying to convey can be challenging. This time was easier than others for me.

“I like it,” I said. “He does really good work.”

The fursuiter nodded at me, slipped his arm from around my shoulder and clapped his paws at the artist, who gave the wolf a grin and a nod in return. “Thank you, thank you! Always nice to have my work appreciated.” I thanked the artist for allowing me to browse his pieces and made my way toward the Dealer’s Den.

There was another volunteer minding the door, but he did not ask to see my convention badge. Volunteers restrict access to the Dealer’s Den early and late in the day when the room is closed. Vendors and artists are usually given special identification which allows them into the Dealer’s Den to get set up for business hours and to stay after closing time to shutter their booths. In addition, certain convention memberships have the privilege of entering the Dealer’s Den earlier than regular tier attendees. This gives the people who paid for the perks that come with obtaining a higher membership the opportunity to get in early and have a better chance of commissioning their favorite artists. This is an advantage as some artists will only take a limited number of commissions each day (or sometimes for the entire convention).

I wandered into the Dealer’s Den. The room was large and there were well over 40 artists and vendors. Some booths were receiving more attention than others, just like at other science fiction convention dealer’s rooms I had attended.

(Recollections from the field notes of Dusty Fleener, 2014)

Artist’s Alley is a designated space at a convention for artists to display and sell their works. Unlike the Dealer’s Den, this space is usually mutable, meaning artists and vendors must usually follow the first-come, first-served practice established by the convention’s organizers and are not guaranteed space throughout the duration of the convention. An artist may find a table open to rent for one day, only to return the next day to discover that the Artist’s Alley may be fully booked. The advantage to getting a space in the Artist’s Alley is that it is usually cheaper than buying a space inside the Dealer’s Den, and if the artist

won't be attending for the entire convention they won't have purchased an entire table for the length of the convention when they are not able to make use of it. Artists in Artist's Alley don't seem to get formal mention or advertising in the convention books or on the convention's website, again possibly due to the informal nature of Artist's Alley.

The Dealer's Den is a structured space. Vendors and artists purchase table space and often have access to extra options such as electrical outlets and secured on-site storage of art and goods that the Artist's Alley space does not usually have. People registered to have space in the Dealer's Den are often listed on the convention's website and convention event book. This can serve as a draw, bringing in potential attendees when popular artists commit to attend a convention. The Dealer's Den, according to interviewee 'Tasha,' is a more formalized space. "Professional artists and vendors are usually in there...casual artists and people who aren't at the convention to do art or sell their works full time are usually out in the Alley." The Dealer's Den space does seem to confer a certain legitimacy to furry artists and vendors, compared to those who operate from the Artist's Alley. The permanency of a dedicated, listed space at a convention hall which only persists for a few days seems to solidify their identity as artists.

The furry fandom revolves around the artwork: works of fantasy, science fiction, erotic, pornography, parody, cartoons, symbolic, and spiritual. A trip down Artist's Alley and into the Dealer's Den will reveal many of these artistic genres and a few more. Furry art comes in many forms: fursuits and Conbadges just cover the most noticeable material. Artists' prints, furry literature books, graphic novels, pottery, adult material, music, apparel, jewelry and other goods are also available for perusing or purchase.

Like fursuits, furry art is a very visible form of the fandom and is perhaps the earliest interaction with furry material culture which people will encounter. Mainstream online art and discussion galleries, such as deviantART, include subsections of “anthro” artwork which are accessed for viewing by non-furries. At Rainfurrest 2011’s “So This Is Your First Furry Con” informational panel, the audience was invited by the panelists to volunteer information on how they “found the fandom.” Several responses indicated that they had come across “anthro” art on sites like deviantART and began using online resources to find out more about the furry community. Some attendees followed online web comics, were readers of stories involving anthropomorphic animal characters (such as Brian Jacques’ Redwall series, or the Chronicles of Narnia), were participants in online multi-user fantasy worlds such as Second Life, or avid followers of video game franchises where anthropomorphic animal characters featured prominently (Starfox, Sonic the Hedgehog, Okami, etc.). Animated movies created by Disney, such as The Lion King, were also mentioned as creating interest in anthropomorphic art. In one instance I overheard a furry mention he was drawn to anthropomorphic art, largely because of his spiritual interests of animism and totemic beliefs. These were drawn from an appreciation for the animal stories of North American Indian tribes he learned about in grade school history classes and the Boy Scouts of America. The Cub Scout handbooks which are written for youths, feature an anthropomorphized bobcat, bear, and wolf characters serving as guides to comprehending lesson material.

Many of the artists I was familiar with when first encountering the furry community have left the fandom, taking their artistic styles and often their artwork with them for

various reasons. Some tired of the fandom and its politics, others discovered religion, and a few just disappeared. This does not dissuade me from looking at new artists' work, or desiring to see original artwork in person which I had only previously seen posted online. The opportunity to meet furry artists and to commission or purchase artwork from them directly on site is perhaps a considerable draw for people to attend conventions.

Artists Alleys and Dealer's Dens provide an opportunity for community artists to meet with one another in person to discuss potential collaboration projects, provide art critiques, or share business advice to one another. Artists may step away from their tables in the Dealer's Den to go to convention programming (informational panels, guest of honor panels, gaming events, social events, and so on). Some artists I met with shared the sentiment that their whole convention experience is usually spent in the Dealer's Den. Those who have assistants feel freer to leave the table for short breaks in order to go to events or meet with friends. Dealer's assistants are also used like gofers to retrieve forgotten supplies, run errands, or bring food to their artist.

During my time as a dealer's assistant in 2012 and 2013, I helped with upselling artwork and merchandise for the dealer, performed food runs, and minded the table while the artist went on breaks. The latter action kept the artist from needing to lose time closing up her table, securing her merchandise and supplies, or missing potential sales to customers. Furry conventions will usually have allowances for a dealer to have at least one assistant arrive early each day to help with setup; assistants are issued with special ribbons or badge markings to denote their privileged access to the controlled space. This is useful if the dealer has a large amount of merchandise to setup and take down at the end of each

day, or has large tables and inventory to mind such as furry publishing companies or specialist product vendors that need to be mindful of who accesses controlled materials such as adult art or products. Conventions will usually denote underage attendees and control their access to certain spaces or events being run by making their presence known through obvious specialized markings on their membership badges or lanyards.

Furry oriented publishing companies like SofaWolf Press or Jarlidium Press will often have a presence at conventions in the Dealer's Den area, selling books by furry authors and introducing new fans to the written and graphic novel materials being produced. Rainfurrest has built itself as the furry writer's convention, and so non-furry vendors such as Pandora House Crafts, who specialize in creating custom pens, writing and drawing implements that are popular with attendees, will also attend to take advantage of the market brought to town by the convention.

Other furry companies such as leather crafter Lagarto or adult novelty creator BadDragon also have their draw on the convention attendees. As Rainfurrest is known for its writing track, non-furry vendor Pandora House Crafts had a presence selling custom upcycled pens, digital styluses, and other writing tools to attendees.

ART SHOW

The art show at a furry convention is similar to other fandom conventions. At Rainfurrest, it is a restricted space, meaning that only convention attendees who have paid their convention association memberships at the registration desk are allowed entry. It features artwork, which is usually for sale via silent auction, submitted from various community artists. The artwork displayed by an artist will usually have a starting bid and

occasionally a “buy it now” or “quick sale” option which allows the bidding process to be avoided and the art purchased immediately by a convention attendee. Artwork which is purchased at the quick sale price is left on display through the duration of the convention at the art show and is made available for pickup at a designated point near the end of the convention. The artists don’t necessarily have to be present at a convention to have their artwork displayed and can either arrange with the convention staff in advance or with the assistance of friends who are attending the convention to get it entered into the art show on their behalf.

Artwork that is deemed for mature audiences is often partitioned off in an additionally controlled space with another convention staff member acting as gatekeeper to keep photos from being taken or underage convention participants from entering.

PANELS

At Rainfurrest in 2012 I served as a co-panelist for the ‘Hybrids Roundtable’ and ‘Hiding and Coming Out as a Furry’ panels, having volunteered after my 2011 convention experience. The two panels, having been offered previously in 2011, varied in content and presentation with new panelists running the events – adding and altering what was addressed in previous years as well as including responses to new questions raised by attendees. By introducing new panelists and moderators, new information is shared and alternative perspectives into recurring panels’ content for convention attendees. Some panels can be repeated without a need for changing panelists or content as they are focused on skill building, such as fursuit construction or sewing, or are generally useful to

be perpetuated every year such as orientation panels for people new to fandom conventions.

Panels at Rainfurrest were focused on entertainment, recreational activities, educational workshops, craft tutorials, or discussion on special topics or themes of the convention. Panels are often led by volunteer presenters and can focus on a variety of topics which have been approved by convention staff as appropriate for audiences and beneficial to the convention's programming. Panelists are usually area specialists or have vested interest in the topics being discussed and can lead the activities solo or as part of a larger group which may include a moderator. Topics can range from orientation on a person's first furry convention to the creation of fursuits, drawing or writing techniques workshops, fandom discussions on franchise characters, and special events which focus on the convention's guest(s) of honor.

GUESTS OF HONOR

As with other fandom conventions, furry conventions will often have selected in advance guests of honor who will be featured on all promotional materials released in advance of the upcoming convention. This acts as both publicity for those who have been selected, highlighting their work to the fandom community, as well as their participation in special programming at the convention such as guest of honor dinners, question and answer sessions, autograph sessions, or how-to panels led by the guests of honor if they are artists, writers, or fursuiters.

Furry conventions will usually select an artist, writer, and a fursuiter guest of honor and will sometimes include musical or other special guest of honor listings as part of their

program line up. Part of the convention programming may include a special guest of honor dinner for attendees to pay an additional fee to attend, special interviews with the guests of honor at the opening or closing ceremonies of a convention, or special panels run by the guests of honor covering topics related to their fields of specialization or interests. For example, the artist guest of honor may hold a panel where they discuss their techniques or supplies. The fursuit guest of honor may run a panel on how to safely fursuit outside of the furry fandom in public spaces such as a park, or explore some fursuit construction steps for those looking to build their own suits. A writing guest of honor may run a special three-day track program for aspiring writers where participants will work on writing projects under the guidance of professional writers or, like Alan Dean Foster, hold a question and answer or autograph session for fans.

FURSUIT PARADE

The fursuit parade is a formally scheduled and organized event at a furry convention where all attendees who have fursuits are encouraged to meet at a designated space and walk through a pre-planned route designed to pass through most of the major areas of a convention's spaces such as main hallways and the Dealer's Den. There is usually an opportunity for a large group photo to be taken either at the beginning or the conclusion of the parade. The official count of fursuiters is often taken during this event for the end of convention report.

Fursuit parade participants are sometimes organized and grouped together by parade organizers by represented species, such as having all the dragons together, or self-organize if with a friend group, local Furmeet club, or with other furies who have

purchased fursuits from particular fursuit makers and have similarity in fursuit design.

Fursuiters at Rainfurrest queued up and followed those in front of them with a few individuals acting out more than just stomping forward and waving.

A violin played a rendition of Roger Miller's Whistle Stop as the leading line of fursuiters came down the hallway into view. There was a cavalcade of faux fur colors, squeakers, bandanas, props, muffled shouts, high fives and thumbs up. Some were very animated, wiggling their paws at those of us on the sidelines, shuffling excitedly to the left or right acting every bit like a happy lab while others shambled forward in pairs or tilted their heads awkwardly as they tried not to step onto the dragging tail of someone slowing down ahead of them. A few onlookers were recording the procession with their video cameras, some snapping photos of parade participants who paused to playfully pose.

"You think you'll get into 'suiting?" Tinkerr, a tall and lanky Canadian with a chiseled face asked me as a fursuiter with their own camcorder walked by, filming the audience along the route. I waved out of reflex and shook my head.

"Not me, I don't think that is something I'm really interested in doing," I said, still unsure of where I should be attempting to make eye contact with the pair of multicolored cats that just strode past where we were standing.

"Ah," he said. "Well I think I would like to someday when I have the money to do it."

As the parade progressed we talked about the research he had done on fursuits, fursuit makers, and which ones he preferred the looks of over others. Names like ScribbleFox and BeetleCat came up, along with a few others I didn't yet recognize. He pointed out a fursuiter walking past and said to me "See, you can tell that is made by MadeFurYou by the style."

An attendee without a fursuit walked by, skirting along the edge of the parade and someone sitting next to us called out to him, wanting to know if he was wearing a "hyooman suit."

"I'm not in the parade, I'm just walking with the flow of traffic!" he responded.

We chuckled, watching his slow progression down the row of fursuit watchers.

Some fursuiters provided their own music, dancing to the tunes spilling out of their portable speakers. Others skipped forward when space allowed. People called out to their friends when they recognized their fursuit and would receive a hug, wave or fist pump in response.

“Partial,” a gaunt and angular man with glasses leaning over a nearby table commented to his companions who agreed. I looked up to see someone only wearing a partial fursuit composed of gloves and a head strut by with bare skinned arms exposed.

“I would have worn a long sleeve shirt,” said his friend wearing a red t-shirt with a black t-shirt pulled askew over it which read “Furries Ruin Everything.”

“That breaks the magic.”

~Recollections from the field notes of Dusty Fleener

SOCIAL EVENTS, ROOM PARTIES, DANCES

Furry conventions like Rainfurrest are first and foremost a social event for the furry community and several areas and activities are designed with socialization in mind.

Conventions will often have designated spaces set aside for people to play popular video, board, or card games. There are often programming events specifically scheduled for performance art such as community variety shows, art jam events, meet and greets, or specialized games for fursuiters.

Room parties are events that are not unique to furry conventions, are hosted in individual hotel rooms, and are not overseen by the convention as official programming tracks. Furry themed room parties held at science fiction conventions were the precursors to furmeets and later furry conventions (WikiFur - Room Party 2014). Furry fandom members Mark Merlino and Rod O’Riley held the first publicized funny-animal fan party at WesterCon 38 in Sacramento, California in 1985 (Patten 2012).

Room parties can be ‘open door’ meaning people are free to wander in as they encounter them, or are invite only events. It is up to the room party hosts to ensure that the noise levels and safety rules of the convention and hotel are followed, or else they risk

visits from convention security or hotel staff which could lead to their expulsion from the event.

Occasionally people will purchase or prepare door art, or room signs, which will sometimes be convention themed, in advance and tape it to the door of their hotel room. When I asked an attendee outside of ConOps, who I will call Shep, about this practice he said that it is “a way to advertise who showed up to the convention. Anyone can do it, if they want other [furries] to know or who they are rooming with having a room party, makes it easier to find them and hang out.”

The room parties I visited were not too dissimilar from what one might encounter on a college campus. Consumption of alcohol, drinking games, video games, general socializing about the day’s activities, inspection of a fursuit designer’s work, or friends becoming reacquainted with one another after having been separated for a year between conventions visits were some of the activities one might encounter from gathering to gathering.

The ConSuite or patron lounge at Rainfurrest was a restricted area, open only to upper tier convention attendees. This was an additional space for convention patron and sponsor level members to get refreshments, snacks or small meals while socializing in a suite of the hotel between events. Most other science fiction conventions have a ConSuite which is open to all convention attendees and isn’t restricted to higher tier attending members of the convention. Unlike individual room parties this space was administered by the convention staff.

Dances are usually held in the evenings after most of the scheduled daytime programming has completed. Dances are organized by the convention staff and will have guest DJs, bands, or themes for attendees to enjoy. The dances I attended at Rainfurrest happened to be focused more on electronic dance music though I was told that the music can change genres from night to night or convention to convention depending on who has organized the DJ line up.

At a convention's closing ceremonies there are a few items which get discussed with the remaining attendees. The total convention attendance is announced, final count of fursuiters in the fursuit parade, any conbook or convention scavenger hunt results are shared, and the theme for the next convention is also announced.

The final organized events for a furry convention are often the Dead Dog Party, held after all the convention's equipment has been stowed. It serves as both a decompression event for remaining convention attendees and staff as well as an incentive for convention volunteers to remain on site to conclude work in wrapping up the convention (WikiFur - Dead Dog Party 2015).

CONCLUSION

This thesis seeks to provide an overview of the furry community and how its members interact with the fandom, define, represent and identify as part of the larger community, participate in the culture via real world interactions, and explore what community interactions occur in the space of their conventions. To that end, my goal was to use thick description and participant observation techniques to help place myself in a position to describe social relations and identities of a few members within the furry community. I was hoping that I brought to the readers some of the authentic furry convention experiences which might help address and dispel some of the perceived stereotypes surrounding this particular polyvocal community.

The goal was not to present information as more truthful than other items brought forward by other works but to provide additional information as a means of comparison to future explorations of this community as framed by an emic perspective, supported by “native” participants in the population. The information presented was intended as a kind of snapshot on the types of people who participate in the furry community in our region, what occurs at a major furry convention, and what meaning those individuals take from these interactions and then reinvest back into the fandom.

The furry fandom has meaning to individuals for interpersonal connections, friendships, artistic expression, and self-identity explorations that are filled with a spectrum of individuals from all walks of life, sexual orientations, and economic stratifications – which shows that it is as viable a community to study as any other community an anthropologist might endeavor to study. As this community selectively presents traits,

displays and performances in the real and digital world, some parallels could be drawn toward other mainstream online communities such as those of Facebook which serves as another form of sanctioned self-representation.

I believe that additional research opportunities could be carried out on this subculture which crosses the boundaries of online and real-world interactions from an anthropological perspective. There are opportunities for exploring the inclusive nature of this particular community, female participation and composition in furry fandom, and popular culture growth in the newly initiated vs. old guard fandom generations. Additionally, global fandom growth and how furry is defined, acted upon, and claimed in other countries around the world in comparison to U.S. ideas and concepts is something which I would have liked to pursue but it was not practical for me to undertake considering the scope, scale and time needed to interact with these regions.

I would like to thank all of the furry community members who helped make this project possible by sharing their recollections on events, personal anecdotes, and lived experiences.

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Documentation about the furry community exists primarily online, along with their self-produced communication resources such as wikis, blogs, and other ephemera. Other valuable sources of information for this thesis have been notes taken by this author, recorded interviews with participants of the furry community, and my observations of these personas in their natural habitat—furry conventions. More traditional resources are listed below.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

University of Idaho

Office of Research Assurances
Institutional Review Board
PO Box 443010
Moscow ID 83844-3010

Phone: 208-885-6162
Fax: 208-885-5752
irb@uidaho.edu

To: Frey, Rodney
Cc: Fleener, Dustin

From: Traci Craig, PhD
Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
University Research Office
Moscow, ID 83844-3010

IRB No.: IRB00000843

FWA: FWA00005639

Date: November 9, 2011

Title: 'CONSTRUCTIONS OF "THE OTHER" AND THE FURRY FANDOM'

Project: 11-056
Approved: 11/09/11
Expires: 11/08/12

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for the above-named research project is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this memo. Should there be significant changes in the protocol for this project, it will be necessary for you to resubmit the protocol for review by the Committee.



Traci Craig

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD YEAR ONE EXTENSION

University of Idaho

October 9, 2012

Office of Research Assurances
Institutional Review Board
PO Box 443010
Moscow ID 83844-3010

Phone: 208-885-6162
Fax: 208-885-5752
irb@uidaho.edu

To: Frey, Rodney

Cc: Fleener, Dustin

From: Traci Craig, PhD
Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
University Research Office
Moscow, ID 83844-3010

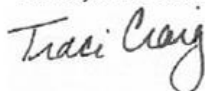
Title: 'CONSTRUCTIONS OF "THE OTHER" AND THE FURRY
FANDOM'

Project: 11-056
Approved: 11/09/12
Expires: 11/08/13

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the **first-year extension** of your proposal is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects as no changes in protocol have been made on this project.

This extension of approval is valid until the date stated above at which time a second extension will need to be requested if you are still working on this project. If not, please advise the IRB committee when the project is completed.

Thank you for submitting your extension request.



Traci Craig

APPENDIX C: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD YEAR TWO EXTENSION

August 6, 2013

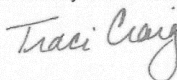
University of Idaho

Office of Research Assurances
Institutional Review Board
875 Perimeter Drive, MS 3010
Moscow ID 83844-3010Phone: 208-885-6162
Fax: 208-885-5752
irb@uidaho.eduTo: Frey, Rodney
Cc: Fleener, DustinFrom: Traci Craig
Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
University Research Office
Moscow, ID 83844-3010Title: 'CONSTRUCTIONS OF "THE OTHER" AND THE FURRY
FANDOM'Project: 11-056
Approved: 11/09/13
Expires: 11/08/14

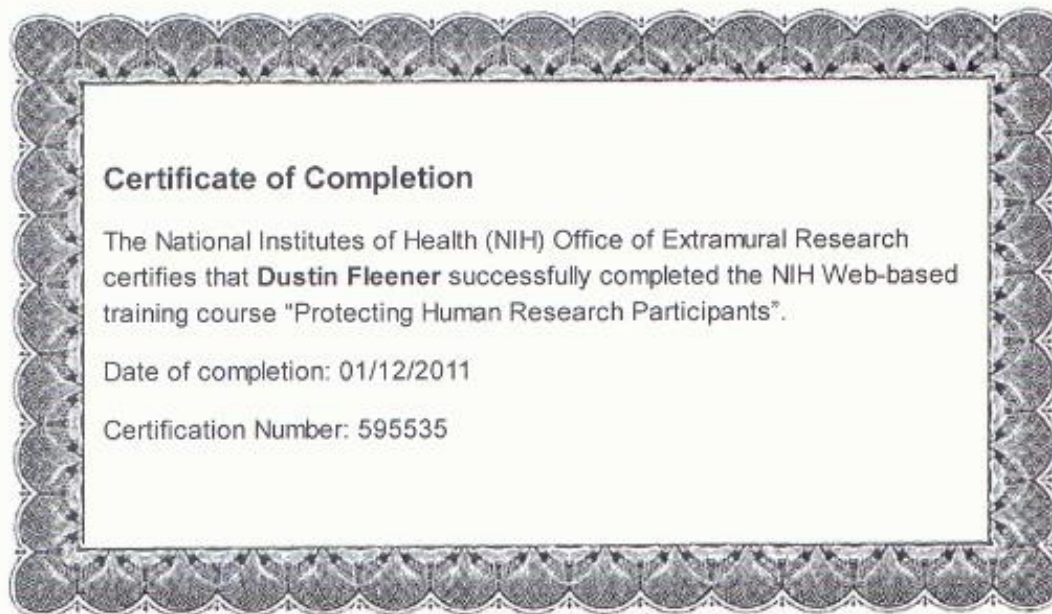
On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the **second-year extension** of your proposal is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects as no changes in protocol have been made on this project.

This is a second year extension of approval and is valid until the date listed above at which time a new protocol will need to be requested if you are still working on this project. If not, please advise the IRB committee when you are completed. Should there be any significant changes in your proposal within the year, it will be necessary for you to resubmit it for review.

Thank you for submitting your extension request.



Traci Craig

APPENDIX D: NATIONAL HEALTH INSTITUTE CERTIFICATION

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM USED FOR INTERVIEWS

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Constructions of 'The Other' and the Furry Fandom

Principal Researcher(s): Dustin Fleener

The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board has approved this project.

The purpose of this study is to collect an insider perspective on what it means to self-identify as a member of the furry community.

You will be asked to voluntarily participate in this research project, Constructions of 'The Other' and the Furry Fandom. The nature of your participation will be that of an interviewee and/or guide to the research in participant observations. You will be asked to help provide your understanding of furry culture and the interpersonal relationship, societal and self-identity issues you may have faced through the course of your lifetime and the personal insights and values relating to those issues.

By gaining access to your observations and experience on how identifying yourself as a member of the furry community has changed the way society interacts with you and how you interact with it, you will be offering the general public, local community members, future researchers and your fellows in the furry culture a valuable understanding about what it means to be a 'furry' and what obstacles you and others may face in self-identifying with this culture. The information gathered with your assistance will provide insight into the stigmas often associated with identifying with this particular sub-culture.

To help accomplish this you will be asked a series of questions relating to your knowledge of the furry fandom, your personal history and interactions with the fandom, perceived or lived experiences that you may have faced in self-identifying as a member of the fandom and any relevant information you feel would be beneficial to share with the Principal Researcher.

Identities of individuals and participants in this research project will not be disclosed. All contributions made will be confidential and pseudonyms will be used for all participants to protect individuals from inadvertent identification or diffusion of sensitive information.

The duration of the interview will vary from an hour to two – three hours. Follow-up interviews may be requested of you.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with your participation in this research project.

This is a voluntary project; you have the right not to participate in it or to withdraw from the project at any time.

At the end of this form there is a list of persons you can contact if you have any questions about this research, your rights, and any other research-related injury as a subject of this research.

I acknowledge that Dustin Fleener, Principal Researcher, has fully explained to me the purposes and procedures, and the risks of this research; he has informed me that I may withdraw from participation at any time without prejudice; and has informed me that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I freely and voluntarily consent to my participation in the above mentioned research project.

Investigator
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Ph. 208-885-6268

I have reviewed this consent form and understand and agree to its contents.

I understand that my name will not be used in the research or disclosed to anyone other than the project researcher(s). I understand that pseudonyms will be used for all participants in this research to protect identities and prevent inadvertent identification of individuals related to the research. I understand that all contributions will be kept confidential.

List any special stipulations or conditions established by the interviewee in the conduct or disposition of this project:

I, (please use full name)

_____, state that I am over 18 years of age, and freely and voluntarily wish to participate in the research being proposed above.

Signature of Interviewee: _____

Signature of Principal Researcher: _____

Date: _____

This project has been properly filed as required by Federal, State, and University of Idaho procedures, and has been reviewed and approved by the University of Idaho Office of Research Assurances. You can contact them at:

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APPENDIX F: 'ELISE' INTERVIEW

Dusty: How long do you consider yourself to have been involved with the furry community?

Elise: I have been in the furry community since early 2006, a little before when I made my FA account.

Dusty: What started your interest in furry and the furry community? Was it a movie? A video game? A story? Artwork?

Elise: It's funny, the first furry picture that I drew was actually in 2004. And, back then, I didn't even know what a furry was. I was on deviantART at the time and a lot of people who I knew had things called 'fursonas'. An anthro form to represent yourself online. And I wanted to jump onto the band wagon and create one for myself. I was a semi new artist at the time (I had only been drawing seriously since 2003) and thought this was a cool concept. I wasn't good at drawing people but I was half decent at drawing animals. So I thought that morphing the two would be a good idea! But I only drew my fursona (and other people's anthro characters) at the time. I was very familiar with anthropomorphism through Disney and Warner Bros cartoons so the concept wasn't foreign to me. It wasn't till I started drawing my own four-legged characters as anthros that I actually started to get interested in furies. I had friends who were furies but didn't think much of it. I found that I had a knack for drawing anthro characters and it really took on from there. I didn't learn the full extent of the furry fandom until I opened my account on FurAffinity.

Dusty: Do you consider yourself a part of the furry community? If so, how do you participate? (Video games, art, writing, chat programs, conventions, furmeets, etc.)

Elise: At this moment, I'm not as much a part of the community as I used to be. I went to one con in 2006 (CaliFur) and spent many years on Furcadia. At this point, I'm only really active in the artistic sense. And even that is fleeting.

Dusty: How do you define being a furry to someone who isn't familiar with the furry fandom?

Elise: A furry is someone who really enjoys anthropomorphic characters. And, when asked what an anthropomorphic character is, I tell them a character more like Goofy than Pluto. An animal person. Like Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Disney's Robin Hood.

Dusty: What does being a furry mean to you? Is it just a passing interest? A hobby? A sense of identity?

Elise: Being a furry to me is a hobby. I go through phases where I'm super into it and I go through times when I'm only in it for the artwork. It used to be a form of sexual release for me. Yes, I did yiff. Yes, I did adult rps on Furcadia. I have done adult rated artwork, but now

it's much more of an artistic release. 90% of the artwork that I do is furry or anthro. But it never really goes away. It isn't something that I feel like I have to grow out of. At least not the way that I have it incorporated into my life.

Dusty: How did you feel when you discovered that there were other people like yourself interested in anthropomorphic art, stories, and characters?

Elise: To be honest, I wasn't surprised. I grew up in the 90's, when I knew there were people who were into Robin Hood and Road Rovers and things like that. It didn't seem strange that there were people who still liked the characters from their childhoods, something they felt comfortable with. Something they could identify with.

Dusty: You say that you did not learn until after 2004 what furry was, what can you say now that you have learned of it?

Elise: As I said before, I wasn't terribly surprised at it. I knew there were fans of 'animal people' out there, like me. It was the very sexual aspect that surprised me the most at the time.

Dusty: What were your primary educational sources on learning about furry? Forums? Friends? Furry websites? Fan fiction/role-play groups?

Elise: I'd say that FurAffinity, Furdadia and a couple friends of mine taught me about being a furry. Probably the most being FurAffinity. It was sort of a candid view of it, what it was like from those who enjoyed and participated in it.

Dusty: You say you are not as much of the community as you used to be, what changed?

Elise: I think that I just got busy with life and my time to invest in it sort of faltered. I also had a boyfriend who was very into the furry lifestyle and when we broke up it reminded me of him too much. Me [sic] losing my interest had nothing to do with the fandom, it was me who changed.

Dusty: Do you work with fellow furry artists?

Elise: I do from time to time, but not nearly as often as I'd like to. Furry artists are always very creative and willing to give you advice on your artwork because, I guess, artwork is a lot of what furry is.

Dusty: What is it like being an artist in the furry community? What makes it different?

Elise: I have done artwork for a lot of different people. From stuff for children's tv show pilots to fantasy book illustrations, and I always have the most fun doing furry artwork.

There are so many takes on furry artwork that there is a lot that you can sort of play around with and make it your own. There are those who like the really toony characters to those who like them photorealistic. I myself like them to me semi-realistic. In that if they were to be in the "real world" they would make sense. But I digress, doing artwork for furies has always been a lot of fun for me. And I think that's what keeps me going at it.

Dusty: What was CaliFur like for you?

Elise: I am, by nature, a shy person. So going to Califur alone was quite an experience. I was supposed to go with one of my local furry friends but he had to back out last minute, so I decided to go anyway. I had only been in the fandom for a year or two and I didn't really understand the variety of furry that there is. And it was a bit overwhelming. I actually only stayed one day because it was too much for me to experience on my own, without a friend to sort of introduce me to it all.

Dusty: Had you heard of furry conventions before? Was it something to look forward to or was it a little intimidating?

Elise: I had heard of conventions before and was mildly interested in going. As I said above, I was supposed to go with a friend of mine but he had to bail last minute. I was looking forward to it but it was also intimidating. The furry community is very close knit, so it was scary going in alone. It felt like the first day at a new school: everyone already knew each other and I was the new kid trying to fit in. But I met a lot of nice people and it was a pleasant experience.

Dusty: Was CaliFur your first time meeting fellow furies? Or have you met up with other furies outside of conventions?

Elise: I had a friend who lived close by who was a furry, so the convention wasn't the first time that I had met another furry in person.

Dusty: Were you just attending for fun or were you participating as an artist?

Elise: I was attending for fun and also, I guess in a way, to see what it was all about. I guess to see what it would be like to be a furry in person rather than just online. I only really keep my furry business online and never really in person. I don't dress up, I'm mainly into it for the artwork. So it was only on my computer for me. Experiencing it in person was, well... an experience.

Dusty: What kinds of events happened at CaliFur that caught your eye?

Elise: I don't remember going to many of the events at the con. I browsed the artist alley and hung out with some furies in the lobby, I didn't do any of the panels or anything like

that. Maybe if I were with a group I was more comfortable with it would have been different.

Dusty: What drew you into Furcadia?

Elise: The roleplaying. I had done Rping in the past and, when I found out that there was a community that did it with just furry characters, I was all in. But it didn't take me long to get into yiffing, which was ultimately what kept me going there for so long. I mentioned before that I used the furry community as a sexual outlet for myself and this is where that happened. But, it wasn't that it was "furry sex" that got me going there. It was that it was sexual at all. It really could have been a human themed forum and I still would have been into it.

Dusty: How long were you involved with Furcadia?

Elise: I was into Furc for a solid 5-6 years.

Dusty: Do you think the Internet played a role in the furry fandom's growth and perpetuation?

Elise: I give the internet credit for a lot of what the furry community is. Most of what the furry community is, from my experience, is the internet. Getting more and viewing artwork, meeting people, all of that. A lot of it happens over the internet.

Dusty: As an artist, do you still feel like you are part of the community? Or do you feel your place has changed as a furry?

Elise: The furry community is nothing without its artwork, and therefore its artists. So, yes, I feel like I am a very important part of the community.

Dusty: Can you tell me what the importance of a fursona is?

Elise: A fursona is a character that one makes to represent themselves online or in the furry community. It can either be based on how you really are or how you want to be. It can be realistic or fantastical. It's how **you** want to be represented online.

Dusty: Do you have a fursona for yourself?

Elise: Yes, my fursona is a rat named 45.

Dusty: What does your fursona mean to you?

Elise: My fursona is a character that I use to represent myself online and in the community. If I draw myself, it's usually as a rodent. This is partially because I'm not very good at

drawing people and I find animal people much more interesting. But she is a very important character to me, I've even tried weaving her into some of the stories that I write up involving my other furry characters.

Dusty: Has your fursona evolved over time? If so, is that typical among furies?

Elise: Yes, my fursona has changed over the years. The most important change is that she changed from a wolf to a rat. When I created "45" I was 16, and I was a very different person than I am today. So it only makes sense that she would change as I have. My first fursona was a wolf because, at the time, wolves were what I was the best at drawing. I had also been a fan of wolves for *years*. But, as I started drawing more and getting better at drawing other sorts of animals, I reevaluated myself and found that I was more like a rat than a wolf. So I made the change.

Dusty: In your opinion, are fursonas needed to be part of the furry fandom? In your opinion, if you have a fursona are you better able to participate in the fandom than someone who doesn't have a fursona? Can people be furies and not have a fursona? For example, people don't need aliases or fictional versions of themselves to be Trekkies. Or are fursonas part of being furry (and therefore a requirement)?

Elise: I think that fursonas are an important part of being a furry. Because this is a fandom about the love of anthropomorphic characters, we create characters for ourselves. Much like a Harry Potter fan creating a wizard character for themselves. I think that it is possible to be a furry and not have a fursona but I think that if you do that you are missing out on a large part of the fandom. Most of us create (and want) artwork of our characters with other peoples, sort of like photographs of what we do. And, if you don't have a fursona, there isn't a way for you to participate in that way.

Dusty: Do you have multiple fursonas? If so, why?

Elise: I only have one official fursona, but I have many characters that I have made up for stories and Furcadia. And each of those characters represent different parts of me. Sophie is the sad and unfortunate side, Jennifer is the sexual side, Shelly is the strong sister, etc. But "45" is the only one that is all of me at once. If that makes sense at all?

APPENDIX G: 'TASHA' INTERVIEW

Dusty: How do you define being a furry?

Tasha: Being a furry is just having an affinity to animals and identifying, usually, with a specific kind of animal.

Dusty: So, anyone can be a furry?

Tasha: Yes.

Dusty: When you say 'having an affinity to animals' what do you mean?

Tasha: Well, you don't have to have an affinity. A love of animals, I guess, is what you need. If you hate animals then I guess it would be hard to be a furry.

Dusty: What does being a furry mean to you?

Tasha: It means being able to be open about my love of animals and how I have connections to lots of types of animals. It gives me a way to enjoy animals in a whole different fashion. It's my artistic identity, it is how I identify myself as an artist.

Dusty: You have to be a furry to be open about your love of animals?

Tasha: No, it's not a requirement.

Dusty: Can you have your love of animals to non-furries, for example?

Tasha: You can be open of your love of animals to non-furries.

Dusty: What do you mean by 'enjoy animals in a whole different fashion'?

Tasha: It's like bringing a piece of science fiction to that. It's like people who identify themselves as Trekkies...I don't know how to explain it.

Dusty: So, to you, being a furry is just about being a fan of animals?

Tasha: Well, for me being a furry, it is also about expressing an artistic side, too. It's not just about loving animals.

Dusty: Do you consider yourself a member of the furry community? Are you fairly involved with furry or is it merely a passing interest?

Tasha: Yes. I like to think I am fairly involved with it. I take commissions, I talk with others in the fandom...I am not a social butterfly *laughs*

Dusty: What is it like to be a furry artist?

Tasha: Within the community it is fairly easy. At times it can be a challenge to stand out among all the other amazing artists. When it comes to, like, the 'outside world,' you know, non-furries...it can be fairly hard. I describe myself as an artist that draws werewolves and fantasy creatures because there is a stigma of being a furry. Most people don't know what furry is.

Dusty: So what is furry?

Tasha: Well, how I explain it to people who are on the outside, I don't know what their reaction is...so I explain it as werewolves and people who create these characters to represent themselves. For someone who has seen the CSI episode about furries they give you the weird freak look and I don't talk to them about being furry. I don't talk about it. I avoid talking about it and don't reveal I am a furry because I don't want them to think I am going to turn into a sex freak.

Dusty: What's the stigma?

Tasha: Well, because the CSI episode portraying us as it is all about sex, they think that it is all about dressing up in animal costumes and having sex. That's not the part of furry that I am, some other people do, but I don't. That's not me.

Dusty: I hear a lot of folks within the furry community refer to the CSI episode. Is it solely the CSI episode that has created the stigma about furries?

Tasha: I think it is the most well-known documentation of furries to people who aren't a furry to people who are outside of the furry fandom.

Dusty: So what is the stigma of being known as a furry?

Tasha: Well because of how that episode portrayed so many people as just dressing up and having sex and not doing what a 'normal' person does. People see that episode and think that is all furries want to do, dress up in costumes and have sex with each other or animals. In my experiences, that is not what most people in the fandom do.

Dusty: But there are people who do that in the fandom?

Tasha: Yes. There's the eccentric in every community.

Dusty: Do you think other groups and fandoms have such people in their ranks?

Tasha: Yes, I do.

Dusty: So it's normal?

Tasha: I think there is always those who, like, find sexual identification and what turns them on is different from others. Everyone is their own person.

Dusty: Does being an artist within the furry community alleviate the stigma?

Tasha: No, not really. I am still part of the community so it's still part of the stigma of associating with being furry.

Dusty: What is your role in the furry community as an artist?

Tasha: Role?

Dusty: Are you creating the fandom? Perpetuating it? You are leaving cultural material in everything you create.

Tasha: Yeah, I'm part of...I help make the images of the fandom. So, that means I do have a finger in how it is represented.

Dusty: What do you do to 'represent' the furry community?

Tasha: I make art.

Dusty: How do you represent it to someone who has never encountered the fandom before, or is encountering it for the first time?

Tasha: I'd show them a cute piece of artwork instead of adult artwork, or if they want to see specifically furry art I would explain it as a werewolf or a werecat.

Dusty: You would refer to it as a werewolf or werecat?

Tasha: Yes, I wouldn't refer to it as a furry right off the bat.

Dusty: Why not?

Tasha: Well, because even for someone who doesn't know what furry is, you can say 'werewolf' or 'werecat' it is much easier for them to comprehend because everyone has encountered that term before. But if you say 'furry' or 'anthro' most people won't understand.

Dusty: Why wouldn't you show them adult artwork?

Tasha: Well, I sort of think of it like, if you are talking about a model, or a woman, you don't go grab a Playboy and show them....you go get a fashion magazine or an anatomy book. Definitely don't go pull a Playboy.

Dusty: There is a sexual aspect to furry then?

Tasha: There's a sexual aspect to any real big group...or, what do you call it? Culture? Subculture? Usually. Not always, but usually.

Dusty: Do other groups that have sexual aspects to them suffer the same stigmas, in your opinion, that furry does?

Tasha: Um, yeah, I do. I think any different culture has that problem. But, I don't think furies were huge or a well-known thing until we were shown on CSI. When we were shown there, it was shown in a way as if it expressed the whole fandom.

Dusty: So this sexual aspect is the source of stigma?

Tasha: Part of it. The other part is...something different.

Dusty: What is the different?

Tasha: The unknown, the different, it's not always accepted.

Dusty: Being furry is being different?

Tasha: Yeah. But everybody is different.

Dusty: So being furry is...a choice?

Tasha: Yeah, nobody forces you to be a furry.

Dusty: What is the furry fandom?

Tasha: A group of people that love animals and that enjoys connecting with each other and sharing that love.

Dusty: So it is mostly social?

Tasha: I think it's a major social thing, even though we have reclusive people just like everywhere else.

Dusty: When you say 'reclusive' do you mean 'non-participants'?

Tasha: Well no, they still participate, they are like the quiet kid in the back of the classroom who is there and sometimes speaks up but they are like the background of the community.

Dusty: How is it social for you?

Tasha: I interact with people when I stream my art live over the internet. I chat with people. I love to talk about art and what each...help teach other people, too. I also go to the conventions. One. I go to Rainfurrest currently, for the last few years. I socialize in the Dealer's Room where I sell art. I have also met great friends through venues like that.

Dusty: Do you only talk about furry related things?

Tasha: No, you still talk about regular life. Friends who are getting married, ones who are having children, others that are going to school.

Dusty: Is the social aspect a primary driver in the furry community?

Tasha: Yes. I think so. People have a starting point to, have something in common. They go "Hey! You're a furry, I'm a furry" it gives them a common point to start having something to talk about.

Dusty: Is talking about furry things your common starting place?

Tasha: I don't think it is like the exact starting point. I think talking about the furry art I do is the starting point I have for talking with people. My art is like the foot in the door for starting to talk with people.

Dusty: Is it hard for you to talk with people outside the furry community?

Tasha: In a social setting or a business setting? Socially it is harder for me to talk to new people and to identify something with them. In a business setting I usually start with a business setting and work from there.

Dusty: Do you talk about furry openly?

Tasha: Depends. I talk about my art more and like I said earlier, kind of feel them out by talking about werewolves and if they are interested I elaborate. If they sneer or don't show much interest I won't talk about being a furry.

Dusty: Do you tell people you are a furry?

Tasha: Depends on the person, but yes I do.

Dusty: Is that hard?

Tasha: It can be, when you get somebody where you are not sure how they are going to react you get nervous because you don't know if they're going to think they are going to freak...or there are other times where people are like 'oh, I'm a furry' or 'I know someone who is a furry' and that makes it easier and I relax.

Dusty: Being a furry is just being a fan of anthropomorphic animals and characters, so it's like a hobby?

Tasha: For some people it's just a hobby. You know, like someone on the side just collects furry things like a Trekkie collects Star Trek stuff. For others it is their life.

Dusty: But if furry is like a hobby, perhaps similar to stamp collecting or being a Star Trek fan, why is there reluctance to claim identity as such?

Tasha: Because the stigma to it. People don't always want to be labeled as outsiders to the general public or as freaks.

Dusty: And in your opinion you think most non-furries believe furries are freaks?

Tasha: From my experiences with other people, the majority label furries freaks that don't understand or have a friend who is a furry.

Dusty: And if they had a friend who was a furry, that would make a difference?

Tasha: If they have a friend that they accept as being a furry I think they are a little more open to other people who are being furries. They are less close-minded.

Dusty: Is furry the only fandom to which you belong or claim membership in?

Tasha: That's the one I consider myself the most part of.

Dusty: Is the furry fandom mainly centered on art?

Tasha: For me, yes. I think there are other aspects that are more centered on other things. But as an artist, for me, it centers on art.

Dusty: How long have you been involved with the furry fandom?

Tasha: Since 2004. Almost ten years! Whoa. Does that make me a grey muzzle?

Dusty: What's a grey muzzle?

Tasha: Somebody that's been involved in the fandom for a long period of time.

Dusty: How long is that?

Tasha: I think it's about ten years when you're considered a grey muzzle.

Dusty: Are there many longtime members?

Tasha: There are those that have been in the fandom around the same amount of time that I have. From what I understand there was an 'original' set of furies before the Internet took off and they didn't care for the publicity that came along with it. Sometimes you will find a furry who has been in the fandom for a really long time. That is getting rarer and rarer.

Dusty: Why is that becoming rare?

Tasha: Well people get tired of fandom, they grow out of it. A huge majority of the fandom is in their late teens and early twenties, you know, they grow up, and figure out that it is not for them anymore and they grow out of it.

Dusty: Is that common to grow out of being furry?

Tasha: Of the people that I know, most of them have stayed within the fandom. Some that are artists get burned out on doing art and taking commissions and they step away for a while. Or they get involved in a relationship with someone that doesn't approve of the furry fandom and they step away for a while. Sometimes they come back, sometimes they don't. Some people just have to walk away sometimes.

Dusty: What do you mean burned out?

Tasha: Burned out is when you get...like artist block. You can't draw, you can't art. When you get burned out on the fandom you get tired of drama and interacting with people. It's like when you just want to step away and get away from people. Just to step away.

Dusty: Can you explain 'drama'?

Tasha: People that, it's more kind of like high school where everything is a major event or a big deal and one small thing can get hugely blown out of proportion.

Dusty: And that's bad?

Tasha: Yeah, you get all these people doing that and you just want to...*laughter* I don't like drama personally...so I tend to ignore them or keep from acknowledging them. People who are trying to cause issues. It is exhausting. People trying to drag other people down. People trying to be like bullies.

Dusty: Is there a lot of that in the fandom?

Tasha: There can be.

Dusty: Is it common?

Tasha: Yes.

Dusty: Are you familiar with the furry fandom's history?

Tasha: Vaguely.

Dusty: Why is that?

Tasha: I've never really tried to go find a comprehensive history of furies. I just take what I have learned and continue to learn and put it away in the store bank in my head.

Dusty: Do furies have a comprehensive history?

Tasha: A written one? I am not sure.

Dusty: How does the furry fandom evolve when it does not seem to have a history that each member can point to?

Tasha: I think it evolves as people join it and leave it and what each individual person brings to it. If you have one person that really loves rainbows and make rainbow huskies, and find others that like rainbow huskies, then it continues on and you have something that you never had before. Or you have this group that loves black tigers, and then that falls out of popularity, well then it disappears. You don't have a huge, written history.

Dusty: So the furry fandom is made up of fads?

Tasha: It can be fads or just individual people.

Dusty: Trekkies have history which non-Trekkies can access; do you think that that lack of furry history is a hindrance?

Tasha: For somebody that is researching the furry culture and wants to know the whole back story it would be an issue. For the average furry I don't think it is an issue.

Dusty: So contemporary furies don't care for the past furry fandom then?

Tasha: It's a case by case I think. Some people are always interested in the past, and other people are just in the here and now.

Dusty: How did you become involved with the furry fandom? How did you learn about it?

Tasha: I originally just loved drawing werewolves! Honest to goodness werewolves. I always enjoyed fantasy movies. I fell in love with Van Helsing the movie. So I drew werewolves, and while researching werewolves I found artists that drew wolves and werewolves and emulated them. They were my first (unknowingly) furry art. How I actually figured out being a furry is I was hanging out with an ex-boyfriend of mine and his friends and one of them asked 'are you a furry?' and me being a high schooler I took it the wrong way and asked him what he meant. He explained a little, like do you have a character, or a fursona, and I said yes. And I finally knew what label to put on it.

Dusty: 'It' being a fan of anthropomorphic art?

Tasha: Yeah. And then I began identifying myself as being a furry.

Dusty: Did you have stigma of it at the time or did that come later?

Tasha: That came later. When I was in high school I didn't really know about the stigma. I was part of a group of people who were furies, we hung out, and that was about it.

Dusty: So it was just an identity to claim then?

Tasha: Yeah, something to identify with as a high schooler and that evolved as I grew up.

Dusty: And how do you identify now?

Tasha: I still identify myself as a furry but I think I have a more rounded and better knowledge of what a furry is.

Dusty: And what is that?

Tasha: For me it is being a furry artist. For others it's having their fursona, their identity.

Dusty: What do you believe started your interest in the furry fandom? A movie? A story? Artwork?

Tasha: I think it was a mesh of all of those. You know I have always loves fantasy, werewolves, and vampires. Researching wolves online I found a chat room where you were all wolves and you chat. Looking at the artwork on there I found furry art and I was kind of elated. I was taken by the awesome art. There are some awesome artists.

Dusty: So the artwork is what really pulled you in then?

Tasha: Yeah, I think the artwork was a huge part of pulling me in.

Dusty: How did you discover furry? Were you surprised that there were others out there like yourself?

Tasha: Discovering it goes back to my friend asking me if I was a furry and then my own research from there. Yeah I didn't know it was this huge fandom. I think it has gotten a lot bigger than when I first got into it. But that could be my perspective as I only had limited exposure to it.

Dusty: Were you from a small town?

Tasha: Yeah.

Dusty: Did the Internet play a major part then?

Tasha: Yes but when I was in high school the Internet wasn't that big, so I had to go to my grandma's to do my research. I got my one hour a day so I didn't have a lot of time. When I went to college I got my own laptop and got my own time to research the fandom, to do my own art. I was able to start putting my own art out there.

Dusty: What is a fursona?

Tasha: It's a personal representation of yourself to the furry community. Some people have one, some people have a main one and others have a whole bunch.

Dusty: Do people need fursonas to be part of the furry culture?

Tasha: No, it's not mandatory. But if you want to get art it is easier to have one. It personalizes it to you.

Dusty: Is that personalization important?

Tasha: I would think so being it kind of identifies you in this majorly internet world. Instead of using your real life picture of yourself you have this, other image, or name that you go by.

Dusty: Do people need fursonas to be furies? Can you be a furry without a fursona?

Tasha: You can be a furry without having a fursona. I have helped people develop a fursona because they wanted one. They started out without having one. One of my good friends was that way.

Dusty: What goes into creating a fursona?

Tasha: For each person it is personal. For me I have multiple. I have a main fursona but I have other ones that depict other parts of my personality.

Dusty: What do you mean by that?

Tasha: I have one fursona that I created to be my graceful side since in real life I am not very graceful. I have another that was my Tom Boy aspect. I have another that was my punk rock/crazy side. And another that was my serene, quite side.

Dusty: Is it common for people to have multiple fursonas?

Tasha: Each person is different. Some have a lot. Some have just one that they use.

Dusty: Do things like animal or color matter?

Tasha: It matters to each individual. Purple is one of my favorite colors so it is a prominent color on my main fursona. I personally identify with a cougar, or puma, so I chose that as being my animal. Though at one time it was a wolf instead. And originally it was a cougar that transformed into a wolf that transformed into a shape shifter. And then I reinvented completely and was back to a puma. But a unique one.

Dusty: Are there rules to creating a fursona?

Tasha: No. I don't think there's any like "oh you have to have this, this and this."

Dusty: Are fursona names significant?

Tasha: To each individual, my original name kind of played off of the puma. My name that I go by now stems from certain things I have an affinity for. It's hard that we're not using my real name...my current fursona name comes from a medium that I have an affinity working with.

Dusty: Is a fursona a prerequisite to belonging to the community? For membership?

Tasha: You don't have to have it to be a member.

Dusty: Is it difficult to interact with a furry who lacks a fursona?

Tasha: It's difficult in my case if they want artwork done and they don't have a fursona, because if they don't have one then I am flying in the dark trying to create artwork. In chat it is a little easier as they can say 'I'm a fox' and then you have a little easier time interacting with them in your head.

Dusty: Are there outsiders in the furry community?

Tasha: I think there is outsiders when you have a group of friends and a new person comes in...the nice thing about the furry community is that they are fairly accepting up to certain points. Some of those certain points are...certain people that are weird or something about them just puts people off. They act strange or have bad body odor, or how they dress puts people off. So, yes, you can have outsiders with furies but in my experience it is very accepting toward new people.

Dusty: It's a tightly knit community?

Tasha: I think when you find friend groups they are pretty tight, but they are usually very open to a new person coming in.

Dusty: Does having a fursona give a furry certain mobility within furry culture? Can you interact with the fandom in a different way than someone who does not have a fursona?

Tasha: I think it is easier for you to have artwork done and for people to have an image of you. It can be done but I don't think it hinders people to a point where they can't interact with others.

Dusty: What is the significance of your fursona? Is it a reflection of you? An idealized version of yourself? What does your fursona mean to you?

Tasha: She is idealized in that she is skinny where I am not. She represents, in her name, mediums I love to work with. When you say my furry name, you have that image of her in mind.

Dusty: Is there symbolism in the fursona? Are the colors important? The species?

Tasha: Well her species is a cougar or puma which is my animal totem. Her hair being purple is because it is my favorite color. She has dark fur because I love dark colors. Originally she had different spots from all the big cats of the world, but when I decided that I kind of wanted to change how she looked her markings are now kind of a big splotch on her back. Kind of like the blanket markings on an Appaloosa (horse).

Dusty: What about with other people's fursonas?

Tasha: Sometimes. I have a friend that when he created his he used his two favorite colors, and has a marking on his fursona that comes from a favorite anime show he watches, so a lot of meaning is conveyed in the fursona.

Dusty: Does your fursona reflect yourself? Or is your fursona just an avatar and nothing more?

Tasha: I think she reflects me. She is my identity as an artist to almost everybody. Even when I am not in a furry community. When I am advertising to people who are not part of it (the furry community) I use my name. I sneak my furry in when I can.

Dusty: So it is like an inside joke?

Tasha: Yeah, I wouldn't say so much a joke as a way to connect it.

Dusty: Has your fursona changed over time?

Tasha: Yes.

Dusty: What was your first fursona?

Tasha: My first fursona was a white lioness with swirl markings. That was the very first rendition of her.

Dusty: Why do people change their fursonas over time?

Tasha: I don't know about other people so much, I changed mine over time as I grew as a person. As my tastes changed that's how my fursona changed.

Dusty: Is that normal, to have fursonas change in the fandom?

Tasha: For some people. Some people never change, really, they change markings here and there but they stay with the same fursona base. For me I drastically changed the fursona completely.

Dusty: Doesn't that make things confusing?

Tasha: For me, I had stepped away from the fandom for almost two years, so I wasn't really part of it. And when I came back I had an idea and a name and didn't really have a representation until later but at the time it was 'this is who I am and who I am now.'

Dusty: What do you think of people who have multiple fursonas?

Tasha: I think everybody has their own ways they identify themselves. Some people need to represent themselves differently. Or they had this idea at one point and it never came to fruition and so they made their original fursona one way and then created a second fursona that will have a background or story to them. Some people will make whole stories or biographies on their fursonas.

Dusty: For role-playing?

Tasha: Yes, some people role-play. And that is where they will use their fursona a lot.

Dusty: So the fursona is for role-play primarily?

Tasha: For some people. It depends on each individual person. For me, I am not a role-player, really. Mine does not take place for that.

Dusty: In speaking about fursonas, do some species confer certain traits or are symbolic of certain traits within the fandom? For example, do you think people with otter fursonas are more playful than those with bat fursonas?

Tasha: I haven't had experience with a lot of bat fursonas but I have noticed that a lot of otter fursonas are playful and bouncy. It depends on each individual person on how they interpret and play it as a furry. I have seen one person that was a raptor of some sort, and they were dancing and playful so you don't have to be, an otter to be playful, it is not something like that.

Dusty: There are not codified species rules in fursonas or furry?

Tasha: No, I don't think there is a rule book saying that 'if you are 'this' then you have to act this way.'

Dusty: Can you explain the term 'Sparkle Dog'?

Tasha: From what I understand, because I am not a sparkle dog and haven't had a lot of interactions with them, I understand it to be people who have neon colors and sparkling fur...they are almost their own little group. Almost like a species. There is also another group called "hollow dogs" where to be one you have to have a Halloween themed dog fursona.

Dusty: Are there other types of themed fursonas?

Tasha: Some artists have created different ones. There are people who are all dragons, or fursonas that are anthropomorphic balloons, or cybernetics, there is...well I can't think of any others right off the top of my head.

Dusty: Do you reveal you are a furry to friends, co-workers, or family members? If so, why? If not, why?

Tasha: Again, depending on the person. My family...most of them know I am a furry. Or some believe, because they have a negative opinion of furies, I play it off as 'I just do art for them because they pay me a lot of money'. It is really person by person.

Dusty: Being a furry artist means you make a lot of money?

Tasha: No. It doesn't mean I make a lot of money.

Dusty: Furry artists, in general, make a lot of money?

Tasha: Some, if you're really good at it. And there is a lot of people that would want to buy your art. It is kind of, almost hit and miss. It gets by the economy issues just like any other place where people are going to spend money.

Dusty: Furry artwork is the primary focus of the fandom?

Tasha: For some people it is, for others it is role-playing. For others it is just to have a common ground among friends.

Dusty: People who are fans of postage stamps or comic books don't seem to hesitate self-identification with their interest, why do you think some furries hesitate to self-identify as fans of anthropomorphic characters, stories, artwork, and so on?

Tasha: A lot of it is because of the stigma against furries. The looks, and how people react to it.

Dusty: It is the 'bad' reaction that furries are concerned about?

Tasha: I think some are. For some people it is kind of like being in the closet when you're gay. Some people don't want to put that out there to everybody. Then there are others that are out there and in your face about it.

Dusty: Why do furries compare hiding their involvement in the fandom to 'being in the closet like gays'?

Tasha: I think they do it because up until recent history, you're really outcast when people don't accept you, when you're different, when you are claiming to be part of a group that is looked down upon. I think a lot of people understand the analogy. People didn't announce, boldly and openly, they were gay once upon a time because the 'normal' people weren't very accepting of what was fringe, what was different.

Dusty: So the 'in the closet' analogy is just to compare the discomfort?

Tasha: Yeah and how hard it can be to admit being different for some people.

Dusty: Is being a furry on the same perceived stigma level?

Tasha: It can be.

Dusty: Have you ever been 'outed' as a furry?

Tasha: As in, I didn't want other people to know? No. Have I 'outed' other people unintentionally? Yes.

Dusty: How did that work out?

Tasha: I felt really bad and I think I kind of didn't help the person's...I kind of made people look at him a little different in his family.

Dusty: And that was bad?

Tasha: I felt bad about it, but I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to kind of say he was a furry.

Dusty: Why do people cloister their furry identity?

Tasha: Some people just don't want others to know. They want it to be a private matter for themselves. It is their secret.

Dusty: Secret?

Tasha: They don't want to face the ridicule, or lack others to support them in being 'out' so much.

Dusty: Have you attended furry conventions? Have you attended local furry events such as going out bowling in public where companions wore ears and tails?

Tasha: Yes. I have. I started wearing ears and tails in public in high school.

Dusty: You have no concern about public displays of being a furry then?

Tasha: In general I don't. I was more open about it when I was younger, and nowadays I pick and choose.

Dusty: Why?

Tasha: Kind of grown up and out of the phase of putting it into the faces of people that 'I am different!'

Dusty: What do you think of fursuiting? Do you fursuit?

Tasha: I think it's almost its own classification within the furry fandom. You have artistic furries, quiet furries, fursuiters who have this physical suit they put on. They identify. They

act out their fursona. For some people they act out their fursona, for others they don't. It depends on each individual person. Currently I don't fursuit.

Dusty: How does the public react to fursuiters?

Tasha: Some people have no problem with it. Lots of little kids just want to go up and hug them. Sometimes parents can be stand-offish. Some people think they are awesome. Some people are in awe, and some people think they are just crazy.

Dusty: Is fursuiting something that you want to become involved with?

Tasha: Personally, I am making a fursuit partial to have the experience as an artist. I don't foresee myself fursuiting a lot. For me it is more of experimentation.

Dusty: Is fursuiting a fairly new part of the fandom, or has it always been around?

Tasha: I think it has always been around but I am no authority on it.

Dusty: Items like the fursuit and Conbadge are considered material culture. What are some other forms of furry material culture that come to mind?

Tasha: Besides badges and fursuits, any artwork like a refsheet done of your fursona is cultural material. Especially if you will be using it to get artists to make you character specific artwork or for when you're role-playing.

APPENDIX H: 'JOHN' INTERVIEW

Dusty: How long do you consider yourself to have been involved with the furry community?

John: I have been in the fandom since mid-2008, but I was never really active until early 2011.

Dusty: What started your interest in furry and the furry community? Was it a movie? A video game? A story? Artwork?

John: What sparked interest for me was a dream I had when I was young, though growing up with Dr. Seuss books and Disney animations probably helped.

Dusty: Do you consider yourself a part of the furry community? If so, how do you participate? (Video games, art, writing, chat programs, conventions, furmeets, etc.)

John: I became an active member of the local community at a Christmas potluck Furmeet in 2011. Our local chapter has monthly bowling meets and small yearly events, like the Christmas potluck and Memorial Day BBQ that I try to attend regularly.

Dusty: How do you define being a furry to someone who isn't familiar with the furry fandom? What does being a furry mean to you? (Is it just a passing interest? A hobby? A sense of identity?)

John: I try to tell people who are not familiar with the fandom something along the lines of: "The furry fandom is a bit different depending on who you ask. Being a furry is defined as having an interest about animals with human characteristics, but for me, being a furry is a way to express my interest for foxes. The only difference I see between dressing as an animal and dressing up for sci-fi, anime, or gaming conventions, is that fursuits are normally characters of the person's own design." Then I show them a badge of my character if I have it with me, or I pull up an image on my phone.

Dusty: How did you feel when you discovered that there were other people like yourself interested in anthropomorphic art, stories, and characters?

John: It felt nice to know I wasn't the only one who found a connection with animals.

Dusty: When you say you weren't "really active until 2011" what do you mean?

John: Before 2011 I was never part of any cliques inside of the fandom. So, I did not really talk to anyone in the fandom, I was just a lurker, someone who just looks at, and favorites other people artworks.

Dusty: Is there a difference between "active" and "inactive" with the furry culture?

John: An active member of the furry member can do anything from creating or commissions artwork, taking part in conventions, talking with their clique, to even talking to strangers. While an inactive member may comment on the occasional piece, so people don't really see them.

Dusty: Can one be "inactive" and still be a member of the furry community? Or are you something else, then?

John: Anyone can be a member of the community if they want to be part of it. Inactive members don't often take place in the community, but they are still part of the community.

Dusty: Is there a classification system to the furry community? A way to identify furry community members and classify their roles or place in the community?

John: As with any large group, furies can be broken down to different categories. There are Artists, who create different types of artwork; Mass Commissioners, who pay different artists to create large amount art; Popufurs, who are well known in the furry fandom (normally artists); Lurkers, who only comment and fave pictures. There are also smaller groups and mixes of these groups.

Dusty: Are certain members of the furry community more valued than others?

John: Popufurs are normally more valued then other members of the community. Though, each member of the community is important. Without the artists many wouldn't even know the fandom, the commissioners pay the artists to create new work, and the commenters give both the artists and commissioners ideas and motivation though admiration to keep working or buying artwork.

Dusty: What makes people 'furries' compared to people who just like animals?

John: Honestly there can be a big difference to a small difference. A person who likes animals can be 'more furry' then a person who is a furry. Part of being a furry is wanting to be a furry.

Dusty: What does your local community do at the small yearly events?

John: Every year we have a few set events such as the Memorial Day weekend zoo and BBQ meet, where we go to the local area zoo for a few hours, then we go across the street to the park hand have a BBQ. During the Christmas meet we just got together for a potluck. And during October we get together for trick or treating since costumes are normal during Halloween and free candy.

Dusty: Can you give me an example of what happens at your local furry events?

John: Normally we all get together, talk and catch up with everyone, then those with suits dress up, and do things depending on the event like bowling we all just bowl, some in suit, others normally dressed. During the Christmas meet, we would play cards, listen to the DJ, and dance. Basically normal activities.

Dusty: Does the furry community always have real world gatherings or is it primarily an online/Internet community?

John: The fandom does have real life get-togethers and conventions, but I believe the fandom is mainly online because of the fact that there are furries in every state within the

USA, furies in Mexico, Canada, England, Japan, Germany and almost every other country in the world, and it would be nearly impossible for everyone to get together in real life.

Dusty: What is the significance of 'badges'?

John: A badge is really no different than a name tag at work or event. They are used to identify who the person is in the fandom if they do not have a fursuit or they are not wearing one, or they can be a name tag for a fursuiter to make it easier to call out to him or her, or find them online later. Some people's badges just show their character, others show the character doing something that pertains to their personality or interests.

Dusty: How did your interest in foxes come about?

John: When I was young, around 10, I had a dream about a family of foxes. I never forgot that dream and that is what sparked my interest in both foxes and Oneirology (the study of dreams) hence the name **** * ***** ** ***** ***** ***** **.

Dusty: Are you hesitant to claim association with the furry community?

John: When I was first part of the fandom I was afraid about what people would think. But now friends, family, and coworkers all know about the fandom.

Dusty: What kind of a connection do you have with animals? Is it spiritual in nature or is it more of an appreciation for animals in general?

John: It is partly spiritual, I joke and say that I am "human in body, fox in spirit, and a bit of both in the mind". Though mainly I just want to have a fox as a pet, and give it a long, enriched life.

Dusty: What were your primary educational sources on learning about furry? Forums? Friends? Furry websites? Fan fiction/role-play groups?

John: Google and Wikipedia, the two sources you learn everything from.

Dusty: Have you gone to furry conventions before?

John: I have never been to a furry convention, though I have been to a few anime conventions that have had fursuiters attend.

Dusty: Can you tell me what the importance of a fursona is?

John: A fursona's importance changes with the person. To some people, a fursona is an animalistic version of themselves. To others a fursona could be who they want to be. To some people a fursona could just be a character they wanted to have and have to real relationship with the character.

Dusty: What does your fursona mean to you?

John: My fursona is a mix of who I am mixed with who I want to be. His appearance goes along with my interests and personality. He has a tattoo on his arm, the same place I plan to get my first tattoo, with the kanji for dream. He wears a kimono to show my interest in Japanese culture. And his weapon is an indestructible bokken, the sword representing my

interest in swordsmanship, while it being wooden makes it more of a defensive weapon to show that I want to protect more than fight.

Dusty: Has your fursona changed over time?

John: From the prototype to the final project my character has changed a lot. It started out as an anthropomorphic fox in blue jeans.

Dusty: Is it normal for people to change their fursona?

John: People change their fursonas all the time, it could be a complete revamp, to a small change.

Dusty: Do people have multiple fursonas?

John: I have *****, which is my character inside the fandom, He has a serious and protective personality. Then I have ***** the fox, who is for the public and his name in English so people can say it easier, he has a happy and playful personality.

Dusty: In your opinion, is a fursona needed to be part of the furry fandom? Can you be part of the furry fandom and not have a fursona, or is it needed to really be considered a furry?

John: A fursona really isn't needed inside of the fandom at all. I didn't have a fursona of my own until early 2012.

Dusty: In your opinion, if someone has a fursona, are they better able to participate as a member of the fandom than someone who lacks a fursona?

John: Having a fursona helps a lot in the fandom. A fursona puts a face behind the screen name even if it is imaginary. Also you have art done of your character to make it known to others.

Dusty: When you are at a local furry event, are you addressed by your fursona name?

John: I introduce myself as my real name first, and then my character name. Though people normally call me by my character name.

APPENDIX I: 'EDDIE' INTERVIEW

Dusty: So, with these two fraternity brothers, I mean, they saw you with your fursuit first? So were they not participants in the furry fandom at all? Or were they kind of like, closeted? Cloistered?

Eddie: Um, one of them had never heard of the furry fandom or had no idea of what it was and I had to explain it, and he was pretty open about the idea and was pretty interested about it actually, at the time. My other fraternity brother, um, at his high school, um, had like one or two, uh, furries and had a kind of an idea of what it was but not entirely...

Dusty: But never engaged with them.

Eddie: Yeah. Never really engaged with it or the idea and I was simply that influence to get into it.

Dusty: Well, how did you explain it to these two then? I mean is it sort of like explaining another language or another culture? I mean how did you go about with these particular individuals in your frat?

Eddie: Um, it's more like explaining a culture. And actually I've had to explain it to more than just them, um, the fraternity. Just 'cause, um, I wore my fursuit that one time, and then just word of it kind of spread around even to the out-of-house members and some of them came to talk to me about it and I just simply educated them. It is like teaching a culture. I view being furry as being a sub-culture. Furry fandom as a sub-culture. So, I teach it like a culture. Um, the diversity of it and just all the aspects that it contains and that's how I taught it to several if not all of my fraternity brothers that were interested.

Dusty: And it is like teaching another culture, you're saying, so do you have some people that understand the diversity of it a little better than others? Or do they focus on one aspect alone, I mean what is the method usually that they approach you with it?

Eddie: A good majority of them have actually been pretty... wanting to know just kind of the whole holistic idea of the fur fandom. Not just a particular area, um, although after some of them seeing my fursuit they are more interested about that side and, um, what the importance of fursuiters in the fandom but mostly they're actually curious of what is the inspiration or the ideas behind me, like, fursuiting which is at large talking about the furry fandom.

Dusty: Right, and fursuits are the most visible aspect of the fandom.

Eddie: Yes.

Dusty: How did you get into fursuiting? Was that the main draw?

Eddie: Uh no, actually I originally got into it, um, mostly because I had started role-playing actually on forums. There was a particular gryphon forum that I was attached to, um, and I had no idea what a furry was, um, even when I was roleplaying just for years on these gryphon role-play boards. Role-playing with other amazing people and a lot of them were very inspiring and helped me a lot. Also, it...roleplaying helped me a lot with my typing, um, being able to type fast and also the creative ideas and stories that came out of it, um, so it was a good benefit and then of, um, eventually I, uh, the board kind of disappeared and I was kind of looking around for a new interest and, um, the Gryphon's Guild...I was a member of the Gryphon's Guild, and there was a role-play section in there and it was...

Dusty: Gryphon's Guild is another forum?

Eddie: Yes, it's another forum. It was originally for a majority of gryphons.

Dusty: Oh, okay. Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

Eddie: No, it's okay. It did die. I did...I have tried to go back to it but it's gone, sadly.

Dusty: People just moved on?

Eddie: Moved on or, um, our webmaster for it just couldn't...kinda, stopped paying for it as well, for the server, and that was part of it. But through the role-playing site on it, well their role-playing thread in there I was starting to notice that people were starting to role-play anthropomorphic characters and I just got curious about it and started reading more and more into it and found anthropomorphic is linked to, with, furry and I ended up in a uh, um, I had breezed by FurNation ...FurAffinity, every now and then but FurAffinity was actually, er, FurNation was actually my start with the whole furry, getting into it. It was still mostly role-play and actually socializing. I just loved interacting with the other characters, um, mostly because it is one thing to write a story about characters interacting and then to have an entire story, um, of one character writing about his character, and another character reacting. It's the human element behind it is what makes it so much more enjoyable for role-playing stories and even just chatting. And from there I got into FurAffinity, I started a page there, and started posting. I started with my photography. I take pictures of lightning and I started posting that and I got a lot of comments on it. Um, and then I didn't...I kind of went a little inactive on the, my FurAffinity and my FurNation just 'cause I was searching for a local group and found one down in Boise and got involved with that. I signed up with...on the group but was kind of a lurker for about a year. And then, finally I just got up the courage to go to one of the outings and my first outing was actually a downtown walk with fursuiters. They had fursuits and just group members, just walking around downtown Boise. And I took my camera and took several hundreds of photos of that, and video, and um, that's actually where I got...I met the person who inspired me to fursuit as well. Is...is it...okay if I say names?

Dusty: Yeah, I will redact them. It will be deleted.

Eddie: Okay, um, yeah, um. Her name in the fandom she on her FurAffinity she goes by *****, but her fursuits is *****. And she had a beautiful, full fursuit when she came to our outing, and she, I would just watching how lively she could be in suit and how, how many people were smiling, and just being in this group and walking around, um, seeing people smile and coming up and interacting and getting hugs, and the kids...just it...she was that inspiration for me to get into fursuiting as well, but that...I didn't actually start fursuiting until about...or at least getting into the fursuit making process until about four or five months later.

Dusty: Oh wow, so that really stuck with you then.

Eddie: Yes, yes it did. Um, it stuck very well. Um, also just continuing to be uh, active, with the local group. Going to the coffee meets that we had and I, um, also in that group I started the, um, bowling meets. So we do, 'cause coffee is the first Saturday of every month, and I started doing bowling meets the second Saturday of every month and we did "Cosmic Bowling," the, yeah, second Saturday of every month from 10 p.m. to, well, 10 p.m. to two in the morning. And even then, people afterwards would go to Denny's or I.H.O.P. and still hang out. And I would...it was fun to start something like that and just getting more involved in...um...

Dusty: Sounds like quite the social group you had there.

Eddie: Oh it was, great! Oh and a lot of the members...um, I also started making tails and selling tails to some of the local furs, at the same time working on my own fursuit, and eventually got it done. Or at least to the extent that it is now. It's fun to get feedback, you know, wear it to the coffee...I could actually wear it to the coffee house that we used. It was totally accepting of furies. It was actually a coffee garage so there was a front room where there was just a small sitting area and the garage. And the group was large enough we would end up taking up that entire garage. We had about a hundred people in there about every Saturday, the first Saturday of every month. One hundred people. Artists, fursuiters, musicians...

Dusty: And they're all part of the furry fandom?

Eddie: And they're all part of the furry fandom and the local group, known as the IdaFurs.

Dusty: Idaho Furs?

Eddie: Yeah.

Dusty: Or IdaFurs?

Eddie: "Ida-Furs" yeah it is just the..."I-D-A" and "Furs." And it was really great, and I actually I also got voted into moderation for, um, the group. And then...

Dusty: Moderation for forums, or for...?

Eddie: For, just, being a moderator in the group for our, for our forum and just at events. To keep things under control. Especially with the bowling meets that was helpful to have some control over being able to, you know, say tip at least. We're paying an extra twenty dollars for cleaning and, um, or at least I was...bowling meets came out of my pocket. I paid for, I, every time I paid for about six pizzas and soda and I paid the extra \$20 cleaning fee that the bowling alley charged and, um, but I still managed to also get us group discounts. And...

Dusty: That's not a bad trade off.

Eddie: Yeah, and I was the one all behind that. And being able to moderate and have some authority to help assist with that, getting people to also bring in food instead of me just bringing in pizza and soda, other people started bringing in cake and veggie trays and things to cater to other people.

Dusty: So it wasn't always just on your shoulders?

Eddie: Yeah, after about the first bowling meet people started getting in on the idea and, um, in the group, and started bringing food as well, and soda, and um, by the, by the time it really got going we had an entire feast. And then...yeah, stayed a full four hours.

Dusty: Well that is quite a meet up.

Eddie: Yes it was, it's great. I actually have, I brought my camera two times and have made videos and I did have them posted to YouTube. I took them down, um, a little while ago just 'cause of drama that happened in the group. Right about the middle of summer. Um, we, the group had a lot of cliques and the cliques were starting to have arguments amidst, among, themselves and it just blew up a little bit too violently to really get the situation under control. The group, as far as I know, still exists it's just a lot smaller now. A lot of hurtful things were said. And, I stepped down from moderation as well because of it, just 'cause I know...I knew the leader of another moderator very personally and they were being, um, these two in particular were being attacked very harshly by other members of the group and I was not going to deal with it. And I left the group as well just because, um, I really didn't want to stay or be active with the people that I know hurt my friends and call them friends. So I left the group for that reason. Um...I...

Dusty: That had to be pretty hard. That sounds like that was a major social appointment for you in your life.

Eddie: Yeah and that was...that was really rough...point. And it was not fun at all in any way, shape, or form. Um, uh, definitely a hard point for not just me but the other two of my friends which were also actually ***** and ***** . Um, us three birds.

Dusty: So once again, you have that flock unity.

Eddie: Our small, small flock. Yeah! Um yeah, just us three. I did my best to keep them happy just because I know after that, um, ***** was actually the founder of that group as well. And to basically have to quit the group...or quit his own group, it was hard on him.

Dusty: That had to be hard on him.

Eddie: But, over the summer, that money that I would have used on the bowling meets I turned around and started using it for just doing activities for among the three of us. Um, which was helpful and very helpful for the two of them and also, for, keeping out of just sinking into a slum. And especially them, they both have a kind of a depressing history. And, I did my best to be a positive influence and keep them happy. We did miniature golf, glow-in-the-dark miniature golf. I did that in fursuit.

Dusty: That had to be hard.

Eddie: That was interesting! And I was the only one who got a hole-in-one, in fursuit! It was like...

Dusty: That has to be an achievement.

Eddie: Yeah! Ding!

Dusty: I haven't heard anybody say that they have gone mini-golfing in a fursuit so I bet you have to be the...

Eddie: Black light mini-golf!

Dusty: ...well there we go, you have to be the first one in the fandom.

Eddie: That was...that was very interesting. But um, we also went to some of the races, um when I say races there's the track out there in Nampa. They, uh, what...Nampa...no it's actually Meridian Speedway. The Meridian Speedway. It's the one mile corner track. And we watched, we'd go to the races every now and then and just watch. Um, I didn't go in fursuit for that just 'cause the crowd...

Dusty: Sure, yeah.

Eddie: I mean, I don't need to fursuit everywhere. It just was more of just being with the other...

Dusty: Being with your friends?

Eddie: Yeah, being with my friends and enjoying it. And, um, we did Pizza Hut a lot just 'cause we could afford it and all three of us just like pizza.

Dusty: It's a good time to go out and have fun with the friends. It's like anybody else who goes out and hangs out with their friends.

Eddie: Yeah, it's the same thing as other people who go hanging out with friends. These friends just have very different interests, similar, but different interests and also just doing my best to keep them happy. And it was a good summer. And then doing RMFC that same summer, um, it was pretty cool. I mean it did cause a little bit of a...my parents did get a little bit upset that...noticing it two weeks beforehand and they had already like, planned a dentist appointment that same time that I was going to be gone and it had to be moved...and, but...it was worth going. Even if my parents got a little upset at me. And it put a little extra stress on me just 'cause basically as soon as I got back from the convention I wasn't even home a day, finished packing what I had to take up...well, to bring up here to the U of I and drive back up here. Well, and drive up here. And so...

Dusty: That's a quick turnaround for you.

Eddie: Yeah. I mean, I was at home maybe 20 hours I didn't have not a full day, pack everything up and get the con funk out and like come back up here and move into a fraternity.

Dusty: What a whirlwind of a summer.

Eddie: Oh yeah, right there at the end it was just getting crazy and...but it's all for the memories and it was so much fun just to go. Even if my first conventions experience was a little bit weird...rooming with eight people in a four...

Dusty: That would make things a little weird, yeah.

Eddie: I was one of the lucky people who got the bed though.

Dusty: Well that's good.

Eddie: Just 'cause I paid a little bit extra than everybody else in the room. Um, but our...at least our person who was managing the room was, um, kind enough to balance the charge cost of everybody so I paid two hundred dollars in and he basically...the fee for everybody was about one hundred nine dollars for the week, well for the three days that we were there, and so he paid me back the ninety-one dollars and I was able to go to I.H.O.P. after the convention and actually ate some food.

Dusty: It was probably pretty good after a long weekend at the convention.

Eddie: Oh at a convention, um, yeah the...kind of...first I go to conventions to kind of spend everything on travel and room, and attendance...that they have very little left over for food. That was kind of the case, I was able to go out and eat at least once outside of the convention. I walked down to get a Sonic or the Arby's across the street. Or there was the...a noodle shop or something like that, in a plaza not too far away.

Dusty: So you had something close by at least.

Eddie: And yeah, I was able to eat a good full meal every day and then it was either snacking or getting invited to go eat somewhere else by another...other furies at the convention. Um, but it was definitely fun. Especially the raves at night. Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday night. Raves started at 9 a.m. and just closed whenever it got too quiet to really keep going on.

Dusty: Sure. Did they have a noise ordinance or something in place?

Eddie: No, no noise ordinance, it was more of just...um, the amount of people in the room. If it got down to four people...down to like ten people left they'd shut it down.

Dusty: Now are furry raves any different than normal...air quotes...normal raves?

Eddie: No, they're no different. The music's the same. The lights, they're the same. The crowds are the same. Uh, people just enjoying the music, jumping around. You just throw some fursuiters in there that's the difference.

Dusty: That makes it furry, just having a few fursuiters?

Eddie: Yeah. Having a few fursuiters, people wearing tails, and that's the only difference.

Dusty: What sort of things do you do at a convention? And I mean you yourself, how many have you gone to?

Eddie: I have only been to RMFC that's been the only convention that I've went to. Um, conventions, um, RMFC...uh, I, I really wasn't sure what to expect. And I...

Dusty: That was your first one and your only one?

Eddie: Yes. First one, totally. And I didn't exactly connect with anybody that, um, gave me advice on what to do at a first convention. I did read up around on forums every now and then. The FurAffinity forums have, like, a sticky for people who are doing first time conventions, you know, recommendations. And even the RMFC website has one as well. Um.

Dusty: Was that useful?

Eddie: Yes it was very useful.

Dusty: Beforehand did you see this C.S.I. episode that we talked about? Did you see it before or after going to?

Eddie: I had seen the C.S.I. episode before I knew what fur... well, before I had gotten into the whole furry thing. Um, but it really didn't put a bad taste on me. It's like oh it's just C.S.I., it's just a show.

Dusty: It's hyped up for media.

Eddie: Yeah. It's hyped up, it's you know, staged and its fake or its not nearly as real as they make it out. But uh...

Dusty: But those online forum posts, like this is what? First time convention goer – this is the thing you should go do or look out for?

Eddie: Yes. Um, like one thing that I kept seeing come up was like panelists, panels, and I was getting confused. Then RMFC released their program which has their program for the convention for each day, and what the panels were in these different rooms and the panels are just things that are put on by convention staff, the guests of honor, or um even just attendees that come in and sign up to run a panel of some subjects. Rukis was one of my guests of...well, was one of the guests of honor for RMFC for the year that I went and she is an amazing artist, and she held I believe three panels. One each day. One was just on, uh, for those just starting out drawing anthro or furry. It was an instructive panel to help people know some techniques to use when starting out drawing furry and then she did another one going over her comic, Red Lantern, which is a really great comic that she's working in tandem with another artist whose name doesn't come to mind. And then she also did a figure drawing panel for those who are artists and it was an adult only panel because of...you know, any figure drawing, for proper figure drawing you use nude models. And people volunteered for that, and it was pretty much as soon as the artist had, um...it was one of the few panels that you had to pre-register for and you had to have an art pad and a pencil and some material to work on in order to be an attendee. You couldn't just stand in and watch. And pretty much once everyone was in the room they locked the door and just had security standing outside just to make sure nobody else was coming in and that was one of her other panels. Um I talked, I knew one of the people who volunteered, actually, two of the people who had volunteered to be models for that and they told me all about it after they got done.

Dusty: It's probably no different than some of the live art modelling that goes on at the university?

Eddie: It's the same thing. It just helps...just that kind of figure drawing helps with getting a more realistic and a more lifelike character drawn out just 'cause you have somebody that's dynamic that you are drawing instead of looking at a picture and going "okay well this is how I think their motion is going." And, but, and having a dynamic person to be looking at and to draw at the same time, gives you a better idea of what moves where in body dynamics and that's...that particular panel was very helpful for, um, for those few artists that were able to attend that work in furry art. And then there was other panels, um, convention wide panels. There was a game of a, not Scattergories, um...Pictionary! And it was, I mean, a hundred people in the convention hall that we were using, at least one of the ballrooms that we were using...just split the teams in half, and then had people volunteer from each side to go up and draw what the word was and most of them...most of the people that went up were artists and it made it helpful in most cases. I mean, that was

really fun. It was competitive but you know, in the end, even if the team, well the team that I was on won, but it was no hard feelings. It was for fun. And people were also appealing to what some of the artists were drawing just 'cause it's hard. It's...one of the artists she was doing one line almost cartoon sketches for her side of the team, and yeah, people were all over that.

Dusty: So these panels go beyond just instructional workshop type things, there are also for fun and socializing?

Eddie: Yeah, um, one of them that I went to, uh, another one I went to was a Nerf...a Nerf...we just took a Nerf...well we just took a Nerf room....well we had a dedicated room for just Nerf. And we setup some tables like a small obstacle course in the room and one of the staff members had somehow managed to collect about thirty Nerf guns and a five-gallon bucket of darts and just gave...started passing out guns, passing out the darts, separated people to different sides of the rooms and just said "Go!"

Dusty: That had to be so much fun.

Eddie: Oh, it was amazing! Just so much Nerf guns, and people were running around being silly. Especially some of the fursuiters that did it, I mean, at the same time we are also being safe about this...making sure people aren't jumping over obstacles that was kind of one of our things: don't jump over the obstacles, move around them. Um and everyone had to wear eye protection of some kind. Even if it was...

Dusty: Always good even with Nerf.

Eddie: Yes, even with Nerf. Eye protection...in fursuiters...we don't have to worry about it mostly. *gestures with hands down across face, where a fursuit mask would extend protectively out*

Dusty: Right, those little lucky hits or something.

Eddie: Yeah. But, anyhow, people...we try to remain safe about it as well and it's just a ton of fun for everybody that participates in a um, a panel like that. And then um, some of the more instructional panels are fun and interesting as well. I, there was one panel that I wasn't able to go to, it was the Poi panel.

Dusty: What was that? Poi? P-O-I-?

Eddie: Poi is...yeah, P-O-I. Or at least I am pretty sure that was what it was, it was basically the art of twirling glow sticks. Like at raves, and people are twirling glow sticks and what not, and all those cool shapes.

Dusty: I didn't know that had a name.

Eddie: I didn't know either! And apparently one of the members, well one of the attendees, just did a panel on that at the convention.

Dusty: Well now that is exciting, it's not really furry related at all.

Eddie: No, it's not furry related at all. You can use it at conventions, heck you could go to Vegas and do that out on the strip and people would be like "Whoa!" It's, it's um, some of the skills, some of the things taught there are more than just furry related. And it was good. Um, there was a game room set up pretty much from noon to midnight for just people to come in, um, there was an Xbox in there, a PS3, and a whole stack of board games and that was fun. I actually tried a new board game, um, "Munchkin?"

Dusty: Oh I love Munchkin.

Eddie: I had never played it before until I had gone to RMFC and played it. And that's definitely fun.

Dusty: We'll have to get you involved in the gaming group.

Eddie: I am still trying to get involved in a D&D group up here.

Dusty: Oh excellent, going well? Or not going well? Or just trying to find one?

Eddie: Uh, I'm, I don't usually have the time for it is the issue. But school gets in the way and the other reason is again, one of my fraternity brothers is the DM.

Dusty: Well that's handy.

Eddie: And it's like, nice! I'm just a player. Um...

Dusty: So you'll have to twist his arm then to set something up for you.

Eddie: A little bit, we already did one little um, just, trial for it. Because I made a new character, just a little quick mini campaign just to make sure everything was setup right. Um but we're hoping to do more, and it sounds like we might have another two or three interested to do D&D as well. So, I'm being influential again!

Dusty: You're good at that moderating thing. You're bringing everybody together.

Eddie: And it's nice, it's natural leadership skill. And I, I constantly get told over and over...I don't know how many times I've been told that I just, I'm a natural leader. And I do deny it most of the time, but always reflecting back on things like this it's like...I did, I kind of lead that. I was drum major for the marching band in my high school and I was...

Dusty: That's no small feat.

Eddie: No, and especially the time that you have to put in as a drum major compared to even some of the people in the band. I mean because you pretty much have to know

everybody's music from every section to know if it sounds right, you have to work with individuals one on one.

Dusty: And that coordination is really hard sometimes.

Eddie: And coordination, especially on memorizing the conducting patterns for an entire show. Because you can't look at a sheet, you have to memorize it all and it's...it's a lot of work.

Dusty: I believe it.

Eddie: But I enjoyed it. I love music, even now, even just listening to some music in my room I'll conduct along to it just 'cause I've always done that, even before I was a drum major I just kind of moved my hands.

Dusty: It sounds like you have a passion for music then, have you tried to incorporate it into your life as much as you can?

Eddie: I mostly just listen, I used to...I did play in the band a lot, actually since elementary school I played in the band. I started in orchestra, played that for a year on the cello and I was really great at the cello. My orchestra teacher told me over and over again. It just wasn't quite my thing. Mostly classical scores, I wanted something more energetic and lively, so I switched to band as a percussionist and was a percussionist for six...seven years.

Dusty: And that held your passion more then?

Eddie: And then uh, I did honor orchestra and honor band, and um, I was marching at the high school, I, well, I...our junior high started doing marching band my seventh grade year and did pretty much marching...well it wasn't marching band it was just marching in the parade but it's, it was a lot of fun, um, doing the parade and then going to high school and doing marching band. It was volumes better, choreographed movements and the music, and the show, visual effects, especially in percussion for, um, two of the first two shows. It was fun. We had tons of fun as percussionists. Um, and then to go to drum major was a whole new experience and still, lots of fun, especially even as I had to take a drum major camp in order to be qualified but even that, even that camp alone, um, on top of summer school was fun and amazing. Just getting to know drum majors, um, that are going to be drum majors for other high schools in the area, so, going to competition you know, another high school would be there like Capital and you know I'd know all three drum majors from Capital just 'cause I'd took a summer class with them and say, go over and say "hi" when we had our breaks and just talk with them.

Dusty: That had to be great.

Eddie: It was very, it was very great experience for the social aspect, 'cause, you know not only being really well known in my own band but also being able to know drum majors of other bands and being able to talk with them and also just kind of incorporate with them

and talk with members of their band. Get to know some of them and it was lots of fun, a very positive experience and I wish I had started being a drum major earlier. Instead of doing it that one semester.

Dusty: Have you considered doing that sort of thing here at the university? Being trained or try out?

Eddie: Um the university actually doesn't have drum majors.

Dusty: Really? It seems like that would be a requirement.

Eddie: You...it's not, actually. A drum major is just a metronome. We...drum majors stand up there, waive our arms to get the time, but, um, eventually bands get good enough with knowing their music and knowing everything that they....they can do...we did it once, we did it, yeah we did it once for our band...um out on the practice field once...it's like our drummers...our drum major...well our band director, up on his ten-foot high podium over the loud phone...over the megaphone, said "Okay, this time ***** is just going to start you...and then he's going to give you four beats to the music and then he's going to stop and then he's going to stop and you're going to play the entire show all the way through." It's what he said to the band, and they did do it. They played all the way through, pretty much flawlessly without my help. All I did was just give them a start *snaps fingers, recreating the tempo* and then they were off! And they did just everything how they should have, the speed ups, the slow downs, the crescendos and the movements that I usually help initiate and point and note, well give them signs for where they occur but I didn't...and they got it on their own. So, really, after a certain point drum majors are irrelevant. Um...and that's kind of why the university doesn't have 'em.

Dusty: Oh, that explains something...I learn something new every day. Have you tried to pick up a leadership position in the furry fandom? Or...you did the moderating, you said, for your own meet up group.

Eddie: I did the moderating for my own group, um, was a ***** ***** for FurIdaho.

Dusty: And FurIdaho was the Idaho convention that just happened.

Eddie: Is the Idaho convention that happened just actually last weekend.

Dusty: Last weekend, yeah.

Eddie: Um, yeah, and I was ***** ***** for that and I just tried doing too much for that apparently. And Con Chair was just getting upset with me, for trying to be too active.

Dusty: So being involved with the fandom is more than just having a FurAffinity account or having a fursuit then, or at least for you.

Eddie: Yeah, I'm definitely involved with it. I've...I'm definitely into the whole furry thing.

Dusty: Where do you think most people are on that continuum? I mean do most furries just have FA accounts, do they just watch art, do they just role-play, or are they more integrated in the fandom?

Eddie: I've seen a few examples of all. But I do tend to come across more people that are just, they're just as involved as I am if not more because they can afford to go to conventions more than me.

Dusty: Is that a handicap, not being able to afford to go to conventions?

Eddie: It is a bit, um, conventions are volumes more fun than a local group. But a local group is helpful as well.

Dusty: What makes the convention more fun compared to the local group? Is it just the socializing with more people from outside of the local group or is it the panels, is it being able to wear the fursuit 24/7 if you wanted and not have people mock you?

Eddie: It's being able to wear the fursuit. It's also being able to meet new people that are just, new people. That are not local. I know people from Texas, I know people from Arkansas, I know people from New York, and Washington, and California, who I met in Denver. And I couldn't meet them because I'm stuck with the local group but after going to RMFC, I know them. I know these new people that are from different areas of the country and it's just...great to have that different exposure and also just to get to know different people and what they're interested in. But it's also...another fun thing is like the raves for me, I just enjoy doing the dancing raves.

Dusty: Do you go to raves outside of the furry convention raves?

Eddie: Um, every now and then I do. I haven't been to a lot recently just because um, up here in Moscow...

Dusty: That's not really a cultural thing up here.

Eddie: Yeah, up here. I mean, I go to the drag shows. It's the next closes thing.

Dusty: That's over in Pullman, right?

Eddie: No, actually those happen down at the Moose Lodge.

Dusty: Oh okay, I didn't know that.

Eddie: And actually the drag show happened just last weekend as well.

Dusty: Do you fursuit there? Or is that just a separate thing from your participation with furries?

Eddie: It's a separate thing from being furry, um, but I have kind...I am...considering highly at least for this next drag show to at least go with my tail on. At least my tail.

Dusty: I mean out of everybody I figure that would be a safe group you should be able to do that in around here.

Eddie: And it is, yeah, out of...its one of the pretty, diverse and interesting and um, less known groups up here.

Dusty: Is it just a hobby then, I mean is that how you...how other people...like you can do furry and do some other things, and or it a part of your lifestyle that you integrated, or would like to integrate in other social activities you do?

Eddie: Being furry for me...yes I do try to integrate it as much as I possibly can, as safely as I can, where I can.

Dusty: Safely being a concern of..?

Eddie: Um, well, of, uh, I keep in mind the audience of where I'm going.

Dusty: Don't fursuit at a bar or at a sporting event for example.

Eddie: Yeah, it's um, it just...you tend to get in places that'll have maybe too much energy, um just 'cause you'll get those individuals that get too riled up or something and just get crazy and...bad stuff happens.

Dusty: Understandable.

Eddie: Um but like doing mini-golf, black lit...

Dusty: It's much more sedate?

Eddie: Yeah, it's a much more calm environment and I enjoyed doing that. Um, even at my high school I would fursuit for activities outside of high school. Extracurricular activities. Our high school did a bike day, it's just kind of a national holiday or something...or we just did it at our high school...where everybody tried to get as many people as possible to ride their bikes to school and I did that for all three years. And then, but like, the last two years that I did it, well no for like the last one year that I did it I did it with my fursuit head on. So we biked from a park about three miles away from the school, all the way to the high school with police escort and what not, and I had my fursuit on! And it was, it was fun. And that's about the only way that I can describe it, fun, and being out in front of the group and mostly just because I am a strong biker, and um, lead the way, just go around corners and waving at cars parked in the intersections with our police escort forcing them to stop, and just waving at 'em. It's probably a good thing that I can't see faces.

Dusty: So that's a big appeal that is, being able to do the public performance. To be able to see the smiles and reactions outta people?

Eddie: And that's what I love about fursuiting is I get to see people smile, I get to cheer people's day up. And even then there are those people that get scared of fursuits just 'cause...

Dusty: It's strange to them.

Eddie: It's strange to them, it's foreign to them and they're not sure what to think about it so they cower away and just kind of ask you or just show that they don't want you near them.

Dusty: And you can pick up on that and respond in kind, and move away or leave them alone?

Eddie: Yeah, either I can pick up on that or um, having a handler is helpful as well for picking up on signs like that, because sometimes I can't see everything in my fursuit.

Dusty: Do you work with a handler a lot?

Eddie: Um, I try to as much as possible. One of my fraternity brothers that I got interested in fursuiting is kind of my...is kind of my handler, like the last time we went, well the one time we went bowling as fraternity brothers and what not, and I wore my fursuit, he was my handler. And we did have that one case where one of the um, girls, that one of my fraternity brothers brought along didn't want anything to do with me and my fursuit. She was scared, cowering behind her cellphone, trying to kind of be proactive and block me out, and I mean I wouldn't have noticed it just because my poor vision of my fursuit...from the distance. But he noticed and was polite enough to mention it to me and I was polite enough to be mindful of her.

Dusty: So you just gave her more space then?

Eddie: I gave her more space. And when I did approach, well before I joined their group...'cause we got done with bowling pretty quick, but before I joined up with their group, um, I went back to the bathroom and changed out and put my fursuit away, and then rejoined them. I really don't like making people uncomfortable with it. You know I'm not going to force it on them, like "Oh it's fun! It's fun! Really, give it a try!"

Dusty: Which goes to how you interact with it in your social life. I mean, you try to integrate it.

Eddie: Yeah, I try to integrate it and show that it's not a bad thing.

Dusty: Right, you didn't eat their children or anything.

Eddie: I didn't eat your children, I didn't steal your car. I'm not reaching for your wallet.

Dusty: You're not trying to mug them or take over the building or anything.

Eddie: I won't take your food, I'm just here.

Dusty: You're you.

Eddie: I'm here, I want to say hi.

Dusty: How did your fursona come to be, I mean how did you come up with...well we'll redact the words, I mean how did you come up with *****?

Eddie: *****, yes.

Dusty: *****?

Eddie: *****, and ***** is actually my other gryphon character that I outwardly portray.

Dusty: So that is your primary fursona?

Eddie: Yes. At the moment, and recently ***** is starting to become more of a primary as I start working on her fursuit more she will become more of a primary character over *****. Um, but, I mean the species started again, with my gryphon roleplaying. I had a fascination with gryphons. Gryphon's Guild, gryphon role-plays that I did on the other forums, and I just loved the species. Very strong, majestic, but also rare, you know...it's not like coyotes and wolves that in the fandom you tend to find everywhere.

Dusty: Right and the dogs at least, canids seem to be the dominant thing.

Eddie: Yeah, it's one of the dominant group. And gryphon was so much more unique and I hadn't heard about it when I got into it. I did loads of research before I really got into the species and I just, liked the history behind it, the, and some of the attributes and traits that are often related with the creature and it just kind of stuck there. And then when I got into furry it just, it was my choice of species. It had grown on me. Um, and, it wasn't very solid right away, coming into the fandom I had multiple characters. I had one that kind of portrayed my younger self, um, but was different.

Dusty: Like you, yourself?

Eddie: Yes, but, well, it had a different history behind it. Um, it was more of my sad, depressed side almost. Had a bad childhood, um, and was very timid and shy around everybody.

Dusty: So that character took on those traits?

Eddie: But...yeah, that character took on those traits of that side of me and then I had another primary character, ***, and he was a mirror image. And, um, he was my primary character through the Gryphon's Guild for a long time and that kind of started coming up through with when I started furry and I just started trying a different character just because he had been with me...he had been a character that I've used for so long it's like I kind of

want to try something new. Um, especially with coloration just 'cause you can get so creative with furry coloration.

Dusty: Absolutely. There's a lot of unique characters out there, and freedom.

Eddie: Yeah. And I kind of started going down my... *** was pretty much a white and silver tinted gryphon. And those were...silver was one of my top three colors. And then, with coming up with a new character, I was like, I want to do something with *****. Just 'cause ***** is my number one favorite color.

Dusty: Good choice.

Eddie: Yeah and I get that from my dad because my dad's favorite color is ***** and I really wanted to try a character, a gryphon character based with ***** colors somewhere. And I just went with the upper half torso, and then finished it out. It took a while to hammer out all of the details and then to finally get some reference art done. But I finally got it done. I really started to get into that character, again still more of a mirror image of me, but, um, more of my fun, outgoing side. And, it definitely shows through in my fursuit. I try to be interactive and outgoing and meet new people when in fursuit. Um, I typically don't do that on my own. Um, I'm fairly timid as Eddie, as me.

Dusty: That's interesting, so you feel more liberated than when you wear ****?

Eddie: Yeah, and that's...

Dusty: Excuse me, when you are ****.

Eddie: Yeah, well when I truly step into ****, it, it's a whole character change for me, personality change. It, it's very liberating and it's not exactly a mask or anything it's another side of me that it's great to portray. I enjoy portraying it and I enjoy seeing other people you know, just the admiration that people get. It's like, "Ah! Your character's so awesome and your fursuit is great! I love the color! Oh the <color>, oh the <color>!" And it, it's nice. It's amazing and, um, definitely, um, became attached to the character. **** has been an official character of mine for about a year now. And then actually, ***** is an old character of mine, back on my gryphon roleplaying days. Um, so she was already there. And I already had kind of an idea of what she was. And then just kind of recent discoveries about myself, um, kind of tapped in, went back in and tapped into her because she is female. Um, and, um, I definitely I'm a bit gender queer um so I kind of portray as male and female, and it's very apparent with online that I try...I don't try, it just happens that I have a more feminine voice. And *****'s started to become the physical embodiment of that. And so she's becoming a whole new character that I've already had, that I'm already growing into and she's just the appearance that I have for her. And it's great and it's, it's, a whole different side. ***** is my more, forward and actual dominant/adventurous side, and again, it's something that I don't particularly portray as being me. But, I mean, more adventurous, more daring. A little more bold and strong. I mean, the natural leader there,

that natural leader is just kind of a dormant thing that happens. ***** is more of, um, initiator. She's the one initiating events or conversations. And I'm definitely...initiating conversations is definitely not my thing. So, she's, she's a whole different side, and a whole different character and it's just another side of me. Just like **** is another side of me.

Dusty: That's not taking on this physical expression.

Eddie: Just not taking, yeah, I'm just now giving her a body and a face and a character to go with it. So, it's, um, that's kind of where **** came from and ***** is starting to come from its just it's...

Dusty: It's been quite the evolution of your fursonas then?

Eddie: It has! I've actually been through several characters, um, just in my gryphon roleplaying days I went through, um, just, I can only remember them by name: ***** , ***, uh...***** , ***** , and those are about the only five that I've been through that I still don't exactly follow anymore. Just 'cause it, interest, moves on. And also, but, most of them I didn't let go easy. I gave, I gave 'em a kind of proper burial story 'cause I wrote stories along with my roleplaying on the side, and I used my characters.

Dusty: Using that creative element again.

Eddie: Yes, and I still use that creative element.

Dusty: That's good.

Eddie: I still write stories, furry related stories, and post them on my FA and see what feedback I get just because I like getting constructive criticism and also just to get my idea out there and see if its original and if people like it. Um, but most of my characters I have given a story to put to rest basically. Um, it's kind of for me just to know that I have moved on from this character, and it's also makes good story material, it really does. Um, and so, ***** was one of those old ones but I didn't exactly let her die, um, just 'cause the story that I was, am still writing on, I still have to finish the end of it. But she is very much a character in that story and actually it is between two of my characters ***, this is story is kind of ****'s like, me letting go of *** but at the same time it is also kind of an introduction with ***** just 'cause she still lives on in the story and it, I, just I like her character portraying the other side of me that represents her. So...I've held onto her, um, *** is just a creation of another side of me that just kind of popped up 'cause I wanted something. So I have been through several more characters. I am up to seven now.

Dusty: That's still pretty impressive that you've had this evolution though, of going...it sounds like they've all just...spawned out of your experiences and your feelings and...is that typical for most people's fursonas you think?

Eddie: I think...for...I can't speak for everybody, um, I think that most people's fursonas change as they feel they do. Um, for me, I mean, starting six years ago with *****, I started with ***** alone...and ***.

Dusty: That was pre-furry?

Eddie: And that was pre-furry. And, I was just getting into the gryphon role-play, and I just started working up from there and as I matured, um, physically, mentally, getting typing, and going through these new experiences a lot 'cause I was twelve when I started all of this with the gryphons, and, and the non-furry. And, growing up and going through fourteen, fifteen, in junior high and the high school, experiences changed. Friends changed. Stresses and...

Dusty: New experiences.

Eddie: Yeah, new experiences and new freedoms, and challenges that came up, um, definitely I feel influenced the change in my characters, and I can definitely see how it would change, well how it's the same way with other people that changed their fursonas. Um, as they grow and also gets...get to see different sides of themselves. I mean, for me as well, um, uh, just learning more about myself. Having time to think deeply, just go over these more deep, um, thought out feelings and questions that I have and self-discovery changes character...changes my character and how I feel I portray as well. And, it's definitely influential for me and I can definitely see how it's influential for other people to change their characters. Um, and some people are really great and are at a good steady place in their life where they can stick with one character, for, with one fursona the entire time they are in the fandom and...props to those people that can do that! Um, then there are those people that are just kind of...their mood flip flops about every week and it seems about every month they are coming out with a new fursona. It's like, "Oh, I'm a coyote. Now I'm a panda. Now I'm a..." it just, jumps around so much.

Dusty: And so you never really have a good bearing on who they are in the fandom?

Eddie: Yeah, and they...those people it seems like they really don't know who they are...and they just go with it with what they feel at the time. It's those people, it's those people that have a solid fursona or solid two or three, that they are always going back to, that seem like...seem like they know themselves better and are more confident with their lives and how they're living it and confident with the friends they have...the character they are, and the things that they do, and um, definitely following one or two of these others that jump around on fursona, they generally seem to have a bit of drama in their life. Um they tend to be drama as well in certain environments, if provoked much. And it just, it's almost a sign that they're unstable. That they are unstable and they're still trying to figure themselves out. Um...

Dusty: Is that a lot...we talked briefly about drama there, is that a normal thing in the fandom? To have drama, to be unstable? You can't really make a call, I understand. Is it something to keep an eye out for?

Eddie: Um, drama happens...it is something to keep an eye out for in the fandom. But, really drama happens everywhere. It happens on the street.

Dusty: Not just restricted to furry.

Eddie: Yeah, it's not just furies. I mean, really, when you think about it, people get drama driving. I mean...

Dusty: You talking like, road rage?

Eddie: A bit of road rage, or people sitting in their vehicles watching these people that are doing these illegal turns and doing stupid maneuvers or just can't seem to drive straight on the road and then there is those people behind them criticizing them and they're just causing drama...and then sometimes they hold onto that and then when they go talk to their friends they just like "oh, well this person on the road today just couldn't keep his eyes on the road, he's too much...he's too busy on his cellphone, swerving all over the place." And people, you know, and other people start going on and on and on and on about it and people in the background just going "why do you care?" It's a bit of drama and it happens everywhere.

Dusty: So it's that superficial stuff, when we're talking about drama.

Eddie: It's not furry specific. I mean anime has it, um, hockey teams have it, bike teams have it, football teams have it, and basketball teams have it. It just...

Dusty: It's there, it's part of the human condition.

Eddie: It's part of the human condition. It...there's no way of getting rid of it, it just, it seems like um, it gets targeted at our group just 'cause we are different. Um, its...

Dusty: I'm sure if we talked about fraternity systems and we talked about golf teams, we talked about anything it must be...they must have their own little divisions and...

Eddie: Yeah, I mean, cliques.

Dusty: Cliques that is the word.

Eddie: It, it naturally happens. People just, people love certain interests and even more picky interests group together and just kind of form a clique and just kind of be in their little own circle on their own inside of this huge umbrella group, I mean that's why the little bout of drama happened in the IdaFurs group that I was a part of.

Dusty: That's too bad to hear.

Eddie: And it's an experience, it's a learning experience, and you take what you can from it and move on. Don't let it haunt you, um, but it happens in every group. You know, our group is a hundred people. And we had at least three groups, cliques that would always gather at the coffee meets...they would take this part of the garage and another group would this part by the windows.

Dusty: So they wouldn't cross pollenate, cross talk?

Eddie: Every now and then you would get people that would go between, um, and then you'd get floaters that can easily go from group to group without causing any grief or frustration or any discomfort in the group. I was one of those that, um, was very fluid, um, between the cliques. I would sit at one table, the artist table, and the artists has, you know, all their stuff out and would be talking about one thing, and then I would go over to another group and they were just people sitting around enjoying coffee and, like, talking about video games. And I could easily just go from the artist group and step into that group and just sit there and listen to what they had to say and none of them paid much attention to me, they were pretty okay with me.

Dusty: Is that how it works at the conventions as well? You have that same fluidity? You're able to move into certain groups or is that really an issue since it's a larger thing like you mentioned before. These people come from all over the place at the convention.

Eddie: Yeah, um, it's just it's more of...um, cliques happen everywhere, even at conventions. You'll get a group of people that may know each other through online, and come to the convention all at the same time and get together. And sometimes you just have to, most of the time you'll just avoid the group. If it's not really something which interests you. But if your are somebody who really wants to get to know people you'll go in and say "Hi" and introduce yourself, and maybe they'll let you into your conversation and say "oh well, we're talking about such and such" and, um, they'll continue on their conversation and they might even let you into...well...put in your own experiences and advice and whatnot.

Dusty: And participate?

Eddie: And participate. It just all depends on the group, and the people that are in it. Um, and if they're...if enough people are comfortable with letting you be there. It...um, yeah, its, it's not that hard to get past it if you're willing to be open minded and willing to accept others, um...

Dusty: So it's no different than any other kind of social interactions then?

Eddie: Yeah, it's, it's the same thing. Really, it honestly is, it's just...it just has a different label on it.

Dusty: It's a different social gathering. It could be a church picnic, it could be a coffee meet up with a writing group it could be anything.

Eddie: Well it's even like family reunions. You tend to get the old crowd with one, the teenagers go off somewhere else.

Dusty: Right, a generational separation. And the black sheep.

Eddie: It happens, generation gap. It's so common and it's, it's very disappointing that people only seem to see it in furry groups or other groups that just aren't normal.

Dusty: Right.

Eddie: Quote normal.

Dusty: Right, air quotes.

Eddie: What is normal?

Dusty: What is normal anyway?

Eddie: Good luck defining it.

Dusty: You mentioned something there about naming other...these different groups that they still come together or at one point in time they came together. Is the furry fandom fairly inclusive in that sense? I mean, across religion and gender and identity and...?

Eddie: Yes, we're very inclusive. Or at least from what I see, fairly inclusive. Um, I mean I'm a bi-sexual male, and, nobody that I have met so far in the fandom, at the convention or even online has had issues with it. They're like, "awesome." It's, it's...other people come in that have disabilities, um, I know a few furs locally, um, or at least was...past local, back at home, um, you know...had a, had a mental handicap. He has Downs Syndrome, but he still comes to the group and participates and most of us still talk with him. And, um, it's very inclusive. From what I see, even at conventions, um those that are handicapped that in some way, are walking around and people will come up to them and say "hi" and or just talk with them. It's...

Dusty: Have you gone to an anime convention, or other types of conventions to compare it to?

Eddie: I have not gone to an anime convention. Um.

Dusty: Or at least know anime fans?

Eddie: I do know anime fans.

Dusty: A lot of furries are anime fans as well, I guess maybe that's not really a fair question.

Eddie: And I also, again, some of the furs that I know are um, have gone to anime conventions in their fursuit and whatnot. And they're fairly well accepted there, um, sometimes there has been a drama between two large groups – furies and anime. It happens.

Dusty: One group thinks they're more superior than the other one, more pure?

Eddie: More pure, or that, their idea or what they believe in is more right than the other. And...but most of the time, really, when you get these different groups that are more unique or more specific, um like furry or anime or drag queens and kings, people in that group tend to understand, um, that you need to be accepting just 'cause, they are surrounded by people that are not. Um you know, being a furry, um I'm not accepted by certain people or I'm being asked to put my fursuit away by my fraternity. Well, in or around my fraternity. I...not everybody is acceptable with me wearing my fursuit all the time. Okay. It, um...and then what I do with that is, like, I know that people don't accept me sometimes for what I do or for what I am. So it doesn't mean I need...it doesn't mean I should turn around and do the same for somebody that has a mental handicap, or is an anime fan, or is...I don't know, collects Elvis stuff. It...It's turning around and being open to them, knowing that, probably somewhere, they're in the same situation where people go "no, we don't want you doing that. Take your identities elsewhere or put them away." People aren't accepting, and it, definitely seems to be apparent that people who have experienced that come into groups like furry, anime, these larger groups, understand that and want to show that accepting just 'cause they know what the other person has been through. That they know that they have been denied, um, or rejected for what they are, for what they do, what they label themselves as and it's, yeah, it's just going back saying "Well, okay I know my fraternity brothers shut me out, or they don't want me doing this...and so I'm not going to turn around and shut out another furry just 'cause their character is too weird or too many hybrid species now...you've got nine different species...how's that work?" It's just showing that level of acceptance back, to make them feel comfortable and it's also positive for them to have support somewhere. Um, being part of the GLBTQA community, um, Gay Bi Lesbian Transgender and Ally, um, a lot of people are very accepting of me and I'm very accepting of others and even people that are just like freshly coming out of the closet whatnot. I embrace them just 'cause I know, I, I had a fairly shaky coming out myself and I know that they can have the same situation, or they might have a better situation than what I had and either way I want them to be comfortable about who they are and know...let them know that they're right, that they are themselves, that there is nothing wrong with what their choice. And, yeah it just turns around and when people, when a group, turn around and do the same thing to other individuals that pick up the interest it, yeah. That's about all my thoughts on that.

Dusty: Along those lines, what does being a furry mean to you then? Just all of what you've just spoken about? Or are there some other extra pieces that tie in with that? When you

say, "I am a furry and this is what it means to me." The connection to the fandom seems to be pretty intense for you.

Eddie: It really is, and probably part of the "I'm a furry thing" is it's a part of me that I am very passionate about. Um, very, uh, feel very strongly about. Being a gryphon, I almost see that as an inner...my soul, I guess, um it's just an...

Dusty: A spiritual connection to a gryphon?

Eddie: A spiritual connection to my species and being a furry just kind of helps with that idea that I can also be...instead of having to just keep it inside, I can express it and, um, people will go "ooo, ah, that's great, again, your fursuit is amazing." At RMFC I got amazing compliments on my arm claws. I mean being stopped by even, uh, Syber, who is a very...um, one of the fursuit makers for Made Fur You, which is a very popular fursuit company, stopped and complimented me on that and that was...

Dusty: That had to give you quite a head rush.

Eddie: Mm-hmm, uh, very nice to be recognized for my work in that way. Um, but being a furry, when I say that it's, it's a different side of me that I've also become, it's like me being bisexual as well, being gender queer. It's all, they're labels, yes, but they're...they're the only way to really describe you.

Dusty: There's some powerful identification with them.

Eddie: Yes, and definitely identify with the furry side. Um, yeah, um being a furry is a whole different side and it allows me...allows more communication between other furies or those that may be interested and its...lost my train of thought, no it's okay, yeah it's...being a furry is another identity and it's...

Dusty: It's the same way that you say I am a son, I'm a brother in the fraternity, I'm a student, a teacher, a mentor, a friend.

Eddie: I'm a member of Costco! It's the same thing as any of those. It, just as a more personal label.

Dusty: So how do you define your pre-furry existence versus your furry existence, I mean how do you define what is furry? Would you say that your pre-declared furriness of the gryphon forums, was that still furry in retrospect? Or was that a definite non-furry phase versus this is furry? Can you define this was furry?

Eddie: It, it wasn't more...the non-furry was definitely a little more, well is a bit more definable than the furies. Um, as a gryphon role-player I mostly...I did most of my stuff online, on forums, on chat boards. And I admired the art, I would go around and find the gryphon art.

Dusty: Was that the first thing that drew you in was the art? Or was it the learning about gryphons in your youth?

Eddie: It was, it was a piece of art that had got me inspired first. Um it was one, um, I can't remember how I came across it. I think it was just Google searching. Popular mechanics did something on the Gryphon wing suit, and I went into Google and searched 'gryphon' and it's what came up and uh, uh the drawing that's in the book for Alice in Wonderland, the original version of Alice in Wonderland f the sleeping gryphon was what kind of drew me in, it was like this very beautiful creature. And even if it is in black and white it's just amazing. I really don't know how to describe it, even with it sleeping it just it seemed to radiate power and a vibe that I just caught onto, and started looking at it more and well for more and more and I just, I got hooked. It was a great species that I followed into. But this is on the non-furry side, and I'm following into. I mostly just followed the art, into the role-play online, into the Gryphons Guild. I didn't actually take it as far as like as thinking about, "oh, I want to do a fursuit of this" or I want to see if I can draw art myself. I just kind of enjoyed being a character. And then getting to the furry side, um, I didn't have to change much in the interaction so much with FurNation and their chatroom in their chatroom that they had for...

Dusty: Yeah because a lot of the online role-play is pretty easily transferable.

Eddie: Yeah, is still transferable, it's pretty much the same thing. It just takes on a different form and being furry I guess goes more personal and in deep than non-furry, as a gryphon role-player I didn't, I did still have that image of it kind of being a soul. An inner animal spirit inside. And that's about as far as I took it. And then getting the furry fandom and seeing that seeing these people that create the amazing art, and the animations that people do, and the music, and especially the fursuits...it's like, that's amazing! It's just, they're not afraid to be who they are. And then, uh, again, **** was kind of the one who inspired me to get into fursuiting. Um, I had developed a fursona, kind of, um, off of ***, while in that beginning months of...in the furry fandom. But then, yeah it seems I really stepped into furry and really got interested into...got interested in it. It was a whole different thing 'cause pre-furry I didn't have a...I didn't exactly have a friend group. I just had role-players that I, well, other people that I role-played with and their characters. I didn't know them that well. I didn't get to interact with them one on one as, ah, me to them or them to me kind of deal. It was my character, your character, this environment, it's this plot setting and whatnot, and go along that line. Getting into furry was a whole different thing because it's a social group, um, social media like um social media sites like Fur...FurNation was...is that social media site, that I got started into and actually started meeting people, making friends that are furry. And then getting into the FurNation I started meeting other people that showed interest in me, and I showed interest in their art and being able to talk with some of these people on one on one, and as more of myself and not as a fursona that I just use for role-playing and stories. Um, being able to talk, you know,

my fursona, me, to them. It's a lot different, a lot more social interaction with it, then making friends and getting into these other activities 'cause with role-players most of your stuff is done online. Furry, you know, we've got the conventions, we've got the local meets, we've got just people that are friends, day-to-day friends that are furry and having that was awesome compared to the role-play. I mean, I still do the role-play now but on top...with, with, along with all the furry, um, things. And it, it, I know, I know, gosh...I know twenty plus furies, um, and a good number of them I met at RMFC, at Rocky Mountain Fur Con. And, I mean, I still talk to them on Skype. I still keep in touch with them on FurAffinity, notes back and forth.

Dusty: So you have a lot of ways to communicate?

Eddie: Yeah, and text messages too. I mean, I text two or three furs that I know. One over in Arkansas, one down in Las Vegas, and one down in Texas. I text them. And Skype, we talk with others that way. And FurAffinity, it's another way of communication. And it's, again, they're more friends than just another character or person to role-play with.

Dusty: Right, it's moved beyond just the simple interaction of a role-play forum.

Eddie: And it's so much more nice to have that 'cause I mean being a role-player was kind of lonely. Being a furry...

Dusty: You get that larger community.

Eddie: That larger community, more interests, more similar interests and can just talk to people. And, make friends in a day just talking over, um, breakfast before the convention, or going down to the convention hall or something.

Dusty: You don't have to have that hesitancy either about coming out as a furry...you're open to be.

Eddie: Yeah, you know they are already open about being furry. I'm already open about being furry.

Dusty: There's that tension that just evaporates?

Eddie: It's gone! It breaks down that one barrier that just makes it sometimes so hard to engage in conversation. It's like, well where do you start?

Dusty: I'm always hiding it...or...I'm going to tell you and run that risk of you might reject me.

Eddie: Yeah, and it's like you know, it's, it's something how I identify. It's not like every person that I go up to and meet is like "Hi my name is Eddie, what's yours? Oh yeah, well, by the way I am furry, I am bi-sexual, and I go to drag shows, I do raves..." I mean it's like you don't just start off like that, and, um, but, getting it past at least one of those,

especially with furry, you know, get furry out of the way you...you both already know it. You can...that's one interest that already helps take down a barrier in conversation. It's just a matter of saying "hi" and maybe starting off with saying yeah, talk about things fur related like artists or music that furry artists have done, and then going off from there. Talking about other interests that people possibly have like airsofting or cars, or motorcycles, or...just all these different interests you could start tapping into, um, after you get past and comfortable with that first area of, like, furry, it's like it's so helpful. Definitely very helpful with finding new friends, too. In the fandom, and also sometimes going around fursuiting. Having random people walk up to me and like after the fact and say "what was that?" And being able to talk to them.

Dusty: Another opportunity to educate like you said before?

Eddie: And educate, and maybe get them hooked and interested. Like my fraternity brother.

Dusty: I was going to say, you got two already and you've only been up here for a whole year.

Eddie: Yeah, yeah. I'm doing pretty good so far. It just, it's nice. It's amazing that uh, the opportunities that it exposes especially the new friends group that it totally opens up that it is so much easier to get friends that way too. It's, it's, it takes some of the grunt work out of finding a friend almost. And it, when, you click at the beginning and things might separate but that's part of the experience. Not everybody is going to be your friend.

Dusty: Right, it doesn't always work out but at least you have the opportunity to try.

Eddie: Yeah, and even just getting to know some of their interests that you may walk away with and go "Hmm, I'm going to go look that up now." And they might have influenced you in some way and your might have influenced them in some way.

Dusty: Right, you never know.

Eddie: It's, it's amazing.

APPENDIX J: 'HECTOR' INTERVIEW

Hector: ...and it's like, really? That's a deal breaker. I just don't understand.

Dusty: Why, why was it...did he have a chance to speak to speak with you about it.

Hector: I had no...no, he basically had to leave, uh, he gave...well it was, it was...I felt really bad for the guy because it was almost like he was committing suicide. I mean, that's what it felt like because he was giving away a bunch of his furry stuff that he had brought with him.

Dusty: Right. Because he had to wash his hands of the fandom.

Hector: Basically, yeah.

Dusty: Because the wife said "it's me or the fandom."

Hector: Basically, yeah.

Dusty: Oh, crazy.

Hector: So he, um, I had never met the guy until that, that previous night. And he had a leather bracelet with a nice wolf engraving on it. And I commented on it 'cause it looked...I mean it looked really cool, really nice. And, so he, before I knew anything was taking place he had taken it off and put it on my wrist and I'm like...*widens eyes and shrugs shoulders*

Dusty: Well that is almost like committing suicide in giving away prized, cherished possessions.

Hector: Yeah, yeah and I am like – What the hell is going on? I mean I am completely lost just...what the fuck is happening? He says "It's yours." And I am like, wait, no! No, no, no. What the hell? And then he explained the little bit I was...

Dusty: The situation...yeah.

Hector: Which I didn't get any more than that. So...

Dusty: My goodness. You think that she would have known that this was a thing when she married him?

Hector: You would think, I mean, but people are weird. Uh, I don't know if we'll get into it with the interview but, ah, uh, I ride Harley Davidson motorcycles. And I ride all over the country, and I'm a biker. I mean even looking at me I'm a biker. That's one of my biggest hobbies. Um, there are only a handful of people that I ride with that even know I'm a furry. Now it's not something that I actually maintain any kind of hiding but it's not something I'm going to bring up, either. Because people are really funny about that shit, I mean, most of the guys I ride with...the closest thing they've ever seen to furry is that CSI episode. Right? *chuckles*

Dusty: Right. And most people point to that, don't they?

Hector: They do, all the time!

Dusty: So I was in a panel about three years ago that I was co-hosting and someone stood up, almost undignified and said "That, that episode was almost a decade ago! Why does it still matter?" 'Cause that's...that's the only thing people see. They see it on Netflix, they re-run it, they think that is like a documentary..." Oh I know what furies are, I saw that episode of CSI..." You hear it from non-furies quite frequently and that is all they have to go off of.

Hector: Right, and, and from us being inside the fandom I mean you watch that episode and you look at those suits and it's like...oh my God, what newbie made those? *laughter*

Dusty: There is almost a certain amount of disdain for those suits? From the inside if the furry community, looking at those like that's not a fursuit it's kind of hackwork.

Hector receives a text message on his smartphone

Hector: I, uh, I should...she just sent me a photo of the...

Dusty: Of the room party in progress?

laughter

Hector: No actually the room...the room party apparently just broke up, uh, *** and ***** are going drunken suiting. *snorts*

chuckles from Hector and Tasha

Tasha: Why am I not surprised about the drunken?

Dusty: That's going to end well.

Hector: Actually it didn't go too bad at Vanc...at VF [VancouFur] last year.

Dusty: Oh really?

Hector: Yeah, they did it last year at VF and it didn't go too bad.

Tasha: I was worried 'cause when she goes without *** I always...especially at the beginning, I like ***** but she, she woke up with somebody in her bed once. And I don't know how exactly how but the fact that happened made me worried...and that's why I asked you...

Hector: Right.

Tasha: ...she's a good person, I like her, I worry about her personality to...when she drinks.

Hector: Yeah, like I said with, with that the only...she cuddled with me a little bit but I mean that was...that was it. And my wife was in the room, nothing's gonna happen. It's completely safe, completely harmless and just, that was it. That's the only thing I saw the entire weekend that was even remotely 'off' and in my mind that's not really that 'off.'

Tasha: Yeah. *To Dusty* So I had asked him *indicating Hector* to kind of keep an eye on her for me.

Dusty: Sure.

Hector: Yeah, and I like them.

Dusty: No, understandable, especially with [her] story of "...I, I don't remember what happened but there was another man in my bed!"

Hector: Well, I had hear that story from [Tasha] and then I heard it from her without any prompting so...um, obviously it's valid. I mean...

Tasha: Yeah.

Hector: ...so...

Tasha: It wasn't just a rumor.

Dusty: Right.

Hector: But she says, you know, that was...regardless how she ended up there, she was creeped out by the situation, I mean, she really was at least...

Dusty: There was more drinking going on that she probably realized.

Hector: Right, she was definitely further along.

Tasha: It was when she was new at drinking. She was, you know, she got drunk at my parent's house and...

Hector receives text message and shares with Tasha

Tasha: ...ooo! That looks good! Look at that.

Hector shows picture of his wife in fursuit to Dusty

Hector: That's my wife in an under...uh...

Tasha: Under bust.

Hector: Under bust!

Dusty: Nice. Oh that's cool, so that's just the ribcage and...

Hector: Yeah ribcage and pushes up...

Dusty: Cool. I think I saw somebody wearing one of those today. I don't know, it looks like that would be super painful.

Tasha: It's basically the corset without the cupping.

Dusty: Well yeah, but I mean...well, I don't know.

Tasha: Especially if you have big boobs it works better.

Dusty: Sure, sure, but just the idea that you're compressing that specific space on the lower part of the ribcage where you've got the false ribs...I mean I guess you'd have more ability to compress there than the upper...but...*shrug* maybe that is the better spot to put the tension is in that middle belly band area?

Hector: Well even if you're pressing even, even not just the false ribs but those lower two, uh, real ribs I mean that cartilage right there will still give and push that whole diaphragm up without really doing any kind of harm to you, so...and, and not forcing you to be [un]able breathe either. I mean, you're still going to have enough room for the diaphragm to be able to move.

Dusty: That's something too, is that it's not necessarily used in fursuiting but furs still wear corsets 'cause there's a lot of, of...

Tasha: There's crossovers.

Dusty: Yeah, mixing a lot of things together. I guess that's just fashion in general, I mean it doesn't have to matter for furies for fashion. You see a lot of different vendors, though...Is drunken fursuiting a thing? Is that pretty big? Pretty common? Because I haven't got to a lot of conventions and you have gone to a lot of different furry conventions.

Hector: Yeah, it's...I'm not going to say its common. But it is a thing.

Dusty: For fun? Or for sport, like a dare? Like, let's go see if we can do it?

Hector: It's, it's drinking like anything...drinking lowers inhibitions and therefore loosens you up to do things you wouldn't do under normal circumstances while if you keep it to a certain level it's still easy to maintain control over what you're doing, but you don't care quite as much that you're making a fool out of yourself doing it.

Dusty: Which already wearing a fursuit you're already kind of doing that.

Hector: Right, but that's where it breaks for me is that when I'm in suit or...I need to get a new suit...but when I'm in suit there's that break. Nobody can see my face. And even though, out of suit people will recognize my name, recognize my suit, they don't see my face when I'm doing stupid shit. And that's the whole easy thing for me. Um, I've been up on stage. Uh, twice now I've gotten called up on stage for Cirque du Soleil, we go to that

every...every time they come into the Seattle area. I absolutely love it! I mean you wouldn't think a biker and everybody would be into that.

Dusty: Yeah, like that would be a thing to go do, yeah.

Hector: Yeah, like, every year! I caught it on television, like, eight years ago. Just caught...yeah, I don't know where I saw it but it was some A&E arts and [enter]'tainment something. I just saw the Cirque du Soleil shows on the television, and I watched the entire marathon. From the time I found it to the time they showed it off I was watching this thing. I mean it literally just encapsulated me that well. So then we found out that it actually is a thing, and it comes to the U.S. and they do stuff. I'm like, okay! I'm all for this, I love this! And it's beautiful choreography, uh, uh, I mean it's just absolutely fantastic. And they have a clown thing, 'cause it's a circus, so they have this clown thing they do. Uh, and, I got called up on stage for a little tiny bit that didn't really pan out to much more than me standing there on stage being a body.

Dusty: Sure.

Hector: Um, but the last time I got up there was for a, uh...[indecipherable] and they picked a few people out of the crowd to go up on stage. And I was still actually fairly healthy at this point. I mean, I had my Crohn's Disease at this point but I was physically capable of still doing a lot of stuff. I was taking martial arts and everything...um, so we got up on stage and they were doing a...a...ah...kind of like a lover's fight? Death scene, thing, that they were...you know...uh, jilted lover comes in and she kills the new boyfriend basically. And I was the new boyfriend. *laughter* So, but ah, uh, he doesn't shoot just me, he shoots his lover as well, which was another woman up on stage. And it was really funny because he's trying to get us to know our parts so you know he's doing...he's going around and telling us what we need to do...well, uh, he wanted us to end up on the floor like we were kissing. Well she didn't want to go on the floor. So I actually did a judo throw on her and let her down very easily but I got her feet out from under her...and eased her to the ground for the part which I thought was really cool because she really did not want to go down. And again, I didn't hurt her or anything, you know.

Dusty: Like you said, it was controlled.

Hector: It was very controlled. Um, so, did that and then like I said I am up on stage and there's three, four, five hundred people out there in the audience. Well the cool thing about being up there on stage is that all the lights are on you, you can't see past them to see into the darkness...that there is people out there. So even though consciously I know that they're there, and I know they can see my face, I can't see them. So there's that conscious break of "Okay, I can do this." I can be up there, kind of make the fool of myself...

Dusty: When you're on stage?

Hector: Right.

Dusty: But then when you're wearing the fursuit though, it's different because you can see...the light's reversed.

Hector: Right, it's exactly opposite, but I can still make that break because now they can't see my face...and even though I can see them I can get their reaction to things. So either way I still have break.

Dusty: So why do you fursuit then? I mean, is it just for performance and for fun?

Hector: It's for fun. It, it's like, uh...there's a bunch of reasons. I grew up in a very abusive household. Um, so, everything was very strict and then I've got images that I had to maintain through high school. I was Goth before there really was a term for it. Um, I got harassed in school for that. So, I had...and I got into a lot of fights all the way through middle school all the way up through high school and I had to make a point that I wasn't going to tolerate any of this crap. So, fights would end very badly for my opponent because I wouldn't stop until they weren't moving, or until I was pulled physically off of them. Not a good way to go, but, you know, it was the only way I could prove that you don't want to mess with me, 'cause I will end up hurting you far worse than you want to be hurt, so leave me alone. And, that went a long way...uh, unfortunately in my junior year that, that spilled over onto a couple of my teachers as well because they started kind of getting into that whole...you know, following the crowd type of deal? I was the only Goth kid in school.

Dusty: So it was very easy to single you out then?

Hector: Very easy, and, and, uh, we had a high cowboy-type population, I mean, this is Eastern Washington/Northeast Oregon, so it's very culturally, uh, cowboy, you know, western type stuff as well as a lot of Hispanics. So you've got that, that desert Wild West type culture in the area and I didn't fit any of it. So there was a lot of stuff that went on there. So I had to prove that in order to be left alone I had to make it so that you didn't want to mess with me.

Dusty: So they'd give you space? Space to be yourself?

Hector: Exactly. Right. Um, so, fursuiting, to me is following that same tradition only now being in suit I don't have to hold the role that I'm used to maintaining. You know, the big biker guy, you know, uh...big scary biker guy. I don't have to maintain that...I'm not going to say façade 'cause it is who I am, but I don't have to maintain that while in suit. I can do...I can be silly, I can do silly things, I can pick on people without...you know...

Dusty: Seeming as intimidating as the biker guy.

Hector: Right.

Dusty: Being jovial, friendly, which is not an archetype that most people associate with bikers. They want to give them plenty of space and try to not make eye contact and...

Hector: Yep, exactly.

Dusty: So really it's quite liberating for you then to put on a fursuit?

Hector: It is.

Dusty: So, you went from the culture where you were a Goth, and you were in the 'cowboy country' essentially, southwestern culture, how did you find furrydom out of that? Because that seems like it's, well not like a polar opposite, but it seems like it's on a different end of the spectrum from all the different subcultures that are out there in America.

Hector: It very much is, um, I'm going to go back to the fact that I was...my father was 40-years-older...was 40-years-old when I was born. Uh, and he came from a very abusive family raised in the mountains of North Carolina where time doesn't exactly catch up fast, so he was...he was beaten, bad, as a child. Uh, and that carried over. He beat the crap out of me, beat me both physically and mentally. Um, to the point there was a lot of times growing up that I was semi-suicidal, uh, and I didn't have friends growing up because...he bought all my clothes, everything was second hand, and if I wanted something he would pretty much make sure I didn't get that thing...so, up until, about fifth grade, I had to wear like corduroys and button down shirts in cultures where that was not...where it was jeans and t-shirts. I'm picked on...a lot. Uh, which is where I started fighting and then, you know, once I started standing up for myself, and realizing that...well, the, the mental image in my head...the only way I can make sure this doesn't just keep happening...is to really hurt these first few people. And, you know, hurt them as bad as I hurt. Again, I'm not proud of it but...

Dusty: But it is a survival mechanism.

Hector: Exactly, it's exactly...

Dusty: Because then everybody else witnesses that, they see it, and then it's sort of...the story grows around that and you create the bubble.

Hector: And then there'll be a few, you know, there'll be a few more and then once those get beat down it pretty much stops. Uh, until you move schools which...whew...that happened twice, so there was a bunch of times where I had to repeat this process.

Dusty: Start all over.

Hector: Um...so, going back to that, um, growing up I wanted to be anything but who I was, uh, I didn't want to be the boy. I didn't want to be a human. I didn't want to be in this situation so growing up, uh, any games that were played where I could pretend to be something else...I almost always ended up being an animal. Something that people generally want to have around, 'cause I wasn't in the feeling that I was wanted. Now, that's completely not true because I was the...my father took me and left my sister with my other

and he tried to do the same thing with his previous marriage...take the boy and leave the girl behind. So he very much wanted me, but, it didn't feel that way. Um...

Dusty: He wanted you more for the son sake, rather than he had bonded with you?

Hector: Yeah, he had wanted the legacy, is kind of what he wanted. More so than actually having...you know he just wanted that relationship. Um, and that boils into some other things that...we can get into if you want, uh, down the road...um, so I wanted to be anything but who I was and a lot of the time that came out as just being the animal, you know, if I could play a dog or something like that I did. Um, advance that forward until I was nine, uh, we lived in Longview, Washington and I...he would bring...we had...he had family friends who had moved from the same general area of North Carolina that he...I don't know if he'd grown up with them but he'd knew them very well. And they lived in Woodland, which was like 15 miles...a fifteen minute drive away. And then we would...he would bring me there and he had...this guy had two boys. Excuse me. Um, and the youngest of...the one which was two or three...four years older than me, was into Dungeons & Dragons. So I got introduced to Dungeons & Dragons. Um, my first character was a human character in that game, but as soon as they started doing other games where they would allow other things, I started playing dragons, you know, or anthropomorphic animals or whatever I could get my hands on that was not human 'cause still, you know, nine-years-old I am still in that same situation...I don't want to be this thing, I want to be anything else! Uh, so I started making attachments to that from a very early age that I wanted to be anything but me. Um, and that's kind of how that whole thing came along. Now finding the fandom that didn't happen till about five, about five years ago...so about 2011. RF was my very first Con. The homeowner, our roommate, uh, I guess it might have been three years now...yeah, three years.

Tasha: This is our fourth year. 2011 was our first one.

Hector: Yeah, so 2011 was the first one but, uh, that was...we had just moved into the place with her at that time and she was the, uh, art, uh, author guest of honor that year. So, she invited me to come along not so much because she knew anything about me being into this type of art or anything but more because she needed somebody to carpool with from Everett to Seattle to make her commute better. Well and I found out furry fandom existed, and that's where I found out that it existed. I mean, I'd see artist Dark Natasha, K-9, you know, all these artists and MUDs and some other things, some online games that incorporated elements of this stuff so I knew...I knew the art existed but I didn't realize the fandom existed.

Dusty: And was that a big revelation for you? I mean, some people describe it as "I thought I was alone."

Hector: Yeah, I mean I knew I wasn't alone because I knew the art existed and if the art exists I knew that there were people that were interested in the same thing I mean that's

just an easy leap to make. So I knew I wasn't alone but I didn't really know how to contact or get in...to interact with any of these people. Dark Natasha was actually the first person I actually ever interacted with 'cause I saw her art gallery and I was like 'Oh my God, this is such amazing!' It just...and that was, I think that was ten years ago when I discovered her, and her artwork was...it wasn't, I mean it wasn't...don't get me wrong, it was not bad by any stretch of the imagination but it was nothing like it is today.

Dusty: Steady improvement. All artists do that.

Hector: Right, exactly. And, uh, so I contacted her, you know, within a few years and that's not something that I do. I don't usually put myself out there. But I had to contact her because her art was just so amazing! And I went back two or three E-mails and then that stopped but it was mostly kind of the fanboy..."I love your work" but without being overly gushy or...

Dusty: Right, just letting them know that there is acknowledgement. People out there in the world appreciate what you do.

Hector: Exactly. And, like I said, that never...you know I never again, never knew the fandom existed until 2011. And that was, you know, a good seven years before that. There was other artists, Willard, uh, you know people that I know aren't around anymore. I can't remember all the names now but...

Dusty: They just step away from the fandom.

Hector: They step away or move onto other things. You know, who knows?

Dusty: You said that RainFurrest 2011 was your first one?

Hector: I think so.

Dusty: So I mean, but, is...so she was just, your author friend was using you to carpool down. Did she invite you to attend the Con? Or did you...

Hector: Yeah she invited me to attend the Con and she bought my membership for the four days 'cause she was guest of honor – Author. Um, she bought the attending membership and I just kind of hung out. I mean, she told me that it was a furry convention and I was like...you know, what's that? I knew what a furry was but I didn't...I couldn't comprehend that there was a convention for them.

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Hector: ...situation, well, uh, one of the furies with a squeaker comes up and...tells him in squeaker talk "F-off." *laughter* Very clearly in squeaker talk, to F-Off. *chuckles* Needless to say that pretty much ended his stay in that particular panel and he got out and ran away and cried or whatever he was going to do but...yeah it was almost immediate that

he was upset and left. But he was really hindering the panel speaker from trying to relay information that we was trying to relay.

Dusty: Which was because he was trying to over talk, or...

Hector: Over talk, uh, trying to...everything that the person said that was a response to or a variation of how that should work or something it was just...I don't remember the whole ordeal but I remember very clearly the squeaker talk and the "F-Off." *laughter*

Tasha: Note to self, must get somebody to tell me to "Fuck off" in squeaker talk. I have to hear this now.

Dusty: I bet ***** could probably do it. Is that a problem at panels, I mean, do people...it seems like there should be...from my experience at panels, at furry conventions or any other Sci-Fi conventions usually there is a moderator involved. Are furies a little more...I mean are their conventions a little more lax? Or does it just depend from Con to Con?

Hector: Um...hold on one second. *checks phone* Oh I never pushed 'send' on that. Oops.

Tasha: Oop-sies, now you're in trouble. *snickers*

Hector: Sorry, bear with me one moment.

Dusty: That's all right.

Damage to audio file, portion lost

Dusty: ...that guy at the front who wouldn't shut up.

Tasha: Yeah, you remember that guy? Everybody...

Hector: *nods*

Tasha: See? I'm not the only one who remembers that.

Dusty: Well you know what's funny is that in situations like this is that I think you [Hector] and I actually met at one of those panels a long time ago and I said I was doing these interviews and then I never followed up with talking to you or contacting you. And then about eight or nine other people at this Con there were...

Hector: And at the first Con I may not have been interested in doing it.

Dusty: Right, absolutely, and that's the way it is with a lot of the other people I talk with and I just think wow, you know, how much all of us have kind of changed since then 'cause, not just in wanting to open up and talk to other people, but we were completely different people.

Hector: Yeah.

Dusty: When we started acting from that point there to where we are now.

Tasha: It's a big difference to how everybody has changed.

Hector: Oh yeah.

Tasha: And watching, 'cause there's a group of us that it's all...every, we were all new, we all started twenty...I know *** and *****, Dusty, myself and now [Hector]...just watching the group of us as we've come in from 2011 go on each year...

Dusty: *****, ***, and...

Tasha: ***** and knowing the regular people that have come back and forth.

Dusty: And just seeing the evolution, it's not just a maturity piece of it but it's just seeing how they have gone through a whole year again and then what they've done, how they've changed or how they view their um, expanded what they do in the fandom or what they contribute. Some of them have become writers, some of them have become crafter/makers, um, because they get passionate about this so...it's a lot of wonderful growth. *chuckles*

Hector: That is...that is absolutely true and 100% accurate.

Dusty: I don't see that at so much with the other fandoms. Granted I have only really gone to Anime Cons and Science Fiction Star Trek Cons, or general comic Comic-Cons and you just have kind of passive fans...you have people who are like...maybe they dabble in drawing a few things or maybe they do it but they don't really find a niche to fit into and with furrydom it almost seems like just being a fan is enough. I mean that is also for the comic ones and Sci-Fi ones too where you can just be a fan but, it's almost important in the furry fandom to be a fan to sustain it.

Hector: I think part of that, at least from my perspective, looking at it is if you look at Sci-Fi Cons or Anime Cons the worlds in which people interact are worlds that have been built for them. Uh, Star Trek, Star Wars, uh, Firefly, you know all these worlds have been built for them. You know they are things that they are passionate about and really enjoy but they're not things that they have any real control or say in how it evolves. Uh, Anime same thing, comic books same thing...it's all controlled by an outside force for...for intents and purposes of the fandom it's controlled by an outside force. It's got their own agenda where...

Dusty: Where people just appreciate what is presented?

Hector: Right. Now they might uh, bring in material or might do things inside of it but they're not going to get the attention necessarily that these bigger names that are more established will have. Um, so in my perspective, the furry fandom is the fledgling. Now there are some people out there like Dark Natasha um, uh, Kyell Gold, you know, writer, that bring a lot in...I don't know why I'm shivering.

Dusty: Well we can probably turn the temperature up. *adjusts thermostat*

Tasha: Yeah it is chilly in here.

Hector: Is that why I am shivering? I actually do not feel cold but I am shivering.

Tasha: I...my hands are frozen. That's why I get talking a lot, and if I start talking too much I start...

Hector: I'm actually shivering and I don't know why.

Tasha: It's cold in here.

Hector: Okay...yeah, yeah it's sad...those people we're seeing are very active in the community and they're very approachable. Kyell Gold is very approachable. You can walk up to him and talk to him, uh, Dark Natasha same thing. And going back to the panels, the, a lot of the panels that I've seen in other fandoms to have that moderation. They do have somebody there that is kind of keeping them on, on task, on subject...both the audience and the panelists themselves. Um, almost seems like there's always a plan. You know, some sort of syllabus or something that they're following to kind of get out their thing but they're still taking questions and answering things as they go along...most of the panels I have been in in the furry fandom don't work that way. Uh, they're a lot more free form. Now the panels themselves, you know, certain ones may have certain topics they want to hit on or certain things they want to touch on but even that is still a free flowing thing, uh, and they'll reach a point where they just kind of need to advance it but even when they advance it they're not ignoring what's already been done. They're trying to segue into that and that doesn't always happen in some of the other fandoms that I have attended or have been a part of...um, the audience participation seems to be a bigger thing for the panelists to kind of play off of...to kind of see where their audience wants to talk, where their audience wants to focus on...and provide the information that their audience wants rather than the information that their syllabus says they need to deliver.

Dusty: So, with those panels and wanting to deliver information, the panels will still have topics, you know, "Fursuit Construction" or "How to Draw Life Models" or as you mentioned "This is Your First Firry Convention." I mean, there is that free form aspect to it though, they're not going to be the sage on the stage and just spend the whole hour talking about, like, a professor's PowerPoint where they've got everything planned out note for note, you mention they are free form so I mean they kind of feel out the audience for what they're eager to engage with. I mean the panel, not so much one way talk.

Hector: Yeah exactly, they want that audience participation, they want...it's like I said, it's less this structured thing where they are trying to give information to the audience as much as they're trying to figure out what the audience has to say as well. You know go to a panel in the Sci-Fi community, for example, uh, you know I've watched, uh, Amanda Tapping up on stage. She's holding a panel about, uh, Stargate, and you know...how her

interactions in that have done whatever...you know, however they phrase it, but it's always her up there talking...she might take a question or two, you know, or there might be a comment shouted out that she'll respond to, but it's never a pause and try to get feedback from the audience, it's always a continually moving forward from...as her leasing it and kind of focusing it on what they've given to her to talk about. Uh, at least that was the one that I remember the most. Uh, I attended a panel today for writing. For, uh, something I don't remember exactly, but it was something to do with publishing a novel. Now, I thought it was going to be a little more talk on what it takes to publish a novel and different genres and how they might interact with that. Well what it turned out to be, or what it ended up being was less that and more of...what questions does the audience have to these people who are already published, who have already written novels in various genres and, uh, what does...what do we as, striving novelists need to do to reach [their] level or to get published or to do this thing. Uh, so they didn't really guide us so much as they answered the question presented and then made sure that any comments were filled in from their perspective to give the information requested. That...did that make sense? Okay. I'm not sure I explain things well.

Dusty: Oh no, it's quite wonderful. So, you mentioned earlier that something like Star Trek or Star Wars, even the Marvel Universe are these pre-made things that are created for the fans to kind of...soak in, to take, but it seems within the furry fandom...talking about panels...but also in the arts, and with either commissioning art or if they create their own art or if they host a panel, I mean there is that contribution that you don't really see in a lot of the other ones. I mean there is fan art and there is these other things but to interact with the furry fandom you almost have to have or you do...or do you think it is a requirement to have a fursona to engage, to commission art, or to, you know being a fan alone in the furry fandom...is there a...it almost seems there is more emphasis on a fan from the way I look at it to...interact with the fandom, out of necessity to help it continue?

Hector: Right, yeah, it's much more fan driven in my mind. Uh, you know, looking at Star Trek, Star Wars, those were created from one person's vision as...not necessarily a way to make money but a way to make money. I mean it's...the only reason they aired is because somebody thought there was money to be made from it, to be had from this idea. Obviously entertainment values as well, networks were trying to get viewership and so on and so forth. So, those things are created not so much for the audience, or for any kind of participation from the audience as more as...at least to my mind...a outlet for the person or individuals and the company to bring in more money. I mean, corporate America. Um, the fandom, while that absolutely exists, I mean everybody needs to make money, everybody's gotta survive and support themselves...it feels more passion. I mean, I've never seen Gene Roddenberry speak, or even anything close to that. Amanda Tapping is probably the only one I've ever actually seen speak...she's and actor...actress, I mean that's what she does that's her livelihood. Now she enjoyed the character she played and so on and so forth, but when the run in Stargate for her was done it was done. She moved onto the next project

and now that's her passion. Her passion is acting, it's not anything related to any fandom or genre, it's just that acting. Here, in the furry fandom it is...I won't say it's a requirement to have a fursona, I have met a few people that don't, but there has to be that love for anthropomorphic or cartoons or Pokemon, what have you. There's some love, some draw, for these individuals to even get interested and get involved. And once they're involved they create more....generate more things for everybody else to interact with and then they'll take from the things other people have interacted with and it just kind of snowballs and builds on itself and then fractures off and does this other thing and...you know...Bronies, and all these different things going on. You know, and ignoring all the fetishes and everything else but...

Dusty: Which exist, they're in all different groups.

Hector: Exactly. Every single group. Uh, but, it's just its own living entity that we drive from the ground up we drive it and it's not driven from the top down like a lot of the other fandoms. The Camarilla, the Camarilla is built around White Wolf's World of Darkness. The Cam is controlled by White Wolf. Anything we did was controlled by White Wolf. Now we could make little changes and have our own interpersonal interactions within that structure, but it all boiled back to that structure. There was no breaking that structure to do something different. It had to be inside that structure. So, while it was fun, ultimately it doesn't have the allure that this fandom does for me. Uh, at no point in The Camarilla could I envision and create my own clan, you know my own sect, anything, and have it be playable in any kind of sanctioned game. Some troop stuff, sure some off-faction little games going on, sure, anything goes...but as the organization itself as that particular piece of the fandom, no. Here, you know, I create my own species. I've done, you know, I'm working on writing, I'm creating a language for them, I'm creating the world the solar system that they come from and doing all this work, and...at least 90% of the people I've talked to that have shown interest in it have really shown interest. It's not that passing "oh you're doing a thing" you know, "cool, good for you" and then walk away. No, they'll ask me questions and they'll ask me questions I never thought to answer on my own. So then I'll make notes of, okay, they've asked this question let me think about it, answer that question, then make notes and put that in my notes for the species because now I've had something asked and I've gotten another piece of information for how they...either the culture works, how they work physiologically or biologically, or any other number of things. Uh, Russian friend, uh, very big into language he speaks Russian natively he speaks uh, French and English as second and third languages. Uh, and I don't know which one's which but...

Dusty: But they are secondary.

Hector: ...Right, they're secondary to Russian. Um, and I've actually been helping him get better at his English because, well, I only speak English, unfortunately. I mean I have a little bit of Spanish but not enough to be conversational anymore. Uh, and, but he'll share stuff

with me from Russia, Russian language, and I'll look at it and try to interpret, try to understand what it is because that's our connection...is that language. And then he's also very interested in the species I'm building, he's been a great support to the whole process. Uh, and that's the fandom. Unlike some other, you know like Sci-Fi thing you try to go off and do your own thing and there will be a handful of people that are all behind you and love it...most of the rest of them are going to be, "whatever it doesn't...it's not this thing, so..."

Dusty: They'll point to the rule book or point to the canon things and say it needs to be like this.

Hector: Yep.

Dusty: Gotcha.

Hector: And that doesn't happen in this fandom. At least not to me.

Dusty: You talked about you created your own species. Is that normal for furies to do that?

Hector: I think so.

Dusty: I see there's foxes and wolves and you know...from my time in the fandom there's the core, "oh you're a rabbit, oh you're this or that..." and they might bring in some extra things like a thylacine or a mastodon character or even something that most people generally don't pick. It's rare that they pick a primate even, which is interesting in and of itself, but you've actually gone to create your own species, your own story, and your own world. I mean, is that...why not just be a fox?

Hector: You're absolutely right, uh, it came down to me for being a thought exercise. Again my, my disabilities have made it so that I'm not employable as a productive member of a work force. Uh, so I've had to figure out other things to do with my time. I'm at home all the time unless I go out for a ride or I do this other thing or what not. Uh, so I've got a lot of free time, a lot of free time on my hands. So what do I do with that time? You know, do I watch television and veg out? Do I do this other thing and...you know...maybe be happy with it or not...um, then it also comes down to uh, other factors in my life is, uh, for example I don't have a lot of room to kind of do any kind of crafts. Um, we've got an office space set up but that is what it is, that's an office space with computers. My wife works from home part of the time so that's got to be setup for that, I've got my own system that's setup for doing things. We view television on the computers, it's set up as an office, there's just not a lot of space to do anything else with it. Um, I'm very much a hands-on type person but I don't like to have to pick up what I'm doing from day to day just to have to put it back out the next time I want to mess with it. Painting miniatures is something that I enjoy quite a bit. Again, we don't have space so I can't put that stuff out and leave it out and do that painting and spend two or three hours on it today and come back to it two

days later and work on it again...I have to put that stuff away every time I'm done with it 'cause there's no space available to just leave it sit. Um, so I don't mess with those things I just don't have that, that drive to clean up the thing I want to work on if I intend to work on it again over the next few days, to have to clean it up every single time and then have to bring everything back out again, uh, just to set up and then spend a few hours on it and have to put it back away...so, a lot of things like fursuited I tried to get into actually constructing suits. I don't have space. Uh, I also don't have the skill but space is the big thing as I can't just leave it out and have it be something I can stare at for two or three days and go how can I work around the problem I'm having. I need to stare at it, I need to see it, I need to pick it up, I need to handle it, you know, I need to look at it. Examine it. If I can't leave it out I can't easily do those things, so, it gets put away and not touched. Uh, I just bought a tablet for drawing. It was something my rather didn't let me do was any kind of art, uh, again, part of that abuse stuff we talked about. Uh, I drew a lot, when I was in junior high and elementary...but once it got past that point where school was more challenging and I couldn't hold the grades he wanted me to hold, those things got taken away and on more than one occasion I was forced to tear them up and burn them myself. It was not...it is what it is, I mean it made me who I am today I don't hold any grudges to that now, but...

Dusty: At the time it was hard to endure.

Hector: Very, very hard to deal with...very hard to ignore, and it made me who I am today, so...it's still not something that can be ignored. Uh, it's something that can be looked past, just, as a thing that happened. So, uh, I wasn't really allowed to do any art so now I'm trying to get back into it and...well the one thing I always could do was write and think. So, spending my free time now is doing a lot of research and creating a species which, yes, I feel that there are some people in the fandom that do it, uh, it seems from my perspective to be mostly...uh, artists, creating...not necessarily trying to create a species to proliferate a species, though that does happen. Uh, Sergals is a great example of that. Uh, there's some other dragon species out there that have a register or somebody you need to talk to before you can create one of that species.

Dusty: Almost like an exclusive club?

Hector: Kind of, yeah. Yeah, Sergals are one that's not, obviously not one that's really exclusive you just say when you create this thing this is who created it, I'm doing this thing but it's their intellectual property, here it is.

Dusty: Just the acknowledgement?

Hector: Just the acknowledgement. Ah...so yes, I'm creating my own species 'cause, going back to the artists, it's, it's...a lot of the time it's a design process, rather than trying to create a new species. Uh, though new species are born out of that design process and things are laid out so that that species then has its own colorations, its own marking sets,

or...or ways those markings are applied. Uh, and then people might start requesting those 'cause they like the design, you know, but they want their own custom version of that design, uh, and again I see that a lot for the visual art side of it. More so than the, ah, reading or the printed version of that, uh, though I again I have seen that but most of your...most of the furry literature at least what I've read has been foxes or leopards or you know...

Dusty: Seems pretty standard, yeah.

Hector: Pretty standard fare, but the standard fare is also something that's easy, again in my mind, to just grab a hold of and do something with because you can look at that creature, that, that, uh, base form and figure out characteristics that the anthropomorphic version of it might have. Uh, and then how in depth you want to go or how accurate you want to portray that. You know, Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote are a great example of how you've been lied to your entire life, you know, roadrunners top out at like 24 miles an hour, somewhere in that range, coyotes can run 35. It should've...the Coyote should've caught the roadrunner. It never happened in the cartoons. So, how accurate is it? It doesn't have to be. But it's that baseline. People can identify with that thing because they know that thing exists, they've had cursory interactions with that thing or at least passing knowledge of this thing existing so it's...it's very easy for people to go "oh yeah I can see this thing having these traits."

Dusty: Suspend the disbelief.

Hector: Right. Uh, you know, moving on to creating your own species then you're getting into aspects of...how do they function? Because they don't exist. They're not something anybody can observe and, and try to get trixed on, but then, how do you base that? You know, where do you start to base that on? Well, every human is tied to human perception, you know, what we see, what we do, what we hear, what we smell. Uh, so...you know how creating an alien species, specifically for me, I'm creating something that doesn't exist that has its own solar system, that has its own history, that has its own planet, its own evolution and for me the fun is, uh, building up all their biology, their culture, uh, their language and how all these things came to be. Uh, but you've got to start somewhere. You know, starting from the point that they are now at least in my mind is where I'm starting and that I can work from that stuff, background stuff out later. But, at the same time, there's certain things you've got to think about. How did they evolve to where they're at? A lot of that is due to environment. Uh, and, culture is based on environment, too, so you know anthropology, it's all...all these things build this thing, this creature. So, I'm having fun with that and thinking about all kinds of different aspects of their life, you know...would they wear clothes? They're furred creatures. Probably not, you know, arid environment. You know, how does their biology work? You know there's not a lot of...not a lot of free water on their planet so how does...how do they cope with that? You know, am I gonna...are they going to be carbon based? Uh, there's that.

Dusty: That's one that a lot of people just take for granted – oh everything is carbon based.

Hector: Right, and, and for me a lot of the fun is just the science behind it all. You know I...I'm a Sci...I grew up on Sci-Fi, I mean I went to a...even before The Camarilla, it was Sci-Fi Cons, it was Sci-Fi related things. And The Camarilla came in...we did a little more Fantasy, a lot more fiction.

Dusty: Sure, contemporary setting.

Hector: Yeah. Uh, Anne Rice, a lot of...a lot more contemporary mainstream material involved that people are, were, really aware of and...you know, again there's going to be constraints. You can't really...the creativity is, is, constrained because you've got to meet "X" requirements before you can even participate. Uh, Society for Creative Anachronism is another one that I tried. That one failed miserably.

Dusty: What, with the SCA?

Hector: Yeah! That failed miserably for me.

Dusty: Oh. Just on the...the personal interactions? Or just with the...

Hector: The organization.

Dusty: ...the organization itself?

Hector: It failed almost immediately on the organization. Ah, my wife and my mother-in-law had been into it for a considerable amount of time and I had been participating to a limited degree. Uh, but at the time I started I was going...I had started getting into heavy participation, uh, so I was going to start fighting, uh, and there were some things there that were kind of...put me off immediately. Uh, I was told I had to fight sword and board, which is sword and shield, and I don't like...I didn't want to fight that way I wanted to fight Florentine, which is two...two weapons, one in each hand.

Dusty: Oh, okay.

Hector: Uh, which is a fighting style they use, um...

Dusty: But they wouldn't let you have the option to pursue that?

Hector: At least not initially. I had to learn this other...style, before I could move on.

Dusty: Sort of a tiered requirement system?

Hector: Right, which didn't ring well with me. I shouldn't have to learn this technique if I don't want to use that technique. I should...

Dusty: Right, you want to do this, you should be able to learn this. Why study Karate when you want to do Jujitsu?

Hector: Right, exactly. You know, Wing Tsun versus another Kung Fu. Exactly, study the one you want to know rather than be forced to study one you don't. Now...

Dusty: It's not like it's a stair-stepping method.

Hector: Right.

Dusty: This is a pre-requisite to doing that.

Hector: Right, if I wanted to study Wing Tsun...yes, I have to start out at the very bottom and learn the katas first before I can advance to any of the other techniques in that style. But I want to learn that style so, okay, I will start with whatever foundation I need. I will learn it, because I want to know this. If I want to fight, there is no pre-requisite between fighting with a shield and a sword that's going to teach me much of anything to fighting with two individual weapons. They don't function the same. You know, they just don't...you don't use them the same. So it didn't, it didn't, I couldn't connect that in my head to understand. Now later I found out that no, I don't have to do that, but that was after I had already had other things that had really put me off. Uh, again my wife and my mother-in-law were into it so we went to an event and there was people there that were doing the registration for your name and for your device. So, I'm like, okay, well there's people already here, my wife and my mother-in-law are already doing it, we've already kind of discussed it and figured out what names we want so we've done some research, we know that they are kind of available but how do we get there and these people can kind of help you with that research to justify those names. *Hector's phone chimes and alert* Wow. Uh.

Dusty: The phone had to put in its two cents.

Hector: What threw me off there was when I put my name in, uh, it came back and they said I couldn't have it. And the reason that I couldn't have it was because the name was too similar in pronunciation, not spelling, pronunciation, to somebody on the opposite coast from me. 3,000 miles away, and I can't have the name I want because it sounds too similar to somebody else.

Dusty: Even though in the great breadth and depth of contemporary America there's loads of people that have names that sound very similar.

Hector: Exactly, and that was the point I'd brought up. Literally, how many Johns do you know?

Dusty: So many.

Hector: How many Mikes?

Dusty: In Idaho? Quite a few!

laughter

Hector: You know, and that's just first names! Put two names together and...yes that goes down but, look at a phonebook and how...

Dusty: Andersons versus Andresons.

Hector: ...yeah, how many John Crooks are there in the book? You know in a metropolitan area...Adam Smith! I mean how many of those people exist in one city?

Dusty: All of which leading completely different lives. Nothing is cookie cutter about them.

Hector: And nobody having any problem with having the same name...so, that really put a bind on my ability to even accept what they were saying. So I ended up having to change the name. Now I changed this to...I kept the first name I was going for and changed the last name to match another friend's name, still same flavor but just changed...it got accepted. It...it...but I shouldn't have had to go that route.

Dusty: Right, they should have just accepted what you handed them.

Hector: Right, and then, register device. Well, again, and everything has to be checked and validated for fitting the period of time in which you're trying to put your persona into. So, register device, well, my...the persona that I was trying to register was a Norse Viking. They didn't have coat of arms. Not, not in the way the Europe did. So, registering device you have to register it in the way Europe registered it. Okay, fine, whatever. Tried to register my device, got everything setup and it took something like nine months for them to go "no you can't have it because this other one looks too similar." Well I went and researched, I found that other one, which was another, uh, persona related one. It wasn't a real one again, this part of the...and they won't let you have anything that's actually real either. So, I went and researched this other one and I brought it to their attention. I said there is no way a seeing individual could mistake this one for this one. Not possible. Well, it still has to have two points of contention. Really. Again, blank background same creature structure on the shield...completely blank background. Creature over here – same creature, same stance, same pose, on a starry background.

Dusty: That's too similar.

Hector: Yeah, 'cause it's only one, only one point of contention.

Dusty: I would think from a distance you should be able to say that's different.

Hector: It is. Like I said, looking at them side by side, even from a distance this one obviously has markings this one doesn't have. But, it didn't fly, so I had to change it. Well, I didn't want to and part of that was because they require you to file it in triplicate and color it and do all this other crap, and color it with special pencils...archive quality pencils and all this...rigmarole, which by the time that it got to that point, I'm done.

Dusty: Right.

Hector: I'm just done.

Dusty: They've engineered the fun out of it.

Hector: Exactly. Uh, now my wife ended up forcing me...not so much forcing me but got me to make a change and do some changes to it and it passed. But by that point, I can't have my name, I can't have the coat of arms that I wanted, I can't fight the way I want...I'm done!

Dusty: It loses the appeal for you.

Hector: Right.

Dusty: But the furry fandom hasn't done that to you.

Hector: No. Not at all.

Dusty: It sounds like quite different how you're interacting with it now from what you were saying when you first started at the first convention. How, I mean how did you come back to the second one? I mean because it must have been enough free form to that first one you got over the personal space issues and there was enough draw to bring you back the second year of your own will because I am assuming your friend wasn't the guest of honor the second time around?

Hector: Was not, no. Ah, yeah, what happened was I found out there was a fandom. First of all, that first convention I found out there was a fandom. Uh, and then I got online and started doing some research, you know, I found out FurLife existed. I found out there's certain people on FurLife that are active in creating these events. So, I picked a name, seemingly at random ***** and contacted him by, over, one of these routes. I don't remember if it was forum or E-mail or exactly what I did but I contacted him. And, asked, you know to go to lunch or do this thing or whatever it was, which it turned out to be lunch. Uh, you know just meet up with him and talk and chat and kind of share some of the same stuff I'm sharing now. Um, but uh, he was kind of that door to realizing what the fandom could be, at least from his perspective, and how to interact. Uh, so, I started going to like the furry bowling meets which locally here those are huge. I mean they are a hundred plus people in attendance at the furry bowling meets. That's a mini-convention, you know, a half-day mini-convention. Ah, it was amazing. I started talking to people and just having that interaction. And there was some touchy moments where my personal space was invaded again. I'm not...I hadn't reached the point I am today and I just kind of let it go. You know it's just one of those things I'm like, okay, this seems to be a recurring theme...breathe! *chuckles* It is not...it's not going to kill you type of deal. And then uh, just moved forward and kept that kind of steady progression of meeting people, getting to know people, talking to people, seeing what uh, interests they have and then you know, who is like minded enough that I can actually interact with more than just once a year.

Dusty: Sure, can build the relationship and then continue talking more.

Hector: Yeah, who is mature enough to...for a 35-year-old to actually interact with, you know, some of the 18, 19, 17-year-olds...not so much. And they're a completely different generation, into things that I just...

Dusty: Things that you are separated from.

Hector: Yeah.

Dusty: Do you get called a 'Grey Muzzle'?

Hector: Yes.

Dusty: But we're not quite in that bracket of a Grey Muzzle, right? Well how do you define the...

Hector: I am!

Dusty: ...Well yeah.

Hector: Look at my beard, that is about as white as it gets!

chuckles

Dusty: But there is that distinction between, even if you look on something like the Anthropomorphic Research Project, they look at the general population of furrydom it seems to be larger toward you know, the late teens/early twenty-year-olds and very few of the Grey Muzzles I mean it almost tapers away.

Hector: Yeah there definitely is that, I mean it's um, and I guess it's...I guess it's kind of what this fandom is good for? Uh, most of your...even starting in the teens you know, 13, 14, 15...even on up into your mid-twenties uh, I know I was searching for myself and who I was during those years and where I fit in where I didn't fit in and how to interact and...you know, be who I wanted to be. This fandom allows a lot of freedom to do those things and figure out who you are, who you want to be...and is very accepting of those that don't fit [society's] norms. Uh, you know there's still a lot of prejudiced to gays, to transgenders, to uh people with physical disabilities, to people that don't look like everybody else, regardless of race...I mean even if you just got, if you're small in stature as a...well as anybody, but you know especially men, uh, that just doesn't have that...they don't have that connection with...with the rest of their generation per se. And the fandom is very accepting of any of that stuff, for the most part. I mean everybody's got their limits, obviously.

Dusty: But the furry fandom does tout itself as being one of the more accepting fandoms...every one of those groups you just described, there is strong representation in the furry fandom.

Hector: Very strong. Uh, so, me being called a Grey Muzzle I really don't care. Uh, I know who I am now...uh, yes I have different facades that I might put on for different things, you know, being a biker, yeah...

Dusty: Fursuited.

Hector: ...yeah versus fursuited, I mean those are two dynamics that really don't mesh well, generally.

Dusty: You're one or the other.

Hector: Right.

Dusty: So, reductionist.

Hector: Exactly. Uh, and close friends know that I furry. They know I suit, they've seen my suits they've seen pictures. Uh, obviously I'm careful to show them only clean stuff.

chuckles You know there's, there's certain things that I don't want general people that I acquaint with outside the fandom to know anything about, but at the same time it's not something I'm ashamed of, it's just something that is better left unsaid.

Dusty: Why is that?

Hector: It's just easier. Uh, you know...every, easiest way I can think about it is...you look at any group of people, regardless of what they are...bikers, bondage...well, and then even church, I mean, any fragment group of society. Whatever that may be, society as a whole, especially American society has certain taboos. Things you just don't talk about, that you don't share with company that might not appreciate it. Uh, so while each of these splinter fragment groups of society are just that, they're fragments or smaller groupings inside a much larger social structure...they all have sex. But, they don't talk about it. Fandom is no different. It...it's...the fandom is accepting of all these things. There's a lot of material that is X-rated. A lot of it that is G-rated. But, if somebody only does G-rated stuff or only interested in G-rated stuff I don't see the need to push anything beyond that on them. If they're not interested in it, there's no reason to show it. Uh, society as a whole, again, there are certain taboos. Sex being one of those taboos...yes, everybody does it, or some form...some participation is taken, however it's taken...but it's not something you share. This fandom is unique in that aspect of being able to share that, but again that's no different really in my mind than looking at uh...a smaller group such as...furry fandom to me is a smaller grouping of individuals I mean it's a much smaller off shoot of the general population. Um, look at bikers. And in the last twenty or thirty years there's been a huge surge of bikers on the road...not all of them are Harley. You know there's all different makes and models of bikes out there, different types of bikes. Uh, in my mind, if you're on two wheels and having fun, go for it! I don't care. Yes, I ride a Harley Davidson, yes I wear leather, yes I do this thing...I don't expect everybody else to do it. Enjoy it the way you want to enjoy it. Have fun! Uh, so, but then there's a splinter group of that group, which

typically are known as One Percenters. Uh, locally you've got the Banditos, there's a few Hell's Angels, there's uh...I don't know, there's too many, I don't even know all of them. I don't want to, I'm not in that particular piece of the culture. Now I have interactions with them because it's impossible to not have interactions but...you kind of got to tread on eggshells to a certain degree with them 'cause you don't want to piss them off because, well, they're One Percenters for a reason. They don't really follow society's laws. Um, now I don't necessarily think it's as bad as what Sons of Anarchy on television would portray that to be, again it's not as bad for furies as that CSI episode. *chuckles* You know...so...

Dusty: But it still seems to stick in the cultural conscience.

Hector: Exactly, exactly. I mean, Hell's Angels back in the day were something you didn't mess with but at the same time you look at some of the groups out there today that would fit into...could easily fit into that Hell's Angels from that era...and they're doing things against [Westboro Baptist Church] I mean, they're blockading them keeping them from interfering with things. You know...

Dusty: That's a really stand up kind of move for them as the rest of nation would look at it.

Hector: Right in the context in which this is happening they're the good guys when they wouldn't be in any other circumstance.

Dusty: Right, any other place just riding down the road you'd want to lock your doors even if they're passing you. *chuckles*

Hector: Right. So...

Dusty: Furies similar?

Hector: It's a mentality that...while completely disjointed from, from each other, there are still parallels to be drawn.

Dusty: With um, with the furry fandom you're talking you don't want to talk about being a furry with folks that much. I mean you said your close friends know, and then you don't talk about the sex piece or the fetish piece, or the other places that the sub-sets within the furry fandom...I mean how do you, I mean you kind of hide away the fact you're furry? I mean you don't advertise this, because I'm assuming, like me, I hide it myself because if I say furry the first thing that pops up is that CSI episode which is a recurring thing for a lot of folks.

Hector: Absolutely. It...for me it's not so much that I'm hiding it, but, more that it's not a subject that is broached in normal conversation. So if it's not brought up or it's not talked about, I'm not going to be the one to bring it up and talk about it. Uh...

Dusty: It's not like talking about baseball, though. It's not like talking about your Harley.

Hector. Right. And even at that, there are people that I won't talk about my Harley about I mean...large, again, close people in the fandom, close people in the furry fandom know that I ride. But there's a lot of people that I've...that I'm acquainted with as well that have no idea that I ride motorcycle or ride Harley Davidson. Now that's something that is a little easier to come up or to bring up or get talked about because transportation and cars in our culture are a sign of status. So it's something that gets talked about and is much easier to convey, uh, to anybody 'cause everybody has to deal with some form of transportation. Be it bus, car...

Dusty: Something everybody has in common.

Hector: Right. And that's what I'm getting at is...you know I won't go into details about my motorcycle to somebody that doesn't know anything about motorcycles. You know if they want to ask me questions, "Well what do you ride?" Well I ride a Harley Davidson. Well, you know, do you ride a small one or the big one? Well I ride the big one. You know, I kind of follow their questions and only give them the information they are looking for.

Dusty: Just the surface, all they know...

Hector: Right, if, for example, my uh, going back to the furry fandom, my species that I am creating...uh, there are artists out there that have seen the species and then start asking me questions about it. I'll answer their questions all day long. I don't care how many questions they throw at me, I'll keep answering those questions. Uh, and I'll add information to that if I feel that's pertinent to what they're requesting or what they're trying to understand. Uh, creating a language, same thing. People that are interested will show that interest and I will provide them that information and maybe more. If they don't show that interest, I give them broad strokes. You know, uh, I drove truck for sixteen years. Every single job I ever had driving truck was still customer service. I'm always dealing with people. So I had to create...I had to learn those skills. You know, customer relations, uh, how to train people to do various jobs and you know how to be in charge of people doing various jobs. Military. So...

Dusty: You served in the military, too.

Hector: Yes. So I had to create, I had to learn the skills to be good at what I was doing. Yes my job primarily was ninety-percent on the road, driving a truck safely, delivering, you know, getting from point A to point B to make my delivery. But that's not all it was, I'm always the person...I'm the only person half the time that the customer ever interacts with. Maybe a phone call to make an order but they never see...they never face to face deal with anybody but me...

Dusty: You're the flesh and blood.

Hector: ...Or another driver. Yeah. We're the face of the company and we're the people that are seen. Uh, and I've always felt not necessarily pride for any company I work for but

pride in myself and what I do. I'm a...driving truck, I'm a professional truck driver. That's a professional job, you know, it has its own skills, it has its own things that have to be done to do it. So, and customer service was one of those things in my mind that was something that needed to be addressed. So I learned those skills, I learned how to talk to people. I learned how to, uh, provide an answer that they needed or wanted or at least steered them towards how to get that answer, but never provide them with more than what they're asking because then they're bored...they don't really care, they're just trying to get a certain amount of information to do whatever they're trying to do, or know whatever they want to know, anything beyond that is...useless to them. Uh, you know, unless they've got some kind of interest and I do that with everything. The species that I'm creating, if they're not...if they don't show the interest I'm not going to go much past "it's a species I'm creating." You know.

Dusty: And most people will leave it at that?

Hector: And most people just leave it at that. You know, and it's not actually because they don't really care, they just don't have the interest. They don't care to know anymore. It's not the focus of what they're interested in, you know? Turn around and talk about cars and then they're "oh my God! Well I've got twenty inch wheels, I've got chrome, and I've got this and I've got that and...you know, fuel injection and..."

Dusty: You find out where their interest is at and run with it.

Hector: And run with it. Uh, and I'm just not one to share information if it's not wanted.

Dusty: Sure.

Hector: It's a waste of my time, waste of my effort to try to explain things only to not have that interest there.

Dusty: Do your friends find the furry interest, interesting?

Hector: Uh, to a small degree. They understand that the reason that I'm into suiting is usually....that's what I like to tell everybody that I like to get into costume. Suit.

Dusty: Perform?

Hector: Perform. And then that performing is the idea that I get to mess with Mundanes. That I get to go have a beer, get in the drunk garden, in the beer garden with the people that are a little bit inebriated and play charades. You know, it's that...that's what I tell people. You know, I leave out the rest of the fandom's idiosyncrasies because they're not interested, you know?

Dusty: They just want to know your personal connection.

Hector: Right, they want to...and then they'll, you know...I get a lot of asking about, well, uh...you know, "what did you do over your vacation?" Because most people know I go to AnthroCon. My close friends know I go.

Dusty: They know specifics?

Hector: They know some specifics, I mean, you know I say a name like AnthroCon...well they may not be interested in that thing, it's a name to an event. And it's a specific convention and I explain, broad strokes again, AnthroCon is a convention for furies and I go there to suit and perform. Uh, biggest one in the world. You know, broad strokes. You know, anything beyond that I don't really share because unless they're asking me specifics...in what they're interested in...you know the questions will inform me to where their interested in knowing, in what they are interested in knowing about. Uh, that will provide me with the information necessary to give them the information they're interested in. Uh, so yeah it's broad strokes for the most part uh, yeah, so my...a couple of motorcycle guys I ride with will ask me, you know, they know I take this big trip to East Coast and do all these things and they know one of those stops is AnthroCon and that I'm dressing up and they want to know if I had a good time, if I have got any good stories from, you know, from the drunk people that I interact with, you know from the people that I harass, you know...playing with, uh, and they like those stories. And that's what they're interested in, you know, they don't have any interest beyond that so I'm just not going to share it.

Dusty: Sure. But it means a lot to you when you go fursuit, though? It's more than just entertainment, it's meaningful to you.

Hector: Well, again, it's that...it's that break from my everyday life. You know, growing up in an abusive house, growing up having to fight, having to make stands and, you know, stand my ground even when I really didn't care, but, putting my foot down and saying 'no more,' you know, 'this shit's gotta stop.' And...that's informed who I am. Now, the fandom has allowed me to put some of that back and I can share with people, you know, that are avid Harley Davidson riders, that they don't belong to any clubs, you know any niche clubs inside that group of people...but they're hardcore motorcycle guys that absolutely love to get out there and ride with the wind in their face. They look like bikers, but I can tell them "I'm a furry," and then not have an issue with it.

Dusty: And they accept you for it?

Hector: Yes. So the fandom has informed that but at the same time, you've got to be careful. Uh, you know, there are just certain people you don't want to tell that to...for example, I've told my father. My whole family knows I'm a furry but at the same time my father is like, very dismissive of the whole thing. Uh, would rather that acknowledgement just not exist...you know he asked me what I'm going to do. I go on these trips, I go visit him in North Carolina. Uh, and he'll say "well you gonna go do..." you know he'll ask me what I'm going to go do. And I'll say I'm going to go pick *** up in Pittsburgh for this convention.

And he'll say "Is it that furry thing?" And I'll say "Yes." And that's where it ends, because he doesn't want to acknowledge anything beyond that. He has no interest whatsoever. I'm not going to push that. I don't care.

APPENDIX K: 'ABE' INTERVIEW

Abe: ...Con in Spokane and, uh, it only lasted three years before it went under.

Dusty: Oh was that, um, took over for ConiFur...All Fur Fun, yeah.

Abe: I was actually involved with Rex's horrendous idea before that of [FurFest Northwest] which he managed to, uh, piss off pretty much everyone in the known world with. Um. Rex was a good guy until he went crazy. Um, anyways, he uh, he had taken a name from another...very close to another convention which had caused problems in of itself. It upset people. And then he chose Moscow which really isn't exactly an ideal location for a Con because of transportation to Moscow. It was terrible. While there are some nice facilities in this town they are not significant enough to have a draw. And then he proceeded to insult the entire furry community of Seattle and that just made sure it wasn't going to happen then at all 'cause it's probably the region's single largest concentration of the Fur community – The Seattle/Tacoma metro area. Um, so that was good stuff there. Anyways, with Uncle Kage, um, what, uh, what got him to insult me before he even knew who I was...and I am not sure that he even still knows who I was, but, uh, speaking to Moorcat – the director for the con, All Fur Fun in Spokane – before our first showing, um, he had found out that I, uh, I'd had a concealed carry permit and have on occasion, in areas such as Seattle or Spokane...dangerous areas like that...I have no qualms about carrying a firearm, which I ended up having to, uh, not necessarily use but I am glad I had had when a number of our Con-goers were, um, accosted by drifters near the, uh, near the, um, Spokane bus terminal the day before the Con when we were getting set up. Um, it was kind of a...anyways...this individual from the east coast said, well, insulted me, calling me "nuts" because, you know, anyone who would have anything to do with firearms whatsoever is therefore some kind of dangerous nut job.

Dusty: I've gotten that myself.

Abe: And which is...that's just plain irresponsible. It's kind of...it makes me glad that people who have those sort of opinions aren't the ones who typically own guns because they're the dangerous ones. Unfortunately, that's not to say that dangerous people don't occasionally get weapons, but uh, the ones with the carry permits don't seem to be.

Dusty: I am right there with you, I myself have one and I think we make a better example, I would hope, as we go out there. As we try to be more responsible, in my opinion. We, we use our mind a little more.

Abe: Looking at the statistics we've got a better judgement record than cops.

Dusty: Hmm.

Abe: I, I think that speaks of itself. But that's still my...opinion. Anyways, um, kind of off the issue.

Dusty: No, no, that's all right. We can go wherever we want.

Abe: Not really, because I...there's, there...there's some interesting furs in the furry community that are...not so much right wing nut jobs but, but um, pro-gun nuts which are kind of interesting 'cause I really don't like them. I don't enjoy dealing with them, because they're um, it seems they're more the crowd that enjoy messing with a...Seattle PD and suing them every week for some kind of infraction against their civil liberties, which half the time they're right and the other half they're just poking at the government with a stick trying to get something out of it. I really can't abide by that. Um, but, yeah. Interesting folks. There's very interesting schism, schisms, within the community based on ideology and what not.

Dusty: Would you say that's normal since we do encompass or...sort of...furrydom is such an umbrella group, I mean that is normal to have that sort of schisms and factions and things?

Abe: I'd agree, um, I think so very much. Um, now that...it seems almost that we um, we get the more extreme. It doesn't seem that there's a lot of middle-of-the-road-furries. I think I am probably the most moderate furry around. Possibly, present company excluded.

Dusty: In regard to everything?

Abe: In general, um, Furs tend to be good folks. But they tend to be very...how would you say...almost fanatical about one idea or another. There is just something that they'll...some kind of idea that they latch onto and it's their core, defining...part of their existence, which is kind of strange. That's probably an incorrect generalization, but, um, it, it seems that uh, every individual has just one thing that almost defines their life. But then again, Americans, we're like that in general. We go to Europe and you ask who someone is, and they get a long laundry list of who they are...you go to America and ask someone who they are and they're "a firefighter," they're "a banker," they're "a bartender." Their occupation defines them, which is just an interesting social difference in of ourselves. And it seems kind of carry-over on that side. Um, I dunno, maybe I should start with...just back at my story. I've seen...I first got involved in the furry community online here as a freshman in Gault Hall before they tore it down. The old, original one. So, fond memories form back then. But, um, my experience has been mainly based out of here but I've encountered furries that are all over the world. I've dealt with Furs in, uh, in uh, Fort Benning, Fort Lewis. I've dealt with them in Richmond, Virginia. Um, I daresay I have probably encountered them over in the Middle East.

Dusty: But it is a global phenomenon?

Abe: It is a global phenomenon. Yes. A number of years ago I was involved with a LiveJournal community called "MilFurs." Probably the worst name title ever.

Dusty: Was that intentional for a joke, or...?

Abe: I...I really don't think so because "MILF" and "Military Furies" are completely different concepts. *chuckles*

Dusty: Gotcha, so there should've been a hyphen in there or something.

Abe: There should have been something. We just um, I don't think whoever set that up ever actually foresaw the connection because he was too much of a nerd.

Dusty: Sure so they never would have been aware of the other acronym that that could've...

Abe: Yeah. And um, that, that community definitely broadened my perspectives. There was a lot of interesting folks that ended up in that community.

Dusty: Was that all branches?

Abe: All branches, all countries. I mean we had Brits and Germans in there as well.

Dusty: Wow.

Abe: Um, one of our core, defining rules...being a military culture, was that it was...that this was about our experiences and our community...protecting each other. It also had a very strong emphasis...I think the rules...one, two, and five on the rules of the organization was: "Don't violate OPSEC" – which was operational security. Because, our brothers rely on that for their safety. Our sisters. Um, it had a lot more activity in the past. I haven't watched it too much recently but, uh, a very strong...there's a very strong community of um, gay and lesbian soldiers...or military personnel that were involved with that, um, especially before the uh, oh the uh...ban on the...on gays in the military was lifted. So there was a lot of people that, um, went there almost as their, um, their private support group to figure out how to deal with it...

Dusty: A space where they could be accepted.

Abe: It was one of many, many, themes of that organization. Um, Veteran's issues, um, when our last president [Obama] was elected...there was all kinds of grief because of he wasn't very well supported...even so that there were a number of liberal leaning members of that group that were very supportive of him, there was a very strong feeling, especially from the older veterans of the group that uh, he wasn't anything good for the military. Um, which I think the military in general holds that point of view. Uh, the gay and lesbian community is definitely happier with him for getting things to move on. Um, I think the military had already kind of realized about three or four years before hand that...look, our country has gotten to a point where um, this [accepting homosexuality] is normal and we just need to move on. Whereas when I enlisted years and years and years ago...I had to file a form, er, sign a form that said okay, homosexuality is incompatible with military service and something, something, something...essentially it was a...the gist of it was, the philosophy was incompatible with military service.

Dusty: So you understand [the military's] philosophy, where they are coming from when you step into that uniform.

Abe: Right. Yeah. Um. Today I understand their point, points of view, and I understand the military but...I um, I don't know. I, I...don't have anything against them per se, but I honestly think it may have been a better philosophy just because we got the smarter people in the military instead of people that were...dumb? Um, not...that's...

Dusty: Are you referring to the take all comers sort of attitude that there seems to be now? Or are you...

Abe: Kind of, um, over...over the course of the war I have seen a lot of interesting, interesting things develop and uh, one of which is pretty much "Yes! You're over forty, you can barely breathe, you can walk...sure we'll take you right now because we need boots on the ground!"

Dusty: Gotcha.

Abe: Whereas before...um...

Dusty: They wanted a certain level of competency, a certain level of critical thought?

Abe: Well, even so, even...even before we...we've always had gays and lesbians in the military. Always. It seems that lesbians have always had an easier time than the gays, whatever, they were smart enough...the ones we had before were smart enough to...keep quiet, wear a chameleon skin, be strong, and just adapt and mold themselves. I think they were um, I think we had...the best kind of people to fill those slots. It was unfair that they were being discriminated against, I, I understand from their point of view. I've been discriminated against in the military because I am not a Christian. Nor am I any one of the other major faiths. Um, Pagans...Pagans aren't well treated, it's been a matter of: "Oh, so you're not going to church today? Yes, so we have got yard work for you to do!"

Dusty: Right, they'll always find something on the low list for you to do.

Abe: Like, ah...it's, it's, it's sad. It's almost a conversion to make you go to church and if they know you're not actually going to church odds are that they won't let you and just make you go do some work.

Dusty: Something unpleasant?

Abe: Right. It's not, not horribly unpleasant, it's just, here I am doing four hours of light work outside while everyone else is sitting around and eating cookies with Chaplain, which, I can't really stand military Chaplains either, but that's another matter. Um, I think most of them are generally good people but they all have their own...objectives, otherwise they wouldn't have gone into military service as a religious entity. Um, but yeah, we got uh...we

got people who were smart enough to survive and adapt and keep the quail feathers down as a buddy of mine likes to say. Not be noticed.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Um, since, since the uh, the abolition of uh, DADT [Don't Ask, Don't Tell], we no longer get that kind of...that same kind of perspective. There hasn't been a big backlash or out lash that everyone was talking about foreseeing for years because, you know, as a country we've gotten to a point where I really don't think anyone gives a shit anymore. Strangely. Frankly put. But, the kind of people that are signing up for the military are um, not necessarily good soldiers, not necessarily smart ones, not necessarily adaptive ones. But we're getting a lot of folks that are doing it just because they can, which I don't really see how that benefits anyone. I can understand a desire to serve but, looking for a job just because you can is silly. Especially when other people's lives are at stake.

Dusty: Absolutely.

Abe: I try not to be bigoted, but I do apologize.

Dusty: No, we're all entitled to our opinions and that is a very insightful one right there. You have that benefit of being part of that inside group.

Abe pauses interview to answer cell phone call, then returns

Abe: All right, so, I guess, eh, back to the beginning about um, twelve years ago I uh, I had uh...discovered the furry community.

Dusty: Just a sec, let me get the input levels back up. There we go. That's better.

Abe: All right, so back to the beginning about twelve years ago I got involved with the furry community, way back in the ancient days of Gault [a University of Idaho dormitory]. That terrible, cinder block rat nest with, with, um, storage closets for bedding spaces. It was, it was great. I, I really do miss it. It was about as ghetto as you could get but it was...it had a...it had a great community feel to it. It was, it was like...um, it was like being in a fraternity without having all the stupid. We didn't have the crazy drunken parties but we still had a kind of a community feel. And we were butted right there with Upham [University of Idaho dormitory] and we still had some of the traditions, we sort of still do, but, the...the co-ed Upham and Gault [current incarnations of the Gault and Upham dormitories now part of the Living and Learning Community Buildings] don't really continue them. Like, uh, last time I checked there was a female in charge of the new Gault and she's got a deer's ass which is our traditional trophy for a flag football game every year held between Gault and Upham for bragging rights and we would pass this trophy of a deer's ass back and forth between one another. Well, it's sitting up in a storage closet in Gault and the female director of Gault doesn't...new Gault at the LLCs, doesn't want to get it out or deal with it 'cause it's

nasty and hair is falling off of it and it's grody and it's rotting...and that's the point! It's tradition. You don't muck with tradition.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: But, unfortunately when they made the two dorms co-ed and they tore down the old ones and built these new clean, modern structures...

Dusty: They don't want something like that in their nice clean hallways.

Abe: Yeah, they don't...it...it was a culture change. I'm not saying that you know...our halls were co-ed before but it wasn't by design, it was by reality. So they had a different culture to it then than it does now. I don't know. I don't like change.

Dusty: I'm right there with you. I was sad to see the old Upham and Gault to be torn down. And I do feel that there was some loss with the community because the new people who live in Gault and Upham...I was in that transitional period where my classmates from high school had gone to college ahead of me and they were in Gault and Upham. Mostly in Upham. But then once it switched over to the new LLC type buildings it just seemed like a lot of that old feeling of community had evaporated into "well, they're just rooms...they're just apartments...they're just suites," a disassociation from the heritage.

Abe: The biggest start of that change I think is when the University...they, they published a survey and used their data to whatever effect they wanted, they didn't actually use the data for what it was. They put out a survey on the...in I think 2000 or 2001, on the security level on campus. This was back when our security consisted of a night watch put on by students ever since, uh, the arson fires before...that led to the arson fire of Gault/Upham, which was actually detected by one of those students. Anyways, um, sorry...tangent.

Dusty: No, no, it's fine.

Abe: I, I'm not a history major but I, I, I study history quite extensively for this town and it's just something that pops up. Um, anyways, so, in response to that instead of asking what we thought we could do to improve security they went: Oh! Oh! There's terrible security, I know, we'll put key locks on every building. Now this is a problematic for...because anyone who lived in the [Theophilus] Tower or Gault/Upham had to go to um, to the Wallace [Complex] basement...Wallace for all their meals, and they had to go to the basement for their mail and all the recreational facilities and everything. Well, at eleven o'clock every night we were locked out because we didn't have the key card to that building. But they decide, as a result of this, that they were going to put locks on everything. Um, the biggest, awesome thing about Gault/Upham is that we had this entry way foyer that went through the building from um, the walk way...I guess they're now calling it the Academic Mall...I don't know why, it's just the walkway that's always been there I don't know who started that fad. Anyways, so between the Ag Science building and Forestry building that walkway goes across the street right through the center walkway of Gault/Upham and it was the

place where everyone on campus went to meet and greet and say hi and see some people on the way through the building to the Tower. It's just, it w-was part of the way things were. Well, they put locks on that, they didn't put locks on the residential areas they put a lock on the entire building so now people had this giant road block on their way to get to the Tower, which did nothing but um, hamper that same kind of dialogue that we had before. It took away from the community feel. And then it's just been a rampant mess since then. And, uh, anyways...good stuff. Lot of rants I could go on, on U of I security. I, I used to work for uh, for their sub-contractor and that's...not...no good stories there.

Dusty: Well it sounds like you'd be the person to talk to for University of Idaho history, though.

Abe: Eh, a little bit.

Dusty: At least as you can give a little bit more of that insider voice, though, that a lot of us would like to hear.

Abe: That's, that's for another project. *chuckles*

Dusty: Yeah that is another project.

Abe: But, um, so, up on third floor I had a...a computer setup in my room and I, I ran the MUCKs. I was searching for um...I was searching for something online that I find kind of embarrassing but I was looking for something to do with anime cat girls because I knew they existed. And then I found the furry community and like, well, this is what I wanted to find anyways so...okay.

Dusty: And you had no idea they existed beforehand?

Abe: No clue. I, and...I, my favorite show has always been Disney's *Robin Hood*.

Dusty: There we go.

Abe: I'm, there's, there's a...a furry survey out there, it's a trick question, they go and say: no, no, you're an idiot! The question is um, what is the first animated film marketed toward the furry community? And it has several options. Disney's *Robin Hood* I think is top of the list, maybe it is *Secret of NIMH*, and yadda-yadda-yadda. And the answer to all of them is: no, these were all for general audiences, you idiot! Now, admittedly, the *Secret of NIMH* was a uh, a uh, um...animal rights propaganda piece for...from England but that's another matter. It's still a classic and most people don't seem to understand it's a propaganda piece. Um, whereas, uh, *Happy Feet* is the same thing. The problem is, unlike the *Secret of NIMH*, they don't understand the concept of subtlety. *Happy Feet* went from cute, half hour film to a stupid half hour propaganda piece. No transition just... *gestures a dropping motion*

Dusty: And the immediate shift is noticeable?

Abe: Yeah. But anyways...

Dusty: And *Secret of NIMH* at least it's woven in...

Abe: It's woven in, it's part of the storyline, it's believable, it's understandable, it still could be taken as entertainment separate from, from, the objective. In fact, I think it's probably better because I don't think most people realized that it was a propaganda piece which identifies it as a classic in that regard as well. Anyways, so I encountered the furry community...several other things at the time I...also encountered um, an online, um, kind of a living history role-play group. It was, uh...Ancient Sites. It was a spin-off/spawn from SPQR, a video game from the '90s. And, uh, so that was a lot of fun. I ended up dealing with the ancient text-based MUCKs. Um, I'm not even sure what to, to....the equivalent...what, to equivalent, to them now. They're um, they're more than a chat program. *Abe sighs* They um, they used TelNet and it was a um, you'd have weird things, you'd have to type "say" and then whatever you wanted to say or "pose" and then whatever you were doing. You could enter in, um, enter in data codes so you could even create buildings and rooms and it was all text described so it was like an old 1980s DOS-based game that was setup to be multi-player and multi-user. And you could program in code to do various functions if you understood enough of it, but it used its own programming language and was completely baffling and I don't think more than half a dozen people in the entire world ever figured out how to program in MUCK. But, um...or MUD, I mean it was also very popular for, um, like sword...sword-swinging fantasy role-play games.

Dusty: So there were several different genres operating in MUCKs and you just had to find the Furry MUCK, or was it...

Abe: I think the base one was MUD and then MUCKs were the uh, the social clients. Um, I think it was "Multi-User" and then they usually put as "MU-asterisk" and the asterisk would be whatever variation of whatever it was after that.

Dusty: Were there several?

Abe: Yeah, yeah there was "Multi-User" and then it was um, like, "Communication Protocol" or, um...

Dusty: I thought "Dungeon" was one?

Abe: "Dungeon," yeah. Yeah. So that's where all those came from. Um, I met a number of friends on Furry MUCK years and years ago that are still very close friends with me now.

Dusty: Excellent.

Abe: But, since then the...the MUCKs were pretty much forgotten by 2004-2005. There are still a lot of people using certain ones but most of 'em were just running from server in a closet somewhere that someone forgot about, hadn't had someone log in for years...they just never shut off the computer...so they were very much obsolete. By 2005, um, Second

Life started appearing on the scene and I think Second Life actually acted to, uh, popularize the furry community quite a bit. Um, I'm a little bit of a bitter individual because when I joined the furry community it was...you had one character, you had yourself.

Abe pauses interview to answer cell phone call, then returns. Dusty begins recording again after delay in conversation.

Abe: Yeah that particular incident, um, I had responded on a, um, a quick reactionary force, a QRF mission for a um, for a supply convoy out of New York state in Iraq that was hit by an IED, um, one of the, uh cargo truck operators ended up being killed and another was seriously injured, and uh...I was actually very upset with the Air Force's explosive ordinance disposal team on that reaction because they...Air Force E.O.D. had actually slowed down our response getting out to secure that scene, to assist those guys in trouble because...the Air Force is...yeah. Angry memories of the Air Force. Anyways, I, I was...it was, a part of the way I had to deal with that incident because it was such a traumatic event, um, was just to write it down on paper. And I...I...it's how I dealt with it, but a part of me has always felt that was um, somehow inappropriate because I was taking um...I was taking real soldiers, in a real incident, where one of which was injured and being evacuated and um...a big burly sergeant who I, I'd uh...I'd um...drew as a bear holding an M-16, which I think was...it very much fit the characters from all the people I saw. And none of them are from my own unit but um, but they had certain characteristics that were very animal like, and all people have them.

Dusty: Sure.

Abe: I know, it used to be a sport to go and sit around in malls, you know, with an Ex and point out what kind of animals certain people were...'cause you know, everyone has just...these defining stereotypical behaviors, or mannerisms, or just the way they're built that make them like certain creatures.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Um, but anyways, soldiers tend to be more like uh, dogs and wolves because they're...they're pack animals. But um, then again, y'know the Army being what it is...it takes all kinds. You get all kinds of bizarre people you wouldn't expect to be in an army. The academic community, um, they're cats. Very different social order. A different hierarchy and they, they behave differently. And anyways, I, I, I...in a while I've always felt that piece was kind of inappropriate because of all the stigmatism of furry being some kind of fetish or it's a kids cartoon with funny animals...it just...just that I drew that picture with them is part of my way of venting, part...you know...it's easier to draw animals than it is people. It really is! And I've never felt that it was quite right because, um, I just don't think the rest of the world sees uh, sees furies quite right. It's just...it's just life. It's all aspects of it, it's not just some fetish.

Dusty: If, if I could ask you, how do you think the world sees furies?

Abe: Well, um, my opinion, and I'm a furry. I've done Fursuited. I've done pretty much anything in the furry community that somebody can do except for have sex in a fursuit because...dear God, why the hell would you want to do that? It's an Easy Bake Oven, why on Earth would you want to be any hotter? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to go on that tangent.

Dusty: No, it's all right.

Abe: The issue I have with furies is, er, the, the world view of furies is that they view furry as being some kind of fetish. Um, everyone, everyone in the furry community is obviously a Fursuiter and has sex in Fursuit. Very much not true. A lot of furies are actually afraid of Fursuits, don't like Fursuits, think that they're kind of a cute little...pretty teddy bear that they'd like to look at once in a while and go "ooo" and "aah" over because of how cool it is and then don't want anything to do with it. And very few, if...there's evidence now that there are people who have in fact had sex in a fursuit. They are a minority within a minority. And, um, hell it's...it's...even as far as the artwork goes, um, there is a lot of...a lot of pin-up art, a lot of um, sexual furry art...but that's not everything.

Dusty: That's a piece of the culture.

Abe: *nods* That's a piece of the culture. And it's, there's...to give you a perspective I guess there's about as much of that art as there is of human art of that nature in the collegiate world. The...the art college has the human equivalent of that and it also has the human equivalent of everything else. I mean, it...this piece of vent art of three of...of a um, some kind of a cat medic, an injured wolf, and a bear bringing in a helicopter is, is, common and it's every aspect of life is encapsulated in the artwork. Because that is what furry is, furry is just...it's just an interest in life. It's not just some sexual fetish, it's just...it's...like a custom skin on your web browser, I guess, would be the best way to describe it. It's, um, just a different way of framing the world. And it's normal. It's no worse than, you know, normal people having sex...I mean, which baffles me that um, I guess in our country we've gotten to the point where everything is so taboo that we feel dirty about having sex with uh...perfectly normal...heterosexual sex, between two consenting adults, that are probably...that are...may or may not be married. We feel taboo about that and that baffles the shit out of me. And it's...just...part of human nature. Anyways, um, yeah, sorry, I didn't mean to get onto a tangent.

Dusty: No, no, it's cool. The furry fandom is more than about sexual fetishes then? You brought it up that the artwork is more than just about adult artwork, it's taking those moments of real life, it's pulling their experiences into some form of rendering whether it's creating a piece of artwork to share on FurAffinity, or writing a story, or...

Abe: If you went to FurAffinity.net, I believe it is, FurAffinity.net and just looked at the main page with whatever is in the new upload is...actually, just for shits and grins, let's go and do that!

Abe uses Dusty's computer to open FurAffinity's main webpage

Abe: Let's go to the main page of FurAffinity. Recent artwork. Okay. So, uh, there is...twelve pieces up. One I have no idea what it is...it probably a story. One is a cute little animal sleeping. One's a uh, a four-legged dog walking in a weird background with human style hair. There's a cute fox fully dressed. That's just a badge. Another cute fox, fully dressed with a couple of androids. Um, another fully dressed fox. A panty shot of a very cute canine animal of some nature, probably a husky. And, oh, there we go! There is ONE piece of porn out of twelve. So, I think that's a pretty fair assessment of it. You know, it's something that exists but it is not the sum total of the community. It is as much part of the furry community as it is a matter...a part...of normal human life.

Dusty: You figure the people who go to sporting games or NASCAR or other things would have similar types of interests.

Abe: Even if you go to a furry website that specializes in pulling porn from various different parts of the internet and posting only the finest furry porn in the world you can still find lots of non-porn, lots of really good artwork of soldiers, of medieval fantasy characters, of um...I've even found one of a firefighter using the Jaws of Life on a vehicle. And any perspective on life...you can find there. My...myself, I have learned over the years to be so...to use discretion in my personal life because I have a number of professional positions. Not all Furs do. A lot of Furs...they're, they're...they're um, their objectives are much more personal and they're much "free-er" to be whoever...er, however they want to live. Whereas if you're in the military or you work in public service or um, fire department, or police, there's a certain expectation that in your...even in your...that in your professional life you'll act in a certain manner. You'll prefer...uh, you'll...you'll have the appearance of normality, you'll act like a normal human being. Which is...very, very hard for me. Um, so it's part of the reason I don't think you see as much artwork of, say, firefighters or EMTs or whatnot because they tend to keep that separate.

Dusty: Is there a need to keep that separate? I mean you talked about the professionalism, is there really a need to be concerned to be cloistered, to be closeted as a furry?

Abe: Well, for me, yes. Um, I've noticed that for females...*laughs*...fancy that, in our society females can get away with pretty much anything. Females are expected to be cute, and bubbly, and have pink cellphones and their turn-outs, you know, those sort of things. Those are normal behaviors. Um, in our society, those aren't normal behaviors for a man. Uh, especially a man in public service. A man is expected to be um...rock solid, kind of conservative, reliable. And they need to be not someone that you look at in an emergency and say "this guy is kind of a freak!" It's an individual where you have to look at him and go

“That is the bustling, muscled, side of help that I’m looking for!” Sure it’s discriminatory, but unfortunately until base human nature changes that’s the way it’s going to be. And um, it’s why cops and firefighters tend to have military-style haircuts because it’s a sign of um, professionalism and...it’s just a professional image. Unfortunately with things like Facebook now, a lot of employers are starting to...especially like in the security world, U of I and police forces...U of I security loves to dive into their employees’ Facebooks to make sure they’re giving a professional image even in their off time because social networking, as a paranoid individual, is the worst thing we’ve ever done! We’ve made, we’ve made not necessarily a spy’s job ethical but we’ve made um, we’ve made pretty much anyone’s job easy...who wants to find out everything there is to know about us.

Dusty: Like personnel managers, identity thieves, even just future spouses or co-workers.

Abe: Oh, it’s terrifying!

Dusty: Right.

Abe: And it’s become such a socially acceptable thing now, that if you don’t have a Facebook that tells your entire life on it, which is terrifying in and of itself, it’s now socially unacceptable not to have that because “oh well, you’re hiding something.” Yeah...myself...

Dusty: Right. You have a right to privacy in your life.

Abe: Right. Um.

Dusty: They think there is something wrong with you, like you’re a Luddite or something, you don’t like technology, you don’t like how this is going...it’s like “No!” *chuckles*

Abe: Which is weird ‘cause I consider myself to be a very nerdy individual. Unfortunately I’m also a medievalist, I’m a blacksmith, and I have a cell phone so I, I may actually be...for a Star Trek fan...somewhat of a Luddite. Anyways, so...I guess we’ll skip over all that stuff at the U of I, the early years of being a furry, when I did my first artwork, we’ll skip onto 2004 when the war happened. So, in 2002 I enlisted in the uh, in the Idaho National Guard because um, I was involved in Naval ROTC before the war. Um, then the war happened, and then I felt completely ashamed. I um, I grew my hair out, I felt like I was uh...somewhat of a loser, like I had failed somehow and now I was being called upon and I wasn’t there doing my bit. So, um, about a year after the war started I enlisted, joined the Guard. Um, partly because Iraq...er, the war in Iraq seemed inevitable in 2002. Uh, took a little bit longer than I expected it to...but it did happen. Well, no, the war happened as soon as I expected it to...it took longer to get the National Guard involved than I expected. Uh, took about a year to start emptying out the National Guard because the active Army wasn’t large enough to fight the war. At least not on an ongoing basis. Which, um, the Army didn’t want to do but once they did they realized how much of a resource they actually had. They actually, honestly, believed that in 2004 that the National Guard was some kind of um...last ditch fall back plan for, you know, Russia invading us. They didn’t actually realize that it

was, in fact, a legitimate fighting force. Which unfortunately since we did such a good job they've been using us ever since. Um, anyways, so...tangent there, uh, so, for about...while I was in basic training uh, we'd actually watched the invasion of Iraq and um...while I was there we uh, everything in our training changed from what it was in peacetime training to wartime training and we even had um, three National Guardsman get pulled out at uh...my program was a combined Basic. It was Basic and Advanced Individual Training all stuck together, so instead of like eight weeks here and like five, six weeks somewhere else it was like...fourteen weeks here, you came out a ready to fight combat engineer soldier. You had all your skills, everything you needed to know, you were ready to go...right out of the can. So, at the end of the basic training phase of week eight, uh, a governor from...I think Minnesota, yanked out these guys and sent them off to the staging line in Kuwait for the war because they were going to finish their training with their units in a combat zone. I...they no longer do that because of the political out lash, but, it was the environment we were in. Um, we were expected to train harder with half the ammunition because...the standard is to throw two grenades, I've only ever thrown one live grenade in my life because they had to cut down all of our ammo for everything to half because it was all being shipped from the arsenal to the warzone. I, there was...as prepared as we were for war...we weren't that prepared! We weren't expecting the um...another all-out war just to land on our doorstep. I mean, we were prepared to fight it but we didn't have the kind of war material that you'd expect. I mean when I showed up to Iraq in 2004 they were dragging out .50 Cal ammo from World War II to equip our equipment. So we still had lots of surplus, but it was literally the last line of what we had.

Dusty: Wow.

Abe: So, anyways, 2004, I was deployed for a year and a half with a group of guys out of Moscow. Um, best folks I've ever known. Most of those guys have gotten out of the Guard now, which has benefitted me...and I'll explain in a minute. Um, over that year and a half there was no hiding anything about myself. I...every bit of myself was on display by the end of that time. We knew what people looked like...how people's silhouette were when they walked at dusk. You could identify two guys walking together by their shape, their...the way they walked, how their legs moved, just their mechanics of motion, from fifty feet away just by their silhouettes you could tell who they were.

Dusty: That's quite a close knit community then.

Abe: Well, we had, twenty four guys eat, live, shit, together for a year and a half. We didn't go anywhere without one another and you know it only got worse when we got to Iraq 'cause we went...we became a Quick Reaction Force, so...our sole purpose for most of a year...for most of a year in combat was to be joined at the hip like a fire department engine company. You see 'em go out to shopping together, you see 'em go out to get gas together, they're always joined at the hip, they're all four guys ready to go at a moment's notice. We were the military equivalent of that. Just, um, six truck, we only rolled about four at a

time...but we had six trucks of, um, three to five guys each that were always together. Ready to go at any moment's time...at any moment's notice just every day, all the time. So, anyways, yeah we got very close then. One thing that did come out was that...yeah, I had been interested in furry. Um, I ended up with a relatively large uh, furry compilation on my, on my laptop computer that I bought. I never even had a laptop until that deployment because I...as much as I am a technological nerd, I love a Frankenstein-style desktop that I can keep plugging parts in and pulling out and upgrading with the times. I am not a laptop person. But I got stuck with one because of necessity. Um, and, one day my commanding officer which we saw very little of and...it's a...it's a good thing we didn't serve with him under combat because he was an idiot...would've killed anyone of us for a bit of shiny cloth...but um, there was a 3-D piece of artwork...I wish I could remember the artist's name...anyways, it was a red vixen in a fantasy style bikini. Um, chainmail bikini, riding a lion and some kind of Sahara...not Sahara...savannah landscape. It looked cool. It was like something, um, like a...like a high fantasy barbarian on a lion charger. It was cool.

Dusty: It sounds really cool.

Abe: It was! Um, unfortunately the C.O. came by and looked at me kind of funny and he was one of those people out of Boise...which...are a very different culture than we are...

Dusty: They are, it's almost a different country.

Abe: It really is, and unfortunately the Guard in Idaho is controlled out of Boise. They...they're like the rest of the state, they expect everything to be there in Boise. They don't understand that all of us up here in Redneck-ville, in the Panhandle, actually exist and we have different philosophy than they do.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Even the ones that aren't Mormon have a very Mormon-centric view down there. So everything is going to be ordered into this sort of life-style and everything is right there in Boise and the whole nine yards. It's just...kind of arrogant people in my opinion. Up here, we're much more accepting of pretty much anything. Even though there are still things that, you know, the kind of rednecks that go into the National Guard still consider taboo were willing to accept other people as long as they, you know, keep their shit to themselves. Kind of a live and let live philosophy. What you do on your side of the fence is your deal. Um, anyways. So. Yeah. We're not really...we're not Republicans up here we're just cons...we're Independents looking for a party affiliation. Um, so, anyways, he uh, he had looked at it on this day and looked at me and went "That's kind of creepy porn you got on your computer there or something" he said. And like, um, no that's not porn but I am sure I could find some nasty, gay, furry porn if that would make you feel any better, sir. Kind of a dick. Anyways, it kind of offended me that that was kind of his perspective on furry in general. He was, um, yeah. He's divorced and an unhappy man so I feel better about myself. Anyways, um...but, um, while I was accepted by my platoon I, I worked well

with them. I was never hazed or whatnot, but for a number of reasons I did feel that I was discriminated against. Not, not actively, not outwardly, but I just wasn't taken seriously. Um, it was very difficult to get promoted even though I had all the necessary skill sets. I worked on deployments and whatnot, I eventually got promoted. Um, but I really had to kind of wait for a full changeover of personnel. And after the war, most of the guys got out, most of the guys that stayed in went to other units. I think I'm...me and one other sergeant now were the only two guys that were in...that are in my platoon now that were in my platoon then. And we were both lower enlisted soldiers. We were both grunts. And um, it really felt like I had to wait for a whole changeover and change the image I had to portray of myself to the new batch, to seem like a refined, um...discretionary professional individual instead of one where I was willing to...on our own time, put my personal life out on display. Though it was kind of an eye opener. Um, I, I took kind of the same approach. In 2008 I deployed as a replacement to a unit in Afghanistan, with the New York National Guard. I um, I still took...you know, some furry things with me.

Dusty: Sure.

Abe: Uh, small comfort items, still talked to Furs when I was overseas. But I made a point to keep it private. You know, no outward signs, no...discussions...with other soldiers. Not even so much as a um, desktop background, that had furries on it.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Just because it felt like it was um...I hate to say it but, really manipulate their point of view on me. And uh, it seems wrong to me that the leadership consists more of social manipulation than actually just...leading. Leading by an example. And unfortunately I've found over the years that, there are basic things you can teach about good leadership but most of all...one thing that no one seems to consider is that you have to be compatible with the group of people you are leading. Um, like I can lead um...on the...as a medievalist I can lead an army of medieval mercenaries to whomp the shit out of any other organization in the Northwest because they respect me and I'm compatible with them. I'm part of their culture. Whereas, a bunch of redneck soldiers from northern Idaho, I have to take a different approach to them. I have to...to find a common ground with them and bridge it differently because they're a different culture than I am. And just because I'm experienced, I have the skills, I have the knowledge, and the tactical knowledge to lead them successfully in combat...I have to bridge the social barriers to work with them which has given me some interesting perspective but I really think that's kind of stupid. It's, it's a factor that a lot of people don't think about because typically when they're doing studies of leadership it's somebody within the same culture dealing with another culture. It would be as...about the equivalent of taking someone out of Northern Scotland, dropping them in Arizona, and saying okay, you're in charge of this, this, machinist shop now. Unless...while they're both from similar English speaking cultures, they're from very different backgrounds. They have to figure out how to overcome that first, and develop a rapport with the uh, with...the folks

from Arizona, otherwise they'll never get anything done. And unfortunately I think that's something that's overlooked in studies of leadership. Anyways, sorry. We went on there...let's see, what else? Let me think a moment.

Dusty: Sure thing.

Abe: Um. So. Before I went to Iraq I went to my first furry convention. It was Conifur over in Seattle. You ever been there?

Dusty: To Seattle? Or to Conifur?

Abe: Conifur.

Dusty: Supposed to go 2006.

Abe: Okay. I think I was at 2003. Yeah, must have been 2003 because it was before Iraq. It's a shame, it was um...Conifur was probably my favorite Con and I've been to several. Um...

Dusty: What made it your favorite?

Abe: It was just...it felt right. In part, it was my first Con, so there's always going to be that um, that magic. But um, I just really liked the feel of it. People knew what they were doing, it uh, it was fun. I did...I'd spent all day in a...in their game room, which was this huge complex which was rigged up with the original Playstation and my favorite thing to do was...me and some guy, I have no idea who he is or if I have ever seen him again since, some furry named SpottyCat, we got together on a Warthog on the original Halo. I drove and he was on the machine gun and we were on some frosted over ice planet, and I was just spinning cookies on the ice while people were up on all these cliffs trying to shoot at us with rocket launchers and he was just mowing them down with the machine gun as we're just zapping around trying desperately to drive on this, this, iced over lake. It was just beautiful. And um, I swear they had two or three Xboxes, the original Xboxes, linked together. We ended up doing that gain as well in Iraq with um, with our guys.

Dusty: Sounds like a load of fun.

Abe: Oh! Something completely un-related that I've got to go on a rant about!

Dusty: Do you need me to turn this off?

Abe: Oh feel free to leave it on, I mean, you can use it if you want. In uh, *Hurt Locker*, the "great" war movie...actually, *Hurt Locker* isn't too bad as far as things go. But there are two things about that film that drive me insane. First, takes place in 2005. I was in Iraq in 2005. First issue: they were wearing that shitty, gray, ACU pattern uniform. We didn't have that yet. We were still out in tan...we were in the three color deserts. The DCUs. Um, and we were wearing the desert uniforms, with woodland green body armors because there were no covers for the body armors available. So we went over with these green desert specs...

Dusty: Someone had failed to do their research then?

Abe: Actually, it's about fifty-fifty. In Iraq, most of it's desert. And then there are tropical jungles all along the rivers, so...pick your time of year, pick your place, yeah...there's no universal pattern. Anyways...

Dusty: So there was one.

Abe: So, that was the first issue. The second, the assholes in that movie are playing an Xbox 360 as a...sneaky little product placement. In 2004 we were using regular Xboxes. There was no 360s.

Dusty: That's a good point.

Abe: All right, so, moving on.

Dusty: I'll have to re-watch that and take a look. I'll take your word for it but that's exciting to hear about. I mean, I never thought...that never occurred to me.

Abe: Unfortunately with a lot of things like that, unless you were actually there you don't. Um, the one thing that was very frustrating about being in Iraq, and this is kind of off topic, was um, I lost...I had lost all faith in American media. And unfortunately most of America did as well. Because, American news reporters were afraid to leave their hotels in Baghdad. So they'd go off hearsay about some event that happened in Kirkuk, Iraq up north where I was. Just complete bullshitting out of their asses. No one on the ground, no one ever on the ground. So, the only news outlet that we paid the slightest bit of attention to was the BBC World Service. Because the Brits actually had some belief in journalistic integrity. They wouldn't report on something unless they actually we to report on it.

Dusty: If they were the primary source.

Abe: Yeah, they, they...yeah. And unfortunately, that was the source that most American reporters were using and they didn't care what the Brits were saying about it they just made up their own crap. Pick whatever channel you want...fortunately, most Americans, for about three years, gave up on American media because what they were seeing on T.V. wasn't jiving with they were hearing on Yahoo Messenger, or E-mail, or on the telephone from little Johnny in the Middle East going, "Da Fuck are they telling you?"

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Unfortunately, America, because we're fat and lazy...we gave up on rebelling against the uh, the um...corporate media outlets and went back to taking whatever they say spoon-fed now because it's too much work to actually, you know, check on the facts. Which is, is, disheartening...for two reasons. First, that American reporters have gotten to the point where they could give a shit less about um, journalistic integrity...which is a sad thing that we've lost that over the last fifteen years. In 1991 we still had some credibility,

um, and, second, that Americans are so lazy that they will just take whatever they're given. It's just sad. Anyways, so, I guess where we left off on another major topic was about 2005, Second Life. Um, from a foxhole in Iraq, I setup my first Second Life account. I, uh, was able to get into maybe one room. Have a chat with maybe one or two people, because I was running on a 28.8kb connection from a foxhole in Iraq. So, um...

Dusty: I am surprised you managed to connect. I mean, it is kind of a graphics heavy program.

Abe: Yeah, well, it was...it was a little bit lighter back then. There wasn't as much of the...just...heavy, not heavy, poorly coded stuff that has the...that takes up so much space because amateurs are making it. It was, it was brand new. So there wasn't very much content so it was at least possible to get in. I tried about three or four times but because of how horrible the connection was...it was just more or less just to get on and establish that, you know, I had an entity there. And then I played with it when I got home from Iraq. Um, but, that was the beginning of a change in culture. Um, before that I want to say that there were...there were much...there were fewer females, especially straight females in the furry community. Um, with the advent of Second Life and a number of other changes, uh, we started seeing a lot more females come into the fandom. Um, a lot of 'em seemed to segue from anime communities into the furry...and then it was high schoolers discovering second life into the furry, and then...what other ways they segued in but, I think Second Life was a major contributing factor. Um, Second Life ended up more or less killing all that was left of the...of the MUCKs. I think Furry MUCK is still up, but it has a user base of...twenty, thirty people, maybe, the world over. Um, it actually has a fairly strong following in Second Life of nostalgic folks that uh...it's almost like them saying that "we're the grandfathers of the furry community because we used this first!"

Dusty: Gotcha, so it's almost like the Gray Muzzle movement then.

Abe: Yeah kind of the Gray Muzzle movement kind of thing. Um, but yeah, so there's that. *browses artwork on FurAffinity* That really is kind of pretty...um, I feel like a dirty old Fur.

Dusty: I think we all feel that way now and then?

Abe: Right, so, anyways, um...

Dusty: I am always amazed at the art that people can do. I can never get perspective down.

Abe: One of my favorite artists, actually, I'm going to get back to the subject in a minute...is named Curio Draco, she used to live in Spokane but she's moved to the east coast, and she'll be coming back for Rainfurrest this year.

Dusty: Oh excellent, will you be going there as well?

Abe: Yeah.

Dusty: Oh well I hopefully will see you there then.

Abe: I go there most years, actually.

Dusty: Oh I must have missed you then last year?

Abe: Yeah. Anyways, she um, I have...one of the few traditional art pieces that she's done. And even that she did...fixed her line art on using graphical...um, it's...it's almost like a badge of honor to be a good traditional artist because with the um, the increases in technology for graphic design software a lot of the artwork has gone to being digital because you can make it much cleaner, much prettier, you can fix the imperfections, you can flip it back and forth to change your perspective on it and go...huh, that's wrong. And change it. One of the problems I have with blacksmithing, actually, is trying to make um...make blades that are um, equal on both sides. Fortunately my partner is left handed, and I can occasionally roll up to him and say...*mumbles and gestures at imaginary blade*

Dusty: Test this!

Abe: So I can hit something perfectly on one side and then go to flip it over and go...I...I'm kind of ambidextrous but I can't swing the hammer right in the other hand. Whereas if it were a digital art piece I could just go, okay, reverse itself. And it's suddenly exactly the opposite. And you can reverse it back to the way you had it originally. Um, sometimes you can actually notice when people have done that because they've played with it so many times that they forget which side was the original, and some lettering or some...some...reference point is actually reversed. Which is kind of amusing to catch that.

Dusty: It's almost like an Easter Egg, a little find.

Abe: Yeah, kind of yeah. But most artists actually consider a good traditional artist to be a, uh, an achievement.

Dusty: They're definitely at the height of the artist community. I mean, traditional artists, and digital art, and all the other crafters down from there. There's almost that hierarchy, there seems to be.

Abe: Yeah, the smart ones that are good and limit the amount of work they can do will make about two hundred to three hundred dollars per piece. Um, a lot of the best, most realistic digital artists can do the same thing but unfortunately...well, fortunately, please don't let this secret get out...fortunately most furry artists are startups or stupid. They don't...they don't understand the concepts of the economy. The fine art community, and the Sci-Fi communities are crooked as hell. They um, the only people who really make money off of that artwork are the promoters in the middle that jack up the prices and pay very little to the artists. So, that's why that art is much more expensive than ours and fortunately...or amusingly enough, I think most furries actually have...I think furry art is far better than abstract, and that is just a matter...not a matter of taste, as a matter of quality.

You know, hitting a sponge four or five random places on a canvas and calling it art and selling it for three hundred dollars is a scam! Somebody who spent hundreds of hours working on a single piece should make that kind of money. Fortunately most of our artists are in it for the love of doing it, otherwise most of us would never afford.

Dusty: It's good they've got that passion and usually it's under a hundred dollars or so.

Abe: Usually it's around twenty.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Twenty to thirty.

Dusty: Right, right. And sometimes you can get it for ten or fifteen if they're doing a special or trying to just get their name out there.

Abe: I feel a little bad, but one of the things I used to love to do was commission startup artists because they tend to be...a lot of them are very good, um, but from a matter of a collector's stand point if they do become something their art is more valuable, but the real reason I go for them is...because most of the time I've been fairly poor, like most of the furry community, um...it seems like the furry community has benefitted greatly from the war because most of us have been poor and then every so often somebody gets deployed or gets a good position for a while and dumps a lot of money into the furry community. Then, like everything else, we go back to being a regular civilian or our luck changes or a job changes and we're down back to you know...seeing the benefits while somebody else gets into it. It's almost like a...as much as I hate to say it because I despise Socialism, it's almost like a de facto socialist point of view. Because, the economy within the furry community it...as people are successful, they draw more money into it and it circulates around our circles and it just keeps going that way. It's kind of an interesting study of itself. But um, so yeah. Second Life! Second Life. Um, with the change in culture that Second Life has brought...even in the MUCKs before you could change your costume or your appearance or whatnot, you could just type in a code and bring up a pre-selected appearance but somebody would actually have to go out and do another look at you to see the change. Whereas Second Life, since it's all graphical and it's all real time, you can change from a fox to a dragon to...um, to, a slutty fox in less time than um, than most girls take to change clothes.

Dusty: It's just a matter of opening up the image folder, right? And switching the skins?

Abe: Yeah, and just click and dick, er...click and change. And, unfortunately, I think that's...that's um, brought in a new mechanic to our fandom that I really don't like. Um, I don't really...I have a hard time taking people seriously that have more characters than they have fingers on their hand. And it's always seemed to me that...and my background might be a little bit different, but it always seemed to me that your fursona is your alter ego. It's how you connect with the world. It's the way that you see yourself. Um, now the

Were community has their own way of describing it...um, Native American communities will call it a totem animal. It, it's kind of the same thing. It's...it's who you are. Now if you want to put on a costume for Halloween, sure, that's all well and fun. That's just having fun. But it's...you know it's not you, your friends know it's not you, it's accepted that it's not you.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Your persona should be...I, I have a hard time taking people seriously that identify that their character, their persona, is a shape shifter. Okay. Once in a while I could honestly understand that, but, I could understand it a little more if "it's a shape shifter but generally it's this because this is who I am, this is how I see myself. I like to have the ability to change and to have fun." Okay, I can accept that. But, if you have no connection with anything, you seem shallow to me. Like, you're...you're changing masks to, on, as you see fit to manipulate the situation. It's kind of like that whole social manipulation thing when I was talking about leadership. It's not real. And, so, I have a hard time taking that seriously.

Dusty: Right, they're not putting any stake into it.

Abe: Right, they're not...they're not...they're not investing themselves. They're just looking for a specific response. And unfortunately that seems very common with the younger crowd. And I can see that for a couple of reasons. Unfortunately it doesn't do anything to help me take younger people seriously. And I was, I was seventeen when I came into the furry community as well, I understand being young and all...but...you have to be, you have to bring a certain level of responsibility to it. I don't know.

Dusty: It's almost a requisite that you need to have at least the one fursona to be really part of the furry community, because I don't...I haven't done a lot of research on the other communities but I don't see the Star Trek fandom or the Star Wars fandom or any of the other groups out there...these other communities, that share the Internet space with us, they have a fursona, erm, a persona, that they have to have something to interact that says "this is who I am, this is myself, as a member of this community." I mean maybe there is out there and I just haven't come across it?

Abe: Um, not so much like the Sci-Fi community and um, Star Trek and Star Wars, and what not.

Dusty: The anime community, though?

Abe: I don't know about the anime community. I really have very little communication with them.

Dusty: As our particular type of Con-Badges, for example. I mean our characters, everything that is us, I've only really see that in our own furry community. I mean, maybe you've see more?

Abe: Um, medievalists.

Dusty: Medievalists?

Abe: Some, some historical reenactors but definitely medievalists. Um, it's not so much an issue with like, you know, Civil War or say...military reenactors because it's very easy. Your persona is: I'm an E-1 soldier. I'll figure out who I am next week, just don't ask me right now. As long as you can wear the right uniform, carry a rifle, and march around you're good.

Dusty: And look the piece.

Abe: But medievalists, um, somewhat the SCA, they have their own culture, but a lot of the other ones like The Adrian Empire and whatnots, split offs of the SCA...having a persona is a requirement. You can come out, you can wear loaner garb, and...and...Furry MUCK had something like that. As a guest, you logged in and you got some random, generic fur covered character. They never really identified what it was it was just something kind of blotchy, brown, fuzzy. And this is who you are until you figure out who the hell you are! Um, but it's the same kind of thing. Medievalists will come out, they'll give you some loaner garb so you don't look like a complete rat bag and stand out. They'll give you a sheet to cover your clothes with, and a belt and call it good. So you get out, you figure out if this is your thing, if it's something you want to do with and then to be fully accepted into the group as, you know, one of them....you have to look into a historical background, you know, what is the culture of your people, what's your name, what your profession is, what you hope to do in the group. And it's kind of like the same prerequisite that to be fully accepted you have to figure out...not fully who you are or who you're going to be but...like a newborn stepping into the world or a teenager coming of age, you need to have at least a base idea of who you are or who you're going to be. What your hopes and dreams are...and the furry community has sort of the same thing. I...it's less rigidly defined and it's more of a social thing but the same thing exists. Um, if you show up at a convention and you don't have a fan name, or a fur name, or a fursona, they kind of look at you funny and go okay well you can put down your legal name.

Dusty: It's a lot harder to interact with the community without having a fan name?

Abe: Yeah. I myself, I'm a wolf...um, I've come with some...I'm violating some of my own rules right now. This is weird, I am not sure where it actually fits in but...okay, so I was a wolf. I decided there was a few things. I did deal with the Were community for a while. Um, and I really do identify with myself in some of the ways, you know, Weres identify themselves...Therians, Weres, Werewolves...they're all the same group. But, in reality, they're like...they are old school furies with a mean streak. Um, a lot of them are very spiritual but a lot of them are just plain assholes looking for a group to be an asshole with. So, as a Were I'd actually prefer to deal with furies because, you know, they can be fun...they're the lighter side, they're less worried about sitting in a room and being snarky

to one another and looking at ways to rip someone's throat out, and you can just have a good time. And unfortunately that's somewhat of a stereotype the Were community has brought on themselves, but, well, in all reality the Were community is...kind of an unknown. Because they're not the Werewolf/Vampire group that you think of...

Dusty: The Masquerade? Yeah I'm not familiar with the Were community.

Abe: The Were community is, um, not really a split of the furry community but it's definitely related. Um, like I guess if you looked into *****'s artwork, um... ***** I think is her username. Um, she has several different personas if you wanted to look at them. So you can look at...like, uh, she has the one piece that shows, you know, werewolf husky, anthro husky, puppy husky. It shows a very distinct change in artwork styles but also shows a very clear change in philosophy just based on the appearance of the animals. The werewolf husky is a large, beefy, top-heavy, angry, shaggy, almost rabid looking thing. And that's kind of the thing that the Weres go into. The Therian community is mostly about the spirituality. Um, uh, kind of the totem...the guiding philosophy really is the totem animal philosophy which some furries follow.

Dusty: Right, there is a spiritual connection then.

Abe: But there is, there is a very strong spiritual connection. Uh, they tend to gather in packs like, um, oh it's all really based on whatever the Therian species is, but, wolf...wolf...wolf-weres tend to gather in packs, usually about two to five people in size, um, they do often end up with an Alpha pair or an Alpha. And they develop all the same kind of pack behaviors and mentalities and unfortunately it's not always a good thing. Sometimes, it really almost ends up looking like a BDSM relationship because the ones that self-identify themselves as Alphas for the pack tend to be...can be...abusive and the whole nine yards and...I guess that's all well and good if that's what they want, but, not always. And on the other hand, they don't necessarily have to have that same relationship. I mean, they could just end up being a um....a group of Furs with a much stronger spiritual connection that gather together in a pack and do things together and hang out, and uh, play video games together, go hunting, all those typical things. Another difference between the furry community and the Were community, per se, is...furries, a lot of furries have this...I don't know, taboo about hunting which kind of baffles the hell out of me because I'm a wolf, I eat meat, that's my purpose in life...right? Um, whereas Weres typically don't have those sort of issues. They don't have a lot of the uh, same cute fuzzy sweet animal friendly points of view that the furry community has. They typically don't have those same hang-ups. And they have...honestly they are like Native tribes. Um, really they are, they're like Native American tribes...a tribal system. Um, reintroduced on a local level on...uh, informally, among their own kind. I guess is the best way to describe it. Um, there is a lot of crossover but I think they take themselves a little more seriously. Furries tend to not take themselves as seriously and they tend to be much broader and encompassing. Uh, one of the rules I came up with for myself years and years and years ago is I won't date a chick

that identifies herself as a wolf because I had found, and this is somewhat stereotypical, chicks that self-identify themselves as wolves tend to be...kind of vicious creatures. Um, they tend to be your...they self-style themselves to be the slightly crazy, Alpha females that you find in a breeding pair and pack. Um, very dominant, very controlling...really kind of a pain in the ass to deal with. I have had one that's taken an interest in me and I'm not sure if she really counts but, um, in the past I've found that um...it's tended to have kind of fallen under that category. Finding a wolf chick that isn't half crazy is kind of hard.

Dusty: This is from the Were community perspective? Or just in general?

Abe: In general. Um, furry...specifically in the matter of wolves, um, I think in the matter of wolves in the furry community, and the matter of Weres in the Were community...they're really kind of the same. It's just a matter of some of the differences and how they see themselves. Um, the plain Jane typical non-unique wolves, you know, the...the...the pile of gray like me, well, I'm a little different I've got some rust and what not...because I've actually dealt with real wolves, I know what they look like. They're not just this slate gray kinda cute little fuzzy thing. They're a lot more, um, colorful and unique individually than most people seem to think that they are, but, anyways, most Furs have never dealt with a real wolf so...a little different in that area. And I've got one sitting in my living room right now, probably eating my cat.

Dusty: Uh-oh.

Abe: Yeah, the cat's vicious he was a barn cat that didn't get along with any other cats so as a kitten they gave him to me and the first thing that he did was hook the wolf's ear and let him know that I'm smaller than you but I will put up a fight!

Dusty: So it might be the other way around then, the cat might have eaten the wolf?

Abe: Well, and they'll wrestle and the wolf will lie on his back and you know...flop at it and put the whole cat in his mouth and the cat will reach one paw up out of the...out of the side of his mouth, hook and ear and start pulling the wolf's head around.

Dusty: Sounds like they've got quite the relationship.

Ave: They do, and um, neither of them are fixed. They're both, both, fully equipped males but...um, if I actually ever believed that they were ever going to hurt one another I would have put an end to it a long time ago.

Dusty: It sounds like they've got a good relationship.

Abe: They've got a good relationship, a strong relationship. They definitely identify themselves as pack members. Um, Blue fortunately is a Beta. Um, now in pack structure...as this actually gets into...as much into watching furies as it does into actual wolves. Um, pack structures...you, the hierarchy usually has about...ah, about five members and about three base layers. The top layer is the Alpha pair, the breeding pair, they're the

ones in charge. They may not be aggressive outright, they might not be vocal, you might not see them do a whole lot...you might just see them sit back in the corner. But they are in charge. Most people seem to mistake them when they are first observing a pack. The Betas, are the enforcers. They're the loudmouths, the growly ones, the ones with all the fangs, the ones that throw their weight around and, you know, they're the linebacker that became a cop. That's what they are.

Dusty: That's a good analogy.

Abe: Kind of, I actually thought of a cop in town that fit that description. Uh, um...so they're very much the boisterous ones, the ones that people mistakenly identify as Alphas. They're not really in charge. All it takes is the Alpha female or the Alpha male to look up, look over to one and go...*Abe mimics a stern face and intense stare*...and they just kind of slink away and back into a corner. It's because...they're, they're the...they're the enforcer. They're not the ones with the power, but they're the ones that bark for the power. And Blue is kind of that same way. He's a, a very much intelligent, strong-willed animal and wolves as pets are something that most people shouldn't have but...great companion animals. Um, but they're not pets. They're not dogs. They um, they're roommates. Um, but that's another issue entirely in and of itself. Um, but yeah, people are a lot of the same way and you uh, you encounter that in the military. In the military platoon, actually, in the military squad. So the guy in charge is the platoon sergeant or the squad leader. They're in charge, they set the plans, they can silence anybody with just a look. The enforcers, the Betas, are the team leaders. The next tier down. The junior sergeants and corporals. They're the ones that have to be, you know, constantly buffing up their shoulders and growling and making noise and making everyone know that they're in charge. Because the moment they don't they'll get eaten alive. And then you have the workers that the lowest tier on the whole mess. Um, and sometimes in packs and sometimes in the real world with humans they have no aspirations of moving up, they don't really care, or sometimes they do...and when they do that's when you keep getting issues between the Beta, the enforcers, and the aspiring grunt. So, kind of an interesting dynamic. But that's part of the reason why I say that soldiers are wolf packs, because they have a very...they have a pack hierarchy. They have the whole kind of concept. Um, it's just a different social order. Um, academia, it's like trying to herd a pride of cats. They um, they have a very different set of life objectives and a very different social order. Um, well it's kind of interesting. Um, so, before, during, and after Afghanistan I ran security for conventions. I started with a convention in Spokane. Um, the first year we had the Redpath Hotel. They'd just remodeled it, it was beautiful. One thing that amused me, actually, is that we had to be all so worried about furry porn. We had to cover every little, tiny, cheesecake pinup, vixens, tits...and we had this giant, giant, golden bust of a naked chick in Victorian style, in the center of the hotel outside of the con space.

Dusty: That was part of the hotel?

Abe: That was part of the hotel! And that, that's okay though...that's art. That's art.

Dusty: That's an interesting double standard for that.

Abe: But, but...but if you draw ears on it, and a tail, it's outright porn! Let me think about the logic here for a moment.

Dusty: I wonder about that sometimes myself.

Abe: Yeah. Artistic nudes, exactly the same thing.

Dusty: Very thin line separating the two things.

Abe: I was half inclined to get a couple of sticky notes and stick them over her tits just to, you know...but you know, the hotel's not going to get sued over that. A seventeen-year-old con goer looks at one artist's cheesecake and, uh, hoo...next the Con Chair has a lawsuit on his hands. Whoa, God, that's just ridiculous. Anyways, so I ran, ran head of security for both these events. Three of these events. Um, the middle year, the girl that ended up becoming my girlfriend down the road...I'd dumped it in her lap and put her in charge of it and that was probably kind of mean for me because she wasn't really qualified to run security but she did a...meaningful job, a good job. The other problem was that there was no one, with the slightest clue around, to do it. She at least ran...was kind of my main gopher the year before so she at least had some idea what was to be done.

Dusty: Some idea how it was supposed to work.

Abe: Right. Um, but there were no competent individuals. Whereas I've worked in private and...private security and military beforehand so it's all old hat to me so I know everything there is to know about event security. Including...from, from the routine just...social management to actually dealing with real crises. So...good fit for me, not necessarily for everyone else. Part of why I ran into some issues with Uncle Kage, he doesn't seem to understand that we have some bigger issues in the world than he seems to think.

Dusty: From the sounds of things, he's just interested in just his own piece of it?

Abe: He's interested in his own piece of the puzzle. Um, things that don't necessarily jive with his concerns...I don't really know that he knows how to deal with. Um, he's...he owns a town once a year for Anthrocon and can do pretty much anything he wants. He's got everyone wrapped around his finger. So he doesn't really have a lot of issues. You put a con, a first year con, and something as unusual as furry, in downtown Spokane, surrounded by drifters...in a beautiful hotel...surrounded by drifters, and you're in an entirely different environment. You're, you're on that shining island of gold surrounded by a slum. We, we got some feedback on that. Um, it was part of the reason we moved the Con the year afterwards, the second...the third year, we moved the Con. But the other reason we moved it was just because of space. The Redpath was nice and all but they kept changing ownership and it wasn't the most reliable.

Dusty: I imagine that made things a little tricky when you had to deal with a new set of voices every time.

Abe: Yeah. It really didn't help when we dealt with the um, the hotel in Spokane Valley...the event center there was very nice, um, the site was great but we dealt with a different sales rep every time and you know...we had some issues with the Con and like "oh no, it's no big deal" and next thing...you know, that this thing that was no big deal that they didn't care about they want two grand from us. We're like, okay, well I guess the Con is dead. Um...dealing with hotels and dealing with um, outsiders, is very much a pain in the ass. Especially when you're dealing with Con planning you deal with it a lot more than the average furry does. The average furry can go out and be whatever kind of an individual...they want. They can be outright "Furry Pride!" as loud at the top of their lungs as they want dancing on the street posts on a fursuit if they want and as long as they've got a handler there, no one cares. If you're trying to deal with the professional community, say, the um...the hotel industry, as a representative for furies trying to put together a convention you have a whole list of um...of things you have against you. And one of which is the fact that it's perfectly legal to discriminate against furies for being furry. There is no legal protection that says they don't have to treat you like shit, because furry is not a protected status.

Dusty: Right, it's just a hobby group, and interest group, that's not a recognized minority in any way, shape, or form.

Abe: Right. Unfortunately the gay and lesbian community ran into much the same issue because it's still a commonly held idea that um, they chose to be that way. So therefore, since they made a choice, they aren't born that way and therefore they should be able to be judged however people want because they made a choice to be that way. Not making a statement on that, either way, that's just where a lot of the contention on that issue comes from and...fortunately for them, they've gotten a lot of protections and a lot of people have stood up and said whether or not it's a choice it doesn't matter they have the right to be that way. Regardless of they were born that way or made up a choice. Furies, however, not even the slightest inclination of protection. The closest we can do is find a black wolf and a, uh, gay cougar and say "Here! These are our poster children, this is why you can't discriminate against us!"

Dusty: Right.

Abe: And that's about the best we can do. Um, and that's really not that effective.

Dusty: But there is something to be said, we are an inclusive community. We have all religions, all sexual orientations, uh, at Rainfurrest I remember seeing several people with physical disabilities I mean it is a very welcoming group. You'd think that there would be more positive interactions to the fandom. Hopefully it's not the media that is overshadowing that inclusivity.

Abe: Well, um...

Dusty: Or public perceptions?

Abe: The media is an interesting one to deal with. Um, generally most conventions are willing to deal with the media but um, they have very exacting standards on what they want. As far as I know Rainfurrest has never had...maybe had one, reporter, that was allowed on scene but generally they uh, they require contact ahead of time, they go through a whole screening process and...

Dusty: And they have an escort while they are there as well.

Abe: Yeah, and none of them ever do so, they're never really included. Um, I know from my own dealing with media that unfortunately, they're no longer a really trustworthy entity. And, um, local media is no better than corporate which is because they've been brought up in this kind of environment where corporate media has said it is okay to put out whatever you want and so now even local journalists are going, well, let's edit this to make a better story. So like, uh, one I saw was um, *****, he runs some pawn shops and a taxi and uh...a class III machinegun/destructive devices dealership up in Spokane. And he had a very interesting one hour interview with um, with um, with a reporter from Spokane. And, he actually had it on display for a while on his shop, just to show what kind of a scum they were. They'd knocked him down into like a fifteen minute presentation, edited...terribly edited, not even seamlessly...terribly edited in such a way that, um, they were using excerpts in the same sentence to make him say things that he wasn't saying. And...um, unfortunately I think a lot of people in Spokane were upset about that but not nearly enough. I think that uh, actually, I kind of like having Spokane around because they...they every so often provide gems of socialist management. Um, our latest one was the decision to...arbitrarily rehire a cop with back pay for getting...who fired because he was responsible for a, uh, hit and run DUI off duty and he was rehire with two years' back pay because he was 'discriminated against' because he had a disability of alcoholism. Fortunately, the moment this was published in the newspaper the entire city of Spokane went 'Oh, hell no!' But, yeah, um, Spokane provides us with lots of nifty gems. They just make me giggle when I read them in the paper. Um, yeah, anyways, so good stuff on furies. Um, what more can I tell about 'em? Um...

Dusty: Can you tell me about your fursona, um, how did you, we started to talk a little bit about you settled on a wolf? And does the name have any meaning? Did you get it from a, um, particular...

Abe: Well yes, um, I um, I'm a wolf. I'm a north American gray wolf. Um, my uh fur is um, is it's a gray fur, mostly gray. Um, little bit of russet on the muzzle, same kind of foxy-red kind of red on the tips of the ears. Black at the very tips. Um, tail is, is gray and then a typical, er, a blotch of white and a point of red and then the very end tips are black. And the reasons

for that is because that's what an actual, well fairly common, markings are for an actual wolf. Um.

Dusty: Not something that a lot of the other furry community really pays attention to?

Abe: Not really, no, they don't seem to know. Markings are kind of a unique, individual thing they do to identify themselves. Which is kind of true, it's what they are, but they also follow um, basic patterns. One thing that amuses me is that um, occasionally people draw gray foxes. And they are poorly represented in the community, and um, most of the time they look like the same sanitized gray, gray wolves. They're just a little bit smaller, so there's often argument whether or not it's a gray fox or a gray wolf. But, sometimes they get it right and they look pretty much like a gray wolf except they've got pointier ears, they're smaller, and they're thinner. Um, and they have the, um, a black mark down the muzzle that foxes tend to have. Aside from that they will look just like gray wolves. And so in artwork they're often mislabeled or poorly represented which is a shame. They're beautiful animals. Um, the reason I chose <Abe's character's name> was um, well all kinds of, wraps up in a number of things. I'm a medieval re-enactor and I'll also deal greatly with uh, specializing in Roman history. Um, I used to be a Signifer for a uh, a uh, legion that started on campus as a roman reenactment group. I had about five to six members at its height, it was a recognized student group and then slowly went away because of a lack of support from the university, no one really wanted to be in charge, um, it was kind of an inclusive group but it had quite a few things that worked against us for credibility. Um, anyways, but one of the things I had was part of my uniform as a Signifer was historically, it's a tunic – white or red or whatever color – um, military sandal boots, um, chainmail armor, belted at the waist, um a sword and dagger, a helmet, and here's the interesting one: so a Signifer, a military standard bearer they wore animal skins. A century Signifer would have worn wolf skin, as would have the light infantry in the republican era before the empire. Um, the light infantry wore, it was part of the spiritual connection between Rome and its' wolves which I'll get into in a minute. And so I had a wolf fur. It had the same kind of markings that my character does. It was, um, kind of hard to explain to most furs because *Abe gestures about his real wolf fur* 'oh God, it's horrible, what a vicious atrocity this is!' It's a spiritual item, and most of them [furries] will understand it when you talk to them about it, it's a religious item almost, in much the same way as, you know, Natives have a spiritual connection with animals.

Dusty: Absolutely, the Natives, the Mayans, the Egyptians, they've always has this, it's been through antiquity.

Abe: Yep. Pretty much any, I hate to use the term primitive culture, but it, early civilization it's a very, it's a very common thing. And, most of them [furries] understand that but I don't leave it out in my house where people can see it because, you know, they [furries] are very passionate about it [love of animals]. And actually, even in the uh, um, the RennFur [Renaissance furries] community, uh slight segue, um, every year another group of

them goes out to Ye Merry Greenwood and we go out and do a number of things there. We actually present them with a military because the actors at Ye Merry Greenwood are actors. They've tried for years to put together a pike block for a historical military. They can't do it because they're actors. Actors are, philosophically incompatible with military service. You cannot take an actor and make him a soldier. You just can't. They cannot do it.

Abe's cell phone rings and he answers, leaving room. Interview resumes when he returns to room.

Dusty: Okay, back on.

Abe: Differing perspectives. All right. So, where to next?

Dusty: We kind of already talked about if there are any dangers of coming out as a furry but um, do you, I think we are still having those types of issues today where it is dangerous to be identified as a furry? We talked a little bit in the stairwell over in the Commons building that the younger furs tend to be a little more out and open than say you and me who, uh, I don't know about your life experiences but for me I definitely have to hide it. One, I grew up in Idaho. Two, I figured out really fast that there was this negative connotation to being labeled as a furry even though people can be comfortable with it but it was a different kind of comfortable.

Abe: Right, right.

Dusty: Do you think that there's that change that is happening or that it is still, cause we did talk a little bit that being the, um, homosexual is more protective because that can be an identity or it can be a genetic thing, but you know it has more protection than say, a fan interest group like furrydom.

Abe: I agree, um, it, it's maybe down the road it will become more acceptable but it, I think we're, we're, we're not in the same place that the homosexual community was in the early 80s. Um, with the AIDS scare and all that crap. But um I think our biggest threat is not so much outright backlash, I don't think anyone is going to hang us up on fence posts with barbed wire. But they're not going to take us seriously. Um, it and it's not just in the furry community but pretty much anywhere. God, I'm going to quote Stargate: the very young often do not do as they're told or as they should. Um, young furries are the same way. I'm not necessarily an old furry by any means I'm 28 years old, so you know, take that for what it's worth. Unfortunately I feel like a grey muzzle being with many of my friends because many of them are younger than I am. Of course, even the ones that are um, longtime friends of mine they're still several years younger than I am because I met them when they were sixteen or so, so years, years in the past. And, really, I try to, I try to avoid dealing with any furry that's under eighteen in general just because, um, a fur, I've had furries come up to me or while I was deployed in Iraq or wherever and shoot me an E-mail and say 'hey, I'm from Lewiston or Orofino or I'm out here in the middle of nowhere, I've never

seen another furry ever and you exist! Please, let me know the world!' And I'm like, um, you're sixteen. And this is furry. As much as I don't have a problem with you being a furry, you're dangerous to me and I really need to avoid you. Not because we are going to do anything sexual, not because furry is anything sexual, but because the general public has a number of dangerous misconceptions. Um, I guess Washington is not that big of an issue but over in Idaho, it is, because of all of our, Idaho's laws are very backwards. Especially when it comes to matters of sexuality. Um, they're very conservative and they're very, very, very much out of date. Um, so, dealing with something like that in Washington is perfectly okay. I mean it's not something you'd end up doing jail time over. In Idaho, you'd end up, if things go as sour as they could, they could go, you could end up with an injury to a child charge and end up in a minimum security prison outside of Cottonwood for six months. Which isn't really that big of a deal but the, all the other legal connotations that go on with it basically your life is fucked.

Dusty: Right, because then there's that stigma attached.

Abe: Yeah, and there, and if you thought being furry was bad try being mislabeled for that shit. Yeah fuck no. So yeah, there are some dangers in that regard. But, for everyday day to day purposes um, the real dangers are just not being taken seriously. You know, being passed over for promotions, you know, the subtle forms of discrimination that people don't think are discrimination. Um, especially in like public service, anywhere where you're promoted based on uh leadership potential or, or perception of competence over very, very objective things. Like, okay you've got a bachelor's degree, you know what two plus two is, you know, and things that are less rigidly defined as those you run into the probability of uh, of discrimination. A friend of mine isn't a furry but she's a cute, bubbly nineteen-year-old girl. Um, she, when she was setting up Wal-Mart when they were getting ready to open as a super, a super store, she would want to drive around on a little Zamboni floor washing machine wearing a pink pig hat. And everyone thought it was cool and cute and okay. It's more acceptable for her to do it because she's a girl than it would be for me but even so, um, me and a number of others counseled her to look, you don't want to do these sort of things because it can get you in trouble. I mean, people won't take you seriously, it'll hurt your prospects. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, and it could be because she was dealing with mainly a female administrative staff. There was very few male managers there at the time. Um, they had uh, pretty much shot her to the front of the line for promotion which equally seemed wrong to me that they were giving preferential treatment to a uh, an inexperienced nineteen-year-old girl that's never had a real job before, let alone a leadership position, they were shooting her to the front of the line in front of a whole batch of male candidates that had well, well written long resumes that were qualified for the position, these positons. And that seemed equally wrong to me, so, maybe my perspectives aren't necessarily always on but I don't think that um, there's safe bets and I honestly think that you know, for the male population which I think is still from, the furry population that is, is still predominately male, but I think the factors are

more, whereas fifteen years ago probably on the order of ninety to ten, it's probably now on the order of sixty to forty for a split.

Dusty: Why do you think the demographics are like that?

Abe: I think that there are slightly more males, I'm not sure why, maybe it's because it's...

Dusty: Do you think the internet was mainly just a male thing back in the 90s and it just kind of stayed that way? Or women have slowly been brought into it [the furry fandom]?

Abe: I think it was sort of a nerdy thing, and for whatever reason um, there have always been female nerds. But, um, it always seemed like there's a greater perspective of male nerds and I don't know if it's because we're socially inept, and we cluster ourselves or what. And um, I don't know.

Dusty: You mentioned the anime group had brought in some furies, do you think that is a gateway sort of into the [furry] fandom?

Abe: It may be, and it may be to them. A couple of nifty things on the animation side, um, so the gateway for a lot of the furs in my generation were, were uh, say Disney's Robin Hood, that sort of thing. Um, the anime community seems to have brought in a lot of females, and uh, I think a lot of it is because um, a lot of them come into it with a little bit of experience at artwork. Either they're experienced with art or they've tried their hands at it and they thought it was fun and tried it and that's how they got sucked into it. Um, but again that's not all, now not all females are artists by any means. In fact, some of the best artists I think are actually males, but they're a much smaller commodity. There's only a couple of them. And I think it probably makes sense that they're better because most guys if they're not any good they just give up. So either, either you're the best or not at all. Whereas the female artists seem to ran the whole gamut from the finest artists I've ever seen to just someone who is budding and playing with it. And I'm, I'm, I don't mean to be judgmental and I don't, don't know why these are but I can make some guesses. Um, and, and I think one of them might get down to the traditional gender roles. Um, guys are expected to go out and do work so they don't have the same kind of free time. Growing up in high school, uh, I think it's much more common for guys to have jobs working as a mechanic or baling hay out in rural areas like this um, which females are expected to do as well but I think a lot more of them are allowed to have free time and do things other than manual labor, get jobs, support family. And I'm not sure if that's actually the reason, but that would seem to be a reasonable guess to me. And, I don't know I ran into issues with my ex-mate because she felt that I put the world all into two boxes. Either it's like this or it's like this, which I think it is, and you can, you can take a bullion view to anything. Either it is or it isn't. That's not to say that, you know, that's all that there is to it but you can definitely select the property of 'it is this, true or false.' That only defines one portion of it. Um, the other thing that often...the one thing that also upset her frequently was um, I do have fairly strong opinions, I believe that things are typically the way they are for a reason.

Um, and, I, I've had a lot of life experience, probably a lot more than most people my age which makes me feel old. I hate that in and of itself, um, but drawing on that experience I'll state, as I have in the past, what I think and why I think that, and she would get upset with me because I wouldn't preface everything I said in a social conversation with 'In my humble opinion...'. I'm not sure if that was her issue or if I was just being a dick, I don't know. But uh, still. So, we've covered backlash, the army, community...

Dusty: So how do you connect, you started off doing a lot of the MUs, and are you still using Second Life? Is that your primary way to connect with the community then?

Abe: No, I think uh, the primary way now is through instant messenger with furs I actually do know.

Dusty: Established friends then?

Abe: Established friends, meeting people at conventions, um, randomly bumping into people and striking up conversations on the internet. Um, there's a lot more social networking for furies now. Um, you can find them pretty much anywhere, they've got furry chat channels in *World of Warcraft*. Not that I've, I've been playing that game on and off maybe one month out of twelve for the last five years. I have finally, last year sometime, made my character up to level sixty. Um, which is no great accomplishment because they've nerfed all the leveling and made it easy and...

Dusty: It's not the same as it was in 2004.

Abe: Yep. So you know, it's something I do occasionally. I play Horde because, you know, actually um...

Dusty: That's really playing *World of Warcraft*?

Abe: Yeah. I came to that with an old taste as well because I'd played Warcraft ever since *Orcs and Humans*, so I'm very familiar with the genre and unfortunately every so often they make me angry because they completely mess up the storyline of *World of Warcraft* because they're playing to a, they're selling to an audience that hasn't had that experience.

Dusty: Right, they don't have that cultural enrichment of playing through the entire system?

Abe: Right, they haven't read any of the books, they didn't, they couldn't, they aren't, they couldn't, could not go back and do an academic study on the lore of Warcraft.

Dusty: I made an argument we need to do that.

Abe: That's kind of funny, but um, yeah. Anyways so I, I'm, I take a very casual perspective to it. But, um, there's furies there. Any server you can find a furry chat channel and there's people talking on it.

Dusty: It seems to be that way for a lot of different media. A lot of different games, a lot of different user groups even. They all seem to coalesce.

Abe: And if you go to E621.org or com I think.

Dusty: I'm not really familiar with that one.

Abe: It's a furry compilation, let's say.

Dusty: So it's sort of like FurAffinity or?

Abe: Kind of, um, how did I create another tab on this thing...

Dusty: Magic. Those Mac computers annoy me.

Abe: Apple is against my religion.

Dusty: Yep, I'm with you there.

Abe tries to pull up E621's website

Abe: So, we will go to E621. E621, um, kind of has some of fchan's old rules for posting what, uh, artwork. It kind of is, um, they'll post anything they can get away with unless somebody actually complains about it.

Dusty: Unless somebody puts up the 'do not post' sort of thing?

Abe: Kind of, um, but they haven't adopted some of the more restrictive rules that um, fchan has. It's just typically, they typically collect the better or the obscure. But it's a huge compilation of...

Dusty: Now is this something recent or has it been...

Abe: It's been around for a few years now. Um, yeah its got a, 179,457 posts currently.

Dusty: That's a pretty good amount.

Abe: It's a lot of artwork. Um. What was I going to watch...uh, oh yes, yes, Team Fortress 2. TF2. Any video game you can find, whoa, you can find a furry presence in. But, uh, let's just pull up um...doo doo, de, doo doo...that's where it goes. Alright so we have just a random red team of fan art of Team Fortress 2. Uh, I've found a lot better examples in the past, but, it's usually any group of furs, furs will get together on any game they'll form a full team and then it's off to the races.

Dusty: So the community then takes itself to all these different games?

Abe: It does, I mean they tend to uh, when you start seeing the artwork you start realizing just where they all are, um, you see them everywhere. I myself have commissioned a piece [of art] of myself and a furry from the uh, he was in the Territorial Army, it's, it's the British

equivalent of the National Guard. The National Guard and the Territorial Army both evolved from the English militia system. Anyways, so we had a, equivalent roles, and we friends and um, I commissioned a piece that's poking fun at him but we, you start seeing that stuff in artwork everywhere. Um, wherever we are we occasionally commission a piece of artwork that I guess in our own minds reinforce the idea that its part of the community and it encompasses all forms of life. All aspects of um, community involvement. We could um, we could boast that we have furs at every level of government in several different countries. And we're pretty much everywhere. Um, we're not just some weird lower class fetish, some bizzare subculture, we're just people and we're everywhere. But, uh, yeah. Interesting.

Dusty: You said you work at conventions, do you attend a lot of conventions yourself as a participant?

Abe: I like to go to a lot of ones in the region.

Dusty: Oh, so Vancoufur and, um, and Rainfurrest, and I'm assuming the new one down in Boise? Uh, Furldaho?

Abe: Yeah I'll be going that way next weekend. I'm hoping to get a table there but apparently the guy who runs the Dealer's Den, some folks I, I uh, I'm very dear to have had some very bad dealings with him in the past. And he is terrible at responding to E-mails through his official website.

Dusty: That's the story I heard from another fur I interviewed here at U of I, he said that they're just a pain to deal with, but hopefully everything works out okay though.

Abe: Yeah, I would love to sit on a panel and go, 'okay guys, I'm not trying to be a dick, I'm not trying to come out and tell you how to run your convention, but, here are somethings you need to fix on your website. And here are some things you need to fix with how you are dealing with the build up.'

Dusty: Some feedback would be nice, like if you could be able to actually contact them.

Abe: Yeah. Um, scratch-n-hisses at the end of any con are very important, any kind of after action review. Unfortunately, especially at new cons, the staff aren't necessarily ready for the backlash and they're not really ready for um, um, to deal with um having a thick skin. They take everything personal, the work so hard to make this [convention], and they don't understand that, sure, there's people who are bitter and will bitch about anything. Yeah, sure, take that with a grain of salt. But most people genuinely want to have a good time and want to make things better and will want to talk to them about how to improve them. Um, if things go horribly wrong, well expect to hear about it and the best thing you can do to make it better and keep the customers happy is smile and nod, take notes...

Dusty: And then change that for the next time.

Abe: ...and consider it, talk about it in a meeting later when you're going, having steak, having a beer and drinking all the money you made at the con. Assuming that you were one of the few cons that actually know how to budget your money instead of having to dump, that you barely cover the costs with admissions you end up spending a thousand grand er, a thousand out of your own pocket to put it on every year. People don't realize that one either. Um...

Dusty: It's quite spendy to run a con.

Abe: It's very expensive to run cons. Um, especially if you're non-insured and you don't have a good relationship with a hotel. Um, the hotels really...a hotel is the difference between a Furmeet and a con, really. And um, the hotel is the determining factor on how much everything costs. And it's a lot. It adds up. Um, the more money the hotel makes and the less they have to deal with the happier they are but, hotel staff are like anyone else. They can be biased dicks or they can be money-grubbing bastards. It all matters, the two most important factors in dealing with your hotel is: A, how open minded the staff are and how much they like money. If you get the right combination of either of those two, you're set. If either one of those is out of whack somewhere, you're gonna have problems.

Dusty: Rainfurrest seems to be lucky in that regard that they have open minded staff and at least uh, staff who want to make money, because they've got the whole hotel set aside for just the Rainfurrest community.

Abe: Yeah, but uh Rainfurrest has still had problems with some of their lower staff being assholes. But they [Rainfurrest] have enough muscle they can fight. One thing that was very frustrating to me um, seeing the first year of Rainfurrest, I, I absolutely love Rainfurrest. I will do it every year. But the most single, most depressing thing to me, is we busted our asses to make All Fur Fun and then, and they actually felt, they wanted to float us and help us go because for all the same reasons we love Rainfurrest they loved All Fur Fun. It was a convention that they could go to away for a weekend, in the region, have somebody else deal with all the bullshit, and they could just have a good time.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: And they wanted us to succeed for a lot of reasons. Unfortunately we didn't, for a lot of other reasons and here's the biggest single issue: Rainfurrest is held across the street from one of the largest airports in the United States. It doesn't matter that they're also nestled between two of the largest metro cities in the United States as well, they just can't go wrong.

Dusty: Location, location, location. You can fly in and take the free hotel shuttle down there [to the hotel].

Abe: The first year they had all kinds of fuck ups. They could screw up everything, and they would still be successful because of their location. And not saying that they are a bunch of

amateur hacks, but some of them, they are a little bit. They're, they've become very good at what they do over the years. But just because of where they're located and some of the assets they have available to them, being where they are, you can't fail. They would have to work hard at messing up their con. There's absolutely no reason they can't make money hand over fist and keep it going. Us [All Fur Fun]? We just didn't have um, many of our best staff were coming out of Seattle and they were overworked and expected to travel all this distance, eight hours away, six hours away. So that drew on them and drew on them and finally burned them out. And when they ran out of steam, a lot of the cons ran out of steam because the chair, which our mistake, was not subbing out the chair every time. We were happy with the leadership, and despite his protests of wanting to be subbed out and not be in charge for a while, we kept him in the position and we never really had a changeover plan. So we exhausted him, we exhausted all the hard working staff, all the administrators, all the intelligent people, all the resources.

Dusty: And so there was no chance to refresh then?

Abel: And they never had a chance to recharge, so it almost got to the point where um, there was a draw on them. It was even harder for one of our staff because the guy who did all the website work, because he had gotten a um, his wife had been a driving factor for him, when she just up and randomly divorced him he moved back to Puyallup specifically for her request because she wanted to be back in the Seattle-metro area. So he left, he sold his airplane, he sold his um, he had a biplane out here, which he sold to get a house. So he sold it all, pretty much all of his possessions, gave up his great job at WAZZU, gave up his good living in the Palouse, gave up all that just for her. So he got a job right away, and became um, chief technology officer for a technology corporation in Puyallup, and um, moved over there got a three hundred thousand dollar home, left her behind for a month to, you know, pack up and get ready to leave and the whole nine yards and so, by the time she was done with that I helped move her around and were up to get to a flight...whatnot, to, just fucking weird. So anyways, she just up and decides to leave him, during that month she realized 'I want something different.' So this guy who has thrown away everything for this woman, she just, dessert him. It happened to me as well, to some degree, but not quite as bad as him. But it was just vicious. And unfortunately as much as I love the guy I hardly ever talk to him, which is sad. Um, he, basically won't have anything to do with any cons or AFF specifically because it brings up all those bad memories of going through all that. Part of the reason he was so successful was being a chief technology officer, in business as a programmer, is he had spent day and night with this company as his way of adapting of trying to get over what just happened to him. Anyways, that, that's probably unrelated that's just human behavior, but, um, the same point Spokane doesn't have the same access to good, qualified, personnel because it's not as large of a population base. So, rather than filling slots with, with handpicked, good personnel they started filling open slots with just whoever they could get their hands on. Um, there were some locals that were very good at what they did like um, there's a um redneck otter from ***** that's

living up in *****, as well, he has houses in both places. He's about my age, he's a diesel mechanic that works in mines, so he lives underground fixing diesel engines. Um, and he is probably the single best, to describe it, he shows up at a con once a year, casts 'Art Show' with a one year cool-down. Anyone who plays WoW knows what that means, anyone else, who knows. But he just, he just kind of appears one day and sets up an art show, it goes great, you don't see a think for another year. And he's just, that good at it. An awesome guy. But he's always busy, he's never around, he works very hard. He's a good, good individual. I hope that he finds a nice mate sometime but he needs to spend less time working a mile underground to find one. But um, anyways. I guess there's a female furry firefighter in that area that has no qualms about talking about [being furry], about her engines and works with some volunteer department up there, small one, um, but again being a smaller department and being female, the rules are different for her than they are for say me. So anyways, segue off that. But, just because him and I were very good fits for the positions we held within the convention there was very few competent furies that could do the jobs we did in this area. But say, for the other things, they didn't have those kind of resources. You can draft almost anyone somewhat reliably and make them a gopher. But you can't grab just anybody off the street and say, 'okay, you're an administrator, now go administrate!' You just can't do that. You, you're going to run into problems. Um, not saying that everyone needs uh, uh, a degree in finance and accounting to be useful at a convention but you need to have a couple people who have a clue what they're doing in the admin side. We've, All Fur Fun didn't have that. There was no replacing the folks that we had that were overworked.

Dusty: That's too bad that it couldn't continue to be around because I think that would have been nice to have a convention at either end of the state. Especially for a lot of the folks who are on this end. I think that was one thing I was looking forward to about FurIdaho is that it was going to be more on the interior side of the northwest.

Abe: Well the nice thing about it is it actually being in the inland northwest, up in Spokane it was close enough that Montana furies were willing to make the six to eight hour drive to go there and Montana is very poorly represented in the furry community for a few reasons. I grew up there so, one they're still...for being a democratic state they're a very backward people, it's very, very weird. Um, they um, Montana is both a very progressive frontier state and also a very, very, backward, backward place. Um, furies really aren't an acceptable thing there. Um, yeah, they still do some of the horrible things. I knew a furry in Missoula that uh, we're not sure if he was um, abused so heavily because, uh, abused and raped so heavily because he was a furry or if it was because he was gay, or if it was because he was born 'gender confused.' It could have been any number one of the three things on this list, but, needless to say he had a very bad time in Montana. Um. But, yeah, there's just relatively few Montana furies because there's no furmeets, no events, no conventions, it's just a dead spot. There would be more, or at least we would identify more of them if they

came out. I know that Orofino has produced several furies but I never have managed to get down to make contact with them. Um. But, yeah.

Dusty: Is there a difference between a furry convention and a Furmeet? I mean, what's the distinction between the two?

Abe: The distinction is a convention is a formal process. Um, if you have to go in, pay a bunch of money and get a badge that says 'yay I paid money so I can go to things' that, that's usually the main identifiable difference between a Furmeet and a convention. A convention will have that. Um, conventions, they typically draw a Dealer's Den. They usually have a show put up for artwork to be sold, or just displayed. Um, they'll have a room with um, uh Suttlers or dealers that'll come out and try to selling their wares, whether they're furry or um, fantasy, or gaming or whatever. I, I'm trying to get into the con two-weeks from now to run a blacksmithing table in Boise and I'm still desperately trying to get an answer to see if the table that's listed is open on the website is mine! Anyways, sorry.

Dusty: That's got to be nail-biting for that, though.

Abe: I was small, I have a large car. I have an old ***** ***** . There's only so much shit I can put in that. And if I don't need to put all of my crap in there, I'm not going to truck it for six hours to Boise. Gas is valuable.

Dusty: Yeah, that's alarming.

Abe: Well their other staff members said kind of the same thing to me. 'A gah, well that's not right. This close in the game he should be responding to you. Keep poking at him.'

Dusty: Right.

Abe: I don't think its going through.

Dusty: And I wondered that too, because I got a bounceback a few times on the E-mails when I send them inquiring about what's going on, are we still going to be able to do X, Y and Z things?

Abe: Clearly their website, and I applaud them for putting one up, their website is using some crap generated software. It's not a purpose built website. Frankly I rather see a very bad basic HTML, hand-coded file that has HTML image, text. The way that their website is organized, and I've had more than a few people actually say this, I've had them say it on the Idaho furies E-mail group, um, I'm not sure if you're familiar with that.

Dusty: No, no. I'm out of the loop. I've basically fell through the cracks.

Abe: We'll have to get you on it. It's very Boise centric, but there's a few other Idahoans.

Dusty: I know that there are a few people out in the peripheral areas, up in Athol and uh, goodness, there's one other...Orofino, of course.

Abe: There's actually a few more in town, I haven't made contact with them in a very long time but there are a few more here [Moscow]. Um, actually of all people um, are you familiar with ***** and *****?

Dusty: Yeah.

Abe: Um, *****'s brother is a furry.

Dusty: *****?

Abe: No, ***. ***.

Dusty: Oh, I had no idea.

Abe: His character is um, Spock's pet. Some weird, Vulcan, toothy, saber-toothed rideable tiger thing. I don't know. He's um, he's a nice guy but um, he doesn't get a whole lot of attention from the furry community just because he's um, he has a number of um, social troubles that makes him difficult to be around.

Dusty: I am familiar, there's a couple people I know like that.

Abe: And unfortunately, and individual by the name of *** was very good at organizing local furmeets and a Furmeet is just any kind of informal gathering.

Dusty: Oh like going to go bowling or something like that.

Abe: Going bowling, or, or what we used to do was like once a month we'd meet at a restaurant and go out. Um, *** liked to carpool up to the Coeur d'Alene Casino, and um, they had an old Super Nintendo video game rigged up. It was um, it was blackjack using, running off of a Super Nintendo. And he liked to play the table with a bunch of furs paying attention to the, to the math of the game. Like, wow, there's got to be...there's...there are cameras all over this little spot. They've got to just be waiting to run us out.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: But they never did. I guess they were making too much money to care. Anyways, um, we only did that a couple of times. Um, generally there's just meals in town. But then *** had a fire in his home and uh, we think it may be a result of the uh, of lead paint poisoning during the fire and uh a number of other forms of poisoning but it, it made him go nuts.

Dusty: Oh no.

Abe: He was just plain nuts for about two years and um, then he quit being nuts but unfortunately he is in the meantime managed to um, socially distance everyone who has ever met him so much that they just regard him as some kind of nutcase and so he's a very

bitter, angry person and has gotten to the point where he just kind of uses people when they suit his needs.

Dusty: That's unfortunate.

Abe: It is, um, there's one other furry in town that I know of that's contacted me and I uh, I got him to go into a blind rage in the E-mail when I mentioned that 'oh yeah *** talked about you a while ago.' *imitates roaring sound* And uh, he then actually sent me another one apologizing, begging me to come out and see him do something. Um, I guess he, uh, when *** knew him, ***'s story was that he was living in a, living in um, a van, was a dooper with all kinds of issues. Apparently him and *** had a really bad falling out. And also apparently this kid is um, on a much, I'm not sure if he's a kid, but he's, this individual was on a much better path than he had been previously. I guess he decided that all that stuff before that he was dealing with was just stupid. So I, I'd like to go out and give him a chance but, I know, I'm a little stand-offish to the furies in Moscow.

Dusty: There's just for me, again kind of my fall back in needing to be closeted, needing to hide some things, just that...I'm always hesitant to meet somebody I haven't checked out and uh, not...oh I'm going to be associated with this person, and will it come up at an inopportune time and accidentally 'out' me or um, will have a discussion that might come back to haunt us in a way. That always seems to be a concern for me, I don't know about you.

Abe: One of the more bizzare experiences I had was I had the, one of my buddies in the fire department, he's unfortunately moved on, he had some issues here, but, um, kind of a funny dude, he was the, he felt himself to be the, the, the consummate firefighter. The finest example of one you'd ever find, short of San Francisco. Ladders was his thing. Ladder truck this, ladder everything, ladder company, blah, blah, blah, blah, blahblahblah. Anyways, kind of a nerd. Um, he was a history major. He um, one time when we were out drinking in town which is something I do very rarely, I actually generally avoid them unless I'm out of town for a number of reasons. Um, either at a furry convention or a firefighter's convention, or something. Partly because, you know, it takes me out of service and I'd like to be useful here. The other is, I'm very guarded. I, I don't like the idea of not being in control. Not because I got power or control issues it's just, my private business is my private business. Anyways, um, and one time we were out drinking he popped the question, 'so, you, are you actually a furry?' Like, I'm not sure how that came up but 'yes.' And nothing more was ever said. Kind of interesting. But he was also a little different individual so, and his um, he had a personal interest in World War II reenacting and what not as well but that never came up. He was always the consummate firefighter in the history of being here. It's just what his persona was, the drunken cowboy firefighter.

Dusty: That was his own self-image, then?

Abe: That was his persona that he gave out to the world. Um, yeah. Anyways, so good stuff. I guess we are still talking about conventions, what else?

Dusty: Do you think...the furry community to me seems to be largely based on the internet and functions on the internet, uh, we have our fursonas, I mean again we talked a little bit about the gaming environments do you think that its easier or more difficult for people to make it to conventions, do you think that conventions are a byproduct of the internet culture of furrydom or that they're kind of linked, that they can operate both in the internet world and the real world?

Abe: The operate both. Without question. Um, the internet realm connects the furry community from a bunch of, a bunch of scattering covens from here and there and wherever and makes them actually into a large interoperable community where...

Abe pauses to listen to multiple emergency vehicle sirens pass by the interview room

Dusty: Must be something big.

Abe: Yeah.

Abe checks his cellphone and beeper

Dusty: Are you receiving signal in here?

Abe: Well I should. I only got an alarm for fire. So who knows what it is, it could be ours, could be someone else's, could be cops. If it's an ambulance call it won't let me know. But, um, yeah so, the internet allows them to communicate. It makes it so I can show up, I can go from being a redneck fur in Podunk Moscow, Idaho and I can show up anywhere in the world and have a good meal, a safe couch to crash on and a couple people to hang out with. Anywhere in the world. However, it still functions as the real world. Every month I think, Bellfurs get together. Um, it's um, in Bellevue, Washington. Outside of the university there's a um, there's a townhouse that somebody has in a kind of suburban residential neighborhood, has like seven or eight furrries living in it and they have just the nastiest piss up, drunk parties once a month. And they all get together and function in it. Um, I'm not necessarily certain that they're the finest shining examples of the furry community, but, well no they're part of us and they're participating. One of the annoying things I had to deal with was cleaning out, dealing with, their room at the last All Fur Fun. They were next to a Wal-Mart, so they were walking distance away, they stole...no, they didn't steal. They stole a shopping cart full of every kind of booze you can think of. They drank every bit of it under the, uh, over the weekend. Refilled the shipping cart, wheeled it back over to Wal-Mart's parking lot and left it there. Not exactly the finest examples of human beings. Um, they, that same group actually got a uh, got a suite at the first Rainfurrest. And, uh, they caused so much damage that they are still paying off damage to the suite.

Dusty: Even after the hotel's been leveled?

Abe: Did it get leveled?

Dusty: Was it...the first one, was it that hotel that they tore down before they put up the rail system, the light rail? Or am I getting my history confused? Uh, maybe, maybe I am.

Abe: No, it's ah...

Dusty: I got that information second hand.

Abe: ...it's um, it's out at um...no. It's, it's still up.

Dusty: Ah, okay.

Abe: The only reason they moved hotels for this last year of Rainfurrest is just because um, because of size. The overflow hotel for the first two years is now the Con hotel, and the primary hotel from the first two years is now the overflow hotel.

Dusty: Oh, okay.

Abe: So just because of spacing needs they had to just move over.

Dusty: Oh, okay I heard that wrong then. My apologies.

Abe: Um, the reason that ConiFur no longer exists is first they were getting tired of running it, but the main reason it doesn't exist is that they had a ten year contract with the hotel that decided to level it right after they made the contract.

Dusty: Oh, okay, that must be what I am thinking of then.

Abe: And, my question is why didn't they sue the piss out of 'em? Because, you know, most people don't, but, that's what you do! When someone screws you over that badly, it destroys your business, and negatively impacts your entire community, you sue the piss out of 'em! Not for, you know, somebody spitting on your sidewalk. That's stupid. You sue the piss out of 'em for destroying your livelihood.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: But, whatever. Anyways, we've been, All Fur Fun benefited greatly from ConiFur. They donated all of our shit, er, all their shit to us so we took a Ryder truck...

Dusty: Well that was a good start for you then.

Abe: It was. Uh we took trucks over, picked up everything we could and moved it out and put it into a storage unit out in a shipping container out in, uh, a field outside of Spokane for a couple years, which was all paid out of the budget of the director. Um, anyways, it's an awful shame. I'm not sure what we ever did with the property afterward. But since it was...we never actually, formally set it up as an S Corp like we wanted to, it ended up being a sole-proprietorship where everything was in the guy's name, so, he technically was the

owner of everything and legally responsible for all the debts and everything associated with it. Which I liked, uh, I didn't want to be a corporate officer because then I'd be legally responsible for covering debts.

Dusty: Right, and that would be bad in some instances.

Abe: They're not going to buy insurance? Fine, I'm not going to be involved!

Dusty: Yeah, that would be a lot to be responsible for.

Abe: Yeah. Anyways, so, again part of the reason why it went down, if we had had event insurance we probably still would have had that one [All Fur Fun]. But, anyways, good stuff. Um, the community does draw in all kinds of people. It definitely, um, I had a medievalist once describe their community as that "their people do not lack in character." I think not as saying that they are good in moral character it was just, they gained people that aren't...A.) these subcultures don't really gain people that are, um, boring, we gain people that are interesting individuals. The kind of characters that you read about in books, both the good and the bad! But, um, anyways.

Dusty: It's good that we have characters in the community, I mean, it makes us more unique.

Abe: Yeah. I...it's really a shared factor between us, us and pretty much everything. Well you know the early history of furry community, right?

Dusty: Only vaguely, I'm getting brought up to speed.

Abe: Well, essentially years and years ago, the furry community was part of the Sci-Fi community, and it still kind of is, um, early furies appeared in science fiction like, uh, Star Trek had cat girls and whatnot, years and years ago before the official date furry kind of created. In fact, furies have been around for hundreds of years and Reynard the Fox is a thirteenth century French story about a fox in the animal kingdom that essentially is a thief and the whole nine yards. He's actually...it's anthropomorphized, so it's actually a furry version of Medieval Europe, told in the contemporary timeframe. So it's not by any means...anthropomorphics is not a new concept. But, for our more modern history, um, furry conventions and whatnot split off from Sci-Fi conventions, they started getting large draws at Sci-Fi conventions and they still have one. But they became large enough that somebody had come across the idea in the 80s that, hey, we can actually start having our own events and we're large enough to support them. And so they started splitting off and doing their own events on the side, instead of [being part of] the larger Sci-Fi community, and started to fragment in much the same way that anime, Sci-Fi and furry have all kind of started going their separate ways. They still all mash...

Dusty: They all still root back under the Sci-Fi umbrella?

Abe: ...they, they, yeah, if you look at it like three circles placed together in like a, like a triskelion, you have a common center ground and then the interests just kind of separate off from there and they all appear at any general science fiction convention, but they've become large enough entities on their own that they can support their own communities. So they've started going off and doing that. Um, I think the movement for that started in the 80s, picked up steam the mid and late 90s and now it's a worldwide phenomenon.

Dusty: Yeah, there's stand alone conventions in Germany, in Australia, and Canada.

Abe: Russia as well.

Dusty: Oh I didn't know about Russia, that's cool.

Abe: Um, the U.K. is known for several, it has some larger Furmeets and so their communities...um, Japan has some following but Japan is such an isolationist state that it's very difficult to figure out what the hell they're doing. They...it's, it's, weird, as much as they sell to the Western world they refuse to deal with the Western world. It's actually kind of bizarre to me. Um, but the Russians, after the fall of um, fall of the USSR has also latched onto pretty much any subculture they can find. It's almost like they were, they've...like, they were forced to have a national identity for so long that they no longer had any kind of individual cultures or identity, so they were desperate to find something to call their own. So they latched onto furry, onto anime, onto some other things. They've even come up with their own uh, I don't think they had their own animation for years and years and so now they're starting to try to work on their own. Unfortunately, on the matter of cartoons, I'm very bitter that western animation has died. American animation just no longer exists. The best we can get, we've adopted anime so heavily over here, that about the best we can do is um, Marvel comics buff action figures/G.I. Joe that are pretty much redone for just about everything. Um, and computer generated animation is becoming so popular that uh, low quality animation has become the standard as well. Things like the Gummi Bears from the early 80s, which I'm still mad at Disney they sold, they were going to sell it as a two volume set for the entire collection. They sold volume one, two years later they were supposed to sell volume two, and the entire...a lot of people in the U.S. and the U.K. are very upset about this because here it is eight years later and it still hasn't come out?

Dusty: Right, and it left them hanging.

Abe: Yeah. But, anyways.

Dusty: The animation did have a warmer quality to it, western style animation.

Abe: It did, and I really liked it. It was, um, a different style. But unfortunately it seemed to start dying in the early 80s. Um, when CG animation started to become a thing. Um, and we started shipping so much of it off to Asia to be made because it was cheaper to hire, to do a couple test cells, and then have a sweatshop work out the rest of the in-betweens. But...there's the power of marketing for you.

Dusty: It's very true.

Abe: Anyways, um, sorry.

Dusty: No, it's all right. It's good to talk about it.

Abe: Uh, so what else do we have?

Dusty: Well, I think we've kind of covered a lot of the things I wanted to talk about. Um, how do you...ah, how do you differentiate between a furry and a fur fan? Those were terms that I always figured a furry covered everything but a previous interview I conducted, there were two things: a furry is a lifestyle choice, it is a full commitment to it [the furry fandom] while a fur fan is more of a, you can appreciate furry art, you can appreciate the fandom but you don't necessarily participate as much. Is there a distinction in your mind between the two?

Abe: I'd call bullshit on anyone who says that.

Dusty. Okay, okay.

Abe: Um, if you identify yourself as a "fur fan" then you are a closeted furry.

Dusty: Oh.

Abe: Um, I have encountered some people here on the um, around the U of I, that kind of like some of the art style. Um, but they're not fur fans. Um, they like funny animal drawings. Uh, they're either artists or they liked early 80s cartoons. There's no such thing as a "fur fan." A fur fan in my mind is just another name for a furry. The fandom, "The Fandom," "The Furryverse," these are all goofy terms we were throwing around the turn of the last century to describe our world, and, a fur fan is just a furry that's afraid to be labeled a furry.

Dusty: Hmm, that's good to know.

Abe: Yeah. It's like saying, okay, so I've got a friend that identifies himself as gay but he'd probably be more viewed as a bi individual that mostly likes men. He would, I think he would claim the same sort of thing as "bullshit, you are who you are!" Um, now, now everyone has their degrees of involvement but...

Dusty: But it's still under that banner of being a furry.

Abe: It's like rolling up to someone and saying I fucked men but I'm not gay. Um, bullshit! I think you just defined it right there! Um, not saying that there's anything wrong with that, it's just that...don't lie to yourself! You can lie to everyone else, just don't lie to yourself. That's stupid. Uh, anyways.

sirens go by outside of the interview room

Abe: I really wish I knew what all these sirens were.

Dusty: It is a very busy day for sirens out there.

Abe: Kind of makes me wish I had left my pager on the general scan.

Dusty: Well hopefully everything is okay over there.

Abe: Well, if they uh, needed fire they would [indistinguishable word] for them.

Dusty: If I could just ask you, we may have already covered some of this, to you in being a furry where would you classify it...is it an interest, it's a hobby, it's a lifestyle? It's part of who you are?

Abe: It's part of who I am. It's not necessarily a side that I show to the whole world, but, you could probably pretty well guess if you walked into my living room. Um, you might have to look a little closer to see that, you know, my desktop has two furrries on it...they're both standing there, they're fursuiters standing back to back, they had to have climbed somewhere into the mountains to get this shot. Which makes me wonder why in the hell you would hump a Sterilite tote with a full fursuit in it into the mountains just for a beautiful landscape shot.

Dusty: That's dedication.

Abe: I can appreciate it, but I wouldn't do it! It makes about as much sense as having sex in a fursuit. Dear God, why?

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Um, yeah, anyways...

Dusty: The dangers of heat stroke.

Abe: Yeah. Really, it is. Um, just dancing in 'em is dangerous enough.

Dusty: I felt so bad for some of the people I was seeing over at Rainfurrest when they had the dances it was just, whew, the sweat was just pouring off of them when they had to get out of 'em [the fursuits worn to dances].

Abe: Right. Um, unfortunately a lot of 'em aren't smart enough to...it adds another layer of heat to put an under suit on, a ninja suit or something, but you absolutely have to because unless you've got such a cheap, crappy suit where you can throw it into a washing machine and not care, to take care of your suit you really have to wash the inner layer you don't want to have to wash the whole thing very often. But, yeah, anyways.

Dusty: Under Armour seems to be pretty popular for wearing under a fursuit.

Abe: It is but it's not really the best choice.

Dusty: What is the best choice?

Abe: Um, kind of absorbent material. Um, there's a lot of problems with Under Armour. Under Armour is nice in that it is slick, moves, whatnot, but you don't really want all that sweat escaping from the suit and venting and being comfortable for you, you're trying to wear it to protect the suit, which um, again it's a matter of...it's almost like, weird as it is, as much as a lot of fursuiters are vain going out and doing it for their own glory, um, part of the reason why they have their own private dens and whatnot is to protect the magic. Because it's almost more like, while they are a minority, they're going out and providing a service for the rest of the community. They're going out and providing, something cooler than Mickey Mouse at Disneyland. They're going out and providing for the ambiance and that's part of the reason why they're so closeted and whacked out because while every fursuiter knows who every other fursuiter is they can try to hide their identity for so long but it only works for a while. They understand all their same issues, they understand how to spot for 'em, they, they take care of their own but they also hide in the backroom and ice water to protect the magic and to keep it so you know, the general popul...uh, furry population, doesn't know who they are because they don't need to, um, it's like, it's like we seeing a Stormtrooper [from Star Wars] without his helmet on.

Dusty: Right, it destroys the magic.

Abe: It's, it's, it's...yeah, it, it, it's...you don't do it. It-i-i-I you just don't! There's supposed to be something in the background looking mean an menacing and skeletal and...portraying this persona that adds to the atmosphere. But if you take away the magic then they're just another guy in a suit, and...yeah.

Dusty: You're just Carl, you're just Sarah, wearing...

Abe: Yeah, instead of, you know, furries are almost walking in Second Life. They're just something that's there.

Dusty: Right and you see that actual representation with a fursuit especially. It's the most visible aspect of the fandom I would argue.

Abe: It is.

Dusty: You and me, we could walk out on the street right now and no one would have any clue. That got brought up at one of the panels I was at at Rainfurrest that there's that big gap between the people who put on the fursuits and you never know who they are, the person inside of them, and the other person who is sitting out there in plain clothes compared to the person sitting next to them who has maybe ears, or a tail on.

Abe: I was actually going to mention that as well. Most of them [furries] are terrible at hiding because they will put a tail on, and ears, and have more...they'll have so many Conbadges on their chest that you can almost argue it was scale mail.

Dusty: Yes, yes, there's quite a few that will do that.

Abe: Yeah, they're...they're as bad as soldiers right out of basic training. If you have the slightest clue what you're looking for they're very easy to spot. Occasionally you'll find a ninja that, you know, will hide on you but...generally they're pretty obvious to spot. They have the illusion of being normal.

Dusty: Yes. There's certain magic then with the fursuits there, that they are willing to be uh, putting on suits and then to be performing even with spotters working with them they are willing to take on their character to a whole new level of actually doing...and performance art might be the wrong word but I mean being the physical embodiment of that [fursona], taking on the aspects, wanting a spirituality sense of it, becoming that representation of self.

Abe: That's actually it gets into one of the main reasons why it upsets the, uh, the fursuited community specifically about um, this portrayal in the media of them being some kind of sexual act that for them is...

Dusty: And solely that.

Abe: Yeah, it's...it's very insulting to them and it's mislabeled. Especially because a lot of the fursuiters have dumped a lot of time and money into their fursuited and then they go out and do community events, they um, my fursuit actually pissed off some dog owners. Um, down in McCall we had a Furmeet in Idaho in McCall for the Winter Festival. We went down, we had a Furmeet and one of the things that the local humane society does down there, the animal shelter, they use a "McPaws Monster Pull" or something and they have a dog in every weight category come out and pull a sled full of whatever specific weight it is, pull this sled of stuff and then they do a timed dog pull like you would do a tractor pull. Well it was kind of cool. Well, um, I-I got entered into that as a wolf-fur. They were a little hesitant at first and then they saw it they were like yeah we're putting that in. It upset...it upset the owners of a couple of the dogs that competed against but like "Oh, a guy in a costume is going to possibly take my shiny ribbon and dog biscuits away from me?"

Dusty: So they were taking it personal then?

Abe: Yeah, a couple of guys that competed against took it personal, everyone else loved it. It actually kind of amuses me when I see people that are that fucking dense, but, so it was awesome. After the event, you know, I was down on, er, on paws, down on the squat on the paws, saying hi to kids...it was just a great event. That's a fairly common thing. A lot of fursuiters actually end up um, their suits end up being public demonstration pieces or community events kind of deals. And, you know, some of them just want to make high activity suits that they can go out and bounce around off street posts and make dumbasses of themselves, ride skateboards down the park.

Dusty: ***** is a good example of that one.

Abe: **** ***** is a beautiful example of it.

Dusty: Yes, **** is great.

Abe: A good friend of mine. Um, not a whole lot of common sense. Great guy. Bu he does some really stupid things. Almost like he needs it, like he needs an agent or a badger with him. Have you ever seen the...Mongrels?

Dusty: No.

Abe: Oh you're going to need to see Mongrels.

Dusty: Wait, what's it called? Mongols?

Abe: Mongrels. It's a muppet show from, um, from the U.K. Unfortunately they're not picking up for a third season.

Dusty: So is it like the Sunday, er, Funday Pawpet Show? Or is it?

Abe: Um, it's more like Meet the Feebles but it's actual animals. Um, but yeah, it's on Hulu or you can buy the DVD set and convert something over to play uh, play um, region two DVDs. Just easier to go onto Hulu, they got both seasons.

Dusty: Sure, I will check that out.

Abe: It's good stuff. Um, it's kind of vile, a little dirty but its good stuff. It's good stuff.

Dusty: Sure.

Abe: Anyways, so, yeah we do a lot of...little bit of everything. A lot of public events, and it's part of the reason why a lot of people refuse to get murr suits or have sex in their fursuits because its...you can't take a suit that you've had sex in and then take it out in public. It's just...

Dusty: Right.

Abe: It's like one, going to the beach in your special occasion lingerie. You just don't do it.

Dusty: You just don't do that.

Abe: Yeah. Um, I do know that there are a couple, there's at least one guy out that makes murr suits, he calls them. And as far as I know they are only made for males so far. They might be a female equivalent, but uh, I think it's a little more involved to make a, uh, a uh, costume for a male because you've got to put special hardware on it to get the sheath and all that whereas for a female you just need to cut a hole somewhere.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: Um, but yeah, I've come across a couple videos on the internet so such a thing does exist. And I know one person that's done it and I have seen another one at Rainfurrest. So they exist. Clearly they exist.

Dusty: Right.

Abe: That's, okay, so that's two people out of, um, 300 fursuiters I've personally met. Hmm. I think that sounds about right for the averages but still. *Abe shrugs his shoulders and rolls his eyes* It's like saying that just because Jeffery Dahmer ate some people *all* people eat people in a cabin in the woods. That is...that is...

Dusty: All cabin owners would be willing to eat people.

Abe: It's asinine that you would do something like that. I mean it's like, one horrific event in Afghanistan - one guy finally goes nuts, murders a village, and suddenly every American soldier is a baby killer. Anyone who would buy that line of logic needs to have their head examined.

Dusty: It's broken logic.

Abe: Yeah.

Dusty: People are willing to do that with fursuits easy because obviously the media portrays such things, it goes back to what you were saying is that people want that easy access media. They don't want to do the research on their own, they don't want to see them as people, individual people.

Abe: They amusement, they want cheap amusement. And unfortunately pop culture tends to do that. If you go back and look at things like, well I recently saw a movie it was uh..."And starring Poncho Villa as himself!" Kind of a nifty piece, made Poncho Villa out to be pretty much a, uh, a Mexican crime lord even though he was running a revolution. Because he was. But, anyways, it...even back then same sort of deal. Turn of the last century, pop culture was still a bunch of dicks being dicks. It wasn't MTV but it was a silent movie...okay, Mexicans are treated like shit because they are the outcasts for the group of the week. Well now we can't treat Mexicans like shit for being Mexicans. Let's look for something else. Oh! We'll treat gays like shit because they have sex with guys. Oh, well, we can't do that anymore let's look for the next easy target until somebody says that you're being a dick and you can't do that anymore. Or just the flavor of the week.

Dusty: Right. And do you think that will change with time? You mentioned a little bit earlier that you thought maybe it would, but I mean do you think it's coming with people or...

Abe: Um, I think eventually people will become desensitized to that and change their views.

Dusty: We seem to be the go to..."Let's kick the furries around" on the Internet at least. Maybe that's just a passing fad, or...

Abe: Yeah well, fursecution is fun. I think we might actually encourage it more than it actually occurs.

Dusty: Just because we enjoy that, or we set situations up? We being the general community.

Abe: Well I've noticed some interesting um, correlations with the uh, the gay community which the furry community has a lot of overlap over there. And there's a lot of them and a lot of us. Um, I almost feel that sometimes they've picked their battles poorly in the past, which is almost like they were looking to stir up the pot. They go piss in someone's Wheaties and see what kind of reaction they could get. And I think we have a little bit of that too. I think we have a few members that, you know, want to go out and get a reaction. So they'll piss in someone's Wheaties and sit back and watch the fireworks because they're anarchists at heart.

Dusty: They just want to watch the world burn?

Abe: Yeah, I think...I think every subculture has a few of them, and unfortunately they don't help with our worldwide image.

Dusty: I bet there's a lot of folks in the fandom who would whole heartedly agree, it's those few loose radicals out there that...

Abe: I think that most furries would be just as happy being quietly their own. Um, dealing with some of my employers, other fandoms, other subcultures, um, one of my boss...one of my employers actually deals largely with the BDSM community in their normal line of work. And they've described them as being the most closeted people they've ever met. Particularly in this area. Out here in redneck Idaho they don't want to show their faces, they don't want to do anything, they want to be quiet, very low key and kind of hidden. Go to Tri-Cities or Portland and they are the...all over the place! They're broadcasting themselves on billboards! I'm not sure why, is it just because they don't black, er, they refuse to black hat in their own town? Or is it just that we're...they're afraid of the reaction in a community this small [Moscow]? I don't understand, nor does my boss that's actually into that community, understand either but she...it amuses her.

Dusty: There's a difference too, that they are willing to be out and advertise openly and they're...they'll even acknowledge openly "yeah, I'm a furry." And for folks like us that are back here in the interior, rural areas, we're just like *mimes drawing a zipper across his mouth and covers eyes with a hand*.

Abe: Well I think that part of it might be that, um, well...I don't think you could find a furry community the size of Moscow in Seattle/Tacoma, but you can enough furs over there that

you can make an independent, self-sustaining, full economy where they can produce every good, service that they need all within their own community. We could set up Furrytown in place of Chinatown over there. Here, we have to assimilate, we have to blend in, and we have to function as a member of this other society because we don't have a choice.

Dusty: We aren't necessarily able to stand alone in that regard.

Abe: Yeah, we are too small of a minority here.

Dusty: We don't have that...I don't know, we don't have the same strength, as say, as we have an affiliation with a football team. You know, we can't just all associate under the banner openly?

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APPENDIX L: FRED PATTEN CORRESPONDENCE

Hello Sir,

My name is Dusty and I am an anthropology graduate student at the University of Idaho, studying furry culture. Being a furry myself (I go by Caffran) I entered into the ethnography program with a desire to write my Master's thesis on furies and the furry personas to increase the visibility and knowledge of them in the academic setting.

I was hoping I could speak to you about the history of the furry fandom, as well as about my research work on fursonas. If you knew any details as to when they came about, their evolution over time within the fandom, etc.

I would appreciate any information you'd be willing to share.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing back from you.

~Dusty

Dear Dusty;

I will be glad to answer any questions that you have.

Here is some Furry information that may help you.

<http://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996>

Best wishes;

Fred Patten

Hello Fred,

Thank you so much for the link! That was most insightful.
So much of furrydom seems to be a grassroots sort of movement!

Since I encountered the furry fandom in 1996, and later began participating within it, I have been excited to learn all I can about it.

Are there many individuals, such as yourself, who work to preserve the information of the fandom for future generations? Are there many historians such as yourself vested in gathering pieces of the fandom to pass on to the future?

Have you noticed an increase in furs wishing to learn more about the fandom?

I was very excited to see the listing (in the link you provided) about furry room parties being advertised on flyers posted at different conventions. I remembered seeing my first flyer. I attended WesterCon 52 at Spokane, Washington in 1999 and saw my first flyer advertising a furry room party. That flyer lightened my heart that day as I learned that there were other real life folks in the area who appreciated anthropomorphic characters. My chaperon steered me away from making contact, however, telling me that "those aren't the kind of folks you want to meet, Spud." This piqued my curiosity even more about the furies as I was suddenly denied reaching out to meet others who were 'like me.' Has there always been a sort of stigma attached to being a furry? Or is that something which developed over time?

Do you know when the personas/fursonas began to become a dominant piece in the community?

When did it become the custom to go by a fursona name, rather than use your actual name?

So much of the fandom, at least since I have been a participant, almost requires a person to have a fursona of their own. Other fandoms, such as Star Wars or Star Trek, don't seem to have the same "requirement" for members of their communities it seems. Do you think that not having a fursona, limits a furry fan's ability to interact with the fandom?

In attending some Sci-Fi and Anime conventions, some Furs I have interviewed have reported negative reactions by non-furies toward furies and some have reported positive reactions. Do you feel that the image of furrydom has been shifting toward the positive in recent times?

I became interested in adding more positive information to the academic realm on furies following my experiences with CSI's "Fur and Loathing in Las Vegas" episode. I had recently come out to my mother as being a furry and she took it in stride. Upon seeing the aforementioned episode, however, she quickly pulled me aside and asked me if that what being a furry was really like and if I was "being safe." While I have learned that the episode and its producers were guided by a member of the furry community and so was far different than what it was originally setup to be, it seems to still remain the 'benchmark' for the general public on what "being a furry" means. While attending RF 2012, I was a panelist for "Hiding and Coming Out as a Furry." That episode was brought up, as well as the Vanity Fair article which also gave furies some bad press...almost immediately, someone questioned what shadows that "old information" had cast over the fandom. How did you react to the CSI episode and Vanity Fair articles?

Thank you for your time,

~Dusty

Dear Dusty;

Unfortunately, there are not as many individuals interested in the history of the Furry fandom as I would like. I have taken on several personal projects over the years -- I have one today to record the events of the Furry conventions such as how many people attended each one, who the guests of honor have been, who the chairmen have been, and so on -- and while there has been some cooperation, there are a disappointing number of people who say, "Who cares?", or "That convention was several years ago; it's too much trouble to dig up the information.", or "Why don't you get that information from WikiFur? That's what WikiFur is for." -- but my questions are about what has happened that nobody sent information about to WikiFur. Strangely, I have gotten some of the most cooperation from the fans in Australia and in the Czech Republic, who seem anxious to have the information about their conventions become known to Furry fans around the world, than from the fans who have organized American conventions.

I would estimate that there are maybe a dozen fans who care about the history of the fandom, who gather it and publish it for a permanent record. Too many fans don't care about what has happened in the past. There are many more who agree that this history is important, but they do not have the information themselves.

The number of Furry fans who are interested in its history is increasing, but very slowly. The Flayrah website is a good place for the fans who are interested in the history, but it is unfortunately not well organized.

I am almost 73 years old, so I feel that Furry fandom has grown up around me. I was an adult when it started, and I have never personally experienced parents or chaperones or non-fan friends who have tried to keep me away from the fandom. When Furry fandom started in the 1980s, at first it was so tiny that people outside of it didn't notice or care about it. Then in the late 1990s the false information was created by non-fan magazines and TV news about Furry fans only being interested in sex orgies while wearing fursuits, and this has created the negative image about the fandom. I have seen the same kind of negative image about science-fiction fandom, but it has not been as bad. Around the 1950s and 1960s, many people in the general public believed that if you read s-f, you believed in flying saucers and that comic-strip heroes like Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon were real people.

At first, the Furry fans of the 1980s used their real names. Then around 1992 and 1993, Furry activities were joined by many adolescents who did not come from s-f fandom or comic-book fandom. They discovered Furry fandom over the Internet. Many of them were

already fans of role-playing games where it was common to adopt an obvious persona like a warrior or an elf name, so they adopted a fursona for Furry fandom. I have been told that I was not a real Furry fan because I use my real name and I do not wear a fursuit. So, yes, not having a fursona does limit your acceptance within Furry fandom with some fans.

The public image of Furry fandom has definitely been improving over the past decade, as more and more people see that the most lurid depictions of Furry fandom are not true. The most extreme example has been in Pittsburgh, where the largest Furry convention, the Anthrocon, is. When the Anthrocon first moved to Pittsburgh around 2006, because it had outgrown the hotels in Philadelphia, Furry fandom had a generally negative image. Then the Pittsburgh municipal government realized that the Furry fans were not being unruly, and that the annual gathering of them was adding over a million dollars to the local economy. Restaurants were almost selling out of food. Since then, the Pittsburgh city government has welcomed the Anthrocon and Furry fandom each year. This year, the Anthrocon's attendance was 5,577, with over 1,300 wearing Fursuits. The Canadian government has given a grant of \$75,000 for a sociological study of Furry fandom.

When the Vanity Fair article and the CSI episode first appeared, I and almost all of Furry fandom were outraged. Today, we look at it as in the past. It still has a negative impact on the fandom, but it is much easier to disprove today after more than a decade without any real criminal incidents. Still, there are many Furry conventions that will not allow the press or TV news crews to attend, to discourage exaggerated reports about what goes on at them.

Best wishes;

Fred

Hello Fred,

Why are the fans in Australia and the Czech Republic so supportive? I would think that Americans would have been very into archiving and history work. Is there information I may assist you with as I go about my own efforts?

Do you communicate frequently with members of the community outside of North America?

Are there others, like yourself, who are 'founders' of the furrydom in their own countries?

When I proposed my thesis to my department and then began to openly discuss it (I was afraid of how people would react to it) I was fortunate to be surrounded by supportive instructors and peers. They did some surface research to become familiar with what I was working on and confronted me about being furry myself. There was sincere

disappointment when it became known that I do not fursuit, nor had any interest in doing so. I have discovered that most all outsiders expect all furies to fursuit. I do not know if that is due to the CSI episode, or just because that is what people think of when they think of furies. I like to think that "being a furry" is a matter of self identification and selective participation rather than being able to check all the "boxes" of furrydom. Did you notice in your travels through time the attitude shift on "what it means to be furry?"

Is being a furry in the current decade different than in previous decades?

Is there a difference between "funny animals" and "furries?" Are they synonymous or do they represent different aspects of the same group? I had one interviewee tell me there was a difference between the two, the former being a way for cartoonists and animators to keep themselves separate from the furry fandom (and not be ostracized by potential employers or other peers in professional art for doing "furry" work). There was also some dialogue I picked up on while at a convention (overheard part of a discussion): "furry" is associated more with the fandom's adult fan base, and funny animals is more of the "clean" side of the fandom (Bugs Bunny, Disney characters, etc.).

I was not around for it (I stepped away from the fandom to focus on school) but what can you tell me about the "Burned Fur Movement" as it relates to the fandom's history? There are a few people I have interviewed that say it was a turning point for the fandom but others I spoke with dismiss it or know nothing about it at all. Some say it was a schism, driving off good artists and turning the furry fandom "dirty."

I know from my own experience that the Internet has played a large part in the growth of the furry fandom, giving people the opportunity from all over the world to share their interest in anthropomorphic art, literature, and discussions. What has been the most interesting thing for you to participate in as a member of the furry community?

There have been several physical books produced about furries (the most recent one I came across was "Furries Enacting Animal Anthropomorphism" by Carmen Dobre) which aim to be more informative about the culture. With academic and non-fiction writing being added to the wealth of fiction which the furry community produces, do you think we will be seeing more people altering their perceptions with the furry fandom?

As a participant, what sorts of things would you like to see happen in the furry community?

Thank you for your time,

~Dusty

Dear Dusty;

I guess that I have just been lucky in communicating with Australian and Czech Furry fans who like to communicate back. None of my e-mails to Japanese Furry fans have been answered, but the big Japanese convention is so thoroughly documented on its website that I hardly have to ask any questions.

No, I have only corresponded with some of the Australian fans before. I was lucky in finding some foreign fans who answered my questions.

Other founders of furrydom in their own countries would include Niall MacConniall, Bryan Feir, Ken Suzuki and Terry Wessner in Canada; Ian Curtis and Simon Barber in England; Sven "Cheetah" Tegethoff and Ronald "Cairyn" Klemp in Germany, and Paul Kidd, Craig Hilton, and Bernard Doove in Australia. This is an oversimplification, but those were some of the most prominent early fans in those countries.

Most of the questions that I have about American conventions are about things that happened at the conventions. For example, it usually says in the souvenir convention books who the guests of honor are, what the scheduled program is, and what the official charity is. But how much the charity donation is is unknown, because that is unknown in advance. It is usually announced at the closing ceremony, and nobody bothers to record it. Unless I can get a reply from someone on the convention's committee who will look it up in the convention's records, I do not have this information. Regular attendees just say that they are sorry, but they do not know. Some of them have recommended that I contact their long-time committee members, who do not reply.

Yes, it was during the 1990s when someone said that I was not a real Furry fan because I did not wear a Fursuit. The popular image that all furries wear fursuits started around the mid-1990s.

In my opinion, funny animals are more juvenile and simplistic, and do not usually say how they started. They just are. Most comic book and animated cartoon characters like Donald Duck and Bugs Bunny are funny animals. Furry fiction is for more older readers, featuring more complex characters, often showing sexuality or violence.

The Burned Fur movement seemed very important while it was happening, but it faded away after two or three years and it is forgotten today. Yes, most people say that it drove away some good artists, but I don't know who.

The most interesting thing about Furry fandom to me is to get the chance to communicate with other fans who share my tastes, and to write Furry literature book reviews and get them read.

I would like to see more in the Furry community take an interest in its literature, and not just in the Fursuits and the socializing.

Best wishes;

Fred

Hello Fred,

In regard to furry literature, anthropomorphic animals seem to always appear in nearly every culture. I have had one interviewee tell me that furies make for great storytelling because as they are a great device for getting people to suspend disbelief. Much like Star Trek was able to talk about real-world issues in the context of 'another time and place,' and therefore allow people to engage with those same issues in an abstract way.

Anthropomorphic furies seem able to explore complex (and sometimes uncomfortable) human situations, allowing people to relate to them in a similar fashion. Do most writers and storytellers you encounter aim to do this, you think? Or are they merely substituting furies for humans without intending to create the metaphors?

Do writers, artists, and filmmakers outside of the fandom know about the Ursa Major Awards, or is it mostly an internal furry community system? By this I mean, do non-furry writers, artists, and filmmakers who win get notified they are nominated and/or won and recognize the award? Or is it more like a fan club acknowledgement? Do the Ursa Major Awards get much notation outside of the fandom?

The data gathered by the IARP reflects that most of the fandom remains in the teen-20 something demographic. Has it always been thus, do you think, or is that a more recent trend? I know very few "gray muzzles" in the fandom, but the ones I do know have been involved for quite a bit of time. Do you think that more of the "gray muzzle" category of folks will enter into the fandom or is that age bracket never going to see an increase?

I have come across another researcher's work and he notes that there are two ways to talk about furry history.

One approach, he suggests, is that furry history is one that encompasses the extent of human history and our utilization of anthropomorphic characters and creatures through our storytelling processes, their use in building group and self-identity, and the evolution of "furry" overtime bringing us to the present day furry fandom. The other track is furry history that solely focuses on the furry fandom circa 1970s to present - covering only the modern ideas of 'furry' and not the pre-historic or pre-modern history of anthropomorphic animals or current furry identity (and this is further split into West and East coast interpretations of order). How do you feel about this distinction? Are there multiple camps for the discussion of furry history or is this a non-issue for the most part? To me, it seems, the furry fandom history is more aligned with the timeline you referenced with me at the beginning of our conversation. It is more of a modern focus than an all-encompassing one.

Do you think that the Egyptians, Aztecs, etc. could be counted among the precursors of furry fandom? Or should the furry fandom case itself within the more recent decades only?

Is there anything about the furry fandom that has surprised you?
New writing, new art, new websites, or directions that the fandom is going?

A lot of my interviewees have said that the furry fandom strives to be welcoming, non-exclusive, and multicultural. Do you feel that this is achieved? Or unique to the furries? It seems like a good value to aim for not only in the fandom but for people in general.

Have you ever introduced anyone to the furry fandom?

The Vanity Fair article and the CSI episode were over a decade ago. Do you think that the view of furries is improving in the eyes of the public? Do you think that the Vanity Fair article and the CSI episode are still noteworthy points for the furry fandom? Are they still relevant?

Thank you for your time,
~Dusty

Dear Dusty;

I just spent about two hours answering your latest letter in detail, and a computer error wiped it all out. I don't have the time now to recreate it. Maybe later.

Best wishes;

Fred

APPENDIX M: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Definitions listed here come from Wikifur entries, Simo's *New Furry Dictionary*, and Furry Grand Central's *A Furry Glossary*.

Alt – Short for 'Alternate' or 'Alternate Character,' this term is used to describe a character under a person's control that is not one of their primary identities.

Anthro – Short for 'Anthropomorphic.' An anthropomorphic creature.

Anthropomorphic – Possessing human characteristics. These include the physical as human/animal hybrids (i.e. – Centaurs, the Sphinx) and/or possessing qualities such as intelligence and/or human-like emotions and reactions to various scenarios (i.e. – Lassie, Rin-Tin-Tin, Flicka, etc.)

Avie/Avian – A bird-like character (e.g. – raven, parrot, gryphon)

Avatar – See: Fursona. An icon often used as a signature for on-line forums and message boards.

Burned Fur – 1. A defunct movement whose stated purpose was to "clean up" the fandom by eliminating those they perceived to be sexual deviants and "perverts." 2. An affiliate who has a reputation for being excessively judgmental.

Con – Short for 'convention.' A formal and organized meeting of furies frequently held at hotels catering to the convention business.

Con Badge - A personalized identification badge (usually 3"x4" in size) that can be used to identify a fur. Con badges are called such because they are typically worn at a convention or gathering. There are two main types: official (issued by convention hosts), and artist badges or fursona badges which are a specialized form of commission. Most often the term 'con badge' will refer to the latter.

Digitigrade – 1. An animal or being that walks on the front 'digits' of one's feet or paws.

Fandom – A term for Special Interest Groups (SIGs) that describes the members of that group.

Fan-fic – Furry related writing produced by insiders, for insiders.

Fan-pic – Artwork produced from within the furry fandom. (Note: Unlike most fandoms, furry fandom largely produces its own artwork from within the fandom itself.)

Fanzine – A portmanteau of the word 'fan' and 'magazine,' it is a non-professional, non-official magazine or comic book containing fandom specific content and is also known as an Amateur Press Association (APA).

Freezing Furs– A tolerance movement within the fandom whose intent was to counter the Burned Furs. Note: Originally known as "Frozen Furs," but had to change the name, as there was already another group using that name.

Funny Animal – A cartoon character, usually of mainstream origin or drawn in the same style.

Fur – 1. One who has made a formal affiliation with furry fandom. 2. An anthropomorphic character. 3. That which covers the exteriors of most mammals and fursuits.

Furcode – A series of letters, numbers, and symbols that concisely sums up personal information and describes the level of one's participation within the fandom. Based on the "Geek Code" from the Usenet days.

Fur-inclined – A fandom outsider who shares at least one interest in common with that of the fandom. A suspected implicit furry.

Furitan – 1. A furry fan who is not interested in any sexual content. 2. One who actively opposes sexual content in the furry fandom.

Furmeet – A local gathering of fans, less formal and organized than a con.

Furotica – Anthro-art that includes an element of sexuality.

Furrie (Variation – furry) – See: Fur.

Fursecution – A semi-serious term used to describe the ignorant speculations of outsiders, and the resulting PR problems thereby caused.

Fursona – 1. An animal/anthro character as an alter-ego. 2. Animal/anthro character with which a strong identification is made. 3. An on-line role-play character.

Fursuit – A full animal/anthro character costume. Usually covered with faux fur (hence the term), but not always. Note: The use of real fur, unless of vintage origin, is considered bad form.

Furvert – 1. Sexual attraction to mascots in non-furry contexts. 2. Sexual deviant whose indiscretions cause the fandom public-relations problems. 3. A mild insult used among fandom insiders.

Graymuzzle – An older furry fan. Usually meant as a term of respect. Note: Sometimes the cut-off age for this classification is considered to be 30-years-old, and can be used to denote someone who has had a long-term involvement or association with the furry Fandom (5-15 years) or who has been involved with the fandom before 1991. The term originally applied to pre-Internet furies.

Hyooman – Dismissive term for “Human.”

Implicit – A non-fan who shares considerable commonality of interests with the fandom. The non-affiliation most often is due to the fact that the implicit furry is not yet aware of the existence of the fandom.

Lifestyler – 1. A fandom affiliate whose interest extends to the creation of furry art forms (obsolete). 2. One whose involvement in the fandom borders on the obsessive/compulsive. Lifestylers tend to identify more strongly than typical furies with their furry avatars, and often act out animalistic behaviors of them. For example, a wolf furry lifestyler might go out barefoot to howl at the moon, and an otter lifestyler might spend much of the day swimming. Often this is coupled with a strong belief in an animal totem, and many lifestylers feel their avatar's spirit selected them instead of them selecting their avatar of choice.

Mate – An intimate partner that one may or may not be committed to, often a replacement for the terms boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, or wife. Often a very general, loosely translated term; it may have many meanings.

Morph – See: Anthro.

Mundane – A fandom outsider.

Netfur – A fandom affiliate whose involvement with the fandom is mainly or only through the Internet.

Otherkin – 1. Broad classification that includes elves, fae (fairies), witches, lycanthropes, angelics, vampyres. Apropos to furry: belief in animal/human amalgamations on spiritual level (therianthropes). 2. A parallel fandom that shares common interests with furry.

Plantigrade – 1. An animal or being that walks primarily on the heel or ball of a complex foot or paw, as in humans. 2. Term used to describe the human leg and lower body structure, which is much unlike the plantigrade design of most other mammals. Though humans may walk in a digitigrade fashion, it is most common and natural for them to walk on their heels.

Plushie – 1. An industry term to describe an animal doll covered with soft faux fur (plush), and Dacron-stuffed so as to retain its shape and softness. 2. Any stuffed animal.

Popufur – a portmanteau of the words ‘popular’ and ‘furry,’ used to refer to a popular furry artist or fursuiter in the furry fandom. This term is sometimes used in a pejorative manner.

Post-con Depression – This temporary condition may occur in some individuals at the end or shortly after the conclusion of a convention or meet.

RL – Acronym that stands for ‘Real Life.’

RP – Acronym for ‘Role-Playing.’ Role-playing is a form of virtual interaction and realistic gaming in which two or more users or characters are interacting live over the Internet.

Scaly (Variation – Scalie) – A reptilian character/fursona.

Skritch – 1. To affectionately scratch a pet, or a fursuit character. 2. Affectionate pseudo-grooming among fandom insiders.

Spooge – 1. Seminal fluid/semen. 2. Art created with pornographic intent.

Subfuration – 1. Deliberate misrepresentation of the interests and/or membership of the fandom to further a hidden agenda. 2. Deliberate misrepresentation to damage reputation of the fandom.

Tailraiser – A male homosexual.

Therianthrope (Variation – Therian) – Amalgamation of animal/human souls that gives the therianthrope “animal energy.”

‘toon – 1. A cartoon character, either mainstream or drawn in the same style. 2. A funny animal.

Unguligrade – An animal or being that walks primarily on a solid or unified foot or paw, usually having a hoof or cloven hoof as in horses and deer.

Were - From werewolf. A parallel fandom which emphasizes the animal nature of its characters, and/or the spiritual connection with some animal (not necessarily wolves).

Yiff – 1. Sex: real life and virtual. 2. Artwork depicting sexed-up anthro characters without pornographic intent.

Yiffy – 1. Sexy: used to describe the attribute of either an anthropomorphic character, or the real-life attribute of a fellow fandom affiliate. 2. Sexed-up anthro character: may or may not have pornographic intent. Includes “mainstream” characters (e.g. – Pepe Le Pew, Gadget Hackwrench) as well as fan-pics.

‘Zine – See: Fan-zine.

Zoophilia – From the Greek ‘zoo’ meaning animal and ‘philios’ meaning deep love for friends, zoophilia is a deep emotional love for animals. Sometimes this is merely a concerned love and other times it is as much as an erotic love for animals. Not to be confused with bestiality, which is the lusting after and unemotional attachment to sex with animals.

APPENDIX N: PARTIAL LIST OF ACTIVE AND DEFUNCT FURRY CONVENTIONS AND MEETS

| <u>Convention Name:</u> | <u>Location:</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Abando | Sao Paulo, Brazil |
| Anthrocon | Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A |
| Biggest Little Fur Con | Reno, Nevada, U.S.A. |
| Califur | Irvine, California, U.S.A |
| Camp Feral! | Ontario, Canada |
| Campfire Tails | Oregon, U.S.A. |
| Condition | London, Ontario, Canada |
| Confurgence | Melbourne, Australia |
| Confuzzled | Hinckley, England, United Kingdom |
| Eurofurence | Madeburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany |
| FA (FurAffinity): United | New Jersey, U.S.A. |
| FurIdaho | Boise, Idaho, U.S.A. |
| FurcoNZ | Auckland, New Zealand |
| FurFright | Cromwell, Connecticut, U.S.A |
| Furlandia | Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. |
| Furloween | Orlando, Florida, U.S.A. |
| Furnal Equinox | Toronto, Ontario, Canada |
| Fur Eh! | Edmonton, Alberta, Canada |
| Fur the 'More | Maryland, U.S.A. |
| Furry Fiesta | Addison, Texas, U.S.A. |
| Furry Connection North | Novi, Michigan |
| Furry Weekend Atlanta | Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. |
| Further Confusion | San Jose, California, U.S.A. |
| Fuzzcon | Paliseul, Luxembourg, Belgium |
| Howloween | Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada |
| IndyFurCon | Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. |
| Kemocon | Kawasaki, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan |
| Lakeside Furs | Grundlsee, Styria, Austria |
| Megaplex | Orlando, Florida |
| Mephit Furmeet | Olive Branch, Mississippi, U.S.A. |
| Midwest FurFest | Rosemont, Illinois, U.S.A. |
| Morphicon | Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A. |
| Oklacon | Watonga, Oklahoma, U.S.A. |
| Rainfurrest | Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. |
| Rocket City FurMeet | Huntsville, Alabama, U.S.A. |
| Rocky Mountain Fur Con | Denver, Colorado, U.S.A. |
| Rusfurence | Moscow, Russia |
| VancouFur | Vancouver, BC, Canada |
| What The Fur | Montreal, Quebec, Canada |
| Wild Nights | Oklahoma, U.S.A. |
| Zillercon | Holzgau, Tyrol, Austria |

APPENDIX N: RICH CHANDLER'S SKETCHBOOK ETIQUETTE

Version of 7/29/2002

The humble sketchbook started as a way for an artist to carry around a lot of paper, which he turned into drawings, and which he could show to other people so they could see his ideas and how his style developed over time.

Eventually, other artists would draw in his sketchbook to show him things, a technique, a joke, whatever. Showing these drawings to other people was a lot of fun, as was drawing in other people's books. This grew until artists started keeping two sketchbooks, one for their own work, and one for the sketches of their fellow artists. The camaraderie and intimacy expressed in these books led to some wonderful artwork. Eventually non-artist friends and fans wanted to have books like these too.

The sketchbook as we know it today, and I'm referring specifically to the ubiquitous black sketchbooks fans are known for carrying, has a certain tradition behind it that a significant number of newcomers to the fandom are sadly unaware of.

The most important thing to remember is that sketchbooks are for SHARING art. They are for showing to other people, so that an artist's work is exposed to and seen by a lot of other people. They are NOT for grubbing up as much free artwork as possible for one's personal collection. If you're going to have a sketchbook, treat it as if you were the custodian of a public trust, like a library. This attitude is very important.

They also grew out of a way of showing friendship. Money doesn't buy love or friendship. While it may buy a sketch, remember that much of the sketching you will see going on will be between friends, because the artist WANTS to do it for a friend. Don't push the issue - you might not be as close to someone as you think, and it's no fun to find that out.

There are several points of etiquette on both sides of the equation.

If you own a sketchbook, remember the following:

- The tradition of sketchbooks involves TRADING sketches. If you have no artistic talent, or just aren't confident enough in your abilities, it is not unreasonable to offer something else of value to the artist, be it a copy of a 'zine, a favor, (sex?) or money. But if you can't draw, don't insist on trying.
- Some artists are perfectly willing to do sketches for no consideration. Be very nice to these people. They think that having other people see their work in your book will be reward enough. However, just because they do it for someone else doesn't mean that they owe you anything. It's perfectly natural for an artist to give preferential treatment to his friends. Bitch about it and you can make sure that you aren't on his list of friends.

- Themes can be fun, if they're flexible. "Sex and Violence", "oops!" and "Wrong Costume" are good examples of broad themes with a lot of potential for fun. "My personal character doing X" is less likely to be fun. You especially shouldn't nag, be anal, or hover over the artist making criticisms before he's finished. Remember that fun is the main consideration, and if the artist enjoys doing the drawing, he is more likely to do a good one, and less likely to ask for anything. (Indeed, more likely to do it period).
- Be polite. And if an artist turns you down, accept it. He may be tired of drawing, may not want to do your theme, or he may have some other reason. If he has a huge stack of books pending, he's probably doing you a favor by letting you go to someone else first. Besides, do you really want someone working on your book who is pissed at you?
- It is a VERY good thing to make a copy of the sketch and send it to the artist. This little bit of tradition is one of the most forgotten, and most appreciated if remembered. Some artists have had to resort to writing their address on the page and ask to be sent copies of their works. You should offer first. The artist will appreciate you, and will remember you. If nothing else, be sure to thank the artist when he's finished.
- Remember that the work is their work. You may own the paper, but the rights belong to the artist. Making copies for the artist is good. Making copies for your own backup in case something happens to the book is good. Making copies and giving them out to lots of people, or even worse, publishing them in a 'zine or scanning them without permission, is very bad. The way to share the art is to show other people the book.
- If you give an artist your book to take home and work on, give him the money to ship it back. Tuck a fiver in the book and make sure your address is in it. That should cover it. Make sure this is completely clear in advance too.
- If you include a bleed page in your book, that makes an excellent place to write temporary contact info like your hotel room number to help you get your book back. The front cover makes a good place to put your permanent address. Losing a sketchbook full of art sucks.

I do have to mention the most heinous act that can be done to a book. Stealing. Rarely is an entire book stolen, but, to give one of the most arch examples, pages have been torn out and stolen. A friend told me about someone taking a razor blade and cutting nine fully colored pictures from one of his books. Just think, now nobody will be able to see those pictures again except the thief, who probably just filed them away somewhere. So much for sharing. Someone who does something like this should be vilified by the entire fandom (And we know how long fans can hold a grudge).

On the artist's side:

- If the sketchbook has a theme, try to stick with it, or at least a humorous tangent (for example, the "Sex and Violence" book mentioned above has a "Sax and Violins"

joke in it). Other books just have a sort of running gag that evolves from one page to the next. Look at the other pages and see what's going on.

- You should protect a sketchbook from damage while it is in your care. When inking or coloring, you should use a bleed page (An extra sheet of paper to keep the ink from staining the next page). On the other hand, a lot of funny things have been done with small amount of bleed, still, a lot just ruins the next page.
- If you don't feel like doing it, don't, but be polite about it. Doing a half-assed job is almost as bad as vandalizing the book, and it will reflect on you when the book is shown around. Remember, these books and what you do in them can be shown around for YEARS. For the same reason, drawing the same picture in every book you get won't reflect on you all that well either.
- If you are going to require money, be clear and up front about what you charge and what that money gets. And stick to it. (Although remember that when you're trading with another artist, it's usually sketch for sketch, although not always. Doing a sketch in someone's book does not obligate them to return the favor).
- Try to have fun, play off the previous sketches. But don't let it become a chore. If being hounded by people who don't have the clues contained here is going to ruin your con and burn you out on the fandom, take a break. Be firm. "What part of "No" didn't you understand?" is one of my favorites when someone won't take a hint, but be polite up to that point.
- And if you accept a book with the promise of mailing it back, do so promptly. If you are going to get other artists in your area to work on the book, your responsibility for the book doesn't end when you hand it off. You must make sure that it gets back to the owner, even if someone else promises to take care of sending it back, it's still your responsibility.
- I didn't think it would be necessary to say this, but a recent incident has caused me to add this: Don't write on other people's pages unless specifically asked to. Someone took a sketchbook and wrote smart-ass "humorous" comments on virtually every page. Needless to say, the owner was not very happy.
- Don't sit on the books. In general, you should not accept more books than you can deal with in a reasonable period of time. If you're not going to work on sketchbooks after the dealer's room closes, then a reasonable period of time equals the time remaining before the room closes. If you are going to work on them in the evening and overnight, then don't forget and leave them locked in the dealer's room. Accepting someone's sketchbook at the beginning of a Con, and handing it back to them at the end saying "Sorry, I couldn't get to it" is a sure fire way to lose a fan and maybe acquire an enemy. You've deprived them of an entire convention's worth of opportunities for sketches, and you might encourage the dreaded resurrection of multiple sketchbook fans.

That's it. Have fun!

Rich Chandler

Permission is hereby granted for this document to be circulated as far and wide as possible, including Furnet, Usenet, being included in FAQs or stored on BBSs and FTP sites,

incorporated into Con program books or printed out as flyers. The only proviso is that it should be replaced with any updated version found, and any corrections, additions, or comments should be sent to me first.

**APPENDIX Q: FRED PATTEN'S "RETROSPECTIVE: AND ILLUSTRATED
CHRONOLOGY OF THE FURRY FANDOM, 1966-1996" RETRIEVED FROM
<https://www.flayrah.com/4117/retrospective-illustrated-chronology-furry-fandom-1966-1996> on 08/21/2013**

Retrospective: An Illustrated Chronology of Furry Fandom, 1966–1996

Posted by Fred (Fred Patten) on Sun 15 Jul 2012 - 15:55

This article is enlarged from a chronology originally printed for an exhibition at L.A.con III, the fifty-fourth annual World Science Fiction Convention, 29 August–2 September 1996, at the Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, California. It was originally published in Yarf! #46, January 1997. Yarf! published it separately online, where it has been a valuable Furry historical reference for fifteen years, with links to it from Wikipedia, WikiFur, the Furry News Network, and many other websites.

In February 2012, Yarf! disappeared without warning from the Internet, and all the links to this chronology stopped working. To restore it to the Internet, Flayrah has agreed to reprint it, slightly revised and with illustrations.

There is no single specific date or event that can lay claim to being the birth of furry fandom. However, there is general agreement that it was around late 1983 or early 1984 that furry fans coalesced out of SF fandom and comics fandom and began an independent identity.

Due to the practice in the comic-book industry of dating one to three months in the future, the dates of the comic books listed here may be a month or two later than their actual appearances.

To indicate significant geographic centers of furry fandom, the home cities have been listed of active fans. Entries without cities indicate that the individuals named have not been active in furry fandom.

The goal of this chronology is to list the "first" and the "most influential" entries in the many aspects of furry interest. Many other favorites could be added to each category: novels such as Mark Rogers' Samurai Cat series; movies such as Disney's The Great Mouse Detective; TV series like the animated TaleSpin; comic books like Eb'nn, Red Shetland, Space Beaver, and Wild Life; fanzines like Hunca Munca!; MU*s like Animal Nation, FurryFaire, FurToonia, Redwall MUCK, and Tapestries. It was not our intention to slight anything. Please consider this chronology in the nature of a brief encyclopedic summary. A detailed history of furry fandom is yet to be written.

Proto-Fandom: Influences Katy and Kimba the White Lion



September 1966: Osamu Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion* begins U.S. syndicated television broadcasting (through the late 1970s). It introduces such thought-provoking concepts as royal lion cub Kimba's search for a way for well-meaning carnivores to live in friendship with herbivores without starving to death, and to get humans to take intelligent animals seriously as social equals.

September 1967: *The Amazing 3* comes to America. Made in Japan as *W 3* (for *Wonder 3*) by the same studio that made *Kimba the White Lion*, for broadcast there on the Fuji TV network in June 1965, this lower-budget TV cartoon series is in black-&-white, in more limited animation, and more limited American distribution; nevertheless it attracts fans with its story of three cute animals who are really space aliens who could destroy Earth.



W 3 (*The Amazing 3*) 01

It is dubbed into English by Copri International in Miami using college students, local radio DJs and little-theater actors as voice cast, and distributed by Erika Film Productions, Inc. Due to its syndicated nature, it plays in individual cities from September 1967 to (the last known market) April 1975.

Young Kenny Carter discovers that Captain Bonnie Bunny, Corporal Ronnie Pony, and Lieutenant Zero Duck are aliens transformed into Earth animals to decide whether humans are too warlike to be allowed into the galaxy. If they decide against humans, they have a "solar bomb" (alternately called a neutron bomb and an anti-proton bomb) to destroy Earth. Although the animals are supposed to only observe, Kenny talks them into using their superior science to secretly help his older brother Randy in his secret-agent missions for the Phoenix Bureau of Peace Enforcement.

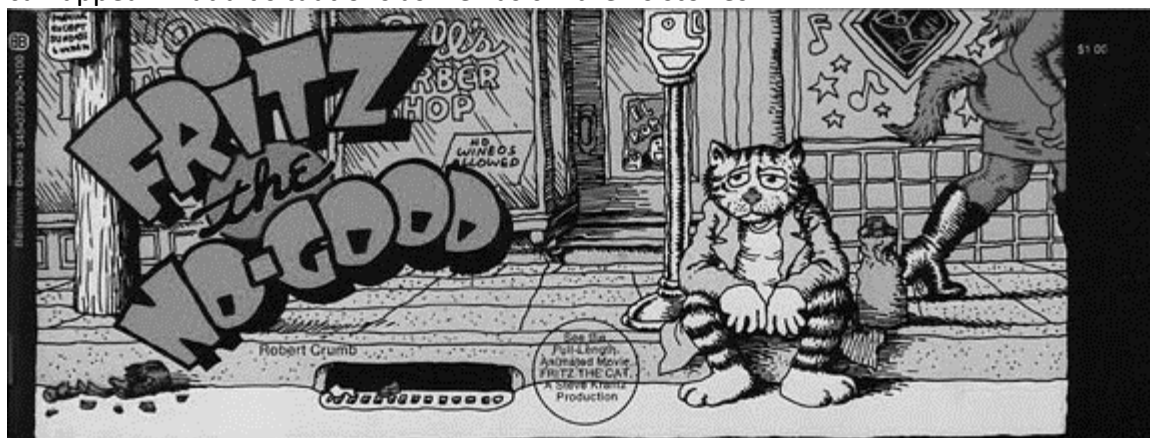
The Amazing 3 runs for 52 episodes, but due to its poor production values and ownership by a minor distributor, it disappears as soon as its 52-episode season ends in each city.

According to one website, it was shown in Melbourne, Australia from April 1969 at 4:00 p.m. on Channel 9, so presumably Erika had the rights to distribute it to any English-speaking market. A few 16 mm film prints exist with title cards for KCOP, Channel 13, in Los Angeles.

1968-1972: Robert Crumb's Fritz the Cat is the first "adult" funny-animal series to gain public attention, in various underground comix and especially Ballantine Books' mainstream editions starting in October 1969, climaxing with Ralph Bakshi's animated feature in April 1972 — which so displeases Crumb that he kills off Fritz in a final June 1972 story. The 1972 Crumb-covered Funny Animals [sic] is another influential underground example of funny animals featured in "mature" situations.

Fritz The Cat #3 - Fritz the No-Good

'Watership Down' 1st UK edition cover 1971–1972: Dan O'Neill and his "Air Pirates" (Gary Hallgren, Bobby London, Ted Richards) carry on their underground-comix "guerrilla war" against the Disney morality, publishing pornographic parodies of popular Disney 1930s and 1940s comic books (Air Pirates Funnies, Dan O'Neill's Comics & Stories, The Tortoise and the Hare), until stopped by court order. This reinforces the awareness that funny animals can appear in adult situations as well as children's stories.

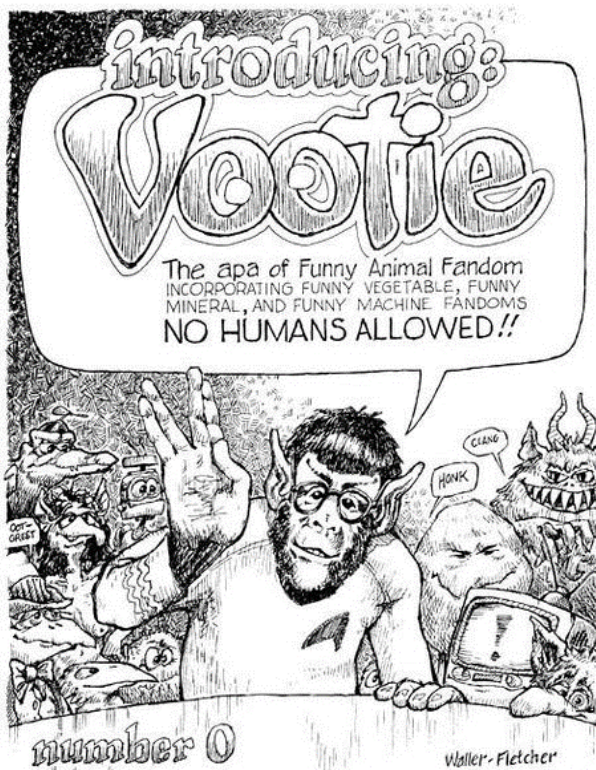


November 1972: Richard Adams' *Watership Down*, a dramatic fantasy about "realistic" talking rabbits, gives new life to the concept of talking animals as acceptable subjects of serious literature. This is arguably the first example since George Orwell's 1945 *Animal Farm*.



September 1973: Lieutenant M'Ress, the feline Caitian female member of the cast in TV's *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, is cited by many furry fans as one of their introductions to the concept of anthropomorphized animals for mature audiences.

November 1973: Disney's *Robin Hood* animated theatrical feature with a funny-animal cast is later named by many furry fans as their earliest-remembered positive influence toward anthropomorphic animals.



Vootie #0 April 1976: Reed Waller and Ken Fletcher in Minneapolis start the APA Vootie, "the fanzine of the Funny Animal Liberation Front," for cartoonists. It is more of a semi-underground comix artists' club than open to funny-animal fans in general, but it publicizes funny-animal characters in mature settings, notably Reed Waller's "Omaha" the Cat Dancer.

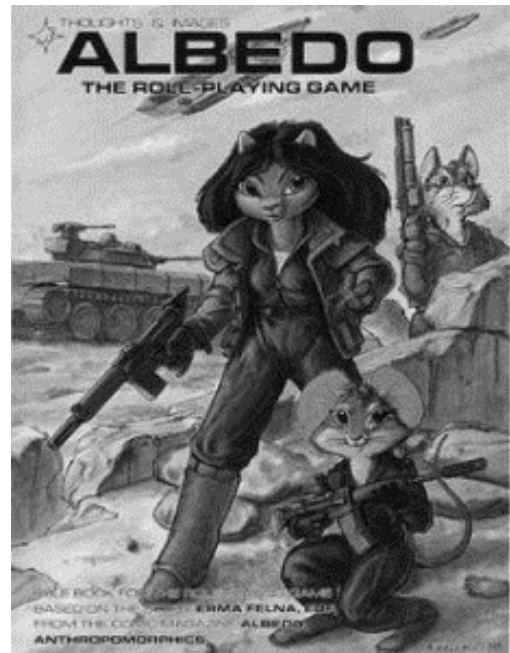
May 1976 (through 1982): Neal Barrett, Jr.'s Aldair in Albion introduces a series of four SF novels about animals who are bioengineered into parodies of man, and who fight for freedom to live their own lives. It is one of the first examples of dramatic SF genre novels for adult readers with a "funny-animal" cast.

1976-early 1980s: Marvel Comics' Howard the Duck (January 1976 through March 1981; a supporting character in Marvel Comics since December 1973, created by Steve Gerber) and Star*Reach Productions' Quack! (July 1976 through issue six in December 1977), plus one- and two-issue underground comix and early independent comics such as *No Ducks* and *Wild Animals*, establish that anthropomorphic animals can be used in "literary" and dramatic stories as well as shock-value raunchy sex-and-drug satires.

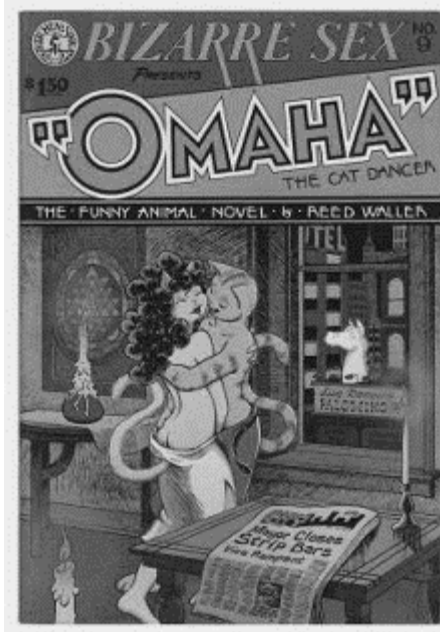
December 1977: Dave Sim starts *Cerebus the Aardvark*, originally a parody of sword-and-sorcery comics but evolving into a complex, sophisticated literary work, with a strong furry protagonist amidst a human cast (to issue 300, March 2004). *Albedo* RPG cover (1988) featuring Erma Felna

November 1978: Martin Rosen's animated feature adaptation of Adams' *Watership Down* impresses a wider and younger public than those who read the book. (With a special preview screening at the World Science Fiction Convention in Phoenix in September.)

Labor Day weekend 1980: At the NorEasCon II World Science Fiction Convention in Boston (August 29–September 1), Steve Gallacci enters an Erma Felna painting in the art show, featuring a funny-animal character in a realistic high-tech military setting (later in *Albedo: Anthropomorphics and Command Review*). This leads to a gathering of fans to look at Gallacci's notes for a SF comic-art serial about bioengineered animal soldiers in a space war. The discussions show a common interest in SF and fantasy about intelligent animals, such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (fantasy), Cordwainer Smith's "Underpeople" stories (bioengineered animals), and H. Beam Piper's *Little Fuzzy* (animal-like intelligent aliens), to name popular examples among the three main types. This becomes an informal series of "Gallacci group" gatherings at Worldcons and Westercons to discuss anthropomorphics in SF, comic art, and animation, and to show off each others' sketchbook art and draw in each others' sketchbooks, from 1980 until about 1985. The group eventually splits into a club grouped around Rowrbrazzle, and the more "formal" furry parties.



May 1981: Greg Wadsworth creates *Ismet*, an early independent SF comic book about an oppressed funny-animal lower class rebelling against their cruel human masters (to issue five, July 1982).



August 1981: Reed Waller's "Omaha" the Cat Dancer, which began in the fan APA Vootie, makes its first public appearance as a book-length story in Bizarre Sex issue nine.

February 1982: Roy Thomas and Scott Shaw! launch the last major comic-book attempt at funny-animal super-heroes with DC's Captain Carrot and His Amazing Zoo Crew (issue one in March, with a preview in The New Teen Titans issue sixteen, February 1982; to issue twenty, November 1983).

July 1982: Don Bluth's The Secret of NIMH animated feature (based on the 1971 juvenile novel Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, by Robert C. O'Brien) is released, depicting a hidden society of intelligent animals.

October 1982: Joshua Quagmire's Army Surplus Komikz Featuring Cutey Bunny is published. Cutey Bunny has continued to appear under various titles to the present.

February 1983: The final Vootie, number thirty-seven, is published as the club disintegrates through apathy.

May 1983: Alan Dean Foster's Spellsinger at the Gate (followed in June by Spellsinger, the mass-market edition of the first half of the story), introduces the popular Spellsinger series of funny-animal science-fantasy novels, which run for six titles through 1986 (and two more in the 1990s).

June 1983: The Tiger's Den BBS is started by Andre Johnson in Los Angeles during 1982 as a general SF electronic bulletin board; he brings it to the "Prancing Skiltaire" in September 1983. It adds its first furry storyboard, Ken Sample's "The Puma's Room", in early 1983. By June it has enough furry participants to qualify as the first furry BBS, and by late 1983 it is almost exclusively devoted to furry storyboards. Johnson leaves the Tiger's Den at the Prancing Skiltaire when he moves out, and it is operated by other furry fans there until it is shut down in January 1996.

October 1983: Marc Schirmeister in Los Angeles sends out a call for fans of funny animals to join Rowrbrazzle, a new APA to replace Vootie.

October 1983: Other Suns, the first significant furry role-playing game, is published by Fantasy Games Unlimited after four years of development by creator Nicolai Shapero of Los Angeles. It includes art by Ken Sample and Fa Shimbo, and species such as Mark Merlino's skiltaires. Many furry fans participate in its playtesting. Other Suns sells at least twelve thousand units before FGU goes out of business.

The Fandom

February 1984: Rowrbrazzle number one is published. Unlike Vootie, its emphasis is more on actual funny animals than general "non-costumed-hero" comics; and it is open to anyone who can demonstrate a creative interest in funny animals, not just cartoonists (current, under new editorship; number 113 published in April 2012).

May 1984: Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird self-publish Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. It is fantastically successful, setting off a vogue for self-publishing independent comic books (including several others with anthropomorphic action-adventure heroes), and it makes funny animals respectable again to those who consider themselves too mature for "little kids' comics". TMNT eventually spins off television cartoons, feature films, and a separate, more juvenile series from Archie Comics, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Adventures (August 1988), which does its own bit for making "mutanimals" socially acceptable (TMNT current in various reprints and some new material; TMNTA to December 1995).



June 1984: Steve Gallacci in Seattle self-publishes Albedo: Anthropomorphics issue one under his Thoughts & Images imprint, introducing his Erma Felna of the EDF. Stan Sakai's Usagi Yojimbo begins in Albedo issue two, November 1984 (to March 2005, under different publishers).



This is an appropriate spot to address the Prancing Skiltaire in Orange County (south of Los Angeles) as the first furry fan commune. The Prancing Skiltaire has been Mark Merlino's personal fannish name for his home since before he, Rod O'Riley, Andre Johnson, and three other fans moved in September 1983 to the house at 13412 Gilbert Street, Garden Grove, California. Merlino and O'Riley have been the two permanent residents in a floating commune of (usually) four to six roomers, all fans but not all furry fans. The commune has also been active in projects in SF, comics, anim , Dr. Who, Anne McCaffrey's Pern novels, and other fandoms. It has had a major significance in furry fandom, starting around 1984 as the

center of the Tiger's Den BBS, then furry parties and ConFurence; but to infer that the Prancing Skiltaire was created specifically to be a furry commune or that it has only been that, is incorrect.

Rene Fromage and Kit Mambo in 'Animalympics' July 1985: Mark Merlino and Rod O'Riley host a Prancing Skiltaire party, the first publicized open funny-animal fan party, at Westercon 38 in Sacramento. It is popular enough to lead to the first furry party a year later.

July 1985: Animalympics is first screened at the Prancing Skiltaire Party. This is not the official Warner Bros. home-video release but a feature-length video compiled by Mark Merlino from the complete February 1980 half-hour TV special Animalympics: Winter Games and the WB footage for the unreleased hour-long Summer Games special edited to match it. Merlino's video version becomes a standard feature of furry parties across America for the next decade, and is still cited by fans as one of the most influential animated furry movies.



July 1985: Jim Groat in Tucson launches his GraphXpress independent comics imprint with his and Richard Konkle's Equine the Uncivilized (to issue seven, August 1990).



September 1985: Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears, co-created and produced by Jymn Magon and Tad Stones, is the first major-studio-produced light adventure funny-animal television cartoon series to establish both popularity and longevity. (Seventy-four episodes, to September 1990; as Disney's Gummi Bears/Winnie the Pooh Hour in its final year.) Its success leads to the popular Disney anthropomorphic adventure TV series DuckTales (Alan Zaslove and Bob Hathcock), Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers (Tad Stones and Mark Zazlov), TaleSpin (Jymn Magon and Mark Zazlov), Darkwing Duck (Tad Stones), and Gargoyles (Dennis Woodyard and others).

November 1985: Tad Williams' Tailchaser's Song is the first fantasy adventure to feature cats as intelligent characters in the manner of the rabbits in Watership Down. It helps to make anthropomorphized animals respectable for adult s-f & fantasy fans.

June 1986: Fantagraphics launches two particularly influential furry comics with its monthly anthology, *Critters* (to issue fifty, March 1990), and Mike Kazaleh's *The Adventures of Captain Jack* (to issue twelve with special issues following).

July 1986: Antarctic Press' first furry comic is Ben Dunn's first *Mighty Tiny* short story, in *Mangazine* issue three. Antarctic, in San Antonio, becomes one of the major publishers of anthropomorphic comics in the early 1990s.

July 1986: After about a year of holding informal open parties at SF and comics conventions, Mark Merlino and Rod O'Riley hold the first "official" Furry Party at Westercon 39 in San Diego. This starts the tradition of publicizing the presence of 'morph fans at conventions by posting "furry party" flyers featuring funny-animal pin-up art. The furry party name leads to the characterization of these fans as "furry fandom" by the late 1980s.



August 1986: As a result of a ban in Rowrbrazzle of explicit sexual material, Jim Price in Atlanta starts Q, "the Mature Funny-Animal APA". (Through issue ten, 1989.)

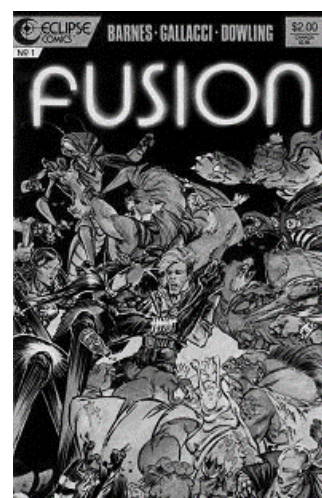
August 1986: Lee Marrs' *Pre-Teen Dirty-Gene Kung-Fu Kangaroos #1* is one of the best of the TMNT-inspired rip-offs of the late '80s; typically with a ridiculous title and a short run. To #3, January 1987. Others included *Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters #1*, January (?) 1986 – #9, January 1988, by Don Chin, Patrick Parsons (Parsonavich) and Sam Keith); *Geriatric Gangrene Jujitsu Gerbils #1*, January 1986 – #3, ?, by Tony Basilicato; *Cold Blooded Chameleon Commandos #1*, August 1986 – #5, June 1987, by William Clausen & Michael Kelley; *Mildly-Microwaved Pre-Pubescent Gophers*, July 1986 (one-shot, no credits); *Naive Inter-Dimensional Commando Koalas*, October 1986 (one-shot, by Sean Deming, Gerald Forton, and Danny Green); and at least a half-dozen more. There were also, following the success of the TV cartoons, unauthorized imitations of the TMNT in other TV cartoons, movies, video and RPG games, and action figures.

October 1986: "Omaha" the *Cat Dancer* issue three begins the regular publication of Reed Waller's influential and critically acclaimed mature soap-opera serial, after Kate Worley becomes its regular writer, after sporadic underground short stories in 1983 and two issues of its own title in 1984 and early 1986 (to issue 24, February 1995; *Redwall* UK cover uncompleted storyline published after Kate Worley's death, 2005 to 2007).



November 1986: *Redwall*, the first novel in Brian Jacques' long running British series about the peaceful animal abbey, run by mostly small herbivores and omnivores such as mice and squirrels, in the forested land of Mossflower which is constantly being invaded by villainous carnivores, is published (June 1987 in America). Marketed as children's books in Britain and as adult fantasy novels in America, the series is exceedingly popular in Europe and America, and helps to promote anthropomorphic literature for all ages. There are 22 novels in the series, ending with Jacques' death in 2011; plus a 1999–2003 animated TV series by Nelvana of Toronto and comic book adaptations of the first three novels.

January 1987: Fusion (Eclipse Comics) introduces the SF comic book adventures of the *Tsunami*, a tramp spaceship with a mixed crew of humans, bioengineered animals, and furry aliens (by Lex Nakashima, Steve Gallacci, Lela Dowling, and others); *Fusion* #1 with the humorous back-up series *The Weasel Patrol*, by Nakashima, Dowling, and Ken Macklin (to issue #17, October 1989).



April 1987: Jim Groat begins *Morphs* as the first anthology comic for 'morphic beginning writers and artists (to issue four, September 1988).

April 1987: Ed Zolna in Roslyn, PA creates Mailbox Books, originally only to sell his *Fran an' Maabl* self-published comic book. It quickly becomes furry fandom's first comprehensive mail-order book service, attempting to stock just about every furry book, comic book, art folio, and fanzine that is published (to April 1999, when Zolna sells the stock to Sean Rabbitt of Las Vegas, NV, who merges it with his older Rabbit Valley Books in October 2001).

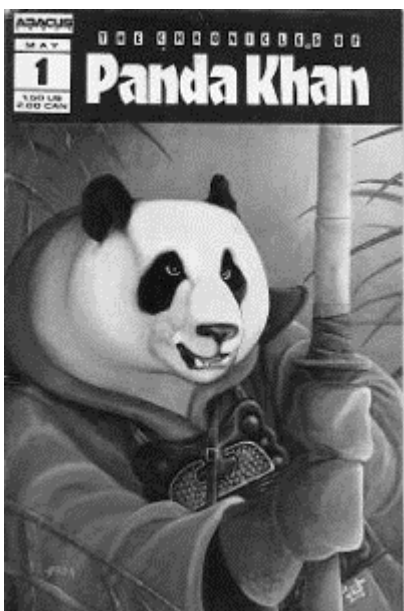
May 1987: Mark Merlino and the furry party crew encourage the "adoption" of the annual Baycon SF convention in San Jose, California over the Memorial Day weekend as the convention for furry fans to congregate at. There are large furry attendances at this and the next two or three Baycons, but active hostility by non-furry fans eventually causes problems.

May 1987: Kyim Granger (Karl Maurer) in Oakland starts *Furversion* as the newsletter of the furry party crowd. It quickly evolves into furry fandom's first independent fiction and art magazine (to issue twenty-one, Nov. 1990).

May 1987: *The Electric Holt* is started by Richard Chandler (sysop), Mitch Marmel (assistant sysop), John DeWeese, and Seth Grenald at Drexel University in Philadelphia. It is the first

east coast BBS with an extensive furry users' group, thanks to Chandler and Marmel. The Chronicles of Panda Khan #1 (It also features ElfQuest, animé, and general SF storyboards.) It lasts until 1990, when the four graduate from Drexel.

August 1987: Mark Merlino and the furry party crew host a furry party at Conspiracy '87, the 1987 World Science Fiction Convention in Brighton (August 27–September 2). This is the first furry event in Britain. Early British furry fans credit this party with introducing them to American furry independent comic books and fanzines, which eventually leads to a British furry fandom around 1992–1993.



August 1987: The Chronicles of Panda Khan, written by Monica Sharp and drawn by Dave Garcia, is published by Abacus Press (cover-dated May 1987) after "guest appearances" in the non-furry A Distant Soil #6 & #7. This is arguably the best of the TMNT-inspired imitations, due to good stories and art, and an authorized similarity to and crossovers with the TMNT. Li Yang, the Panda Khan, is descended from a race of giant mutant anthropomorphized pandas in the future. After several adventures in his own world, Li Yang time- and space-travels to our world to help out the TMNT. Four regular issues and one Special are published (to August 1990), with Li Yang joining the TMNT merchandising as an action figure, and cameos and guest-appearance art in other comics.

September 1987: Ralph Bakshi's and John Kricfalusi's Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures establishes television-cartoon funny animals as respectable for "adult" viewers. (Thirty-seven episodes, to August 1989.)

Xanadu #1 November 1987: Amazing Heroes issue 129 (Fantagraphics) is a special funny animal issue highlighting independent furry comics, Rowrbrazzle, and the Bakshi/Kricfalusi TV cartoon series, Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures. Numerous furry fans later say they first learned about furry fandom from this issue.

May 1988: Vicky Wyman's Xanadu (Thoughts & Images) introduces furry swashbuckling romantic fantasy. It continues to today, both as an irregular independent comic book (different publishers, to MU Press' Xanadu: Across Diamond Seas issue 5, May 1994) and through its fanzine, The Ever-Changing Palace.



June 1988: Mary Stanton's *The Heavenly Horse* from the *Outermost West*, followed by Piper at the Gate the next year, introduces the *Army of One Hundred and Five* (recognized breeds of horses), and does for horses what *Watership Down* and *Tailchaser's Song* did for rabbits and cats.

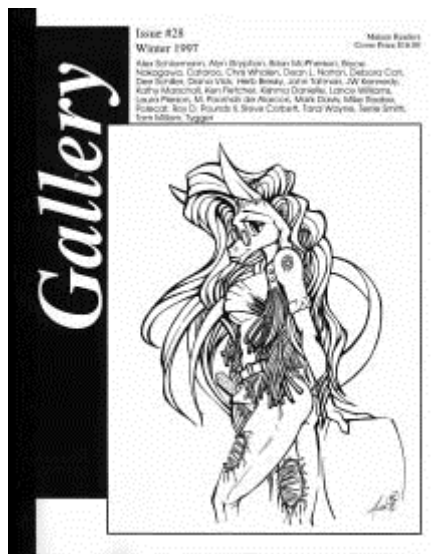
January 1989: ConFurence Zero, the first exclusively furry convention, is held 21–22 January at the Holiday Inn Bristol Plaza in Costa Mesa, California, organized by Mark Merlino, Rod O'Riley, and others. ("Zero" because it is considered a test for a 'real' furry convention the next year.) Membership is about 90, attendance is 65, including most prominent furry fans from across North America and Steve Kerry from Australia. Art Show auction sales are over \$1,100, including \$450 for a Susan Van Camp painting. One programming track is on "Furry Costuming".

May 1989: Martin Wagner self-publishes *Hepcats*, turning his earlier college-newspaper humorous comic-strip into a critically acclaimed furry human-interest serial involving mature themes such as child abuse and suicide (new series from Antarctic Press, to issue 12, June 1998).

July 1989: MU Press' first anthropomorphic comic book is Steve Willis' *Morty the Dog* issue one, a collection of Willis' strips from small-press and mini-comics of the early eighties. MU Press, in Seattle, becomes one of the major publishers of anthropomorphic comics in the early 1990s.

August 1989: *FURtherance*, published by Runé (Ray Rooney) in Philadelphia, is the first of several new fanzines, mostly short-lived, devoted to furry literature and art (to issue three, winter 1991).

August 1989: FurNet is started by Nicolai Shapero as a network (through FidoNet) of BBSs with furry discussion areas. By 1996 it includes over twenty furry BBSs throughout North America.



November 1989: Robert and Brenda Daverin in the San Francisco Bay area start *FurNography*, one of the first public fanzine-art folios for furry eroticism (to #4, June 1991).

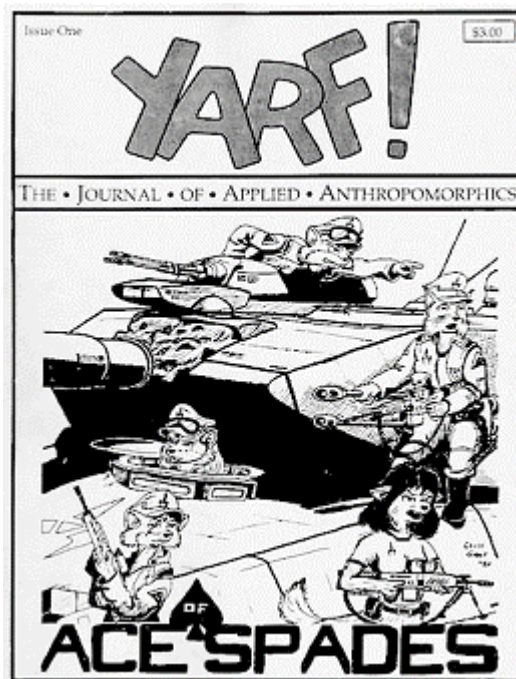
November 1989: Richard Chandler in Philadelphia starts *Gallery* as a cross between an artists' and writers' APA and a commercial magazine for general furry fans (to issue 50, Winter 2004).

January 1990: ConFurence 1, the "first real" furry convention, is held 26–28 January, again at the Holiday Inn Bristol Plaza in Costa Mesa, California. Membership is 145; attendance is 130. The ConFurence adds guests of honor (Jim Groat, Monika Livingston, Martin Wagner) and awards (Best Costume, to John Cawley as Zorro the Fox; Art Show Best of Show, to Ken Sample's "Winter Charge"; Best Filk Award, to Kay Shapero's "Furry").

January 1990: Yarf! is begun by Jeff Ferris, Kris Kreutzman, and others in the San Francisco Bay Area to replace the moribund Furversion. Debuting at ConFurence 1, it becomes furry fandom's most reliable general magazine (to issue 69, September 2003).

March 1990: MU Press' first original anthropomorphic title is Dwight R. Decker's and Teri S. Wood's Rhudiprrt, Prince of Fur issue one. (to issue 12, May 2004; Will Faust replaced Wood as the artist)

Spring 1990: Mythagoras, an excellent literary furry fanzine, is published by Bill Biersdorf and Watts Martin in Tampa (to issue three, Autumn 1990).



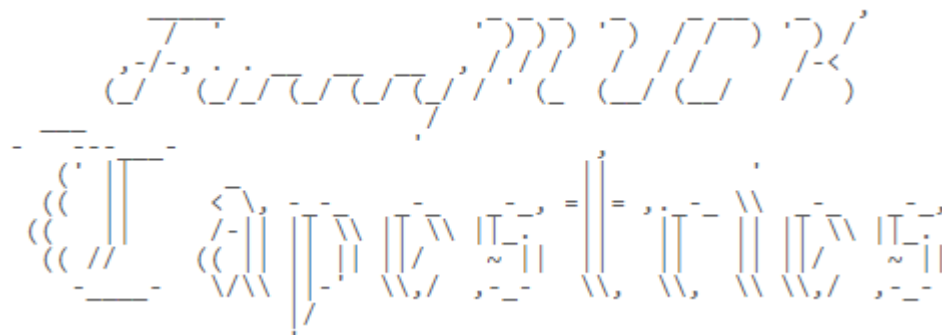
September 1990: The Furry Home at Squirrel Hill (2613 Tilbury Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) is started as a furry commune by Centaur (Paul Blair), Ashtoreth (William Haas), Drew Maxwell, and Shatterri (Steve Stadnicki). All are students at or work at Carnegie-Mellon University, and all had been role-playing furry characters on a general SF multi-user dimension, Islandia, until it shut down that summer. The Home lasts as a furry commune through several student generations until around 1994, when the last furry fans are replaced by non-fannish students.

September 1990: Meet the Feebles, a December 1989 New Zealand feature film directed by Peter Jackson, is shown at the Toronto International Film Festival. It becomes famous throughout furry fandom as a hilariously raunchy parody of The Muppet Show starring foul-mouthed and degenerate anthropomorphic-animal hand puppets such as Heidi (hippopotamus), Bletch (walrus), Samantha (cat), and Trevor (rat). The film is not distributed in the U.S. until September 1995, following which bootleg videos and later legitimate video and DVD releases from 1998 become widespread.

September 1990: (Steven Spielberg presents) Tiny Toon Adventures, created and directed by Tom Ruegger, is co-produced by Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment and the re-formed Warner Bros. Animation studio. The cast featuring juvenile counterparts of Warner Bros. cartoon stars, including Buster and Babs Bunny, Plucky Duck, Hamton J. Pig, Fifi La Fume,

Dizzy Devil, and others become favorites with furry fans. They also inspire considerable furry-fan pornography, which becomes so extensive that it results in a story in *The Hollywood Reporter* (November 1, 1995) and a chapter, "Fans versus Time Warner: Who Owns Looney Tunes?" by Bill Mikulak, in the book *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*, edited by Kevin S. Sandler (June 1998). It includes 98 episodes in three seasons to December 1992, plus a direct-to-video feature, *Tiny Toon Adventures: How I Spent My Vacation* (March 1992) and two TV specials in 1994 and 1995.

November 1990: FurryMUCK is built as the first exclusively Furry MU* by the denizens of the Furry Home at Squirrel Hill plus Claire Benedikt, with Drew Maxwell as the prime wizard, to replace the defunct Islandia. By 1996 it has more than two thousand users worldwide, with two hundred to three hundred log-ons per evening. The core group shifts around late 1992–early 1993 from Pittsburgh to the Bay Area, as the wizards graduate from Carnegie-Mellon and settle into the Silicon Valley computer industry.



November 1990: The first furry Usenet newsgroup, alt.fan.furry, is started by Peter da Silva in Houston as alt.fan.albedo. He changes the name to alt.fan.furry two months later to make it more generic.

December 1990: Gary Sutton in Poulsbo, a suburb of Seattle, starts the Furry Press Network as furry fandom's second major APA. Despite a successful start, Sutton kills it in early 1992 by refusing to allow its other members to continue it after he gives it up. The Tai-Pan #1

January 1991: ConFurence 2, on 25–27 January at the Holiday Inn, Anaheim, California, grows to an attendance of more than 200. Guests of Honor are Reed Waller, Kate Worley, Steve Gallacci, and Vicky Wyman. It is the first to have attendees from mundane companies (Carl Gafford and Len Wein of Disney Comics). The art show auction brings in over \$3,000.

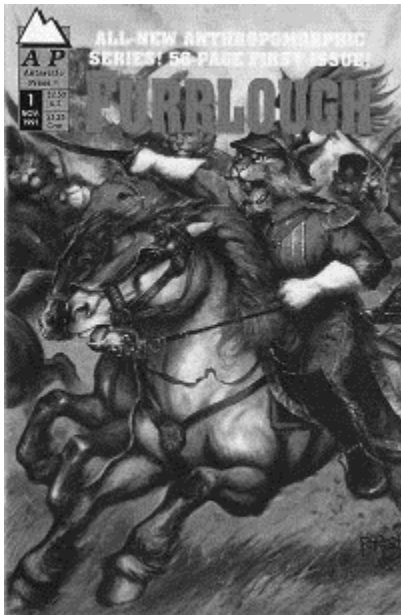
March 1991: The Tai-Pan Project, featuring stories set on a furry-crewed tramp spaceship, is started as a shared-world writers' project edited by a group of Seattle fans chaired by Whitney Ware (current, under new editorship and title, Tales of the Tai-Pan Universe).



June 1991: Mark Merlino and the ConFurence group publish a fanzine, Touch (to issue three, August 1992).

Furrrough #1

July 1991: The Furkindred: A Shared World is started by Charles Melville and Edd Vick at MU Press as a writers' and artists' project. Stories adhere to guidelines describing a furry world, its nations and politics (to issue 3 and a graphic novel, The Furkindred: Let Sleeping Gods Lie, February 1997).



November 1991: Antarctic Press begins Furrrough, a monthly anthology comic book for furry action-adventure stories (transferred to Radio Comix with issue 52, April 1997; to issue 191, November 2011).

February 1992: The "First British Furry Micro-Con" is held 1–2 February, when Ian Curtis invites furry fans throughout Britain (only about a dozen) to meet a group of visiting American fans. A dozen fans (six American and six English) spend the weekend partying at Curtis' home in the village of Yateley, Surrey, England.

February 1992: Dwight J. Dutton in Huntington Beach, California turns Huzzah! (previously an Albedo fanzine) into an invitational furry artists' APA starting with its issue four (to issue 50, January 2004).

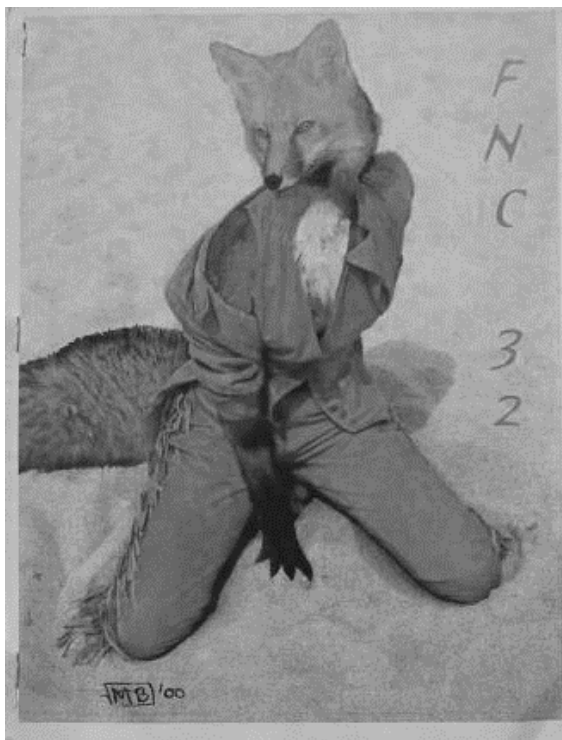
May 1992: Shanda the Panda, created and written by Mike Curtis in Beaumont, Texas (later Conway, Arkansas), debuts from MU Press. By the end of 1996, Shanda holds a record for the number of publishers (MU, Antarctic, Vision Comics, and Curtis' own Shanda Fantasy Arts) and artists who have produced her adventures.

July 1992: Groul (Paul Groulx) in Frankford, Ontario starts the FURthest North Crew as an APA for primarily Canadian furry fans. It is almost immediately filled by former Furry Press Network members, and becomes furry fandom's third strong APA (current, under new editorship).

Furthest North Crew

August 1992: Mortality comes to furry fandom when popular fan artist Charles "Deal" Whitley of New Haven, Connecticut succumbs after a lifelong struggle against sickle-cell anemia, on 30 August.

January 1993: Robert C. King coins the term "fursuit" for the Fursuit Mailing List, for full-body anthropomorphic animal costumes worn at furry conventions.



June 1993: Jan Paxton invites furry fans around Britain to a weekend party at his parents' home in Tonyrefail, South Wales, 5–7 June. About ten fans attend.

June 1993: Antarctic Press starts Genus as an anthology comic book for furry mature erotic humor (transferred to Radio Comix with issue 23, April 1997, to issue 93, February 2011).



September 1993: Darrell Benvenuto in New York starts The American Journal of Anthropomorphics, an annual coffee-table-format collection of furry art (to issue four, 1997).

September 1993: Biker Mice from Mars begins a three-season broadcast, to episode #28, February 1996. This is the best and most popular of the imitation-TMNT TV cartoons, with its own three-issue comic book, video games in 1994 and 2006, and an August 2006 revival with 28 new TV episodes, to July 2007.

September 1993: Tiny Toon Adventures leads directly to the even more popular (Steven Spielberg presents) Animaniacs, also created by Tom Ruegger, and starring

Wakko, Yakko, and Dot, the three what-are-they? anthropomorphic animal WB siblings who live inside the water tower on the WB studio lot. Although the series features several other cartoon animal characters including Slappy Squirrel and her nephew Skippy, and the mice Pinky and the Brain, the fan favorite is clearly ultra-sexy Minerva Mink, who is drafted

as the fan-fiction femme fatale of several furry conventions. The program lasts for 99 episodes through November 1998, plus a theatrical short, "I'm Mad", in March 1994, and a direct-to-video feature, *Wakko's Wish*, in December 1999.

September 1993: *SWAT Kats: The Radical Squadron* is a Hanna-Barbera animated TV series that comes the closest to costumed-hero action-adventure cartoons with a furry cast. Set in Megakat City, Chance "T-Bone" Furlong and Jake "Razor" Clawson are unfairly cashiered from the semi-military Enforcers and assigned as mechanics in the city's salvage yard. Secretly building their own Turbokat jet fighter, they fight supervillains and other menaces as masked heroes, earning the cat citizens' gratitude but dismissed and hunted by proud Commander Ulysses Feral and his Enforcers (who are jealous of them as rivals) as recklessly dangerous vigilantes. 25 episodes are broadcast (to January 1995) and it is the most popular syndicated TV cartoon series of 1994, but its abrupt cancellation (with three episodes still in production) and a lack of merchandising items leaves fans frustrated.



PawPrints Fanzine #1

October 1993: Damian Cugley (Slate) in Oxford publishes the first British furry fanzine, *Furry Furry* issue one, autumn/winter 1993. (To issue two, spring/summer [May] 1994.)

December 1993: *Anthropomorphine*, the first successful British furry fanzine, is published by Kevin Charlesworth of Hailsham, East Sussex (transferred to Lazy Fox Studios, to issue 14, June 2010).

January 1994: After "rattling around" with attendances in the low hundreds at different hotels, ConFurence V almost fills the Airporter Garden Hotel in Irvine, California, 21–23 January, with an attendance of slightly more than six hundred. The Airporter, with its friendly management, becomes the first real "home" for ConFurence. A Rowrbrazzle tenth anniversary celebration is held.

April 1994: Ian Curtis hosts another weekend furry party at his home in Yateley, 22–24 April. This is called *Furry Housecon 3*, retroactively assigning #1 and #2 to his February 1992 party and Jan Paxton's June 1993 party. *Furry Housecons* have been hosted by Curtis in Yateley approximately quarterly since then (#13, 29 November–1 December 1996; attendance sixteen UK fans and two German fans). The average attendance is around fifteen.

July 1994: The first annual UK Fur CON is held 9–11 July, organized through *FurryMUCK* by Adam Moss as an informal house party at his home in Colchester, Essex. About fifteen fans attend, including one each from Germany and the U.S. *Furry Housecon 4* is the same weekend (8–10 July), and accusations of "trying to hijack our con" against the *Housecon*

are later put down to an innocent lack of communication between Britain's FurryMUCK and non-Internet furry fans. The two series of house parties are mutually coordinated today. *An Anthropomorphic Bibliography*, first edition



Winter 1994: PawPrints Fanzine, one of the highest-quality literary/art furry fanzines, is started by Conrad Wong (Lynx) and T. Jordan Peacock (Greywolf) of Los Altos, California (to issue 12, Fall 2001).

November 1994: Martin Dudman in Keston, a suburb of London, launches the first major British furry fanzine, the quarterly *Fur Scene: The Anthropomorphic Newsletter* (to issue 11, February 1998). Dudman also starts United Publications, a mail-order service to import American furry books, comics, and fanzines for British fans, and vice versa.

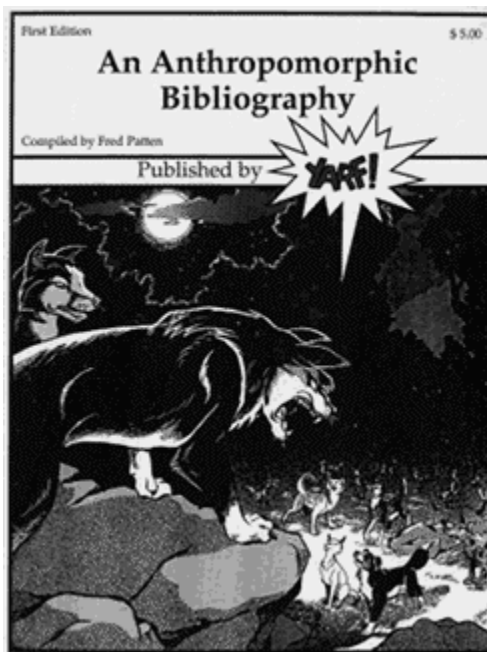
November 1994: As a result of perceived anti-furry prejudice at the annual Philcon SF convention in Philadelphia, east coast furry fans hold their own

Furtasticon I. (Some furry fans are declined space in Philcon's art show or dealers' room when their applications arrive after both are all booked up.) Furtasticon is organized by Trish Ny of Cleveland at the Holiday Inn City Line in Philadelphia, 18–20 November. Organized on a couple of months' notice, it draws about 230 fans from across North America and creates a demand for an annual furry convention for eastern North America

January 1995: *An Anthropomorphic Bibliography*, by Fred Patten in Los Angeles, is published by Yarf! as the first bibliographic compilation of general literature and SF genre novels featuring anthropomorphized animals. Its unexpected popularity leads to an expanded second edition in August 1996, and a third edition [cover] in January 2000.

South Fur Lands #1 April 1995: Paul Kidd's *Mus of Kerbridge*, by a popular furry fan, is considered by furry fans as a novel by "one of us" and proof that furry-authored fiction can sell to the mainstream fantasy market.

May 1995: UK Fur CON 2 is held 26–30 May, organized by Ian Stradling at his home in Bristol.



About twenty show up to his house party, including a fan from Germany. Videos shown include the British premiere of Eric Schwartz's furry animation.

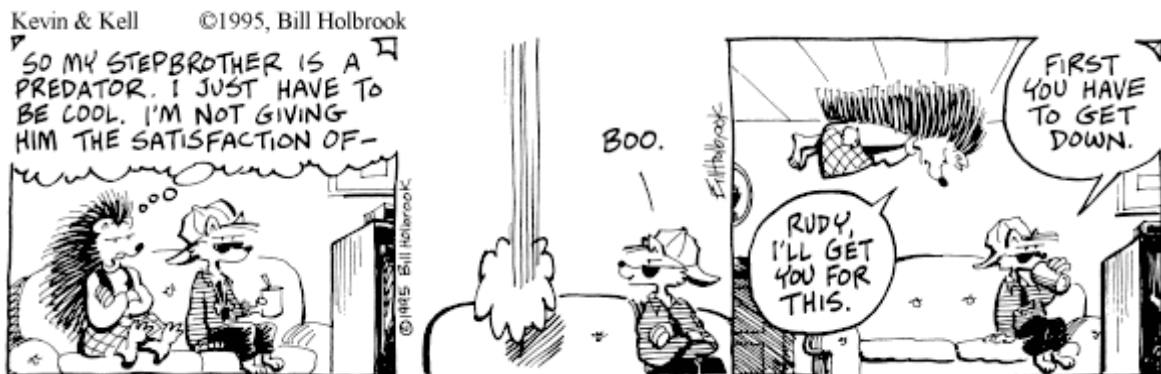
June 1995: EuroFurence 1 is held 30 June–3 July; organized over the Internet by Gerritt Heitsch and Tobias Köhler as a house party at Heitsch's parents' vacation farm in Kaiser Wilhelm Koog (near Hamburg), Germany. Nineteen attend from Northern Europe and Britain. Activities include watching furry videos and drawing in each others' sketchbooks.



July 1995: South Fur Lands is started by Jason Gaffney in Brisbane as the first major Australasian furry fanzine. It is continued from issue 20, March 2001, by Bernard Doove in Melbourne (to issue 57, December 2011).

September 1995: Ian Curtis hosts a "British Furry Convention" (Furry Housecon 8) at his home in Yateley 1–4 September, so British fans can meet American fans visiting England after the 1995 World Science Fiction Convention in Glasgow the previous week. About twenty American and British fans gather to party and to take the American fans on a furry tour of London and Oxford.

September 1995: Newspaper cartoonist Bill Holbrook's Kevin & Kell, about a rabbit's and wolf's controversial predator-prey mixed marriage in the city of Domain in a totally anthropomorphized world, begins on 3 September as the Internet's first original daily comic strip. The success of Kevin & Kell leads to hundreds of daily, semi-weekly, weekly, monthly, and sporadic original online comic strips today (current).



ConFUREnce East 1995

October 1995: Furtasticon evolves into ConFurence East, held at the Holiday Inn Jetport in Elizabeth, New Jersey, 13–15 October. It is organized by Trish Ny and her family. Guests of Honor are Vicky Wyman, S. Andrew Swann, and E.L.V.I.S. Convention Services. Attendance is 449. ConFurence East conbook; art by Vicky Wyman The program more resembles a traditional SF convention format with many panels than the more informal ConFurence. The art show includes 795 pieces of art; sales are near \$11,000. An official charity is heavily promoted: Wolf Park nature study preserve at Battle Ground, Indiana. The Sci-Fi Channel covers the convention.

January 1996: ConFurence VII, 12–14 January, spills over into both Irvine, California's Airporter Garden (renamed Atrium Marquis) Hotel and the next-door Radisson Plaza Hotel, with a membership of 999 and attendance of 875. Many fans arrive on the eleventh to make it an informal four-day convention. The convention awards its first Golden Sydney Award (statuette by Ruben Avila), "to a person in 'mainstream' media or publishing who has helped to create a more 'furry friendly' atmosphere for anthropomorphic material and fandom"; the first recipient is Disney animation writer-director Jymn Magon (TaleSpin, A Goofy Movie, et cetera). Art Show sales reach almost \$30,000. There is general agreement that, as popular as the Airporter Hotel has been, ConFurence needs a larger venue.



January 1996: Mike and Carole Curtis in Conway, Arkansas turn their Shanda Fantasy Arts small-press art folios into a full comic-book imprint with the Giant Shanda Animal (annual) at ConFurence VII. The imprint becomes a regular anthropomorphic comic publisher starting with the release of Katmandu: Velites and Hoplites and New Horizons issue one at ConFurence East 1996 in November.

April 1996: Quarantine (9 Kitching Street, Chapel Hill [Brisbane], Queensland), is started by Chris Baird, Jason Gaffney, Marko Laine, and Simon Raboczi as the first Australian furry commune. It is the publication office of South Fur Lands (edited by Gaffney), and the Net center for OzFurry (moderated by Baird).

May 1996: Darrell Benvenuto launches Vision Comics as a major specialty furry comics line, with four bimonthly titles — Kjartan Arnörsson's Savage Funnies, Mark Shaw's The Hollow Earth (both new), Carole Curtis' Katmandu, and Mike Curtis' Shanda the Panda (both from Antarctic Press) — and announced plans for others.

June 1996: UK Fur CON 3 is held 14–16 June, organized by Kevin Charlesworth as a party at his student house in Coventry. About fifteen attend. The main events are games of laserquest and soccer.

July 1996: EuroFurence 2 is held 18–22 July in Linköping, Sweden, organized by Snout (Henrik Isacson) in a rented school building. About thirty fans from Sweden, Finland, Britain, and Germany attend, mostly Internet Eurofurries meeting in person. There are furry hall costumes, a martial arts demonstration, sketching, and a zoo trip. Chama (Thomas Hagenfeldt) premieres a EuroFurence Hymn.

Labor Day weekend 1996: At the L.A.con III World Science Fiction Convention in Anaheim, south of Los Angeles (August 29–Sept. 2), a Furry Fandom Lounge operated by the ConFurence committee becomes essentially a five-day furry convention within the Worldcon. Its panels, demonstrations, and evening furry parties are integrated into and publicized within the general Worldcon program schedule. A glass-showcased History of Furry Fandom exhibit assembled by David Bliss is included among the Worldcon's exhibitions. A general SF trivia quiz includes a block of "Fins, Feathers, and Furry" questions.

October 1996: The New York Times Magazine, 27 October, has a brief article (pg. 25) about "a growing subculture of furry-suit hobbyists who don pelts, whiskers and tails year-round. They hold conventions — 'conFURnences' — and use the Internet to swap stories about the fun of role-playing as otters, foxes, and beavers."

November 1996: ConFurence East 1996, 15–17 November, moves to the Holiday Inn Independence in Cleveland, Ohio. Guests of Honor are Susan Van Camp, Paul Kidd, White Wolf Game Studios, and White Wolf artist Andrew Bates. Attendance is estimated at around five hundred. The dealers' room of fifty tables is sold out. The art show has fewer entries (596 pieces), but greater sales (\$12,400). Many attendees carpool to a local theater for the premiere of Warner Bros.' Space Jam that weekend. Trish Ny announces that this hotel will remain the convention's venue for the next several years, and that the convention's name will change to MoreFurCon to avoid confusion with the established ConFurence. A third annual furry convention, Albany Anthrocon, to be held in Albany, New York over the Fourth of July weekend starting in 1997, is announced.

Author's note: Many fans helped supply the information for this chronology, and we thank all of them. Special thanks go to Simon Barber, Richard Chandler, Ian Curtis, Martin Dudman, William Fortier, Mark Merlino, Rod O'Riley, Nicolai Shapero, Steve Stadnicki, and Ian Stradling, who not only went to considerable trouble to dig through old records to find some exact dates, but who helped to get information from other fans to make this chronology as accurate as possible.