

## Furries of Oshkosh



Photo by Sarah Nocktonic

The great beasts come, lo Pan! I am borne  
to the death on the horn  
of the unicorn.  
I am Pan!

*Hymn to Pan* Aleister Crowley

I straggled into China King to drown my sorrows in Tsingtao beer and stuff a void with sugary steamed doughnuts. Life had dealt a few blows that threw me off the diet wagon (a program I followed since 1994 that is a variation of Atkins modified to allow honey-glazed chicken wings, brownies, all boozes, and macaroni and cheese topped with cheese cubes, dusted with grated cheese, finished off with cheese curds, and self-righteously prepared with skim milk.)

The effort required to wallow in misery or actively descend into despair was more than I could summon on a dreary weekday while wearing stretch slacks (known in the reducing vernacular as “eatin’ pants”). I slid easily into the despondence that overcomes anyone who has a third anesthetizing helping of deep fried egg rolls.

If you are a crack addict, hitting rock bottom might be waking up in a gutter after being beaten by a tranny hooker. For a girl who likes elaborate hairdos and fancy outfits, sitting solo in an all-you-can-eat restaurant while wearing workout clothes and a topknot is as low as she can go.

I wasn't wearing a scrunchie in my hair (for God's sake, I am still sentient!) but The Ghost of Scrunchie Future loomed over my shoulder echoing warnings and seducing me into the sick world of wash-and-go comforts, "What will you do with your life? What does it all mean? Remove your complicated ribbons and bows. Come to me. I am Scrunchie. Forget those teased crowns and ringlets. A housewife in holiday vests weaves elastic in a brightly pattered round of fabric and creates me. Relax, baby, Scrunchie knows what you need. Employ my services and you can gorge on twice the chow mein without getting hair in your food. All I ask in return is your soul."

As I considered relinquishing an exotic banquet life in couture for a cheap buffet existence in sweats, I received divine intervention. They scampered in the room like woodland creatures flushed to civilization by a magical forest fire. In a dull sea of denim and double-knit, these sons of Pan burned brightly.

Their earthly incarnations showed them to be two burly gentlemen of hearty Wisconsin stock, but their totems hailed from mythical caves and enchanted mouseholes. One wore a pair of rodent ears adorned with jewelry. The other had a set of slightly matted black ears that may have been hound, wolf, or the most duplicitous of creatures that appears adorable from afar but will spit in your face upon approach, the vicious alpaca.

They sat one booth away and the satanic spiel of Scrunchie was silenced by the power of their presence. I tried eavesdropping on their murmured conversation, but could only hear a recognizable word from time to time. The rest, I imagined to be the secret dialect of their pack.

"Squeak, chatter, chit-chit, computers, rat-tat-tat," said Die Fledermouse.

"Grrrrrrowl, ruff-ruff, guys at the office, ffffffft," said Dark Wolf or Alpaca Joe.

When approached by their human waitress, they spoke clearly in the language of people.

Struggling slightly with her English, the server asked, "Why you have that? Why you wear that on your head?"

"We're furrries," said Die Fledermouse.

"You funny?" asked the waitress.

"No, we're furrries," he repeated.

"OK, OK," she said shaking her head and not feeling compelled to press for more details.

For grandmothers, Girl Scouts, and healthy tanned people who spend time out of doors, furrries are a subculture of individuals who revel in anthropomorphic animal culture and often don the characteristics of their favorite critter.

Piqued early in life by talking cartoon characters such as Yogi Bear, Bugs Bunny, or Scooby-Do, the furry is drawn to expressive animals in all art forms. If you recall the book *Watership Down* (you bought it when you were a kid because it had cute bunnies on the cover but then it turned out to be an allegory about personal freedom vs. institutionalized oppression and a lot of rabbits died), this is an example of a foundation furry novel. Others include *Charlotte's Web*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Aesop's Fables* (where you learned to never trust a damned crow!), and *Animal Farm* (again, you chose this classic for its cute livestock only to discover the pig represented Joseph Stalin).

Furries see the world through the unique lenses of their horizontal goat pupils. Look around locally. To you it's a sports mascot, but to furries Bango the Milwaukee Brewers deer could be one of them. The Fox Cities Fox's roller derby logo featuring a sexy female fox with a come-hither wink is iconographically furry. That grinning ham-hock atop Piggly Wiggly grocery store is hardcore furry.

In major metropolitan areas you might encounter them at comic book conventions trading furry fanzines, performing their rutting stag poetry while dressed in horns, and populating specialty clubs that cater to plushophiles.

As with any subculture, there is a branch of furries that is highly sexualized. These hot-to-trot folks are sometimes labeled "furverts" by others within the community. Erotic comics in the spirit of *Fritz the Cat* ignite animal passions. Sugar Bear, the half-lidded hot slut with the Billy Dee Williams voice who represents Super Sugar Crisp cereal fits into this category. Bango the Buck might even qualify due to his suggestive name. There are tales of bear-headed orgies, cat-clad swingers swapping wives with guys in dog suits, and even an exotic offshoot of denizens in full leather regalia augmented by swishy horse tails who engage in pony play.

My friend Sarah N. from California reports, "I was looking out the window during the Folsom Street fair when I saw a woman in gothic Victorian riding gear in a carriage drawn by a man wearing a black leather pony outfit complete with spat-like hooves. She was holding a riding crop and he actually had a bit in his mouth. The rider stopped and chatted up another woman and while they talked she gave the 'pony' little treats from her hand. Then she encouraged her lady friend to take a ride!"

Sure, big city California citizens can merely part their curtains to hone in on some furry action, but what's a small town furry to do? There is role playing on line, creating elaborate costumes alone in your apartment, and attempting to assemble with like-minded minotaurs via Internet meet up groups. One web call for regional fur traders was an innocuous invitation to get together for bowling or a barbeque. In Oshkosh, they can hit the China King buffet.

To some the man-mouse and alpaca-wolf-boy may have seemed absurd, but to me they were glorious distractions, reminders that around every corner there is the possibility of some happy accident to break the spell of sadness. More noble redemption is found in the miracle of a weeping saint or the wisdom of the ages, but when it comes in the specter of

two trucker-built children of God struggling with their chopsticks while wearing fuzzy ears, one must heed the call.

I suddenly felt full and finished with emotional eating. I left the last crab rangoon floating in sweet and sour sauce and paid my tab. Something evened out inside. I will not wear a scrunchie, I will not settle for stretch pants in the light of day, and I will not forget to keep my eyes open for the small pleasures of life in whatever form they are offered.

Channeling my inner wide-eyed doe, I pranced into the parking lot. Bloated families exited China King groaning and moaning about how much they had eaten. Patrons waited idly in line to buy tickets at Marcus movie theater. Shoppers came and went from the surrounding stores. The drudgery of the human condition would never change, but something inside me did. Within this dull strip mall, the beasts were alive and prowling.

TRIED: I tried Bumpits instant beehive creators and will now pronounce them my favorite beauty essential for 2009.

TRUE: The Oshkosh Public Library presented clothing historian Scott Jorgenson. His lecture *High Fashion USA: The Birth of the American Fashion Industry* consisted of an informative overview of how war spurred a sense of nationalism that spiked the American fashion industry, a show featuring vintage gowns by Christian Dior and Oscar de la Renta, and the underlying thesis was that well-made beautiful clothes never go out of style.

TIRED: The ironic mullet is tired but the classic I-think-my-hair-looks-good-like-this-and-I-don't-give-a-damn-what-you-think-see-ya-at-the-Pantera-concert mullet can still be rocked with impunity.

TRENDY: Revision your life to reduce crow's feet.