



HERE'S ALIX FOX... AS
A FOX. LOOKING FOXY!

WORDS ALIX FOX
PHOTOS JOE PLIMMER

If you go down to the pub today, you're sure of a big surprise... because you'll find yourself surrounded by dozens of sleek, sexy 'furs'.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS



CHALLENGE ALIX

Every month, *Bizarre's* pun-lovin' reporter will take on a weird and wonderful mission... and **YOU** get to decide what it is. For Fox sake, dear readers, try not to kill her! Send your ideas to Challengealix@dennis.co.uk, and stay tuned to *Bizarre* to see if she's brave enough to take up your challenge!

It's 1pm on Saturday, and I'm sitting in a basement bar beside St Paul's Cathedral that's filled with more hair than a beautician's bin after a week's worth of back, sack and crack waxes.

To my left, a fluffy blue squirrel in red boots plays cards with a pantomime horse, while to my right an arctic wolf, a puma, a leopard in a cape and kitten wearing a corset crowd around a laptop. Red Rum is sipping Strongbow, the big cats have eschewed Tiger beer in favour of a bottle of plonk, and most of the larger-than-life animals are well on their way to becoming tiddly. I treat myself to a G&T and toast the fact that I've gained the trust of the London Furies, members of a famously private group of enthusiasts who usually respond to inquisitive journalists by telling them to hack up a hairball - or in other words, to 'fur cough'.

FUR AND LOATHING

The Furry Fandom, or Furies for short, are justifiably wary of the media. By definition, they're people who 'enjoy the concept of blending animal with human characteristics', and celebrate related art, literature and entertainment. Many also develop their own anthropomorphic animal aliases, or 'furonas', who they can dress as during role-playing sessions.

For a limited number of Furies, this interest has a sexual slant - and in the past, the press has focused on extreme cases to create sensationalist stories. One notorious example was a 2001 *Vanity Fair* article that featured an intense 'Plushie' (someone who's into plush stuffed animals) who got hard over soft toys, and not only did the dirty with them via small holes in their seams, but also extended his repertoire of doggy-style pursuits to include live Labradors and German shepherds.

It's true that such full-on fetishists *do* exist; trawling the internet during my research, I came across a giant 'Geisha Panther' doll for sale on a Furry-themed auction site, complete with integrated love holes that brought new meaning to the phrase 'prick up your ears'. Yet radical 'furverts' make up only a small minority of the huge international Furry movement, and assumptions spread by biased reporting have unfortunately put a Watership Downer on the relatively innocent activities of the majority.

As a consequence of bad press, role-playing forums are spammed with aggressive taunts from bully websites such as Godhatesfuries.com, fans of *ThunderCats* and Disney's *Robin Hood* are being accused of bestiality, and any group of Furies seen socialising are automatically presumed to be doing it "like they do on the Discovery Channel", in an unrestrained orgy of claws and paws. It's time to tell the real story. →

Dingo lingo

Slang that's slung around by foxes, cats and hounds



- **YIFF** An onomatopoeic term coined in online role-play language Foxish, allegedly derived from the sound foxes make while mating. Originally indicating an energetic "Yes!" or cheerful greeting, it's now used as an expression of sexual interest or activity. A Furry who's not getting any action is *not* known as a Yiff Lemon.
- **SCRITCH** To scritch means to gently scratch someone's neck, back or between their ears with the fingernails or claws of a fur suit. A sign of affection and sometimes flirtation. Scritch is not a character from *Saved By The Bell*.
- **MURR** A general sound of contentment, in no way related to gold or frankincense.



Hey ya! Meet OutKast



Nut strokes mutt



Some Furrries are content with just a tail



Leon the Wolf's arse had crushed the giant chipmunk

FOXY LADY

I wanted to write an accurate piece about what Furry Fandom is really about. That means fully immersing myself in the culture by dressing as a cartoon fox – in fur a penny, in fur a pound. Unfortunately, the mascot outfit I've ordered from China doesn't arrive in time for the Fur Meet I'm attending in the capital. Hence I find myself enduring two train trips and a rail replacement bus ride squeezed into a hastily acquired faux-fur hooded waistcoat designed for 3–8-year-olds, and sporting a face full of Snazaroo body paint. Although I'm a fancy-dress fanatic and quite at home in artful attire, on this occasion I look more like exotic roadkill than anything approaching Jimi Hendrix's 'Foxy Lady'. So when I arrive, I'm glad to take the edge off things with another form of Hendricks and tonic.

TAILS OF THE UNEXPECTED

No Dutch courage is required when it comes to meeting and greeting my fellow Furrries, however – satisfied I'm not just some hack determined to deviously depict them as deviants, the 100-strong group give me a welcome warmer than a sauna full of Breville toasters. Which, my new friend Tom – aka TigerFire – informs me, is also the temperature inside the oversized feline head he's wearing.

"Some advanced fur suits have fans inside their cheeks or muzzles,



but it's important to keep hydrated so you don't overheat," TigerFire advises. "You'll sweat buckets in any case, so whatever species your fursona is, a can of Lynx is essential!"

BO that could KO a buffalo isn't the only hazard; TigerFire's legs are crisscrossed with scratches, the result of slips with the scalpel after donning long Johns, wrapping them tightly with gaffer tape, then cutting them off to create a purr-fectly fitting body cast around which he's making a tiger suit, with electroluminescent wire woven into the stripes to make them gleam like embers.

This level of craftsmanship isn't unusual. An incredibly realistic wolf, looking dapper in a steampunk jacket, shows me blueprints for a praying mantis outfit he's designing that incorporates metal stilts. Michelle, aka OutKast – and TigerFire's girlfriend – has painted the paws of her "demon from space" so they glow in the dark, and is working on a mock jet pack. One of the group leaders brings up photos on his MacBook of him in a latex frog suit made by rubber designers Pretty Pervy, his chest resplendent with a pair of huge inflatable knockers. "If you're going to play-act you're an animated amphibian, why not be a different gender?" he reasons. He's even commissioned a fully inflatable rubber slug suit (although this has met with



Andy Squirrel suspected Papa Smurf might not be his uncle after all

"I've noticed lots of hugging and people wearing collars engraved with the names of their 'owners'"



Foxy loses her head over a Kitty marshmallow

mixed reactions from staunchly traditional Furies who believe slick materials such as latex aren't 'furry' enough. They'll have to slug it out.)

CASH BUNNY

Kitting yourself out as a bear, beaver or bunny can really burrow into your bank balance; wannabe wolves have to squirrel away thousands of pounds before they can afford a custom-made suit, while creating your own critter using internet tutorials can demand fabric costing £80 per metre. Some Furies wear a 'partial' costume (head, paws and a tail) while others sport a fox's brush or dog's ears. Shirik, a 'draguinea' ("a hybrid of a guinea

pig and a dragon") assures me that giving a convincing performance is more important than appearance. "In role-play, I'm loveable and naïve," she explains.

"I've gained popularity due to Shirik's adorable appearance and the squeaking noises I make rather than speaking. It's generally considered out of place to talk while wearing a suit if the jaw has no movement." OutKast agrees: "I find a Furry who can really 'perform' in a suit to be the most impressive. It's creepy seeing someone in an animal costume just standing there and not interacting or playing their fursona."

Fursonas can be developed from an existing character, such as Sonic the Hedgehog, but often reflect aspects of the Furry's real-life personality; many cats I speak to feel they have naturally feline qualities, while monster OutKast represents Michelle's angry side. While researching this feature I heard rumours about Furies who

believed they were *actually* animals stuck inside human bodies, or at times became possessed by the spirit of a particular species. "I knew someone who was an 'extreme' Furry," warns OutKast. "She'd eat only the food her 'inner animal' ate. She'd hop about rooms, refuse to participate in activities because her inner animal didn't enjoy them, and she didn't like to clean or 'groom'. In the end, it got a bit scary." Thankfully, no-one I encounter takes the link between themselves and their fur suit alter ego too far, and beneath the fuzzy felt and puppy-dog eyes the group's heads seem firmly screwed on. Speaking of screwing...

NO PETTING

Knowing how much they hate journalists rabbiting on about how they're all apparently at it like rabbits, I'm worried the Furies will get touchy if I tackle a touchy-feely topic. But I've noticed lots of hugging and people wearing collars engraved with the names of their 'owners' - and when I'm handed a promotional →

Guinness for those who wait, Fosters for those paws-ing



TigerFire will be feeling roar tomorrow



Waxing and electrolysis had failed her



Gothicat eyes up a fish supper



He'll be back in the morning for hair of the dog

condom for a Furry convention, I broach the fur-bidden subject of Furry sex.

"We know it goes on, so we try to make it safe", answers one of the meet's organisers, "although I think in any gathering of people who share a common interest, there are likely to be some who pair off - especially if booze is involved. I don't think there's much difference between people's sexual behaviour as the evening goes on at a Furry meet than at any other party."

If the rumours about group gropes are true, then the cats are staying quiet as mice. And as for the notion of having it off with a boiling fur suit on, the overwhelming consensus is you'd evaporate before



you ejaculate. OutKast volunteers that she's worn some furry accessories in the bedroom before, justly saying that "some people like the feel and look of PVC, whereas other folk like fur". As she's explaining that it was only a partial costume (hence she wasn't incinerated during intercourse), it strikes me that my own antics of dressing as a bunny girl or coy kitten to make partners purr haven't been that far off Furriness. And I'd considered them as vanilla as a 99 without the Flake. As for the Furry Fandom being a huggy culture, after a few hours I find myself actively asking people if I can embrace them, hopping about like a kid in Disneyland and loudly exclaiming how everyone's "cute as a button" (an attraction to haberdashery - now *that's* weird). The urge to give a giant, doe-eyed doggy a bear hug is immaturely instinctive. I only go for the full suiters, though - partly because of the tactile appeal, but more because when there's more fur between my body and theirs than there is lining a truckers' café kettle, things feel less personal.

If I can't feel their skin, or make out the outline of their true form, I feel less awkward that I'm throwing my arms round a stranger and more able to enjoy holding and being held.

TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC

When my mascot suit finally arrives and I don it to frolic at a Furry picnic in Sutton (if only I'd ordered a sheep - then I'd have been in Sutton dressed as lamb), this effect is intensified. Inside the head, sound is muffled. I can't smell anything, and my peripheral vision is so limited that during a hug I can see only the sky. I feel cocooned and protected - both liberated and private - and I understand why some of the Furrries say they feel more relaxed about expressing themselves in costume. I wonder whether some members join the Fandom to indulge in giving and receiving affection in a way that's both physically and metaphorically cushioned, although I'm sure there are a good proportion who simply enjoy the amateur dramatics of acting in character.

Some studies suggest that the Furry Fandom has a notably high number of gay and bisexual

**“Inside the head,
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Gothicat and
Foxy play 'hide'
and seek

members, a trend supported by statistics provided by Furry dating site Pounced.org. Chatting about this with OutKast, she remarks that, “the Fandom has always been open-minded and it can be more accepted here to be gay or bi than in the ‘real world’, where people may struggle with coming out.” So does she think that bi and gay people approach the Fandom because it’s a safe environment, or that, once inside the Fandom, those who thought they were heterosexual are prompted to reconsider? “If you’re open-minded enough to be a Furry, then I guess you can be open-minded about your sexuality. For example, in my art I’ve drawn OutKast in some risqué situations with other female Furies. Her personality’s strong, tomboyish, maybe even butch. Perhaps the Fandom makes you feel comfortable to explore in that way.”

GET OUT CLAWS

As much as I’m yapping on about what the mutts might like to do with their nuts, the reality is that I witness little, if anything, of a sexual nature during my time with the Furies. Everyone is

chummy without being over-friendly, and meets are mostly spent larking about in character – play-fighting, blowing bacon- and catnip-scented bubbles sourced from pet shops, and delighting in the jaw-to-the-floor reactions of passing children during the much-anticipated walk around London. There’s a lot of computer-based chat; perhaps due to a strong Furry presence in online role-playing games, many anthro amigos enthuse as much about bytes as they do barks. And as an artist – the other main faction of the Furry community – Shirik admits that “there are a lot of programming in-jokes in Furry humour and I find it hard to understand some of the geeky talk that goes on at times”.

Furies strike me as a highly creative and warm-hearted bunch, and it’s a shame that so many misguided people seem to want to dock their tails and neuter their harmless fun. They may be breaking away from the herd, but having seen things from the inside, I’m inclined to say that the world might be a chirpier place if a few more sheep dared to dress in wolves’ clothing. **B**



Furry art

Tony the Tiger meets Tony Hart

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Furry Fandom is what an imaginative bunch they are. As well as dreaming up amazing costumes, many members also create animal-themed art based on their fursonas and those of their Furry friends. Just do a Google search and you’ll find thousands of pics online.



Pancakes by
Sangluna. See
more of the artist's
work at [Sangluna.
deviantart.com](http://Sangluna.deviantart.com)

See more online! You’ll find loads of unseen photos of Alix’s day with the Furies, and more interviews with members of the Furry Fandom, online. So what are you waiting for? Rock on over to Bizarremag.com!