

Virtual Soapbox



Street Fursuiting: The Most Fun Furry Experience "Patch Packrat"

A book dealer and a member of the Furry community tells us why "street fursuiting" – going out to public events in a fursuit – is so much fun.

The Furry convention scene is where fursuiters may be most at home. Over the past decade, attendance has grown at double digit rates per year, with cons popping up every month some place in the world.

[Anthrocon](#) is the largest, topping attendance of 5,000.

Near Silicon Valley in Northern California, where I live, is [Further Confusion](#), which gets several thousand. The San Francisco Bay area is home to the densest population of Furry fans, because of their ties through internet culture.

Editor's Note

An earlier version of this article appeared in a FurAffinity [blog post](#) by the author titled, "Street fursuiting is arguably the most fun furry experience there is."

The beginning of fan fursuiting (officially, in the 90's) probably came from a handful of devoted semi-pro's who appreciated mascot performance, and didn't have much published refere, just a will to invent. The classic fursuit book *Critter Costuming: Making Mascots and Fabricating Fursuits* was published in 2004, and includes some of those original makers.

Full suits generally go for near \$2000 (all custom work), and sometimes even higher at auction. There's a tiny cottage industry of professional makers and a few small businesses offering services full time to a fan base in, perhaps, the mid thousands. *[Read about a professional fursuit maker elsewhere in this issue – Ed.]* There are many more personal hobby makers.

News media stories that cover furies are likely to focus on fursuiters, and their striking visual appeal. Fursuiters can't represent the whole of furry fandom, when "furry" is vague, and broadly defined as anything related to anthropomorphic characters; but I think fursuiters represent the expressive, theatrical soul of furrydom.

There is an element of "ambassador" role to their hobby. Without the 15-20% of furies who wear fursuits for role-playing, it would just be regular unglamorous nerds saying "meow! I'm a cat".

That's what crazy people do.

Me, I like to put on silver disco pants and a Husky partial, and get on the subway to go dance and hug random people, under the influence of blasting techno music. They become so entranced by a giant sparkly talking dog, that they hand over their babies for photos.

That actually happened several times recently at a street faire in San Francisco. I didn't know where those babies had been, but I let them touch my paws anyway, even more carefully than when I pick up my tiny chihuahua (who gets super confused and never knows whether to trust me when I dress up.) As far as I can tell, everyone loved the experience, even the astonished babies. Those photos might provoke some interesting questions when they grow up.



Left to right: [Kitten](#), [Meerk](#), Me, and [Ty Cougar](#) in background

Taking the subway home made an extra special conclusion to the day. It was myself and Meerk on our own, after parting ways with the group and handlers who stayed for after-parties. When a husky and a meerkat stepped on the car of the BART train, there was a wave of laughter, raised cameras, and incredulous questions from people who had been settled in for a boring mass transit ride in coats and ties. Several got up for photos with us, sat down to post to Facebook, then got back up to share how much fun they were having.

But the best part was standing in the doorway as the car pulled in to each station, and watching commuters walk past the open doors and do a cartoonish double-take. It happened every time someone walked by. Meerk said: "I love making people's day like this... this is why I have a fursuit."

I'll let you argue for your preferred furry experience, but street fursuiting is mine. I'm a shameless about exposing my fursuit to surprised and delighted members of the largely uninitiated public. It never fails to arouse curiosity, turn heads, and invite photos, dancing or hugs. Some may yell out "Furries!" and a few may confuse it with the word "Plushie" (a different species, that I suspect is more of a dated media creation than a self-applied label these days). There will also be some "phwoooar!" reactions, prurient interest, shock, or "I'll-just-pretend-that-didn't-walk-past" sour expressions.

This kind of casual street theater seems to go over with overwhelmingly positive response in San Francisco. Here, Furries are an accepted part of the landscape. As a blogger said in "[25 Things I wish I knew before moving to San Francisco](#):"

Costumes are a way of life. "Is that a costume, or is that how you always dress?" is a legitimate question in San Francisco. I can't tell you the number of times I've thought that question when I look at a fellow passenger on the bus or a group of people walking down the street.

Even with the prevalence of outlandish fashion in this city, fursuiters stand out as



A young fan is fascinated by "Patch's" nose at the Cherry Blossom Street Fair in San Francisco.

more glamorous and head-turning than most any other sight. Street fairs are a perfect occasion for them. There's an enthusiastic audience of packed crowds looking for fun, relaxed social rules, festival atmosphere, and a progressive urban community that blocks off streets to make a place for the energy.

Compared to furry conventions, there's no expectation for a predictable furry presence, and it creates a special kind of surprise. I can't say enough about the positivity of furry cons and their strong growth in the past decade or so, as a real-life social glue for a largely internet-based fandom. But they are a safe and planned space that can bring to mind criticism I've heard about cliques and pre-fab experiences. Street fursuiting can bring extra spontaneity and surprise.

Unpredictability also brings a bit of risk for fursuiters in the spotlight, especially from overly friendly or even aggressively drunk people. Good handlers are valuable. That comes up in [conversation](#) on a Furaffinity journal posted by Samoy Wolf, another fursuiter who brought the magic with us to How Weird Street Faire, and the previous weeks outing to the Cherry Blossom Festival.

"Patch Packrat" is the Furry alter-ego of professional dealer Although he does not build fursuits himself, he has attended events and conventions every month for the last several years, usually with his fursuit as a Husky Dog. See his review of "Critter Costuming" elsewhere in this issue.