

Calling it a Spade

a belated reply and contemporary warning.

by Kem Regik

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FUNNY ANIMAL FANDOM, UNITE!

I am of the firm belief that our fandom—as open-minded and flexible as we have demonstrated ourselves to be—is fundamentally *exclusionary*. This is not surprising, all cultures on Earth are also fundamentally exclusionary. Not everyone is from any given culture and nobody can be inducted into every given culture, not just for logistical reasons but for logical ones; every garden must have a gate, lest it become diffused into nothingness. Many who live in one garden can live in and with others as well, but some cultures are opposed to one another on irreconcilable grounds, and that is to be expected. Our culture, the Furry culture, is mutually opposed to most cultures on at least one of our three core values, and to explain why this is I must explain what those values are.

Like our ancestors and graymuzzles have been doing for decades and like Outsiders have been doing for millennia, the Furry fandom makes and consumes art. Written, Visual, Auditory, Tactile, they're all represented within our cultural institutions and this enterprise has always served the first of our core values: **Expression**. How we present our furriness to others, both to each other and to Outsiders, is an inextricable part of our cultural fabric that has been present since prior to the fandom's birth. We have always promoted the cause of expression, so much that we have built social infrastructure to support newer and more potent manifestations over time. That being said, we don't need to look much past the first few pages of our annals to know this, the best proof we have has been around since day one: the humble fursuit. What could express more than a moving and living work of art designed from the ground up to outwardly project an idea, a character, even a narrative to passers-by? The first thing many Outsiders see and many of us saw when making first contact is a fursuit, and we know this experience is not only emotionally impactful but information-dense. This is the product of investment in this first core value: an optimised communication.

In the case of a fursuit or any other art made of our fursonas, we are actively seeing ourselves in our expressions. This base human impulse is captured by our cultural institutions through our second core value: **Identity**. The personal connections we make between ourselves as individual beings and the Expressions we create or consume is an unmistakable measurement of our furriness. Fandom membership is synonymous to a great extent with this core value, immediately visible in any interaction with a furry on- or offline. If you are a furry or have furry friends, you may have encountered the very common phenomenon of knowing someone's fandom name instead of their legal name, and I would argue that this is exemplary of the fandom's prioritization of Identity as a value above other things Outsiders might expect us to value. It's not enough for someone to call themselves a dog or a rabbit in passing for poetic or narrative purposes, furries are called by this value to attach their internal understandings of themselves to the iconography of the animals they use to express ideas and emotions. This is the product of investment in this second value: a cohesive introspection.

All sexual desire stems from a fundamental human urge for "more"; not a specific *more*, but a universal or general *more*. All sexual acts not covered under masturbation are an exercise in fulfilling that *more*, if only through the seeking of *more* than oneself for performance of the act. Our furriness is also exemplified through this *more*, the seeking of *more* than the human body, generating the third and final core value: **Sexuality**. Notice that furries are not particularly

attached to the animals we iconograph, but instead to the symbols, archetypes, and narratives we as humans have ascribed to their invocations in our language. Foxes are not actually sly, nor do any of us think that they are, because "sly" is a thing humans made up and therefore a thing only humans exhibit. But, when we invoke the fox as a symbol for expressive purposes we attach this thing, "sly", to the symbol so that it can interact with other symbols we construct. This is an Expression manifest. When we make connections between this Expression of the symbolic fox and its slyness and our internal understanding of ourselves, we have Identity. When we take the Expression and the Identity together and internally process them, we have the furry value of Sexuality. This is not mere sexual orientation or activity but the abstracted *eros*, the drive towards synthesis of object and subject, culminating in a product that is distinctly anthropomorphic, which is to say *made in our image*. Returning to the example of the fursuit: if the suit itself is the Expression and the fursona it's based on is the Identity, the refsheet the fursona lives in is the Sexuality. The paws, the muzzle, and yes the knotted penis are all manifestations of the same desire for *more* than what one merely is; symbolically ripping the physical characteristics from an animal and symbolically attaching them to a symbolic "I" for symbolic purposes. This is the product of investment in this third value: a holistic synthesis.

These three values cannot exist separate from one another and still be labelable as "furry", and I think we all know this to some extent. Without Expression, you have poetic daydreaming. Without Sexuality, you have storytelling animism. Without Identity, you have... well, zoophiles, which we now have to talk about.

Squee Rat, like any broken clock, was absolutely right about the alarming presence of zoophiles in our community, but was not able to resist the temptation of lumping them in with groups of people who clearly do not resemble them in any way. To quote from her seminal 1998 essay, *This Sordid Little Business*: "Plushophiles have latched onto Furriness like a swamp leech. When people call furries 'perverts,' THIS is the kind of crap they're talking about." Squee Rat, manifesting a disgust response, has abandoned core furry values to dehumanize and liquidate groups she believes are bad for optics. Plushophiles are not "swamp leeches" nor have they "latched onto" anything, because plushophilia exists in the fandom as a legitimate manifestation of the three core values discussed above, even if Outsider plushophiles existed pre-Confurence. They Express, Identify, and Sexualize as furries, so they're just as much furries as the "lifestylers" and the spiritualists and the vegans. That their furriness manifests in a shape not gratifying to the eyes of others is of no consequence, and Squee's particular disdain for them does not remove them from our culture.

Zoophiles, on the other hand, are 100% not furries in this sense because their sexuality is not concerned with the symbolic or narrative aspects of invoking animals in language but with the individual flesh-and-blood animal itself, which violently bucks not only the value of Identity but also Expression. The zoophile, conversely to the furry, is not defined by the creation, consumption, internalization, and personal synthesis of art, but by a sexual attraction to non-human animals.

And I *do* mean strictly the animals here, Dear Reader. Complain all you want about feral art on e621, but you cannot sit there and tell me that there isn't a MASSIVE chasm between pixels on a screen and a real animal that lives and breathes. One is clearly a human creation that conforms anthropomorphically to the linguistic uses of the symbolism they invoke, the other will bite you if you get too close; to lump them together in your poorly managed disgust is to toss the kitten out with the litterbox. Sure, it's easy to throw many of your fellow furries under that bus and hope that it scares enough of the rest into molding the fandom the way you wish to see it, as is the lure of *any* anti-social revolution. But, in doing so you sacrifice the values this fandom established under the guiding paws of Sylys, and that should be enough reason for you to second-guess your gut reactions.

There is, however, a contingent of so-called "cultural conservatives" slowly growing in number within the fandom, and *they* claim to suffer from cultural heartburn. FreeFurAll notwithstanding, their presence has gone largely unnoticed until the last decade or so. These individuals can be loosely grouped by their subversive political focuses, affiliation with foreign religious institutions, and opposition to furry cultural cornerstones. They parade themselves publicly as supposed paragons of virtue only to turn around and scoff at what our fandom has called virtuous for decades. The primary concern seems to stem from the same pernicious worm that festered in the Burned Furs and their talking points: the supposed "oversexualization" of our fandom.

They point to the institutions our graymuzzles built to archive and organize billions of individual furry Expressions and decry them as perversion. They point to the traditions built into our culture by our founders and reject them as degeneracy. They point to our friends, our families here within our fandom, and denounce them as wretched. Many a brigade on the former bird app have taken on these not-so-novel banners, some under cover of piety and others under threat of politic, but the melody does not change. There is often little more to their talking points than repressed homophobia and latent kink-shame, neither of which are worth the air they cost to express. They can, however, both be boiled down to a positioning against the value of Sexuality.

The words of Patricia Taxxon ring clearly in my mind whenever I approach this topic with the so-called "cultural conservatives" in our fandom: "The Furry aesthetic, as a whole, is a concession towards the symbolic, the sensory, the ever-so-slightly autistic." To position yourself against the core furry value of Sexuality is to position yourself against what it means to be a furry, what it means to be attracted (in a poetic sense, you hornball) to the cultural landmarks of our fandom. There is no way to remove or diminish the aspects of our community that revel in sex and the symbolism of sex from our culture because it *is* our culture.

Those who, at the behest of benefactors foreign to our community, promote some other value within our fandom are *importing* alien concepts and frameworks with the intent to supplant what our graymuzzles built for us, and in merely entertaining their presence we materially support their cause. Theirs is the work of sociopolitical subversion, perhaps even cultural colonialism, and it should be met with the very same ire it faces elsewhere in our fandom. These

so-called "cultural conservatives", the ones who lament the mundane and virtuous artistic expressions we produce regularly, the ones who insist we should feel shame for producing them, the ones who readily provide xenophilic remedies to non-existent problems, are not furies in a cultural sense. Not only do they not champion furry values, they refuse to even operate within our established cultural framework. The "culture" they seek to "conserve" is not yours nor mine, but *someone else's*.

To conserve *furry* culture is to fight for the values that existed at the founding of our fandom, for the values of Sylys, who *was* aware of what our core values were and *did* actively promote them even pre-Confurence. A cursory look through his LiveJournal shows he was participating in the hallmarks of our fandom's culture in his own art long before he rose to prominence among us. He is, in fact, the origin point for the very material these so-called "cultural conservatives" decry; an unpublished work of literotica titled "Turn the Man On". If he's your cultural lodestone—and honestly there is no better candidate—you have no choice but to reject the ridiculous notion of "oversexualization" in our fandom.

In this sense, I declare myself to be the *genuine* furry cultural conservative, as I choose to carry the torch of Sylys and keep it lit in the face of Outsiders wishing to cosplay us. Squee Rat was, by this metric, a kind of anarchist agitator who wished to upend and destroy the very foundations of our culture and thrust it into a bleak unknown full of ambiguities and poorly-defined motivations. The people this letter is penned to are, however, worse than her. At least Squee Rat was intending to "preserve" some aspect of our cultural institutions after she took a machete to them. These so-called "cultural conservatives", in regurgitating Squee's sentiments onto their historical revisionism, are wishing to do away with those institutions completely and replace them with things we have never wanted and have never benefitted from.

All of this to say, keep your prudishness out of my fandom and follow it out the door for good measure, because neither of you are welcome here. You never have been, and that should have struck you cold in the face the first time you scrolled through our archives, let alone the first time you attended our gatherings.

It leaves a sickly-sweet taste in your mouth, Burned Furs rhetoric, like handmixed drinks at a room party. The flavor doesn't matter that much anymore, Squee Rat's words taste just as foul coming out of anyone else's mouth, and we know it's schnapps all the way down; same playbook as yesterday, just slathered in new paint. History will call them Revanchists, because our graymuzzles slapped them for it thirty years ago, and they never got over it. There is a kind of future-bound serenity in that, at least.

But for the moment they call themselves a vanguard, so for the moment *I have a fucking problem with that*.

A stylized, handwritten signature consisting of the letters 'K' and 'R' in a bold, expressive, and somewhat abstract font. The 'K' is on the left and the 'R' is on the right, both rendered with thick, dark strokes and some trailing lines, suggesting a quick, energetic penmanship.