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Impudendum

STRIPE TEASE

FOR MATURE
ANIMALS ONLY

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An Aromatic
Anthology of
Anthropomorphic
Artists

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REFLECTIONS ON THE APPEAL OF AROMATIC META-ICONIC TOTEMS AS PERSONAE REPRESENTATIVES IN A VIRTUAL INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENT

or

Can Skunks Safely Cross the Information Super-Highway?

When a psychiatrist asks you "If you could be ANY kind of animal, what would you be?" take a second before you answer. Unless your doctor happen to be a Furry fan, this could be looked upon as a Trick Question.

Humans are jealously smug of their superiority, and look upon just about anything out there that's not human as either a pet, a poster-thingie to save, a wild beast or a snack. Requests to emigrate from your fellow man are looked upon poorly, and the hermits and iconoclasts who try are usually shunned, sedated, or shot. Being asked a question like this one is akin to filling out a form in Kampuchea to a Khmer Rouge official - any answer is the wrong answer.

Pick a hunter and you'll be thought aggressive, pick a herbivore and you'll be deemed passive, too large can intimidate, too small and you display overwhelming urges to be dominated. Birds will be seen as escapist, fish as a return to the womb, insects as a Kafkaesque dementia and reptiles as some primordial urge lurking under the skin working it's way out. You'll be told there are no wrong answers, you should also realize there can therefore be no RIGHT answers. So what good is the question?

Imagine if you will what would happen if a Furry fan were to look the questioner square in the face and say "I'd like to be a winged hermaphrodite panther-taur-morph with a barbed tail and a color scheme that varied with my moods." The doctor would probably not just hit the panic button, they would build one if none existed. In Furrydom, the queried would blend in with nary a ripple..

So, what does this have to do with skunks?

Skunks, like potatoes and Coca-Cola, are a New World phenomenon - it would be interesting to find the first account of them in some European court by a malodorous Conquistador or *courrier-du-bois*. However remote a place in the world you are, even if only from pictures, the aromatic qualities of skunks are now a fact known to the entire globe.

For OBVIOUS reasons, skunks have managed to evade the quaint history of the beaver, the bison or the turkey. Evading wide scale slaughter for fur, food or fun is a tough trick anywhere on the globe, and skunks have managed to hold

their own toe-to-toe with human encroachment. Currently, they have the same natural enemies as always - the bobcat and great horned owls having odd appetites. The only serious new addition to the list is the steel belted radial tire.

No one is going to make movies of vicious skunks terrorizing our parks, our beaches, or what forests we have left. Even if confronted on our home turf in the middle of our metropolitan areas, anyone who intimidates a skunk usually gets what's coming to them. If anything, getting the wrong end of a skunk is a source of humor, a mild way of Mother Nature proving the idiocy of another living thing.

Wandering into the Infobahn is the very height of modern future shock for some, and the alienation and detachment with reality that is found, or actively sought, often requires a mask between our inner selves and the virtual reality's co-habitants. In some places, the mask and the inner creature merge into a single form, and for a great many, the revealed fur is the person, and vice versa.

So where is the mystique, the identity, the attractiveness that brings so many to don the armor not of some primitive shredding machine or armored cybernetic nightmare, but the simple stripes of a quiet insectivore and scrounger? Debugging the net in a suitable innocuous form would never be more appropriate.

I'm not advocating a change in stripes for everyone out there. If it happened the very degree of protection offered would vanish and we'd be right back at square one. All right, if we can't beat 'em, and can't join 'em... let's try something new - tolerating them.

ANY one willing to look beyond their nose can find out what's on a skunk's mind, but best if you're doing so with the skunk's consent. As a general rule they seem to be a bit quiet in real life - I haven't met any megalomaniacs yet, and it's still early, but I'm hoping that my luck holds out. If not, say a prayer for me, and have a few cans of tomato juice handy. I could be wrong...

But then again, that's just MY two scent's worth.

- Kevin A. Duane -

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