

SouthAfrifur Convention 2017

by Erdwolf_TVL



Twenty eight tails strong we came; armed to the teeth with cameras, sketchpads, smartphones and fursuits. Though at the time we were not entirely sure what would transpire, we knew that not a single precious moment of (what many consider to be) the first true furry convention on African soil should ever be lost to memory.

It was a warm Friday afternoon. A fully laden silver Hyundai Tiburon rolled into the sleepy rural town of Magaliesburg. *"Blink and you will miss it,"* they say. In the driver's seat, Yukon, a Wolf. And riding shotgun, an Aardwolf. (Me.)



I gazed down the broad and dusty main street at

townsfolk going about their business. In my mind's eye I could see a sun-bleached banner "Furries - Welcome to Magaliesburg!" perfectly still in the windless North West winter warmth.

I pictured posters outside the local Wimpy offering Furry-chinos. Aunt Marie's home industries offering furry-themed butter biscuits, hand-knitted beanies with ears and ginger beer. Local entrepreneurs flagging us down, offering makarapas with fuzzy ears by town's only traffic light. This was, of course, not the case.

Hardly anyone noticed the trickle of out-of-town cars, making a pitstop at the local supermarket and liquor store before tackling the dirt road that lead to our final destination. And I am willing to bet that, in a town where the size of your tractor determined your status,

no-one knew (or cared) what a *furry* was. And we were okay with that. For the time being, at least.

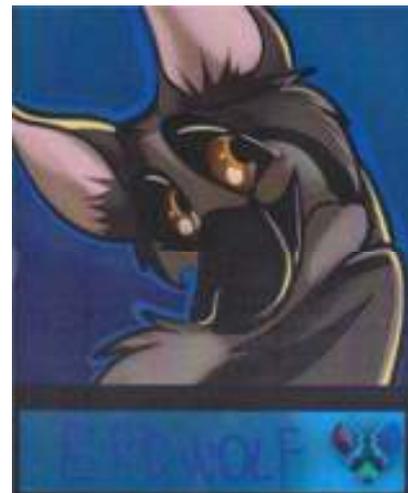


Magalies Retreat was a place of certain character - a place that tries to be a lot of things at once, and only manages to be some of them. A bushveld retreat with not-so-subtle Christian overtones (a cross on the hill and all buildings are named after prominent characters from the Bible.) Laser-cut signs outlining virtues such as “Trust”, “Loyalty” and “Honour” scattered randomly throughout the grounds, rusting away in the hot African sun.

In addition to offering a selection of summer-camp style accommodation, it also has a paintball arena, hiking trails, several swimming pools, a golf driving range, an obstacle course, semi-domesticated horses and a Gladiator arena (more on this later.)

All our meals and accommodation were included in the con registration fee of R1500,00 (about \$115.00) per head for regular attendees. Registration and welcome was a low-key affair. Having set our bags in our rooms we wandered around checking out the terrain.

The organizers called out names from a clipboard and handed out our con badges. The badges themselves were custom made by ElectroCat, a local artist, who could sadly not attend. The cost of this was also absorbed in the registration fee. Sponsors and super-sponsors received fluffy ears and T-Shirts as well. We were all now ready for adventure.



The first afternoon and evening was uneventful. Other than the communal braai (BBQ) there were no planned activities. Most canines, felines and dragons spent the night enjoying drinks, playing games, chatting and updating their Twitter feeds.

Bedding was basic. There were five rooms with bunks and communal bathrooms. Though most only visited the bedrooms for sleep. Most activities took place around the *boma* or in the large dining room. For obvious reasons, there were no room parties... though one could also argue that the entire con was a room party! Having travelled far, most called it a night early. The con would go into full swing on the second day.

By 09:00 on Saturday, the combined artist's alley and dealer's den was operational. There were a grand total of four exhibitors. One Fursuit builder (Yote), two artists offering sketches (Sudan Red and Niexie) and myself - shamelessly promoting my book *reWritten* and my up-and-coming visual novel, *Greenfields*.



It did not take long for the artists' notebooks to fill with requests from con-goers. Many of them had asked for multiple pieces. Sketches cost between R50,00 (\$4.00) and R150,00 (\$12.00) a piece. The standard of their work comparable to some of the best international artists. (Of course.)

Though not actively seeking commissions, YoteFox managed to create a lot of buzz with his fursuiting exhibition. Interest in my writings were greater than anticipated and I managed to sell all the copies of *reWritten* I had on me. Though the artist alley officially closed at 10:30, sketching and queries continued throughout the weekend.

Next on the agenda, was the scavenger hunt. After dividing into teams, we set about scavenging the area around Ruth's Place, looking for objects and clues. It was good, clean fun. The winning team scored a large box of chocolates.

After lunch, it was time to explore the obstacle course. We were implored by the organizers to dress comfortably and to leave our fursuits at camp. With good reason.

We strolled down a dirt path and came to a shadowy enclave at the bottom corner of the farm. A sign proclaimed "Obstacle Course". We were assured of being in the right



place. Some of the resort personnel were there to welcome us and ensure we knew what to do. Hilarity, sweat and mud ensued.

Being an overly creative bunch, a running joke came to life amongst the attendees. All indications were that the convention was the setup for a social experiment (read : impromptu horror

movie.) And who could blame them?

The campsite was enormous and isolated. Walking among the silent ablutions and boarded up sleeping quarters, our small group of attendees were slightly overwhelmed by the lingering, perfectly windstill silence.



“What is this place?”

Moving across a yellow grassy field towards the gladiator arena, the swings and merry-go-rounds in the lower park squeaked eerily as some furs frolicked like pups and cubs. The sense of abandonment continued to grow, however. It is then we noticed vultures circling overhead.

Though the logical explanation would be that they visited from the vulture sanctuary nearby. Of course, it was more fun to pretend they knew that there would be corpses to feast on. *Soon.*



A group of furs (myself included) splintered from the main contingent and wandered off towards the perished metal fortress that housed the gladiator equipment. We treaded across a rolled lawn littered with human-sized skittles. (They were the perfect size to store bodies.) There were also two wire-mesh balls, large enough for a person to climb inside. Human skittles, apparently.

Also on display were two gigantic chariots, endowed with the logos of two prominent local Rugby teams - The Cheetahs and the Blue Bulls.

These were larger than life. Constructed in such a way that six people would push them forward and one would stand atop to steer. Though we did not have the opportunity to perform a Ben-Hur reenactment, Wolfspike was

brave enough to get inside a human-proportioned hamster ball and topple the two upright skittles in the proper manner. They tumbled. Creepy smiles and all.

The Gladiator arena itself had the vibe of an abandoned amusement park (think those creepy photos of Pripyat.) Massive, and though apparently functional, in a mild state of disrepair. Half-filled pools, meant to catch competitors who fall from the phoophie slides and girders were distinctly unwelcoming. Cholera? Crocodiles? Piranhas? We did not find out. Fortunately.



Poking around the abandoned buildings beside the arena, we were expecting a little girl in glowing white pajamas or a creepy clown to make its appearance. This did not happen, though, and we live to tell the tale.

Inside the Gladiator arena itself, the canvas was faded and dusty. Some of the props are inflatable and sagged miserably. They rose unenthusiastically as the air pumps were turned on by the resort staff.

It lives.

The focal point of the area was the “ball of death”. All furs were in agreement that it resembled Hell Raiser’s face with its pointy edges. When powered up, it turned ominously like the Event Horizon’s Core. We waited anxiously, but no hell portals opened.

The ball itself consists of three concentric spherical frames, covered in cloth and netting. It required one to keep one’s wits about trying to find the exit as it turned slowly.

A few hundred meters beyond the arena, past the paintball fray, an even smaller group of furs explored, what could best be described as a dumping area for unused equipment. Broken desks, tables, steel girders. Barrels of creosote. Plastic classroom chairs arranged in an eerie circle around an open piece of field. This is where we saw some bodies.



Not real ones, of course. Steel silhouettes, presumably part of the paintball setup. Some aggressive, toting machine guns. Clearly the targets one are meant to hit. But also one or two innocent bystanders in civilian clothes. Clearly the targets one should avoid hitting.



We were called to order and the gladiatorial games could begin. After a quick briefing by the staff, a handful of brave souls set out to take on the course. There was climbing, sliding, swinging, running, slipping and diving. And the ball of death. Hilarity ensued.

The final challenge pitted our champions against each other on a rotating platform, armed with cushioned poles. The victor was the last fur standing. Ivic was flung from the platform and narrowly missed fracturing his skull on a steel beam. But other than a few bruised egos, all was well. The vultures would return home disappointed.

On our way back to camp, we took a group photo on an old crane truck. Apparently used in better times to erect and maintain the gladiator area. This is one of the defining moment of the convention for me. This picture begs to be transcribed with our fursonas.



Back at Ruth's Place, dinner was served. Drinks flowed. The coils of a hundred vape machines glowed. Furoticon and Coup was played as artists continued to slave away at the stream of commissions.

Saturday night was also movie night. *Wolves and Sheep*, as well as *The Secret Life of Pets* were screened.

The last full day at the convention was set aside for panel discussions. In my personal capacity, I lead a panel on writing. Again shamelessly plugging my book and game. Bravura, Scratch and Ivic presented a panel of Social Media and Furry.FM. Yotefox presented a panel on fursuiting and fursuit building.



Attendance was good. Questions were asked and answered. My pick of the lot was the fursuiting panel. I realized many tricks of the trade, including the challenge of sourcing of faux fur locally and the role and importance of a handler. Until then, I did not even know it was even a thing!

Hereafter everyone suited up and we did our group photos with the bushveld (and some stray wildlife) as our backdrop. After more chilling and dinner, we held our quiz night. “Fur De Merwe”, “The RapsCALLIONS” and “Roll 1D Fur” duked it out intellectually in the ultimate test of geek. The winning team got a small amount of cash as a prize. Most of it



was quickly converted into more commission requests and raffle tickets.

The last planned event of the evening was a charity raffle. All monies raised were for the benefit of the Knysna Wolf Sanctuary. After all contributions from con goers were matched by the con organizers, an amount of R4260,00 (\$327.00) was tallied.

Prizes up for grabs were three signed copies of Tempe O’Kun’s “Nordguard”, SouthAfrifur themed merchandise, signed copies of Tempe’s Manifest Destiny, The Bluff and Sixes wild. A copy of reWritten, signed copies of the Greenfields promotional poster and some commissions by Sudan Red were also lotted out.

At this point, it became clear that the convention was drawing to a close. The organizers (Ivic, PowerCat, Valerion, Scratch and Doge) took some time to thank the attendees, each other, as well as the guest of honour, Bravura from Furry.FM fame. It is worth mentioning that he travelled all the way from Switzerland to attend the convention.

The speeches were truly moving. Not the fall of a pin could be heard in the dining hall as Ivic related the massive amount of planning and dreaming that went into organizing this event. The applause thereafter was heartfelt and sincere.

After enjoying a last communal breakfast on Monday, the furs helped take out the trash and clean their rooms. Smoked a last cigarette. Gave a few last hugs before getting in their cars and leaving Magaliesburg to return to obscurity.

In hindsight, SouthAfrifur Convention 2017 was more Camp Feral than AnthroCon. A small, intimately connected group of enthusiasts got away from it all to have a good time. I have heard nothing but praise from those in attendance.

As of right now, rumors of “next year” can already be heard on the Internet. There exists a guests-of-honour wishlist (hitlist?) in our collective conscience. The organizers can stand proud, knowing that they have done something amazing.

And as for Magaliesburg? This sleepy little town may not know it yet, but it’s name is now recorded in the furry hall of fame. Forever. And our paths might cross again.

