

'A fetish could be anything. People think of corporal punishment and someone up on a wall getting flogged, but everybody has one. It could be as slight as a sexual position or a part of the body that you prefer.'

— RUTHIE LaFORCE, DUNGEON MONITOR, DIABLO'S

to the idea that he has a thing for wearing dog collars and leather chaps exposing his naked butt, instead of the notion he might have a small wooden carving in his pocket he believes has magical power. "Fetish" was first used to describe sexual activities in the 1800s and was associated with the idea of perversion or sexual deviance, but it signifies lot more than that today.

So what is a fetish? Fetishes run the gamut from something as simple as only wanting sex with red-haired women to less socially acceptable activities like getting off on watching women in high heels stomping bugs, worms or sometimes (less legally) fluffy critters like mice.

Plushies or plushophiles are people who get off on stuffed animals. Literally. Furies are folks who find large furry costumes tantalizing. You might be watching the Ducks play UCLA during Saturday's game, but a furry (or a furovert) is watching the Duck mascot. A fur pile is when a group of furies pile on top of each other and skritch one another, often resulting in spooging (we'll let you draw your own conclusions about what that might be), and www.Pounced.org is the primo meeting place for those of the furry persuasion. (Mental note: We will never refer to our pets as "fur kids" ever again).

If there were any furies at the last Diablo's Fetish Ball, *EW* didn't notice, but it may well be that we were distracted by the guy getting a butt tattoo, the girl getting spanked on stage and the good number of bad fairies that showed up.

A foot fetishist might find painting someone's toenails the height of eroticism. "I have people who want to worship my feet and paint my toenails for me," says Mistress Cecelia, a local former professional dominatrix who now does it just "for fun and pleasure." She also mentions "electric play," which uses low-level electric currents. She says, "There's something I've heard of called the 'forced cheeseburger,' but I'm not sure about that." Mistress Cecelia speculates that the forced cheeseburger might be when a vegan is forced to eat meat. "It's the control of being forced to do something," she says. "There's nothing like true submission."

A lot of fetish revolves around fashion. High spiked heels, leather corsets, vinyl dresses and leather collars epitomize the associations most of us have with fetish.

A gerontophiliac is sexually aroused by a significantly older person. Finger sucking, sex with people with piercings, latex wear, leather wear, men wearing women's panties and sex with vegetables — these are all fetishes. Most people involved in the fetish scene, when asked to list what fetishes are out there, typically resort to saying "everything."

Feels good to be bad

For most people with a fetish for BDSM, wearing leather and carrying a whip is something they do in the privacy

of their own home. As it turns out, Eugene does have its own dungeon.

The Asylum Dungeon, located in a former fire station, proudly advertises 15 play spaces with sets from medical to Asian motifs on its website. Owned by "Boss Bondage," the Asylum offers monthly pansexual parties to its members. Boss Bondage also sells bondage merchandise, from very Eugene hemp ropes in a plethora of colors for tying people up to body piercing kits, paddles and canes for spanking.

Boss Bondage said in an email to *EW* that he makes "a living by traveling the country teaching bondage at some of the biggest events around the country," but unfortunately, he didn't respond when asked for a longer interview. He must be tied up somewhere else.

But Boss Bondage seems the exception to the rule when talking about BDSM and fetish in Eugene. While many of those in the scene want to maintain their privacy and anonymity, they are happy to talk about what they do in the privacy of their own homes or in public at Diablo's Fetish Nights.

Ruthie LaForce lights up when she talks about her involvement with BDSM, fetish and Diablo's Fetish Ball. A former small town girl who was persecuted when she came out as a lesbian, she's the appointed DM (she prefers Dungeon Monitor to Dungeon Master), and has been working with Diablo's owner and fellow fetish aficionado Troy Slavkovsky to put on Fetish Night since it began about 10 years ago.

"A lot of the people come to Fetish Night that are new to the scene and don't know where to start," says LaForce. Fetish night at Diablos, she says, "is a safe and secure environment for people who want to try this." Those into BDSM can also meet others with similar inclinations at "munches." Munches, says Mistress Cecelia, take place at local restaurants and are a comfortable place for people new to the scene to meet up and talk, wearing street clothes.

Munches also provide a meeting place for those in consensual power relationships. Sheryl, a slave in a power relationship and the organizer for Eugene's chapter of Master And slaves Together — the word slave or submissive is always lower case in power exchange relationships, according to MAsT's Pacific Northwest website www.mastpnw.org — says people interested in a Dominant/submissive or Master/slave relationship can meet up, whether they are already in a relationship or not, through munches or at a monthly local meeting, held at a private home. A quick Google search reveals that various McMenamins pubs around the state seem to be a popular spot for MAsT and other munches, and at one point Sheryl says, Eugene's MAsT was meeting at the Valley River Center Food Court.

It's about relationships

LaForce, like many in the Eugene fetish/BDSM scene, is blissfully in a long-term relationship. Participants in the scene are often happily married and hold down full time jobs or are full time parents. "Lawyers, DAs, schoolteachers," says Slavkovsky, "it doesn't make them freaks."

Members of MAsT, Sheryl says, are less focused on the sensation aspect. "We're more focused on lifestyle and relationships." Sheryl, who prefers only to use her first name because she works for the state of Oregon, identifies as a slave in her consensual power exchange relationship. "There's such a sense of oneness with your partner," she says, despite what outsiders might think of a Master/slave relationship. "You have great communication. A huge amount of mutual respect."

Downstairs at Diablo's

If a munch isn't your thing, and a full time Master/slave relationship is more commitment than you are ready for, but you think maybe you may want a little kink in your otherwise vanilla life, then Diablo's Fetish Ball is the place to explore your latent desire for a spanking or getting tied up. Walk down the dark steps to the lower level of Diablo's Downtown Lounge, and you'll come face-to-face with Slavkovsky's personal A-frame: a wooden frame adorned with cuffs and bondage accoutrements, designed to have willing participants bound to it.

LaForce shows how the frame is set up for quick release. All the bondage situations are designed to be safe she says, and she keeps scissors on hand for cutting people loose. And this is where safe words come in. If a submissive (sub) is getting too close to the edge in a "scene," he or she uses a safe word like "yellow" or "rainbow" to let the person doing the spanking, flogging or piercing know that it's getting to be a little too much. A stronger word like "red" means the scene needs to end. In a noisy setting like Diablo's a gesture is used instead, something as simple as making the upraised palm "stop" gesture, Mistress Cecelia says.

"Safe," "fun" and "consensual" are the words LaForce, Mistress Cecelia and Sheryl bring up again and again. "I am a very happy sadist," Mistress Cecelia says, "I'm always smiling when I do this."

Gearing up

Good fetish gear isn't cheap. LaForce says she can tell someone who's skilled with a single-tail whip from a newbie just by looking at the whip. "A single tail from the local porn store costs \$75," she says, while a good one, made and sized for its owner, can cost as much as \$600. A single tail, by the way, is a bullwhip type of whip — think Indiana Jones. And LaForce says it takes training to use

a single tail or any other kind of whip without causing lasting damage. You want to avoid the kidneys, she explains, and areas like the spine.

Along with single tails, other whips used are floggers — whips with multiple "falls" or lashes (a cat o' nine tails is a flogger with nine falls), bamboo canes, crops and birch branches. Birch branches, LaForce says, "are cheap and disposable." They get thrown away after use. All the other gear is carefully cleaned.

"It takes me three days to clean everything after an event," she says. Whips can be "stingy," she says, like the branches, which can draw blood, or "thuddy," which she says feel like a punch in the back.

For Fetish Night, LaForce brings in local dommes, like Mistress Cecelia, as well as others from around the Northwest who are skilled at everything from whipping to mummifying. Most of them lately, she says, are women. Contrary to the popular belief that BDSM debases women, LaForce says that right now she has more dominant women, also called "tops," than men.

The dress code for Fetish Balls, La Force says, is fetish gear or black, but many of the 400 or so people that attend are there for the first time, she says, checking out the scene. If someone wants to come down to the lower level and watch what's going on but isn't wearing fetish gear or black, LaForce will ask him to strip down to his underwear. She says, "It's the first lesson in humiliation." She adds, "Ninety-five percent of people we do that to come back dressed up."

The Fetish Balls focus on what LaForce calls "eye candy": scenes that are visually interesting like suspensions, where someone is tied or pierced and suspended from the ceiling, or bondage and floggings. Fetishes like blood sports (yep, bleeding, but practioners say they are very careful about contamination) and water sports (and when we say water, we don't mean the kind you drink) have less visual appeal to the newcomer, and even mummification — wrapping someone up entirely so she can't move — while a turn on for the wrappee, is difficult for bystanders to relate to.

Many use Fetish Night as their first introduction to the BDSM and fetish scene. For the upcoming Fetish Ball, newcomers can expect burlesque, fire dancing, play piercings, suturing (for example, flowers being sewn to the body), sensory play (things like dripping hot candle wax onto the skin) and floggings, spankings and suspensions. All of this activity LaForce says, takes place "behind the ropes" where she and her assistants can monitor the scenes, and newcomers can participate, or just watch.

Is fetish fun? The next Fetish Ball is Oct. 10 at Diablo's at 959 Pearl St. "Everybody has a fetish," says LaForce, "whether they want to admit it or not."

EW