

# OUT OF THE SHELL

New SLUG Queen to leave Eugene in stitches BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

She is an emissary of the arts — a thread-spinning, yarn-whirling ambassador of costume — and a die-hard advocate for keeping Eugene wonderfully weird. Queen Sadie Slimy Stitches is Eugene's new 2012 SLUG Queen, the official royal representative of the Society for the Legitimization of the Ubiquitous Gastropod. It's a Eugene thing, and this queen wears it well.

Slimy Stitches is a Eugenean through and through, having lived here since she was a 16-year-old girl. Now, in her not-so-free time, when she isn't managing the weight of her crown, she works as a costume dresser for theater and dance shows at the Hult Center. This is how she found her way into the slime-light.

"Last April, *Wicked* toured through Eugene and stayed for two weeks," Slimy Stitches says. "And the women's ensemble had these green Emerald City gowns. They were these huge avant-garde green dresses. And someone made the offhanded comment that the SLUG queens would kill for gowns like this."

Queen Slimy Stitches — who goes by Maiya Becker when the crown isn't resting upon her head — took that offhand comment seriously and began knitting great green gastropod-themed garbs. Ironically, Slimy Stitches' original intent was to convince others to enter the SLUG Queen competition, wearing her meticulously knitted lime-colored linens.

"I started going around to everyone I knew and trying to get them to run for SLUG Queen," Slimy Stitches says. "I just wanted to make the dress, but everyone kept telling me that I should run for it."

Slimy Stitches says that the outward show of support from her community encouraged her to do research on the SLUG Queens of Eugene, and the more she learned, the more she liked.

"I went online; I read everything I could about the SLUG Queens, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized I could totally go for it," Slimy Stitches says.

So for more than a year, she prepared to make her run for the crown at the 30th anniversary of the SLUG Queen contest on Friday, Aug. 10. It took her 483 days to knit the costume that would become her regal gown of slimy success. Slimy Stitches says that part of the outfit was made out of (lime green) T-shirts, cut and turned into yarn. Thirty individually knitted slugs (one to represent each previous SLUG Queen) also adorn the gown.

"Some of the yarn I spun with my spinning wheel," Slimy Stitches says. "Most of it was donated by people who really supported me. It was a lot of work."

Slimy Stitches says she started knitting 10 years ago, when one of her friends agreed to teach her in exchange for some house-sitting time. "I can't look at things without seeing them covered in textures," she says.

And as if this new SLUG Queen's professional career of charismatic costume creation isn't eccentric enough, she is also a dedicated guerrilla yarn-bomber. If you happen to be walking by a parking meter or a local business sign and see it covered in beautifully knitted brightly colored yarn, Slimy Stitches and her group "The Naughty Knitters" are probably to blame.

"It's knit-graffiti. We literally do graffiti with knitting," Slimy Stitches says of yarn-bombing. "It is illegal but I've never ever heard of anyone getting arrested. People love it; they encourage us."

Slimy Stitches says her desire to yarn-bomb stems from a need to shake people up and make them look at things from alternative perspectives. She says she loves engaging with the community of Eugene because the city is a mix of very weird, very opinionated people with so many different agendas.

Being SLUG Queen means being Eugene's unofficial ambassador. The queen is elected from the midst of a rowdy no-rules talent show and asked to throw a fundraiser for a charity of her choice. Slimy Stitches, who earned her crown



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

after a hard-fought display of simultaneous knitting and dancing, will champion the Materials Exchange Center for Community Arts (MECCA) as her charity of choice. She says that choosing to fundraise for MECCA is a decision that's directly aligned with her personal mission to kick the cage and inspire alternative perceptions.

"It's the same sort of thing as yarn-bombing and altering perspectives," Slimy Stitches says. "They take garbage and turn it into art. That's different and I love it."

Sitting at an outdoor café shortly after her coronation, sipping beer while dressed in full SLUG Queen regalia, the "raining" queen waves to passing motorists who honk in support. As she greets a young woman who walks up to congratulate her on obtaining the crown, the young woman tells Sadie Slimy Stitches that she one day wants to run for SLUG Queen.

"You definitely should," Slimy Stitches urges her loyal subject. "It's a wonderful way to be a part of the community, and really do something here." EW

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