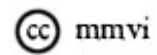


The Book of Edge



Being one leatherman's journey



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Dedication

For SIR, for cub, for the man who was my lover—
For the boys who have knelt at my boots,
For the men I have served—
For all those who have taught me,
For all those I've taught—
For those who have come before,
For those yet to come.

—edge

Inscription of Lineage



his book will find its own path; I release all claims to its journey. Keep it, toss it, do with it as you will. But, were I to have one wish for these pages, it would be to see them passed on. *Hold onto this book only so long as it means something to you* and, when you find someone who needs it, pass it on. Should you do that, record here this book's journey. I give this book to you; whom shall you give it to?



LTHR EDGE

gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to

who gave this book to ...

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Prologue: Into the West



What is it about the West? Civilization spreading ... cowboys riding into sunsets ... “Go West, young man!” ... Lao Tzu, leaving the imperial Chinese court, heading West to Tibet and stopping only to write the *Tao Te Ching* ... Joseph Bean in Hawaii ... and yes, even all the elves of Middle Earth (and some hobbits and humans, too).

The West is where things go, where people go. It's what's next, the direction of transition and transformation.

And now it's my turn.

Only, of course, there's no West in cyberspace, a land with no direction. But humor me, please, and see me heading West. I was LTHR EDGE for 10 years, but it's time for me to move on, time to begin a new journey. I leave these pages behind, in part from an all too human desire for immortality and in part because some have expressed nostalgia for the site that was lthredge.com. I have collected in these pages the core content of that site (for what it's worth—a value you will determine, not me) and have added a bit more, thoughts that never made it to the site.

I don't know how these pages reached your hand. I don't know if you know me, knew me, heard of me, or have not a fucking clue who or what LTHR EDGE was. I don't know what you will think of what I have written, and I don't know that you will read even one sentence more.

I only know this, my story. One leatherman's journey. And so I give it to you.

I never intended to become LTHR EDGE. It all started on America On-Line, with a screen name and profile crafted from the stuff of frustration. I had grown tired of not finding what I needed and I had grown very, very hungry for *more*. So I set out to find it. That was back in early 1995. By November of that year I had launched a small website hosted on AOL. It wasn't much really, because the Web wasn't much back then. It was just a few pictures of me and a few links to some useful sites.

But I grew, and as I grew the site grew too. By 1997, the year I held the short-lived title of Mr. Internet Leather, I had my own domain name, lthredge.com. With each update of the site, I added more—more pictures, more links, more stories, more essays, more resources, more thoughts. It grew and grew. Some time early in the new millennium I started blogging, too. That might seem awful common now, but back then it was a rarity and all that text just added more to the juggernaut that had become my site.

At its peak, it had over 1,100 individual files representing nearly 30MB of data. In its lifetime it was featured in *Unzipped*, *Cybersocket 1999*, *Gay and Lesbian Online* 3rd edition, and the Japanese magazine *G-men* (three times, no less). It was linked to, talked about, praised, enjoyed. It was something, yes, and it made something of me, too.

But by 2003-2004, things slowed for the site because everything else got faster for me. I had gotten so busy in the rest of my life that I was unable to keep the site updated the way I wanted it to be. And of course by then the Web had grown so large that my little site was just one cluster of pixels in a dizzying sea of electronic ink. I started thinking about taking it all down.

I didn't make that decision, really, until 2004. Those who knew me and the site wondered why I decided to close shop. Back then, I had more than one blog posting detailing all the reasons behind my decision, but in the end only one mattered: *it was time*. I sensed—knew in my heart and soul—that my site's time had reached its end, that it had run its course and it was time for it to go and for me to move on.

Down it came.

Since then, I've been tinkering with the book you hold in your hands (real or virtual). Just as the site had its time, so too this book: it will be done when it needs to be done. I got no doubt about that.

In the meantime, "West" I've gone.

There's something else about the West though. Keep traveling in that direction and eventually you come 'round again. Funny, that.

Safe journeys ...

—edge



Introduction: You are not Alone



ou are not alone. I know this for a fact because *I am you*. Or at least, I was you, am you, will be you again.



I have come to believe there's nothing special about me. That might sound self-denigrating but it's not. Instead, it's a mindset that enables a terribly powerful positioning. You see, control comes not from keeping a man in chains or hurting a man (these things are easy to do), but in making him *want* to be bound by you, in making him *need* to hurt for you (these things are much, much harder to do). For that to happen you need to get inside his head. And because there's nothing special about me, it's a simple task: his head is my head.

All that might sound like a Jedi mind trick, a mental somersault that helps me get into just the right space for hunting and for play, but when I say "I am you" I also mean that quite literally. Your heart beats with nervous excitement before a scene—mine, too. You dissolve in ecstatic pleasure when a long-held fantasy is fulfilled—me, too. You curse the world in frustration, looking and looking yet never finding the man you need, the scene you need, the experience you need—I know.

Whatever you're into—and I *do* mean *whatever*—there's a good chance I've tried it, mastered it, surrendered to it, had it done to me and did it to others, considered it, or have (at the *very* least) heard of it.

And I say none of this to boast. I say it for one reason only: because I, too, have felt alone. I didn't like it, and if I can let one person out there (you, perhaps) know, for once, for just this moment, that he is not alone, that there are others like him, that it's OK to think what he thinks, feel what he feels, hunger for what he hungers... if I can let *that* person know he is not alone then all the work I have put into these pages is worth it, and more.

Maybe now you'll believe me... You. Are. Not. Alone. Take comfort in that.

Of course, knowing you're not alone may ultimately be small comfort. If you are at the start of this journey, you may still desperately need others to walk with you. If your journey is far along, you may have lost companions along the way, finding yourself alone again. And, sometimes, even when we're embedded in a community and surrounded by friends we remain oddly alone, isolated by our own desires.

I can't help you with that, though there is a strong need in me to save and protect. Maybe that's why I've collected fragments of my story here. Maybe they're enough to bring you to where you next need to be, a place with others who recognize you, accept you, embrace you, and celebrate you.

And fragments these are. Some of what you find here are my thoughts on different aspects of leather and the wisdom I've gleaned about this culture and community as I've moved through it. Some of what you find are stories I've written—more erotic than pornographic—but even in fantasy I can't help but transmit core truths of what I know about this world. The rest? The rest are thoughts that have come into my mind and taken up a demanding residence.

Those thoughts are presented to you with minimal editing; this is a rough-hewn text. In part, that's a function of time—it's taken me over a year to get this all completed and I won't delay it more with fine-tuning. But, more than that, I wanted to preserve the content of the site, in all its repetitions (you will, to be sure, find recurrent themes and even frequent and familiar turns of phrase) and in all its imperfections. Those imperfections are not merely manifest in language—typos and grammatical errors—but also in the unavoidable fact that what I wrote I wrote in a specific time and place. Looking back over all this, a lot of it feels dated and some of it may no longer apply. Consider those parts history, a history grounded most particularly in the Northeast, within the gravitational field of New York City.

I am a gay male leatherman; that is the position from which I speak. And so I speak most comfortably to other gay male leathermen. You'll find, therefore, a lot of "he"'s in this book. But what I know I have learned from leatherfolk of all genders and all sexualities and so I hope that what I say will speak to anyone with an interest in leather. Forgive me for not engaging in the grammatical acrobatics needed to accommodate both he's and she's; indulge me my imaginary audience, but know too that whoever you are I do not wish to exclude you. Indeed, I invite you into my story, too.

So let it begin...



Tenets



From time to time, people visited my website and then dropped me mail asking how to get started in leather and s/m. I always answered such emails, and I always tried to give the best advice I could. But at some point I decided that for every person who had the time and energy to write, there may very well have been two others who couldn't, wouldn't, or just simply didn't. So, I created these tenets for novices, as a way to share some of what I have learned from my experience.



BE HONEST, to yourself and to others. Spend some time thinking about what really turns you on, what scene you want to explore, what gets your cock hardest. And *let* yourself be turned on—without guilt. For example, I have a friend who is sort of a peacenik. But he has *some* interest in knives. He has to accept that part of his sexuality, even though it may be in conflict with other parts of his thinking. Being able to articulate your desires and fantasies is important. When you do meet someone, they'll appreciate you knowing where you want to start. And, when you do meet that someone, be perfectly honest about what you have done, no matter how little, what you want to do, and what you are just not ready for. If you're not honest, the scene doesn't mean a thing.

BE TRUE, to yourself and to others. *You deserve your fantasy, safely enacted, and you deserve to decline any scene you're not comfortable with.* Being true isn't always easy. When I was first coming out, I was only into bondage. But most men saw bondage only as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. It took me several years to even learn that there was a whole bondage community out there that had *just* the fantasies I had. Be true and find your fantasy, on your grounds. In return, treat potential partners with respect. If you say you'll meet them, be there, or call and simply say you're not ready to meet. I know I appreciate someone backing out more than I appreciate being stood up—and, yes, I have been stood up—more times than I care to count.

BE OPEN to exploring new things. It won't kill you, you might not like it, but you just might shoot the biggest load ever. This doesn't mean you should walk into just any scene. Nor does it mean that you should let someone talk you into something you *definitely* do *not* want to do. When I meet someone, I like to tell them what I'm into, what my definite limits are, and then simply say "all else negotiable." Decide for yourself what you won't do and then think about what you might do.

BE PATIENT and enjoy the ride. No one becomes a leatherman overnight. Move at your own pace, and you'll get where you want to be in time. This is even more true for "edge" play. People tell me, "Take me to the edge." I always answer "Which one?" There's an edge form of whipping, bondage, fisting—anything. For me, edge play is about moving further and further into what turns you on. I am here only because this is where my experiences and desires have led me. Be happy where you are, and find your own edge.

BE SAFE at all times and in all ways. Trust your instincts. Don't take any risks with your health, or with your life. If it doesn't feel right, don't do it. Any ambivalence is ambivalence. It's always better to say "No thanks" and walk away from a potential partner—there will be another one. And when you have the right vibes, you won't have fear. You can let go, and you can grow. Try to have a first meeting on neutral turf, to feel each other out. And if you're going to be meeting someone, let a friend know who he is and where you will be and when your friend can expect to hear from you.

Safe journeys. Find your edge.



Being a Leatherman



I am a leatherman. That doesn't mean, simply, that I am into kink or that I like to wear leather. All that would just make me a pervert. On the contrary, being a leatherman means being a part of a *culture*, one with traditions and customs and mores and rules and protocols. If you're just a pervert, if you just like to do very kinky things in or out of leather, that's fine. But if you want to be a leatherman it takes work, *much* more work.

And an odd culture it is. We do not know our father's fathers or their fathers before them. We speak of the "Old Guard" but we do not know if they existed, if they existed in a way we do not remember, or if we invented them because, not having them, we *needed* to invent them. You may hear, too, of a "New Guard" but, really, that's even more of an imaginary construct, a life form that never lasted much beyond its embryonic stage.

Odder still, though we don't know our origins and can't reliably trace our history we nevertheless have definite traditions, ones that came from *somewhere* and ones that we strive to pass on, if haphazardly.

That cultural transmission is haphazard because of three great crises to hit the gay community and with it the leather community. First, the Epidemic of AIDS, which, starting in the mid-80s, culled from our ranks many, many good, strong men. Those were the ones who would have mentored the coming generation, would have passed on history and tradition. But most of an entire generation was lost and so knowledge had no choice but to leap across that horrid wound, jumping from an older generation a new untutored one. It did not always make it.

Then came the Birth of the Web. Our community expanded at a terrifying pace and in two directions. The Web enabled a massive vertical expansion as younglings who would, in other times, have come out as gay first and then, later, would have come out as leathermen suddenly had access to porn and stories and images and chat rooms filled with leatherfolk. At the same time the Web enabled a horizontal expansion that was just as massive. Men who had only a passing interest in leather participated in the same chat rooms. Unlearned and unskilled (and perhaps uninterested in learning or becoming more skilled), these men swelled our ranks in such a way that the next generation

had and continue to have tremendous difficulty spotting our number in the crowd. With the Web came too many needing mentoring and too few to mentor. The Web also crippled many of the core institutions of our community: magazines disappeared when porn came free on the Net, bars began to die when people stayed home to hook up, and clubs struggled to maintain membership when comradeship was found on chat sites.

Now, a third wave assaults us: the Rise of Meth. This drug is worming its way throughout the whole of the gay community, but as it takes hold among leathermen it stunts growth and knowledge even as it destroys individual lives. When the line between “play” and “party and play” threatens to collapse, we lose not only knowledge but the men who would carry it further, their minds trapped in the endless loops of addiction.

Are we doomed, then? I think not. In fact, I know we’re not, both because here I write and here you read.

To pass on to you all I know of this culture would take more than pages can hold, but consider these simple acts—rituals and customs both:

- ☞ A leatherman never enters a leatherbar without wearing boots. To do so is to profane that space. Are there exceptions? Yes, of course, but only when you hew to this tradition can you sense the occasions right for breaking it.
- ☞ A leatherman never touches a man’s leathers without permission.
- ☞ A leatherman never approaches a collared man. To wear a collar is to be owned by another. Are you a bottom wishing to be collared? Then wear it around your right boot, in your right back pocket, or—perhaps less preferably—around your neck but *with the lock unlocked*.
- ☞ A leatherman does not bring a cellphone to a bar and often does not wear a watch there either. That’s because the Leatherman is whole in himself and timeless in that wholeness. If circumstances demand you be reachable, keep the phone on vibrate and exit the bar to answer a call.
- ☞ A leatherman does not wear underwear. A jock perhaps, but not briefs or boxers.



☞ A leatherman knows the Nod of Acknowledgement. This nod is accomplished by tilting the chin down and to the left. When done quickly it's a way of saying "Hello, fellow leatherman" or even "Hello, you have permission to approach." When done slowly with the head in more of a bow, it's a way of paying deep respect to someone. Never tilt the chin up; that is not the Nod of Acknowledgement but a "What's up, dude?"

☞ A leatherman is true to his word.

☞ And, in the virtual world, it's "SIR" or "Sir" never "sir"—it's a name and a title of respect.

Do you know these things? If so, pass them on. Are you just learning these things? Take them into practice, find those who seem to know them too, who find these acts legible. Ask them questions and learn more.

Or, be a pervert. There's no shame in that and no judgment to be made. But, if you reject these traditions or the entire notion that to be a leatherman is as much culture as desire, then claim the label "leatherman" carefully; leatherfolk do not tolerate pretenders well.



You

*I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look
And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
—Daddy," Sylvia Plath*



waited for you. But you never came. *You never came.* So I became you instead. What else could I do?

I always knew you existed, knew it from the moment my cock first got hard. After all, I've seen you in my mind all along, dad in leather armor, commanding with a look, distilling all of masculinity, seducing me down to my soul. I didn't know a lot about you then, but I sensed you. From the start, I felt you inside me not as a presence but as an absence—some missing shape I could almost trace with my fingers along the contours of my soul. I didn't know where you were, didn't know *who* you were. I had no words to name you back then, but still I knew you were there. That counts for something? Doesn't it?

And then I found you. I started reading porn and there you were, in every fucking story I picked up. And so I learned your names: Daddy, Sir, Boss, Master, Sarge, Commander. I learned you rode a bike, worked on a ranch, were the best cop on the force, trained the platoon with an iron hand. You wielded a bullwhip like it was an extension of you, and you fucked like it was an art. Do you know how jealous I was, thinking all those men had met you and written about it? (Do you even care?) Each word, each turn of phrase, brought you into sharper focus as I spilled load after load in honor of you. I came to know you intimately and came to know, above all, that I needed you. You see, I never wanted you, never—that would be too easy. No, I needed you. That's why I kept waiting.

I knew you were out there—there was the proof in black and white, right?—so I looked for you. I looked in every bar, every weekend. I looked in all the ads and all the chat rooms. Sometimes, I thought I found you. But it wasn't you. It wasn't ever you. They wanted to be like you, perhaps even (like me) wanted you, but they could never be you—no matter how hard they tried (not that they tried very hard). Shit, the men who use your names! Fucking liars! There should be a law really, or a system or, well, *some* kind of protection. Because each time I sought to ease the pain, it deepened. Each time I met one of those almost-yous it just made my need for you, and *only* you, that much sharper, the hunger that much more real.

Still, I learned what I could from them, because I wanted to be ready for you. I learned how to black boots to a mirror sheen; I learned how to relax my throat into a warm velvet hole; I learned how to suck tits in ways that could drive men mad; I learned how to light a cigar, and how to take its smoke and ash; I learned how to offer my suffering, even though I learned that by offering it to “dominate” men who didn't deserve it. I got hurt a lot, usually not in very good ways. Each time I had to tell him to stop a scene, every time I had to admit it wasn't working for me, it killed some piece of my soul, because it was something I would never want to do to you. That's not what boys do, you know—they just take it. So I did, and I kept playing—good scenes and bad—just so I could keep learning. I thought it was worth it—anything would be worth it, for you. If only I could be worthy of you. I guess in the end I wasn't.

I figured you wanted a man in leather, so I got some. I wore each piece with careful precision, wanting it to be just so, thinking that if I could only get it right you would notice me. I looked at all the pictures of you (they're all over the net, you know, in a million pages in a million shots in a million ways). I wanted to learn how to dress, how to stand, how to carry myself in a way that would speak to you. My boots were simple combat. My chaps were bar style—not biker—as was my vest, with my keys on the right (of course). Perfect boy uniform, right? I thought if I had the right gear, if I looked right in it, well, somehow I thought it'd be easier for you to find me and that, when you did, you'd recognize me, welcome me. *Wrong.*

Then I thought it was because I was too heavy. It's not that I was ever (technically) “fat” but clearly I wasn't trim enough, slim enough, firm enough. If I were, you'd come. The men I met thought I was just fine, but they weren't you so how could I believe them? So I lost weight. I went to the gym. I lifted, I ran. Still, you did not come. That made me depressed so I gorged. My weight shot back up. I dieted again. You still did not come. I starved myself back into my leathers and ate my way back out of them. How many times? Fuck if I know.

Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but once, I cut myself. No, it's not what you're thinking. I didn't want to harm myself, because that's not what you're about. It wasn't sick, really. I think it was beautiful. I just wanted to prove to myself that I would be ready to give you whatever you asked, because I was willing to bleed for you, you know, and because those little cuts didn't hurt near as bad as the cuts I had



inside. I used a kitchen knife—Henckels—carving the wounds with care (not too long, not too deep), thinking about being tied down by you in your dark dungeon, begging for rituals of intimate bonding.

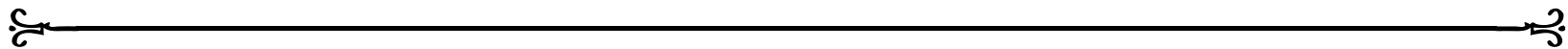
After a while, I used to wonder why you weren't coming. I was still ready, still waiting, but I wondered. Maybe you found someone else. That was certainly possible. Maybe that was you over there with the boy on the leash—he looked contented enough, that's for sure. But some part of me knew that that couldn't be you, because I know you'd have room in your life—*some* room—for me. Other times I worried about you. It's just the way I am. I worried that maybe you were hurt, or jaded, or burnt out, or somehow lost in this world. Those times were the worst, because I wanted so fucking badly to be there for you and I felt so fucking helpless that I couldn't be.

What more could you want from me? Huh? I could never be perfect enough. I could never look good enough. I could never be experienced enough or obedient enough or submissive enough or piggy enough. I tried. I tried with all I got in me, honest. All that, yet I knew—*knew*—that none of that crap really mattered. You'd see through all that—that's just how you are. You'd see my hurt, and my need, and *that's* why you'd come. But you never did.

I didn't mean to stop waiting. I didn't think I could have if I wanted to. It just happened, slowly. I'd be online and these boys would come to me, and as often as I told them I'm not you they'd still come. I was even concerned: all my signs were right, I was sure; all the words in my profile made sense, and they all called for you. Why did they come to me? Couldn't they read? What did they want from me? I dunno. I guess I was lonely then, without you, and so were they. Sometimes being lonely *with* someone else feels something like belonging. And, as lost as I still felt, they were even more lost, more confused. I knew their hurt; it's mine. These men, you see, they started coming to me and I could see they were waiting too, and I knew how it hurt to not have you come. So I came for them. I did for them what you would not do for me.

Maybe that makes me a better you than you are.

I came to understand. I figured out that I learned a lot from all those shithead almost-you's and now maybe I could teach the hungry others without them having to go through the crap I went through. Maybe, just maybe, I could come to them and they could leave me a little wiser, a little more centered, standing just a little taller *without* the disappointment and the tears and the frustration. Maybe that's what makes me you—not the leathers, or the experiences, or the skills, or the whole fucking arbitrary look. Maybe it's just that I learned the hard way and because I care enough about others—others I hardly fucking know—to teach them the best way I know how. Is that what you do, too? For those others who are not me?



At the same time, I was still waiting, *still*. Sure I came for them, but after I left their beds I would come home, looking for you all the way. In fact, I remember the last almost-you. I was careful, cautious. You only need to be burned once to know the color of fire. But it seemed OK, more than OK even. The vibe was there; the hankies were properly aligned. Thinking back though I imagine I must have crushed him with my expectations (how could anyone bear them?), but I thought he was you, so it was OK, right? It's not too much to expect *you*, is it? And I was so sincere—you have to understand that. At first, when I got there, I thought it would work. My cock responded to the you in him, and I let myself go. I responded body and soul, baring both in offering. But it didn't work. As things progressed, the chemistry fizzled, as though it had run out of some vital catalyst consumed in the reaction, and my cock failed me. Or he failed me. Or I failed you. I don't know. I only know I ended it, *again*. Not at first. I sat there, going through the motions, telling myself "I need to end this. *No*. Tell him now. *No*, please not again. You can do it. *I can't*. You need to. *I can't*. Now. Tell him now." And finally, I did. He was angry with me—can you believe that? It took all the strength I had in me to end it, wrung me dry in the process, and there he was angry—and disappointed. The anger I could have handled, but the disappointment was crushing because, still thinking he was you, it hurt me, mortally. I cried all the way home. Yeah, hope springs. But maybe not eternal.

Now I look in the mirror and I see you. My eyes have that same wisdom. (Did yours come through so much hurt? Did he not come for you?) My leathers are heavier, more intense—just like me, just like you. My boots are the ones I always imagined I would buy for you. The cigar I light now is only for myself and now those others, those hungry others, get the smoke and the ash. Now *my* cock finds the velvet throat, coaxes it open, makes it home. Now *my* boots receive the offerings of hunger, returning to them the answers they need (the same ones I always needed). I'm you.

I thought it would be hard to be you, but it's not. Not for me, at least. When you've been me for as long as I have, you know what it's like. You know the doubts and the fears and the longings. It's easy to climb inside a head when the floor plan is the same as your own. And being you just takes saying what *I* would need to hear. So I do just that, and I can see it, you know. I can watch their eyes and see something like peace seep into them. It's pretty powerful, I'll give you that. No wonder you're all you are, to have that kind of power over men.

Do I enjoy it? Yeah, I guess. I mean, I cum and all, but that's not what any of this is about, is it? I enjoy being there for them, giving them what they've been endlessly looking for, because that's what it's about—you know that. But some part of me, I'm ashamed to say, is envious, bitter, angry. *They* don't have to wait any more; *they* don't have to wonder any more; *they* don't have to hurt any more. Why the fuck them? Why the fuck not me? *Why?* It doesn't matter, I guess. I guess what's important now is that you're here, in me, and if I have to



carry the hurt around at least some others don't. It's not the way I'd like things to be, but sometimes we don't have a whole lot of say in that. I can't save them all, can't even save myself, but some's better than none.

Still, you know what's *really* weird? Once I became you, I think I needed you more than ever, even though you're nowhere in sight. There's so much to try to figure out, just trying to find my fucking way in all this, and there's no you to answer my questions or point me the way. I stumble along, blindly. If you couldn't come for me then, couldn't you come now? Couldn't you give me answers, or, if that's too much to ask, couldn't you at least help me find the answers myself? I guess not.

I've stopped waiting. I hate saying that. I don't even want to believe it. But it's true. I know it now even if I haven't accepted it. It reminds me of those nights at the bars, when I'd look at my watch and know that closing hour was coming soon, but I wouldn't leave, wouldn't go home, because I still thought you might walk through that door. So I'd sit there, nursing one final beer, leaning as casually as I could against the wall but for whose sake I didn't know, looking at the door, waiting. It's like that. I'm not waiting any more, but I'm not letting go either. You still might come. I don't even want to say that, because to say it is to believe, to believe is to hope, and (if there's one thing I've learned) to hope is only to see that hope die.

But how could I ever stop waiting? Especially now, when I am you? Wouldn't letting go of you mean letting go of myself? And where the fuck would that leave me? I don't know. It doesn't make sense, I know. But that's where I am—still confused, only about a whole new set of shit; still lost, only on a whole new path.

They say you don't exist. They say no one can be you. They say maybe we're all waiting. They lie. I know because I come for some men, and I end their waiting. *Why didn't you end mine?* Never mind. It doesn't matter now. I'm writing this though because I know you're out there, despite what they say. I guess I'm hoping that you'll read this some day; I guess I'm hoping these words will hurt you. I'm not proud of that fact, but it's true. I'm sorry. I'm sorry to say all this and I'm sorry if my confessions wound you. It had to come out. This, you see, is my exorcism. If I can't keep my hope for you alive I can at least set it free of me, borne ever onwards in these lines. And, maybe if I hurt you, you'll come then, and we can both say we're sorry. Until then, I need to be free of you, so that I can be you. I know you'll understand.

You know, I never expected you to love me. I never wanted to take up all your time. I just wanted a pair of boots to sit at, and warm eyes to look up to, and a confident voice to tell me, "It's OK. It's all gonna be OK."



The Koans of Edge



Like all koans, these statements demand a kind of meditation. That is, if you think you know what any of these statements and stories mean then it's time to think again. Each is a kind of knowledge, a situated truth, distilled into a concentration of word. Return to them again and again and you will be rewarded with new levels of meaning.

- ☞ A man came to me and asked, "Sage, how can I have everything I desire?" I replied, "*Desire nothing.*" He looked confused. The crickets sang. He looked disappointed. The birds chirped. He looked angry. The trees whispered. He looked contented. He understood.
- ☞ Look at your cock. It gets hard. It gets soft. It pisses. It cums. Finite. Look at your mind. It does everything, can be anything. Infinite. I say to you, if you seek infinite pleasure, seek pleasure in the infinite.
- ☞ To conquer others is to have power; to conquer yourself is to know the way. Brute strength carries no power, only force. True power comes only from Presence. To know yourself, to accept yourself, to live yourself—this is the path to Presence.
- ☞ A boy came to me and said, "Master, take me to the edge." I asked him "Which one?" He left. A boy came to me and said, "Master, please do to me whatever you wish." I told him "I wish for nothing." He left. A boy came to me and said, "Master, this is where my journey has taken me. Will you take me one step further?" I beat him with my fists, and he flew.
- ☞ Easy to make a man hurt; hard to make him want to hurt for you.
- ☞ A journeyer passed by and remarked to me, "Sage, surely you are lonely in this forest! Do you not wish to be like me, journeying?" I answered him, "The journey is not in the motion, but in where you go."
- ☞ Have you self-doubt? You need never believe you are hot. You need only believe others find you so.

☞ A journeyer came to me and said "Teach me about pain." I answered, "Life teaches that." He said, "Teach me about pleasure." I answered, "Quiet teaches that." He said, "Show me my path." I answered, "You are never not on it, so what is there to show?" He said, "Learn with me." And so we played.

☞ The boot is the sole of the Leatherman.

☞ A man came to me and asked, "Sage, tell me please the path to power." I replied, "Cultivate silence."



Sacraments



When *did* my interest turn into obsession? I'm thinking back, trying to remember, skimming over the events of the last two or three years (as long as I've known Peter) and trying to identify that moment, that one incident, that tipped my scales. But I can't, and somehow I find that frightening, even now after all that's happened, *especially* now after all that's happened. An obsession born of a single event is easily uprooted, but one that grows organically, one that seeps into your being until you realize you can't remember when it wasn't there—well, that one is there to stay.

Was it when I first met him? When I saw him whipping that boy in the demo? Fuck, the way he moved! With surety and grace like rage itself tamed and channeled into a singularity of attention. I swear, that man could carve his initials into a boy's back with such precision you would think it a tattoo (never an easy feat, but even more miraculous when one's initials are "PS"). But it wasn't just his skill that drew me to him. No. There was something else, something more, something that none of the mechanical Tops of our world seem to have these days. Passion? Yes. But also Presence-with-a-capital-P. He seemed to light up a room, as though all eyes (even those blindfolded) shifted to him, sunflowers to the sun.

Yes, maybe it was then—right at the start. And, now, considering it carefully, I realize why the attraction was so strong that obsession was inevitable: when I looked at Peter, I saw myself. It's difficult to talk about this without sounding egotistical, but if I don't explain you won't understand all that's happened, and why it *had* to happen this way. You see I too am a man who enjoys control, who relishes inflicting pain on those who so deeply hunger for it. I too look so at home in my leathers that you would see them in me even when they are all put away. I too attract men easily, without trying, as though they are, well, just drawn to me. In some ways, though we look different and have different interests and yes even different tastes in scenes, I *am* Peter. And, he is me. Given that, what else could I do?

How else could two Sadists make love to each other, and be true to themselves?

If I (or he) were a different man we would, perhaps, be lovers now or even Master and slave. But I am what I am as much as he is what he is, though I've tried to change. Yeah, believe it or not, big ol' muthafuckin' nasty-ass Top me tried bottoming, just to see if I could offer myself to Peter. It didn't work. It was, in fact, a total and unmitigated disaster. And I tried with the best, with Carmine, my very good friend and a Top of some renown. Thankfully, he understood: he understood why I was trying, understood it wasn't working, and

understood why, too. Nah, I couldn't bottom to Peter. And, looking at him play, seeing the glow of pure joy in his face as he worked a boy at one of the many demos he did, I knew he wouldn't bottom to me, either.

Not that that hasn't happened before. I've had more than one good Top at my boots, but something in the submission changes them. It doesn't lessen them (indeed, I count it one of the greatest honors I can be given to have a Top bottom for me), but nonetheless something in them is different down there at my boots or held helpless in a web of my ropes. Some quality is, well, not lost, but translated into something else. So, yeah, maybe I *could* have Peter that way, but in having him that way I would not *have* Peter—not the Peter I needed and longed for and, OK, even worshipped. No, Peter would not do. Only Peter would.

If I felt this was all one-sided, then I could let go—not easily, for sure—but I *could* let go. But the attraction (if not the obsession) was mutual. That much I've known for a while. I've seen it in his eyes as we watched each other at the bar or when we've chatted before one of GMSMA's programs, a kind of intensity and longing and hunger. I've even felt it, both the electrical chemistry and that undertone of frustration—it's bristled between us all along. I think, in fact, that our desire for each other is precisely what's kept us from getting to know each other better. It was just there, and neither of us could figure a way around it. And so we've remained only friends, something just this side of acquaintances.

And this, all this, was somehow more manageable when Scotty was still with me. We'd be out at the bar and I'd see Peter and then when we came home I'd beat the shit out of the boy and then fuck the crap outta him. I don't think he ever quite knew what sometimes turned me into that raging beast. Or maybe he did. Maybe he came to sense, if not know, that while he had my love someone else had a big fucking chunk of *my soul*. I guess that's what he meant when he left me, when he told me that he needed all of me. I regret it. I do. He was a good man and a better boy and I *did* love him. If I could have forgotten Peter, blotted him out of existence, I would have. But I couldn't.

It's been three months since Scotty moved out. Three long fucking lonely assed months. I've had boys, sure, and they've been enjoyable. But it's like eating nothing but rice cakes when what you want—no *need*—is chocolate cake, three layers, with extra icing. I was satisfied at times, but never sated. Never.

Early into those months, I came to recognize this obsession *as* an obsession. At the same time, I came to understand that the only way I could move forward, the only way I could avoid hurting the next Scotty in my life (or could even *make room* for the next Scotty in my life) was to see this through. I was left with a choice that seemed deceptively clear: do something about the obsession, or live crippled by it. I'm a Sadist. I did what I had to do.



The answer came to me suddenly and (I still think) inappropriately—in the middle of a scene nearly six weeks ago. It distracted me, lured my focus away from the boy squirming beneath the drizzle of hot wax I was raining down upon him. I shifted subtly but quickly into an immobilizing bondage scene. That gave the boy time to stew and float and go off into his world while I turned the answer about in my head as though it were some shiny object I could visualize and even touch. I released the boy soon after and sent him on his way. I might, in some other time, have enjoyed waking up to him, but the answer compelled me and I needed to be by myself, because some part of me did not trust it, did not feel it could be so simple after all, and I was afraid of it betraying me.

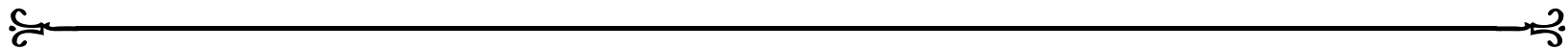
The key, though, the very key to all of it working was leaving everything—*everything*—unstated. I had to act carefully, had to speak sidelong, had to project my desires outside of myself so that they could be seen and recognized but not connected back to me.

Still, it was worth it. That much I knew.

Even then, it took a couple of weeks to put it all into place. First thing I needed was the right bottom. Not a pig. Nope. That wouldn't work. A pig would be up for it all, sure, but he'd just wallow in the sensations and so wouldn't be able to give what I needed from him the most. A slave? Nah. It wouldn't be right or fair—too much attachment and expectation. Only a boy would do, and even then it would have to be *just* the right boy, one with a careful balance of experience and innocence, so that he could handle all that would happen physically and yet, at the same time, be completely oblivious to what was really going on.

I don't think I've ever been so thankful for all the bullshit on AOL, the sheer variety of men and desires and understandings and expectations, because in the end, it wasn't all that hard to find Jimmy. Actually, he found me. His approach was awkward but sweet and I'll admit, guiltily, I paid him far more attention than perhaps I normally would have, because I suspected from the start he might be the one. Our chat was sufficient to establish his interest as well as his ability to get into the kind of play I had in mind, and his gif sealed the deal. He was in his mid-20's, 5'8", toned but not buff—your typical boy next door with a sweet smile and a tantalizing trail of hair down his chest leading seductively to his cock. After a few chats, we decided to meet. I played with him a couple times after that, and while I still had some doubt (because so much was, really, at stake) I finally decided just last week that it was time to give this whole thing a go. The boy could take it. I wasn't sure if I could, but need outweighed all other considerations.

I was terrified. You would never have known by looking at me, or even speaking with me. On the outside I was the same cool, cold Sadist. But inside I was shaking with fear, and still I don't know if it was fear that this wouldn't work, or that it would. I think what scared me so



much is that I needed to let go and trust. For one thing, as a Top, I'm used to getting trust far more than I am to giving it. But what's more, it's not that I had to trust someone. I needed, instead, to trust something like the universe itself. In short, before it all actually happened, very little of what would occur was under my control. I hated that.

Well, that, and the fact that at the center of it all was a lie. I hated that, too.

It was the hardest part of all, in retrospect, because I had to lie to Peter. I don't think I could have done it in person, or even on the phone. So, I sent an email:

P:

Hope you're well -- was good to see you last week at GMSMA. Thought I would drop you a line 'cause I got a situation I'm hoping you can help me with. There's this boy I've played with a couple of times now -- real cute, you'd love him. Well, anyway, he's got this major fantasy of being worked by two Tops at once. That's not my usual style (I think you know) and I don't think it's yours either, but, to be honest, you're the only man in this city I think I would be comfortable working with. So, if you're interested, and if you have it in your heart to make a poor sweet boy deliriously happy and fulfilled <g>, lemme know and maybe we can all three of us get together for a scene sometime.

Anyway, hang in there and hope to hear from you or bump into you soon.

--M

I was surprised to hear back from him the very next morning, but also so enormously pleased that I jacked off before even writing him back. He expressed possible interest (just as I would have had I gotten an email like that—you know, keep your options open) and wanted to know more, so I emailed him back with the boy's pic attached and described some of the scenes we had had. OK, I described the scenes I knew he would have enjoyed the most, and I described them in such a way that he would be able to imagine himself in my boots, doing what I did and relishing it just as much.

It was easier with the boy, much easier. I just called him and told him I had decided to share him with another Top. He was nervous, of course, but I could also tell that he'd do it—for me as much as for the experience itself—and that nervousness soon passed into tentativeness



and then, once his cock took over, into ardent desire. Even then he needed *some* reassurance, but after I told him who the Top would be, he acquiesced. He hadn't met Peter (not yet) but he had seen him do a demo once, and I think he understood that I was presenting him with a rare opportunity; he just didn't know how rare. I encouraged him to write an email of supplication to Peter—even had him run it by me before sending it off. I tweaked his words just so, knowing the effect they would have. And it worked. When I ran into Peter at the local Gristede's he mentioned the email and confirmed his interest.

Very *very* good. All that was needed was a time. I coordinated schedules between the three of us and worked out a time—this past Friday—for all of us to meet at the Lure, to test out the chemistry and dynamics. For the boy, I gave more exact instructions, detailing what he should be wearing (combat boots, the tight jeans he wore when we first played, his chaps, a simple T, and a vest). I also told him to get there about ten minutes later than the time I told Peter. Everything was set.

Friday. Can it really have been only three days ago? Yes, the memories of the day are fresh and clear in my mind, and yet, at the same time, there's something in it all that feels like an eon ago, as though the day had been lifted up and out of the normal stream of time. Friday. Fuck, what a day! I was excited from the get go, waking up a half hour early because I just couldn't sleep. There was a sort of nearly uncontainable glee in me. Even people at work noticed, commenting on the childlike twinkle in my eye and the fresh bounce in my step. I didn't explain where it was coming from, of course, because this was to be my own pleasure, my own *very private* pleasure. I skipped out work early just because I couldn't stand waiting for the hours to pass. I ate a light dinner half-heartedly and then spent a good chunk of the evening planning out what I would wear and getting things ready for the scene I hoped would follow.

Each item of my leathers was chosen with care. For boots, my 18-inch Chippewa high-shine engineers. I even polished them myself. Boy's work, right? Hardly. Any Sadist who can't show care and love for his own leathers has no right to them. So I spent a good hour with some rags and a tin of Parade High Gloss because tonight of all nights my boots had to be *just so*. Then my heavy leather pants, custom made on a trip to Germany, thick and supple with a drop-down sailor front (so damned convenient for fucking a face while staying fully leathered), tucked neatly and sharply into the boots. A simple black leather belt with plain buckle. Sleeveless leather shirt, buttoned down the front—the one that made my arms look like I'd spent more time at the gym than I actually have. A pair of my favorite Damascus gloves tucked into my left back pocket, and I was ready.

I readied the apartment for play, leaving toys of particular selection out and readily available and screwing the eyebolts back into the ceiling. Everything was ready early (of course) but I headed out to the Lure anyway; I just couldn't sit around any more and I'd rather wait there than at home.



Normally, I only tolerate the Lure. It's not much of a leather bar, but really it's all we got. But on Friday, it felt like mine—all of it: the darkness was mine, the ceaseless thump of music was mine, the few men in leather (and all of those not in leather, to be sure) mine. Something changed in that space when I walked in. I'm not always conscious of the effect I have (good thing, I think) but this time I felt it. The place seemed to wake up, as though it knew that something was starting, and I was the catalyst.

Peter, as it turned out, arrived a bit early, too. I swear I felt him walk in, though I had ensconced myself on the bleachers back by the pool table. Was it some shift in air pressure as the front door opened? Was it the imagination of a fevered, nearly nervous, and very horny mind? I don't know. I just know that I wasn't at all surprised when he came around the corner. We both broke out in smiles that mixed generosity and sheer evil. He, too, was in full leathers, though he had gone for uniform. His Dehners shined as spotlessly as my Chippewas, and a bright, nearly reflective yellow stripe ran down the sides of his heavily leathered legs. His shirt, short-sleeved, framed his chest, well, magnificently, and the gloves he wore seemed almost two sizes too small, stretched tight across his hands.

We hugged, tightly. My cock hardened. "Hey Marcus. Good to see you. Is the boy here yet?"

"Not yet. Soon. Maybe about twenty minutes or so. How's it going?"

"Eh. Same old, same old."

"I hear ya." I flashed another grin as he climbed up to sit next to me. The toe of his left boot rested against the right one of mine. "About the same here. But I've been having fun with Jimmy. Sure appreciate you climbing on board."

"Not a problem. Beats staying home and jacking off." He chuckled, and I joined in, but my mind was seized with the image of him jacking off, those powerful hands pumping his meat until it exploded in pleasure.

"Well, I think tonight should be worth it. At least I hope it will be."

He looked at me, seriously. "Marcus, I have no doubt about that. I've enjoyed watching you work on more than one occasion, and I'm happy to have the chance to see that up close and personal."



“Ditto.”

I went off to grab us some drinks and to say the required Hello's to those I knew. When I returned, we chatted some more while waiting for Jimmy's arrival. He was a few minutes late, but not so late that I had a chance to worry. And, I could not have scripted his arrival better. Peter and I were discussing some of the inevitable local leather politics and Jimmy simply stood before us and off to the side, hands behind his back, head slightly bowed, waiting. Fucking perfect.

I made the introductions. Jimmy was properly respectful but I thought I sensed some real nervousness in him. When Peter went to take a piss, I asked him if he was OK. He assured me he was nervous, but in an excited kind of way. Shit. He could have been describing me.

When Peter got back, I asked if they'd like to continue things at my place. Assent was unanimous, and the three of us made our way to the front door. It was early still (of course, anything before 12:30 or so is early in that place) but I could feel a sighing in the air, as though the bar, collectively, regretted our departure, missed the energy and the excitement and the sheer potential our presence lent to that space.

A quick cab ride later we were at my apartment. I told Jimmy to go take a piss, just enough time for Peter and I to have a quick chat about what might happen. He already knew Jimmy's interests and limits from the email he had sent, so we focused instead (finally) on us, on how we would work together to make something happen. And, I think, in what he said and how he said it, he got it—he knew what this was about, understood it wasn't about Jimmy at all, not about his (supposed) fantasy or growth or pleasure or anything. I think (even now) that Peter knew that Jimmy was a bridge between us, a blank sheet of paper where we could write our desires for each other, to each other. It wasn't in anything we said, really. We just had time to sketch a quick arc for the scene. But it was there in his aspect, in the way he looked at me, and the way he subtly shifted his weight towards me while readjusting his cock. Yes, it was there.

We were sitting on the sofa when Jimmy got back. He knelt before us, and I'll give him this much, he knelt right between us, showing equal respect. “Boy, Master Peter's boots look a bit dusty from the bar. Fix that.” It was the only invitation he needed as he fell into Peter's boots and gave them proper worship. That gave the two of them a chance to connect; it also gave me a chance to go fetch some of the toys we'd be needing. When I came back with the boxing gloves, the horny fuck had worked his way up the shaft of Peter's right boot and I could see his glistening spit on the shaft of the left one. I paused barely a moment, just long enough to take in that scene, to see, not Jimmy at all, but Peter, as something like a LeatherGod, receiving proper worship. My cock throbbed.



“Marcus, I think what we got here is prime, grade A punch meat. On yer feet, boy, and strip!” Jimmy moved quickly as Peter got up and came over to me. He took the gloves from me and held the left one for me. I inserted my hand. It felt like a beginning, or a courtship, the way he helped me into that gear, the way he got me ready to give that boy some hurt.

And so *our* scene started.

Peter moved behind the boy, grabbing his arms and holding them behind his back. Jimmy, I think, was semi-hard already—honestly, I wasn’t paying much attention to him. The way he was being held, the way Peter made the boy thrust his chest forward, it was an invitation. It said to me, “Yes, I want this, too, want *you* too, and I offer you this boy for our pleasure.”

It was an offer I was only too happy to accept. The first few jabs were tentative, testing. Jimmy looked at me with a mixture of hunger and fear. Beside those eyes I could see Peter’s, his face nuzzled against the boy’s as he held him tight, and in those eyes I could see more than a mirror of myself. Yes, I could see the same power and horniness and evil but something more, too. His eyes beckoned and challenged me at once, saying in some way “OK, fucker, show me what you got.” And so I did. The punches slowly ramped up in intensity. I glanced down only long enough to see that Jimmy’s cock was in fact hard, just long enough to make sure I wasn’t pushing him already beyond where he could go. With that erectile reassurance, I fell into the scene. Jabs became punches became poundings. With each blow, Jimmy oomphed, which normally would make my cock throb, but what was making me drip this time was the way his body would jerk against Peter’s leather. I could see the energy of each landing moving through the boy and into the man I wanted so badly, whose whole being absorbed the remnants of the piece of me set loose through my fists. All the while, Peter was talking, though I only half-heard his words, lost as I was in the image of my energy moving into him and his leathers. “C’mon boy, take it. That’s it. You want that hurt don’t you?” And more words, all washing over and beyond me except to the extent to which they fueled my raging desire to put more of me into each punch, more of me to flow through the boy into Peter. “Offer your suffering to that man, boy. Show him you need to serve a hot fucking LeatherGod. That’s it. That’s it boy. Take it from him. Look at him, fucker. See what a total fucking man he is? You need him, dontcha?” These words, I knew, were meant for me as much as Jimmy. Peter paying me homage, speaking his own desire in the only way it could be voiced. “I think the boy’s about ready for the next level, Marcus. Whaddya say?”

I say *yes!* I say *please!* But actually, I said nothing, just grunted and stepped back as Jimmy sank slightly in Peter’s embrace. He held the boy a moment longer, making sure he was OK before letting him stand on his own. He came to me with a wicked grin on his face. “Mind if I have a piece of that meat bruder?” “Not at all, buddy.” He helped me out of the gloves, his touch gentle and electric against my arms. I moved back behind the boy and restrained him again with my arms. His body felt nice—warm and naked, smooth and firm. But what really



made my cock jump was knowing that my crotch was nestled just where Peter's had been, as though I could still feel him on the body I now pressed against my leathers. Bare-knuckled, Peter resumed the beating.

I had never held a boy as he was being pummeled. It was more erotic than I could have imagined. Peter's punches were light but significant. Given that the boy was already sore from the beating I gave him, he moaned more and squirmed more each time Peter's fist landed on his chest. He writhed against me and yet I could still feel each punch myself, cushioned and filtered through the body of this boy. The motions of his ass against my crotch, pressing and grinding against my hard cock in its leather prison, drove me wild. The boy moaned. I grunted. Peter uttered more and more encouragement to the boy, more and more coded messages to me. I was increasingly lost in the symphony of sounds that emerged, all following the steady staccato beat of the smack of Peter's fist.

And then it ended. I emerged suddenly from my reverie to find Peter moving into the boy, hugging him, his arms reaching around to find my back, pressing the three of us together. "I think this boy needs his holes filled, Peter." He released his embrace, stepped back, and grinned. "Let's do it."

As I set up the sling I noticed we had been beating the boy for over an hour. It seemed like no more than fifteen minutes, but time flies when your soul is alighting on another. When the sling was ready Peter helped Jimmy up into it. I locked his wrists into the leather restraints attached to the chains while Peter did the same to his ankles. I looked down the body of the boy—chest reddened, bruises aching to blossom, cock bobbing—to Peter's crotch. He was working his cock out, getting a condom ready. I unzipped the leather panel of my crotch and my own dripping hard cock flopped right onto Jimmy's face. He wasted no time licking and slurping at it, and I maneuvered it so that it could slip into his mouth. Around that time, Peter was working the lube into the boy's hole. His moans vibrated against my cock in his throat, making it jump and making me slip it down into him a bit more. I slowly fucked his throat as Peter eased into his ass. Unconsciously, we came to match our rhythms—in and out, in and out—Jimmy moaning, Peter murmuring "Yeah" or "Fucking nice" every now and then, and me just soaking in the sight of the man I needed so badly in my life.

Our eyes met, locked. Jimmy dropped away. There were only two holes, and two Sadists needing and wanting each other. Staring intensely into his eyes, I could feel Peter in me, and I hoped he could feel me in him, too. Our pace quickened, intensified. Jimmy, perhaps, moaned more, but I didn't hear it. I didn't hear anything. There was nothing in my universe but my cock and Peter's eyes.

And then. And then he leaned forward, across the aching body of the boy, strained towards me. And I met him half way, until our lips touched. His tongue probed my mouth tentatively, and I sucked it in, greedily, needing some piece of him physically within me. I slid my



cock out of the boy's warm throat and stroked it, pumped it, as Jimmy licked my balls. Peter's fucking intensified. Our kiss continued. Deepened. I could feel my load churning in my balls. Peter's tongue moved deeper into me. I jacked harder; Peter fucked like a beast. I held my breath, relished the lingering kiss, and shot my load all over the boy's chest. Moments later, Peter broke off the kiss, closed his eyes, arched his back, and (I could tell) shot his load as well.

I went to work on the boy's tits while Peter jacked him, moving his own still-hard cock slowly in and out of Jimmy's ass. It didn't take the boy long before he shot a load as well. We released him from the sling and the three of us collapsed together onto the floor, resting as one mound of leather and flesh for a few minutes. Finally, I managed to stir and started to clean things up, fetching us towels to mop up the accumulated sticky mess we had formed. Everything else was left more or less as it was as we stumbled back into my bedroom. Jimmy, and I give him credit for this, was still in a good boy headspace, helping me off with my boots before doing the same for Peter. As we each stripped out of our leathers, the boy took each item, folded it neatly, and laid it into two piles, one for us each. Then we climbed into bed. I had wanted Peter to be between us both, but naturally the boy ended up there instead. Still, the memory of Peter's kiss fresh in my mind, I was content. The boy fell asleep first. I guess he was all tuckered out, and it was only then that I stopped to realize that he had been through a bit tonight, given his previous experiences. His breathing became slow and even as he turned and snuggled against Peter. I suppressed my envy, choosing instead to separate out the sound of Peter's breath as it slowly lulled me to sleep.

They left together after a lazy morning of coffee and bagels. I spent the rest of the day putting the toys away, but my mind wasn't in it. My mind was in the kiss, and I have to admit I jacked off twice that day thinking about it. Finally, after so long, I had tasted Peter, body and soul. I was a very happy man.

Happy, that is, until I got emails from both Peter and Jimmy this evening. Jimmy's was short and sweet, thanking me for the scene and for introducing him to Peter. Peter's was longer, and devastating. He thanked me too, but also related how he and Jimmy ended up spending the day together after they left my place. The final lines chilled me to the bone: "I think Jimmy and I might turn into something, M. Thanks for that. He's just what I've needed for a long time now."

Peter and Jimmy? Jimmy and Peter? But what about Peter and *me*? As soon as my mind voiced the question I realized how stupid it was. What had I expected from this scene? Did I think that Peter and I would somehow end up as lovers? I guess some part of me did, but what I wanted more than anything was to be rid of this obsession, to be free of it so that I could go on with my life. But the question that popped into my head, the question about Peter and me, revealed that the obsession was still there, only perhaps now stronger.



I wish... I wish my life were a story. Stories have endings. They may be happy or sad, but they're there and things get resolved one way or another. But this isn't a story, and nothing's resolved. *So what do I do now?*



The Fetish Map



he fetish map comes from my personal experience, both in life and online. I remember when I first came out, I was just into bondage, but it was at least two years before I discovered there was a whole community of people *just* into bondage as well. I didn't know they existed, and I figured I was alone in my desires. These days, I occasionally get emails from people that reflect similar experiences, people who write me to say that before they found my page they felt they were the *only* ones into pipes or guns or stogies or whatever. The fetish map is meant for people like this, and for all of us. It's a way of finding ourselves in our sexual universe, locating our desires among others.

It's also a kind of sexual anthropology from the field. I've spent a lot of time online and have learned a lot about my fetishes and the fetishes of others. I've always been fascinated by all the things that get us off, and this is my effort to record all I have seen and experienced and learned.

Manifesto

Behind these observations, literally grounding them, are certain axioms that I feel are fundamental to the fetish map, and to my own understanding of sex, kink, sm, leather, and play. They guide my experience, and I hope you might find them instructive as well. I present them here as a preface to the terrain of sexuality contained herein. I offer them to you as a manifesto:

☞ YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

No matter how perverse your desire (or how banal), it is shared by others. No matter how specific your fantasy, it is never yours alone, for there is always someone who desires to play the counterpart in your fantasy. We may not always find these others, but they are there, and the web has given us the greatest chance of finding our own kinky communities. Browse through Yahoo's dubs or E-Group's mailing lists for just a sense of how very not alone we are. There is a group for every kind of play, and if it doesn't exist, you can create it. And in creating it, you provide a space for others with your kinks to find you as well.

☞ YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE YOUR FANTASY, ON YOUR OWN TERMS.

The community has stressed "safe, sane, and consensual," and rightly so. But what about those of us who get off on nonconsensual play? What about bugchasers, who don't want to play safe? Too often, we vilify these people as sick, but in making judgments we forget how often we ourselves have been judged. If you fantasize of rape or kidnap, you deserve to live that fantasy, and you deserve to live it as close to reality as you choose. If you want to be pozzed, that is your right, your decision (though clearly one that bears close examination). *Never* let someone discount your fantasy. I am reminded of a program I attended on forbidden fantasies. It was put together by a nationally known leather group, and I was eager to see what they had to say. But, when they got to gun play, they simply showed a clip from a movie in which both men ended up dead, shot to death. The implication was clear: some fantasies should remain forbidden. Bullshit.

Living your fantasy on your own terms means validating your desires and recognizing that, as an adult, you are free to make your own choices, even if that exercise of will means choosing something as extreme as mind control, losing the very will that enables the decision. But living your fantasy on your own terms also means that you should not have to do things you do not want to do to enjoy the things you want to do. When I was coming out, my only experience of bondage was in the context of other kinds of play which I didn't enjoy as much. But I felt like I *had to* suffer flogging or spanking or whatever to get the bondage I wanted. Bullshit.

Your desire is true and valid, because it is yours. Don't let anyone discount it, and don't feel you have to compromise to live it.

☞ AUTHENTICITY RESIDES IN THE FETISHIST.

I meet people all the time who complain about people not into "real leather," people who just like to wear it out and then take it off when they have sex. But their desire is no less authentic than your own, only *different*. Someone who likes leather and likes to take it off isn't "fake"; that person just isn't into the same thing as you are. Our community is experiencing a phenomenal horizontal expansion thanks to the web. People are flirting with kink, trying it out, testing it. Rather than condemning them because they are not like you, recognize that their commitment is as valid as yours. Every person's investment in kink is authentic. Judging them assumes a single standard of authenticity when any person who judges could just as easily be judged by others.

☞ FANTASIES CANNOT BE REPLACED, BUT THEY CAN BE DEFLECTED.

There are certain fantasies that we want and don't want at the same time. We will never be able to rid ourselves of the fantasy itself, but if we think *behind* the fantasy, if we figure out the needs the fantasy fulfills, then we can find ways of meeting those



needs without the fantasy itself.

For example, some people have snuff fantasies. It's extreme, to be sure, and the real problem is that you can only live it once (well, the severe legal ramifications, too). But if those people can figure out *what about snuff gets them hard*, then they can meet the needs without having to be snuffed: is it submission to absolute power? is it an extreme of pain? The answers to these questions can guide you to new scenes. Ask yourself about your own fantasies. Whatever answers you find, explore them in other arenas.

I, for one, have certain mind control fantasies, including even brainwashing. Do I *really* want to be brainwashed? Naw. I have a rich, full life and a mind that I love. But that doesn't get rid of the fantasy. However, I've been able to explore that fantasy in safer realms, because I have figured out it's about escaping the enormous stresses of a very full life. So, things like learning about hypnosis have let me play with the elements in my fantasy, but in a way that leaves me undamaged in the end.

☞ THE KINKY UNIVERSE IS AN OPEN SYSTEM.

In a closed system, there is (literally) nothing new under the sun. But the kinky universe is never delineated—it is always growing, changing, and evolving. And this is a very good thing. I can remember when a leather uniform was hot, but not a fetish in and of itself. Witness now its emergence *as* a fetish, supported by groups like BLUF and leathersmakers like Tino. Gunplay was once, perhaps, a secret illicit fetish, but now there is GunPlayer! There was a time before vac pumps, before sleepsacks, before neoprene. But now each has a place in the kinky universe.

I find this axiom comforting. When I feel like I've lived all there is to live, played all there is to play, I remind myself that there is always something new on the horizon, and I wait for it to find me.

Encounters

Encounters in kink, leather, and sm come in many forms, but three of the main ones are sex, play, and scene. These are not to be ranked in value, such that scene becomes the "highest" form of kinky encounter, for each is equally valid. Moreover, none are discrete, for sex can be a part of a scene, play can be a part of sex, or scenes can involve new types of play. Rather than being seen as ways to categorize the encounters we have, then, these rubrics should be seen as ways to help us describe the facets of our experience: to understand that we may find just sex unsatisfying, or to know when we are in the mood for just play, or to realize when the time and place are not right for a scene.



Sex is an encounter in which the goal is orgasm for one or both parties.

There may or may not be kinky elements in sex, but in the end it's about getting off. Cocksucking and fucking are the most familiar forms, but one might also list frottage or mutual j/o. In sex, orgasm is the goal. Kink may help us get to that goal (hard nipple play gets our cock hard, which makes it easier for us to be jacked to orgasm), but the point of sex is not the kink, but the sex itself. Sex doesn't require that both parties get off, nor does it even require an ejaculation. But it does require some sort of orgasm, an intense release of pleasure for one or both parties.

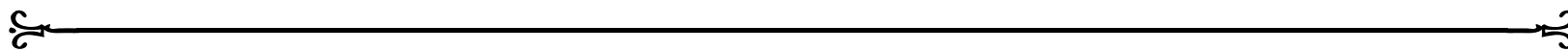
We may think that our encounters in sm are forms of sex. Perhaps, but not always. Kink itself is independent of sex, which is to say that you can have a very kinky encounter (and a very satisfying one at that) without any actual sex. We may say we "had sex" in that scene, but that is, in some sense, a misnomer.

I, for one, am not particularly interested in sex. Sure, sometimes I wanna get my cock down a boy's throat or want the privilege of shooting my load on a real man's boots. But my satisfaction doesn't come from the orgasm, but from the overall quality of the encounter. This is just another way of saying that if an encounter doesn't involve kink, if it's *just* sex (let's call this "vanilla sex"), chances are I won't enjoy myself very much at all.

Play is an encounter in which the goal is experience for one or both parties.

Play is an encounter in which we gain experience (add to our knowledge) by experiencing (absorbing sensations, mentally and bodily). It is a kind of encounter with little emotional investment: when someone says they want to "play" it means they want to enjoy the experience of kink with another person. It is not about submission or dominance, per se; more often, it is about trying new things or revisiting the things we have always enjoyed. In play, one party will often be the teacher and the other the student (of sorts), though it is also possible for both parties to learn from each other through a mutual exploration. It is also possible for two parties with near equal skills to simply enjoy the sensations of kink through play.

I first realized that play was a certain kind of encounter when I went to a leather run. I had been to Inferno and Delta, which also have elements of play (but with many scenes as well), but it occurred to me at this particular run that runs in general are about play. Runs are above all friendly spaces where all participants are open to experimentation. You could go up to someone and say "Hey, I've never been flogged. Could I try that with you?": and so you play. For example, at some runs I've seen a man with a complicated set up of restraints, winches, and bungee cords that lets you experience floating in suspended bondage. It's a "ride," of sorts, welcome to anyone who wants to try it. That's playing.



I say that play has little deep investment. By that, I mean that both parties enter the encounter with a goal of fun or enjoyment. It's recreation; it's exploration; it's relaxation; it's a blast. But, though we often say we've "played" with someone, play is very different from a scene, and precisely because of these investments we bring to the encounter.

Scene is an encounter in which the goal is meaning for one or both parties.

In a very real sense, a scene is not so much an encounter as it is a process. It is a method of transformation, of growth beyond simple experience. It is a way for us to make meaning because, by its nature, it is significant to both parties. There is a kind of intense energy in a scene that makes it larger than either or both parties alone. It underlies the spiritual and "sex magic" forms of sm.

Scenes are often planned, or at the very least they have some thought behind them. They require time (because the energy must be nurtured slowly as both parties get off on each other), and controlled conditions (because both parties must be able to focus on each other, and the dynamic developing between them). "Planned," in this case, does not mean scripted; it does mean, however, that there is intent in the actions: the Top means to push limits; the bottom plans on submitting more fully; both desire to go someplace neither has been before.

The intensity of scenes often creates great pleasure as well, but it's a pleasure that comes not only from bodily arousal (as in sex) and not only from the kink itself (as in play) but also from the knowledge of what is occurring between the people: the transformation they are sharing. The intensity *may* come from the sheer intensity of sensations: pain from a single-tail whipping, taking a whole fist, being fully immobile. But the intensity is not dependent on what is done, *but on what it means to the parties involved*. For a novice, experiencing a hood for the first time can be a scene. For a Top, having a bottom go further to please the Top can be a scene. It's never about anything else than the meaning that the parties take from the scene.

Often, the meaning created is shared: "You've gone to a new level for me/I have gone to a new level for you." But the meaning is not necessarily shared: "You have gone to a new level for me/Experiencing that pain has released my inner demons."

In fact, in any given encounter, two parties may experience it differently: a Top may just be playing with a bottom, introducing the bottom to something new but with no particular investment in the encounter while the bottom may leave the encounter with a new understanding of their needs and desires. The Top played, the bottom had a scene.

But these very terms, Top and bottom, require an examination as well, and an understanding of positions.



Positions

If encounters define the experiences between two (or more) parties in a kinky experience, positions define the sexual and psychological spaces they occupy. Positions include both the stances taken in sexual activity, such as **T**op and bottom, as well as the roles assumed in play or identity such as Master and slave.

Preliminaries

The first thing to understand is that sexual and psychological positions are fully independent of each other. In usage, the differences between the two are often elided, such that men talk about wanting a **T**op, Dom, or Master as though these are synonymous. However, sexual positions are dependent merely on the roles taken in acts of sex, while psychological positions are related to dynamics of power. Thus, a Master can suck his slave's cock: though the Master is taking a role assigned sexually to the bottom, it does not change the fact that he is the Master. From that position of power, he controls the encounter and therefore can assume whatever sexual role he chooses. Another way to think of this is to say that just because the Master sucks the slave's cock, it does not make him a slave or the slave a Master.

Sexual positions

The three basic sexual positions are **T**op, bottom, and mutual.

These sexual positions are generally conceived in relation to activity, though this is a partial misconception. The sense is that a **T**op is active and a bottom is passive, but while a **T**op actively fucks, a bottom actively sucks cock. This is reflected in terminology such as "Greek active/French passive." Perhaps a better correlation, though also imperfect, is to say that the positions are related to the focus of the orgasm: the **T**op is the focus of the orgasm, whether being sucked off or fucking, and the bottom enables this orgasm through a tight throat or hole (the bottom's orgasm being secondary or irrelevant). In mutual play (such as *69*'ing), each person's orgasm has equal priority.

"Pushy bottoms," then, are those bottoms who do not give priority to the **T**op's pleasure. Instead, they focus on their own pleasure and orgasm. However, most often, "pushy bottoms" could more accurately be referred to as "frustrated bottoms"; moreover, their demands most often relate not so much to sex, but to kink. In such cases, there is probably a mismatch between the **T**op's and bottom's expectations of sex, play, or scene.

"Switches" are generally believed to be men who can perform either role in the sexual act. Personally, as someone who both **T**ops and bottoms, I don't like this term, since it suggests that one can willfully "flip a switch" and be **T**op or bottom. More often, I believe, switches



function in relation to psychological positions: they tend to Top men less experienced than themselves, and bottom for men who are more experienced. This, then, reflects the power dynamic characteristic of psychological positions.

Psychological positions

As opposed to sexual positions, psychological positions relate to the attitude and behaviors a player assumes in the context of kink. These positions are most often assumed in relation to a dynamic of power, in which the player assuming the role with more power acts as Top and the player assuming the role with less power acts as bottom. It is possible to have scenes in which the power is nearly equal; this is reflected in psychological positions just as it is reflected in mutual play.

Psychological positions are difficult to define. Because they may or may not be integrated into a person's identity (some will play the role of slave in a scene, some consider themselves slaves outside of a scene) and because the extent of these roles are defined between two parties (some Masters and slaves will sign contracts, some won't; some assume their roles in the context of play, some live them 24/7) accurate definitions are dependent on one's one identity and desires. To define these roles myself would be to limit them, so I will only list as many as I can think of off the top of my head (there are infinitely more, based on each person's fantasies, and if I have missed some obvious ones, please let me know). In each case, the roles reflect a difference in power or experience:

Master/slave, SIR/boy, Daddy/boy, Parent/baby, Cop/prisoner, Sarge/rookie, Drill Master/grunt, Skinhead/boi, Headmaster/student, Hypnotist/subject, Coach/athlete, Feeder/gainer, Bear/cub, Kidnapper/victim, Rapist/victim, Feeder/toilet, Roper/bondageboy, Master/dog, Master/pony, Big brother/little brother, Doctor/patient, Pisser/urinal, SIR/pup.

Many people online refer to themselves as "Dom" or "sub." This terminology, I suspect, comes from the hetero kink community. Personally, I don't feel it is appropriate in the gay leather community because these are not roles (they're barely even *nouns*). Rather than describing roles, they describe attitudes (they are, after all, adjectives). Because they are not discrete roles, use of these terms can be highly misleading: someone looking for a "Dom" may really want anything ranging from an aggressive Top to a Master. Similarly, a "sub" can mean anything from someone who enjoys sexual domination to a slave.

While it is impossible to provide concrete definitions for any given role, I feel two roles deserve particular consideration: slave and boy. I find it most useful to consider these positions in terms of power. The divide in power between a Master and a slave is absolute: the Master has all power and the slave has none. Slaves generally find fulfillment in submitting fully and completely to a Master, though what "fully and completely" means will vary from relationship to relationship. In general, the power divide between a SIR/boy or Daddy/boy is less absolute.



Boys enjoy submitting to the power of their counterparts, however they generally retain some power over their lives. In no way, however, should the difference between slave and boy be considered in terms of emotional commitment: a Master and slave may be as deeply in love as a Daddy/Sir and boy.

One other role deserves commentary: pig. My sense is that this term originated in the raunch community to describe bottoms who were into (like pigs) filth: manstink, piss, and shit. However, it has grown to become a modifier for any role assumed in a scene. Someone can be a bondagepig, bootpig, smokepig, pisspig, fistpig, etc. In this sense, the "pig-ness" refers to someone who can't get enough of a scene, who therefore enjoys "pigging out" on their fetish.

A final note on psychological positions and online conversations. Note that many of the titles for a Top are terms of respect: Sir, Master, Daddy, and so on. As a title of respect, these terms should *always* be capitalized: "SIR" or "Sir" but *never* "sir."

Now, we should consider some specific fetishes. Perhaps the first that deserves our attention is leather.

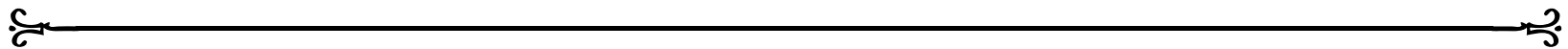
Leather

So fundamental does this fetish seem that it is often used synonymously with the the community itself: leather/sm—they seem to mean the same. It is also a fetish that roots our history *as* a community in post-World War II biker bars and groups. It seems to function, at times, as a unifying common denominator, such that people are not just into fisting, but leather and fisting, not flogging, but leather and flogging (there are of course numerous exceptions here, as everywhere). As such a universalized fetish it is the first we consider here *as* a fetish.

Appeal and Protocol

Leather is a material that appeals to every one of the five senses: it has a particular look, taste, feel, smell, and sound. Certainly, its physical presence accounts for a large part of its power as a fetish item, but it is simultaneously connected to icons of power and masculinity: bikers, cops, cowboys. Perhaps it is this confluence of the physical and mental which makes leather so very popular as a fetish.

At the same time, leather is intensely personal, or at least should be. Leather, after all, is a living skin (here I recall the leather shop in New Orleans, Second Skin). As such, every item of leather you own must be yours, must *become* yours. In saying that, I am not referring to physical ownership. Rather, I am suggesting that each item of leather we possess takes a piece of us into it. Perhaps the best compliment I can give a man (or receive) is the he looks comfortable in his leathers. Again, this does not simply mean that the leathers fit him; instead, it means that he is at home in his leathers, that they look like they are a part of him. Every person entering the leather scene should strive for



this comfort in their gear. Achieving it requires a mixture of activities. One should, for starters, care for leathers with cleaners and conditioners (Lexol is an effective and readily available brand). One should also *play* in one's leathers (or have scenes in or have sex in). It is primarily in experiencing our play in our leather that we come to feel at home in it. This is also to say that leathers need to be worn, since they become more a part of us the more we wear them. To cement this comfort in our gear, we must also consider confidence, which is in some sense the projection of our comfort. Confidence is symbiotic with our gear: we feel confident in our gear because it looks good on us; our gear looks good on us because of our confidence. Regrettably, there is no simple path to achieving this confidence. It results from the accretion of experiences we have in our gear, which is why we play in it, why we wear it often, and why we care for it so.

There is very little formal protocol to leather, probably because of its universal presence and availability. However, if you want to be precisely polite, you should never touch another man's leathers without permission. Few men may appreciate this behavior from you or understand that it signifies a deep respect of the personal power we each invest in our leathers; however, it is generally a good behavior to follow. Similarly, those interested in leather are advised to get some leathers of their own and wear them. Generally speaking, men in leather are looking for men in leather (one important exception concerns Old Guard protocols, in which a man earned each item of leather). Finally, leather today is available in a dizzying array of colors. Except for important exceptions such as uniforms (covered elsewhere) and except for rare personal preferences, leather should be *black*.

Variants

Any scene is actually composed of any number of sub-fetishes:

☞ Butch Masculine

Perhaps the greatest lament I hear online is that the leather bars are filled with men who only want to stand and model, who have no interest in playing in their leathers. But what we must all realize is that their interest in leather is not superficial; it's as legitimate as anyone's. I would refer to this scene as "butch masculine," because part of the appeal of leather for people into it in this way is the masculinity associated with it. Leather also serves, in this scene, to accentuate the body. Many men into "butch masculine" leather are also into their bodies and may spend a lot of time at the gym. These men may not be "kinky" at all, or at least not in the ways we usually think about. Their sexual activity may consist primarily of sucking and fucking (in or out of their leathers), but what seems to fire that activity is leather and, in that sense, they are fetishists like the rest of us.

☞ Biker

The biker look (and we may even say "mystique") is integrally connected to leather as a fetish. The chaps we wear are not (generally



speaking) cowboy chaps, but biker chaps. The jackets we wear are motorcycle jackets, and Harley's are (in themselves) something of a fetish. It's important to note, however, that there is a particular look when it comes to bikers, one that is not synonymous with leather itself. For example, we should draw a distinction between biker chaps and bar chaps. Bar chaps are made for the fetish community. They generally have snaps in the front, are cut tight to the crotch and ass, and zip on the inside. Biker chaps, in contrast, often buckle in front, may adjust with velcro in the back, are cut lower in the crotch and ass, and often zip on the outside (so that the zipper won't scratch the bike's paint). In general, biker leathers are made for comfort and protection more than anything. The lower cut of crotch and ass in biker chaps, for example, is perfectly consistent with the fact you'll be riding long and hard while wearing them. This emphasis on comfort and protection marks the biker scene as different. The "biker look" is not concerned with the neatness or cleanliness of leathers; dirty, greasy, road-worn gear is preferred. Leather may be mixed with denim, also old, worn, and greasy. Actual play can range from mild (fucking a boy bent over a bike) to more extreme (piss and raunch play).

☞ Cowboy

Cowboys, like bikers, are powerful symbols of masculinity, filled with the lore of the Old West. In terms of leathers, cowboys have a different style of chaps, often not in black leather and often decorated in some way. This style can include "bat wing" chaps, which feature extra leather in a wing-like flap along the sides of the legs. Closely connected to the cowboy leather fetish are the fetishes for nooses and hanging and gunleather. These more extreme fetishes will be treated later. There are also fetishes for cowboy boots, which I will cover in the boot fetish section, and spurs as well. Perhaps I might include here the fetish for "pioneer" or "mountain man" gear, distinguished by its construction from smooth and supple buckskin.

☞ Uniform

Leather uniforms combine two fetishes. Sometimes they seek to replicate an authentic uniform in leather, such as CHP or RCMP. At other times, they simply take the authoritative form of any uniform and recreate it in black leather. Leather uniforms generally consist of a uniform shirt and breeches. The shirt generally has two flap pockets on the chest as well as epaulets. Shirts may or may not include a grommeted badge holder. Breeches are distinguished by the pattern of stitching on the ass, which avoids a convergence of seams in the seating area (they are, after all, made to be comfortable while riding all day). They may or may not flair at the hips, depending on the preference of the person wearing the uniform. There is some confusion between the terms "breeches" and "jodhpurs." Jodhpurs are in fact very similar to breeches; the difference lies at the ankles since jodhpurs are essentially breeches made to be tight at the ankles. Often, breeches will have a stripe down the side. In authentic uniforms, this stripe should not be read as anything but the stripe of the uniform; however, non-referential uniforms may use the stripe to indicate other kinky interests: grey for bondage or red for fisting, for example. Truthfully, the meaning of a stripe can only be established by chatting with the man



who wears it; don't make assumptions otherwise. Recently, it seems to me that leather uniforms in particular have experienced an explosion of popularity. Some leather makers have, in fact, come to be known for their leather uniforms (in particular, Tino of New York) and groups such as BLUF have been formed specifically around leather uniforms. In some ways, leather uniforms have become the standard dress for our stock images of a leatheman, rather than chaps and a biker jacket. Men into leather uniforms may be into a wide variety of kink, ranging from simply getting off to another man in leather uniform to Masters with slaves.

☞ Sportbike

There is a sharp distinction between what we generally think of as the biker look and those into sport bikes, or as they are sometimes (and somewhat derogatorily called, "rice burners"). Sportbike leathers are usually one-piece leather suits, or two-piece suits that may or may not zip together. They are often not black, or not wholly black, but incorporate instead a wide array of colors such as red, blue, or white. I've found that men into sportbike leathers are often also into rubber, and there seems additionally to be a near-common physical type among these fetishists: young, svelte, smooth. To be sure, anyone who has looked at one piece bike suits quickly realizes they are not usually designed for heavier or bearish men. There is no specific kink activity integrally connected to this fetish. Sportbike fetishists can be into a wide array of kink, though I have found many who are into (at least) bondage.

Basics

If you are just getting into leather, you should work on assembling a basic kit: chaps, vest, motorcycle jacket. I would consider these the bare minimum passport for entry into the leather scene. The order in which these items should be purchased is entirely up to the novice leatheman, but once they are assembled, that person has a set of basic leathers.

Fetishist's Choice

There are a number of leather manufacturers so valued by leather fetishists that their names are instantly recognizable and almost fetishized themselves:

☞ Mr. S

Based in San Francisco, Mr. S has become perhaps the premier leather store. Their extensive and semi-pornographic catalogue is about as expensive as their gear. They charge top dollar for every item they sell (I have, in fact, heard them referred to as "Mr. Dollar Sign," which makes sense when you see their logo and their prices). At the same time, there is no denying the solid quality of Mr. S leather items. You can expect excellent construction, innovative and classics designs, and superb overall quality. Just expect to pay for it, too.



☞ Langlitz

Langlitz is a small, family-run company based in Oregon. They only do custom work, and they have *mastered* the art of working with extremely heavy leather, making their products extremely prized among fetishists. Because they are small and family run, and because they only do custom work, you must first get on their waiting list (with a deposit) before you can have your leathers actually made. According to their website, overall production time from first deposit to delivery can range from half a year to a year and a half. I am sure, however, that everyone who has Langlitz will tell you it's more than worth the wait.

☞ Vanson

Vanson is a commercial manufacturer of motorcycle leathers. They make jackets, chaps, and sportbike suits. The quality is excellent and the product is readily available. I myself have a pair of Vanson racing chaps, which are styled like the bar chaps described above, as well as a padded Vanson CHP motorcycle jacket.

☞ Heine Gericke

This is a German manufacturer of motorcycle leathers. Like Vanson, they make a variety of leathers; however, they are most known for their racing suits and euro-style jackets.

☞ Schott

Schott is a good basic solid choice to leather jackets. Their construction is solid, and their prices are not fully out of reach. The styling is classic. Look for Schott "Perfecto"—it's a great choice for a first jacket.

☞ Tino

Tino of New York has become known for his leather uniforms. These can often be recognized by the liberal use of piping on the leather, as well as the wide variety of colors. Some would say, however, that Tino has become a victim of his own success. His uniforms have become at times nearly ubiquitous and you may see yourself coming and going if you own a Tino uniform. yet this also attests to the styling and quality of Tino's work.

☞ Custom

Custom work is exactly what you want, exactly how you want it. Given the particular tastes of individual fetishists, custom is often



highly valued. David Menkes is one of the best custom leathermakers. He's able to create just about anything you can imagine. David made my restraints, my hood, and my muzzle with interchangeable gags. As a fetishist, I know I prize it <g>.



The Leatherman's Almanack



What is the Almanack? Primarily, it's a way for me to share tips and information I've accumulated in all my play. There are a number of fables for people getting into the scene which contain lessons I had to learn the hard way. But it also has all kinds of tips for leathermen. Like a real almanac, it is more than anything a resource. I hope you will find it such.



Rascal Briar Boy

He was a boy of such an age and appearance that you would have immediately recognized him, though you had never met him. Like so many of us, he occupied that nebulous territory between cute and hot, belonging to neither yet reminiscent of both. Yes, you would have overlooked him at the bar, at first. But he had a wit and intelligence that both boys and Sirs had come to appreciate. They called him Rascal Briar Boy, for his sly mind and ever-present pipe. Cock, his friend, was in many ways his opposite. Purely muscled and completely aware of it, Cock walked proud and erect with a head so swelled that it left no room for careful thought. He was hot: everyone knew it, but no one more than Cock himself.

The two friends were at the bar one night. Rascal Briar Boy spent a long time chatting with a very hot-looking Top. Cock watched jealously, knowing a scene was in the making. But instead, Rascal Briar Boy left alone. Cock swooped in, went home with the Top, and had a deliciously good time.

He called Rascal Briar Boy the next day. "Why didn't you leave with that Top?" he asked.

"Well, something in me just said no. Something just didn't feel right."

Cock laughed, "He was great! Your loss, my friend."

Rascal Briar Boy replied, "No, not at all. There will be other Tops."

Moral: Better to miss a good scene than suffer a bad one.

Tip: Keep your boots standing tall! Place empty one-liter soda bottles in your boot shafts. This will keep the shafts standing up, and will help them retain their shape.

Bully Top & Cock

Bully Top believed both in a direct correlation between volume of voice and greatness of skill and in the myth that boys were objects for any Top's use.

One night he was at the bar and cornered Cock. Soon, he was paddling Cock vigorously. When Bully Top had had his fun, Cock skulked over to Rascal Briar Boy.

"Cock, you don't enjoy paddling like that. Why did you let him do that to you?"

"I was being a boy."

"No, you were being a fool."

Moral: You always have the right to say NO.

Tip: Condition your gloves! Keep old gloves in good condition. Put them on and then rub in just a little unscented hand-lotion, like Lubriderm.

Cock & the Rules

Cock impulsively purchased chaps in auction online without seeing them. He was sorely disappointed when they arrived and were brown, not black. In disgust, he gave them to Rascal Briar Boy.

"What's wrong with them, Cock?"

"Everyone knows leather should be black."



"Oh. If you say so."

The next week, Rascal Briar Boy wore the chaps to the bar. He wore, as well, brown cowboy boots with spurs, a western vest, and a white straw cowboy hat. Cock, in his black leathers, had little luck that night while Boy chatted with countless men and went home with a very hot Top.

Moral: If you truly know the rules, you will also know how to break them.

Chemistry/Compatibility

Rascal Briar Boy spent one night at the bar furiously making out with a very hot man. They chatted for quite a while, but then each parted and went to look for new conquests.

"Another silly gut feeling, Boy?" asked Cock.

"Oh, no. The chemistry was perfect."

"Then why didn't you go home with him?"

"In the end, our kinks were too different."

"Then why not go home with that man over there? I know he's into all the same things you are."

"True. But there is no chemistry there."

Moral: Chemistry and compatibility do not always coincide.

Tip: Wet that gag! Bandanna gags can dry out a mouth. Wet first, with the fluid of your choice.

Cocks Rush In

Cock and Rascal Briar Boy both decided to get police uniforms. Cock went right out and bought an amalgam of uniform items. When he wore his uniform to the bar, he got no attention at all.



Boy took a lot longer to put his uniform together. In the end, it was just like Cock's and when Boy wore it, he got a lot of compliments.

"I don't understand," said Cock. "I look better in my uniform, so why are you getting so much attention with yours?"

"That's not what it's about. I took the time to study men in uniform at the bar, what they wore and how they wore it. I don't need your body. I know how to wear this."

Moral: Observation is education.

Boy's Uniform

It was uniform night at the bar. Cock wore his police uniform and headed out. On the way he met Rascal Briar Boy, who was wearing a UPS uniform.

"You call that a uniform, Boy? Don't you think a cop uniform is hotter?" Cock asked.

"Yes, I suppose. But I like this one, too."

They arrived at the bar and immediately Cock was lost in a sea of cops. Everyone, it seemed, was in police uniform and no one noticed Cock. In contrast, several men complimented Boy on his uniform, and he went home with the hottest cop there.

Moral: When everyone is zigging, zag.

Tip: Smoke in your hotel room! Cover the smoke detector with a damp washcloth, then the shower cap, then a rubber band. Have your stogie fire alarm-free.

Daddy Bottom

Daddy Bottom had been around for many years. Though older, he was handsome, but Cock would never give him the time of day. "Why should I bother with someone that old, Boy, and a bottom at that!" he would ask. But Rascal Briar Boy always took the time to greet him at the bar with "Good evening, and happy hunting."



"Cock was surprised one night when Daddy Bottom came in with two very hot (and younger) men. Cock looked and lusted and plotted. "Surely I will get one of those men. They couldn't be interested in an old codger like that!"

He didn't have a chance to find out. Boy was saying hello to Daddy Bottom, and before Cock could make any move, the four of them left.

Cock, of course, called the next day. "What was that all about, Boy?"

"That, Cock, is what comes from respecting any man who plays seriously and honorably."

Moral: Respect costs nothing and earns everything.

Tip: Keep those pants in! When tucking your pants into your boots, use blousers. These are small elastic straps with velcro sold at Army Surplus stores. Pull your pants leg tight, wrap the blouser around, and the pants will stay put.

Cocks & Thinking

Rascal Briar Boy saw Cock leaving the bar with a very hot looking man, one who also looked like a very heavy player. He called Cock the next day. "How did it go?"

"Bad. I'm bruised in places I shouldn't be bruised. He was into a lot more than I was."

"Well, didn't you discuss that at the bar?"

"Of course not. Didn't you see how hot he was?"

"I did. But maybe you've learned learned something from this."

"Like what?" Cock replied.

Moral: Cocks don't think. You should.



The Hot Leatherman

Cock and Rascal Briar Boy were both in awe of an incredibly hot Leatherman at the bar. Even Cock was intimidated by how very hot the man was. But Boy screwed up his courage and went over just to compliment the man on his striking good looks.

"I just wanted to say, you're the hottest man here."

The leatherman looked surprised, almost shocked, and then very pleased.

"Thanks! I would have never thought so myself."

They chatted more and wound up going home together.

Moral: The hottest man often has the greatest self-doubt.



On Power



Increasingly, I have come to realize that I have a unique fetish: POWER.

I know it doesn't sound very unique; after all, who *isn't* into power in the leather/sm community? But I think power is a fetish unto itself—one that does not automatically inhere to sm. I know of masochists into heavy pain trips and the endorphin rush that comes with them who aren't necessarily into power itself. Similarly, there are bondage enthusiasts who enjoy a give-and-take scene which they connect intimately to childhood games. Indeed, the very diversity of our community suggests that while power may at times play a role in our play, it is not always the primary fetish. For me, it is.

Unfortunately, there are no hankies for power (or boots or gloves or stogies or breath control or many of the activities that I personally associate with power). But true power doesn't need hankies. It flags itself.

Still, I wanted to put some of my feelings for this ur-fetish into words—to give, in some sense, my leather philosophy. If you're looking for porn, go to Smut Lit now. This essay won't make you horny. It might make you think. And it will certainly let you know how I think. And in thinking about power, I've found two terms useful: ascesis and sprezzatura.

A Brief History of the Fetish

But first, some background on fetishism which I hope will explain why this fetish strikes me as so unique. According to Daddy Freud, the fetish is a uniquely male phenomenon (though this tenet has been challenged in theory by the feminist critic Naomi Schor, as well as in practice by both lesbian and het female players). In classic psychoanalytic theory, the fetishized object is a boy's defense against castration anxiety. Little boy accidentally sees Mommy, who has no penis. Mommy has been castrated. So, instead, the boy looks down at Mommy's shoe (or fur or glove or hair or whatever) and that becomes Mommy's penis. Freud believed that some degree of fetishism was naturally a part of love. We come to associate objects with the loved one: the smell of their hair, or a unique fragrance, the sound of their voice, the memento of a stolen moment. But fetishism was also capable of becoming a sexual perversion. Thus, he writes in the *Three Essays on Sexuality* that "The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary

condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of the normal aim, and, further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the sole sexual object" (20). This is the fetishist as many of us understand him/her (though without the pathology: s/m and fetishism in and of themselves are no longer psychological illnesses). Who hasn't gotten hard over a pair of boots, or leather jeans, or gloves, or a stogie—even when they are *not* being worn, or are not attached to a particular person? Who is not aroused by our fetish objects themselves?

Power, however, is uniquely different, for it is always relational. According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault (himself an avid gay masochist), power is a "multiplicity of force relations," or the "interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (*Introduction* 92, 94). Power is the effect of any relationship, since relationships are always necessarily relationships of difference. No two people are identical. The multitude of differences (in gender, age, race, class, sexuality, social power, knowledge, strength) creates power. So *unlike* the classic fetish, which is an object detached from the individual and endowed with displaced sexual aim ("likened," as Freud writes, "to the fetishes in which savages believe that their gods are embodied" [19]), power, as a fetish is *never* detached from individuals since it relies on relations between yourself and another. A boot can make you wet or hard, but you cannot have that same effect from power, unless it is power exercised *by* someone *on* you. Thus, for me, a uniform can make me hard not because it is a uniform, not because it contains some residue of the authority associated with uniforms, but only because it will be worn, is worn, can be worn. And the man that wears it can control me.

And for that man to control me, he must have the ability to form power in relation to me. Power is not something I can give, or something he can take. It is not a question of domination or submission. Power is created between us, in the relations we form in our play. Thus, I don't respond to a man who impetuously barks orders or beats me senseless. Neither act creates power itself. Instead, I respond to a man who has the potential for real sexual power, and in that sense, he must have a sexual power to start with, for it is in my response to him and his response to me that the scene is created, and power as well. And for me, that is a man who practices both asceticism and sprezzatura.

Asceticism

"Sexual ethics requires, still and always, that the individual conform to a certain art of living which defines the aesthetic and ethical criteria of existence. . . . As for the definition of work that must be carried out on oneself, it too undergoes, in the cultivation of the self, a certain modification: through the exercises of abstinence and control that constitute the required asceticism, the place allotted to self-knowledge becomes more important."—Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 67-8



The third volume of Foucault's multivolume work, *The History of Sexuality*, is called *The Care of the Self*. In it, Foucault explores the first two centuries of Western history—Rome—locating a decisive break from the Greek vision of sexual pleasure resulting in increasing concern and anxiety around sex which lasts to this day. As part of this study of classical texts, Foucault examines the development of ideas about "the cultivation of the self" or the "art of existence." It "took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it become instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science" (45).

While in these ancient texts asceticism, the work that must be carried out on oneself, involved self-discipline from pleasure and abstinence (leading to the Christian ascetic tradition), I would like to use the term instead to describe the kind of work we do on ourselves when we play: sort of the self-discipline of pleasure. Experience is, for me, the foundation of sexual power. I've found this particularly true as I have started to Top. I find that I can only really enjoy bottoming for men who have more experience than I do. Similarly, I enjoy Topping men/boys with less experience than myself. Experience is the basis of an important inequality which engenders power for me.

This makes a lot of common sense. When you want to submit, you tend to find someone who knows what they're doing. But in terms of the fetish of power, asceticism goes deeper. It's a kind of cultivation and refinement of experience. The man who practices asceticism does not simply get pleasure from playing, he garners it, draws it in to him, makes it a part of himself. This is just to say that asceticism is a form of learning about pleasure: both your own and that of others. Learning how you enjoy receiving pleasure, as Top or bottom, and learning how to please. *That* kind of experience, that kind of *cultivated* experience, is crucial for enacting the kind of power dynamic I find so very sexy.

We all play. The man who practices asceticism also *works* at his play, even as it *works* at him.

Sprezzatura

"But I, imagining with my self often times how this grace cometh, leaving apart such as have it from above, find one rule that is most general which in this part (me think) taketh place in all things belonging to a man in word or deed above all other. And that is to eschew as much as a man may, and as a sharp and dangerous rock, Affectation or curiosity, and, to speak a new word, to use in everything a certain [Sprezzatura], to cover art withal, and seem whatsoever he doth and sayeth to do it without pain, and, as it were, not minding it."—Castiglione, *The Courtier*, translated by Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561



If ascesis is something like the raw material of power—the sheer weight of experience—sprezzatura refines that raw power into an integrated style. In Renaissance terms, sprezzatura is art which is so artful it seems natural. The courtier's dress, manners, speech are practiced to a degree that they seem fully inherent. And so too with a leatherman.

I respond to a man with that sense of integrated style, whose leather is worn within him. Words can't adequately capture this quality, but imagine this: the man who has sprezzatura walks into the bar, fully at ease in that space or any space, fully at ease in his leathers or any dress. He commands not with a barked order, but with a look, a gesture, simply because command is so naturally a part of who he is. And you want to submit to him, serve him, suffer for him, simply because that is the only way your self and body knows how to respond to him. He naturally requires it, and you naturally give it. But there is nothing natural about these sexual roles we assume. It is only sprezzatura that makes them seem so.

Sprezzatura is the quality of all our fantasy men. But while those men never really exist that does not mean the qualities we love in fantasy men cannot be possessed by real men. A leatherman with sprezzatura has stepped into his leather so completely that he naturally resembles that creature of art, written and visual, the fantasy leatherman. Yet he is real, and human. He is intelligent and honest. He is not the fantasy, but you don't care.

That is power to me.

The Leatherman

Ascesis and sprezzatura combine to form a very powerful man. Ascesis, his work in play, his experience in getting and giving pleasure, means that he will take you where you need to go, perhaps just a bit beyond. Sprezzatura, the ease of his style, means that his role feels natural to him, and in that, your role feels natural to you as well.

That combination of experience and style is intoxicating, and powerful in itself. In my sexuality, it forms a core of my desires and my greatest fetish, power itself. The man who practices ascesis and sprezzatura bridges the real world and the fantasy life. And so I submit, because that is an integral part of the fetish of power: his power is only real when it is exercised. My cock is only hard when I feel his power and in turn help create it, adding to my ascesis and his, learning his style and making it my own.

And shooting a big load in the process <g>.



The Path of Shiva



Sadist without a philosophy is a bully. If you do not understand your Sadism you cannot control it; it will control you. A masochist without a philosophy is a victim. If you do not understand your masochism you cannot offer it to another; you will submit only to your own misunderstood needs. Let me ask you then, be you Top or bottom, "*Why do you hurt?*"

I cannot offer you my answer to that question, for my philosophy is mine and mine alone. You must find these truths for yourself since, in the end, they will be most true only to you. And yet I will share with you what I have learned, to provide a model of what such a philosophy looks like.

I love to beat the inner thighs of men—with my fists, with sap gloves, with blackjacks, with a mag flashlight, and more. It is excruciatingly painful. The men who suffer this scene, without exception, cry and bruise. Yet it is also the most intimate scene I do, and for each man who falls under my fists, each man whose gaze is locked in mine throughout it all, I am there to catch him when he falls, to hold him as he floats back down to earth, and to cradle him as he stands again, and taller.

And yet I would not say I am into pain. I don't "get off" on hurting men and in that sense pain means *nothing* to me. Rather, I get off on where pain takes a man, the journeys he is able to complete in his head, heart, and soul. And so pain is just a tool. Were I able to take a man to that place by throwing popcorn at him, I would do so.

Central to my Sadism is creation, but only the creation made possible in destruction. As the Hindu god Shiva reminds us, there is no creation without destruction. For me, then, to follow my path, the path of Shiva, is to remember this: that which creates nothing, is nothing; that which does not destroy, does not create.

That then is the core of my philosophy. What's yours?

On Humiliation



recently received an email from a visitor to this page. After reading my piece, "On Power," he asked about his own particular fetish, humiliation:



"Again, in summary, what is the turn on about humiliation?"

I thought I would reprint my reply here, for others who might have these or similar questions.

Let me start by saying that I don't think we can ever fully explain our turn-ons, nor do I think we would want to. I think they would lose some of their power if we could. So, if humiliation turns you on, that's the only thing, not the why of it. Accept, trust, and explore that.

One could give any number of reasons for the fetish, after all. It establishes a man's dominance over you, it makes your own submission a felt experience for you. It might connect to some long-forgotten childhood experience, or you may be acting some old script from some family dynamic. To flip this all around, it may be your way of conquering feelings of humiliation, since after all, you don't end up, in fact, humiliated, but end up turned on. It's one way for you to control your own feelings of humiliation by channeling them into sex, and as you yourself observe, nullifying them so that what's done once is less and less humiliating each time it's done.

Humiliation is a common turn-on, I think. I've certainly heard a lot of boys who say they enjoy it. But it also strikes me as a very personal turn-on: what humiliates you may not humiliate another. Thus, I don't think the fetishness of it lies in this or that act. As you said, sometimes an act only humiliates you once or twice and as you also say it might work again and again with the right person.

It would seem, then, that your fetish, like my fetish power, rests in your relationship to someone else. In thinking about this yourself, it might help to think not so much about what's being done to you, but about who is doing it. Often in sex we're so wrapped up in our turn-on (it is, after all, *our* turn-on) that we lose focus on the other person. If you can replay those moments and think about that person—what he's doing—what the two of you are doing together, it might help you understand why it turns you on so much. For, like power, you need

someone else to enact this fetish. While you may be able to humiliate yourself, it hardly seems as much fun. Thinking about the relationship occurring between you and him might give you the insight you're seeking.

Finally, I would add this: respect is key. I'm assuming, and hoping, that you enjoy being humiliated by men who, at base, respect you. I think it's also possible to find men who don't care one jot about you, and humiliate you because of that. That seems dangerous, unfulfilling, and unhealthy to me. But there are also men who share your fetish; I know, because I've discovered in my sexual exploration that no one is ever alone in a fetish. Someone else, possibly many others, shares it. So, seek those men. It may be that they will have the connection you need to enact the humiliation again and again, to cum again and again.

Good luck. And lemme know if this helps...

Apparently it did, and I hope this helps you as well.



SM Netiquette



was asked recently to help NYC's GMSMA with a program on "getting on and getting off"—sm on the web. In particular, I was asked to talk about sm netiquette. Rather than just making a list of do's and don't's, I hoped to open up some of the possibilities of seeking sm online. I offer it here for any who may be interested:



I begin with apologies, a wholly appropriate gesture when discussing etiquette of any kind. I apologize because I am no expert on *this* aspect of the web—no Emily Postnews—and, yes, there is such a website. To find it, and others on netiquette, go to www.yahoo.com and plug in netiquette.

While no expert by education, I am Mr. Internet Leather 1997, a title which means little more than that I have a homepage and it looks pretty good. Still, title-holding has so few privileges (especially when your reign is past) that I'll claim authority by that title. I am also perhaps qualified to speak merely because I spend 5-8 hours online each day, most of it looking to or in fact getting off. I offer you, then, my personal observations on sm online, netiquette, and logging on to get off.

First, some general guidelines when seeking sex online. **NEVER TYPE IN ALL CAPS, PLEASE, IT IS THE EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING.** At the same time, always capitalize "Sir," to show the respect implicit in the title, and for inverse reasons, never capitalize boy or slave. Indeed, if you feel that you are a slave and not a boy or bottom, you may wish to forsake all capitalization when referring to yourself, especially when typing "i" or your name.

Email, in its similarity to letter-writing, calls for a whole separate protocol of netiquette. Don't forward pointless mail: no one is stealing kidneys, there is no good times virus, and Bill Gates would not part with a nickel of his money even if he were beta-testing an email tracking program. Quote from messages, and do so judiciously. Since email is somewhat ephemeral, I may not remember what I sent you. Sending back "yeah, that sounds hot" mean little if nothing if you don't quote what it was that got you so hard. Emails have subject lines;

use them. My mouse button is near worn off from deleting mail that has missing or irrelevant subject lines, so make it clear what the content is (it's called, after all, a *subject* line). Finally, reply to any mail you get from someone. A simple "Thanks, not interested" is all it takes.

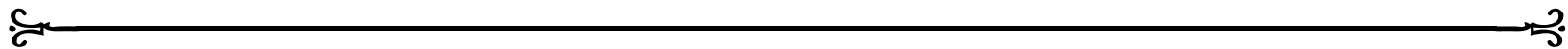
When chatting in public cyberspaces, be aware of the topic. CIGARS M4M on AOL is a room for men into stogie sex—it's not the best place to discuss Monica Lewinsky's favored cigar gauge. Be friendly and polite in these rooms or channels. Keep in mind that sex doesn't happen much in public chat spaces, but discussion can. In private chats, don't be instantly demanding. Most people will not respond if the first thing you ask them is "stats?" Take your clues from the other party when chatting privately. If someone sends you, "Hello, Daddy" sending back "Howdy, boy" would make more sense than "on your knees before you approach me, slave." Private chat is a conversation, so treat it as such. Open with a greeting, perhaps a compliment on a particularly hot sounding name or profile, and respond from there.

For newsgroups, stay on topic. Few if any are appropriate for personal ads. Speak to the list when you have something to contribute to what is being said. Otherwise, sit back and enjoy the exchange. Popping in with "I agree" adds nothing to the conversation, so if you're going to post to the list, make sure it's something that will move the discussion forward.

If you are designing a homepage, remember that others don't have the same computer. Keep in mind that people have lower bandwidths, slower computers, and older browsers. Accommodate them as well by keeping your design simple. Avoid pages packed with full-sized gifs of yourself. Yes, you're hot. No I can't wait for the images to load to prove it. Shrink them down to manageable thumbnails and I'll dick them in turn. Avoid clashing colors or busy backgrounds which can make it all but impossible to read your text. Avoid pointless graphics that look "cute" or "hot" but simply frustrate your surfer as they wait for them to load. Avoid midi music that plays automatically. Yes, I, too, love the disco classic "it's Raining Men," but I don't want to hear it digitized while I am listening to something richer, and probably better, on my own stereo. What's worse, keep in mind that illicit work-bound surfers will have co-workers peeking into their cubicles wondering where the Weather Girls are booming from. Web pages are about information—never let your design interfere with people getting that information.

Implicit in all these recommendations and admonitions is the recognition that although sitting at home in comfy lounge pants, you enter a community when you go online. A useful analogy for thinking about this sm cyberspace is that in many ways it's like a bar:

Just like a bar, people are primarily looking to get laid. Some will be out just to be out, to see and chat with friends. These people will be chatting in the channel or room. Everyone else cruises names and profiles, looking to find the man who can make their cock hard. The pickings are rarely slim. Unlike a leather bar, the cyberbar seems to be crowded any day at any time. Just like at a bar, you approach that hot



sounding man and start a conversation. However, cyberspace offers the additional advantage of multi-tasking. Why waste your time cruising one man when you can be cruising five or six at once? Also like a bar, chatting privately gives you a good chance to discuss interests, experiences, fantasies, and limits, all without a steady throb of always-too-loud music competing with your conversation. If all clicks in conversation, you can meet and the magic begins.

At the same time, this is not a bar. For one thing, the man who makes your cock hard is probably on the West Coast. You can jack off thinking about him, looking at his picture, and he may get to NYC on business twice a year, but chances are you won't be having sex later that night when you sit down to log on in the evening. So while you broaden your search online, you also broaden your geography. Be prepared to wait to meet that man you're chatting with, or be prepared to travel. And when you do meet, keep in mind that it may not work. Yes, his profile was hot. Yes, his picture made your cock throb. Yes, you were into the same things. But there is an element of chemistry that does not transmit across the wires. Usually, when meeting someone for the first time, I like to meet someplace neutral, a bar ironically enough, just so we can see if what we felt online can be felt in person. Often, things don't click. You get out of the meeting as smoothly or awkwardly as you can, and try again. Often, things do click. These days, 95% of the men I have sex with I meet online. In fact, it's something of a rare treat to go out to the bar and pick someone up there.

Being a good "netizen" is little different from being a good member of the "real life" leather community. Be honest about who you are, what you have done, and what you want to do. Show respect to others, and demand respect as well. Be willing to learn, willing to ask when you don't know, and willing to answer when you can, teach when you can.

And, just as we fashion ourselves as leatherfolk, grooming and growing our leather identity, seek out your online identity as well. Choose a name or nick that somehow expresses who or what you are. I used to go by LTHRnBONDS, when I was primarily into just leather and bondage, but as my needs and desires deepened (almost without end), I became LTHR EDGE. I identify so closely with my online name that it serves as my *nom de plume* in publication. And I can maintain that identification because it reflects who I am on and offline. Do the same for yourself, for while it's possible to be anyone and anything in cyberspace, you can really only pull off being yourself.

For, just as there is bottom instinct and Top instinct in real life, there is a cyber instinct as well. The more you chat, the more you will be able to tell a dabbler in sm from a hard core player. From what is said to how it is said, you will be able to sense the sincerity and reality of the person on the other side of the screen. For example, sometimes people with generic names like Steve567 will IM me on AOL. I ask if they're into cigars. They say sure. I don't believe them. I ask what ring gauge they like, they disappear. Similarly, if chatting with someone



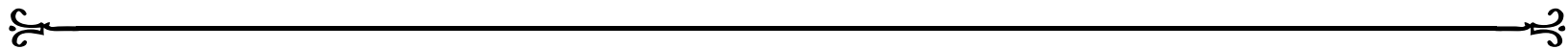
“really” into uniforms, you will know how into them they are when they refer to a PR-24 or a stick-thingy. So while it’s possible to live a lie in cyberspace, that’s also how you will probably be seen.

Once you have forged yourself as a netizen and have mastered the nuances of chatting online, you will find that sm online can be everything that sm in real life cannot be. Freed from the constraints of reality, you can virtually live your every fantasy. Some people find “cybersex” weak, unfulfilling, or plain boring. Yet there can be something very empowering about taking out your most intense fantasies while safely at home. For people with forbidden or taboo desires like abduction, snuff, bestiality, and more, it is a way to play them out and explore them safely. You can only do a snuff scene once in real life: the bottom won’t be back and the Top will be in jail. But you can do it again and again online. You know you can’t take two fists yet, but the idea gets you hard. In cyberspace, you can take those two fists, and as deep as you want them.

Yes, ultimately, cybersex is not the same as real life. But it can get you through until the real thing comes along, and it can help you figure out what kind of real thing you want next.

There are, finally, some implications for us to consider about all this sm online. The bars are emptying: why go out and see the same tired faces when you can stay at home and see new ones every night? The magazines are dying: why pay \$7.00 for some hot stories and pix each month when you can get new stories and pix for free every night? I won’t guess how cyberspace will ultimately impact these real world avenues for the sm community, but I will ask you to consider this final thought:

Leather was once something of a second coming out. You came out as gay, then slowly discovered this other community that answered to your deep, dark desires. Think of the wealth of information on the web today about sm: pictures, stories, chats, how-to’s. What would you have done with the web when you were a teen? How many young adults—18, 16, 13—are finding those pages now, recognizing already the match with their desires? How young will the next generation of leather people be? How will they be absorbed into our community in real life? And perhaps most of all, how can we teach and mentor them by proxy now?



Hemp



Only hemp will do. Sure, I've tried the others—MFP, cotton, even nylon—but nothing, and I mean *nothing*, is like hemp. It's not simply the fact that it's the traditional rope in Japanese *shibari* (though that's certainly part of it—always been something of a purist). It's also the absolute sensory engagement of hemp for both my victim *and* myself: the color of well-used hemp, mellowed from a grassy hay hue to a deep rich golden brown; the smell of it, rich like fallen leaves trampled underfoot on an autumn's day; the feel of it, soft and unyielding; the sight of it, as it is wound again and again around a limb, binding it as neatly as a package; the sound of it, a subtle whish pulled against the skin. Yeah. Only hemp will do.



And if you were to beg to be my victim, and if I were to choose you, you would come to know hemp very, *very* well—intimately, in fact. Because my rope scenes start weeks before you arrive. Ritual, after all, is the first step towards the mind's erection. If I agreed to accept you, agreed to take you into my world for time and hold you there immobile, motionless, subject to my rope, you would start by ordering raw hemp—one hundred feet of it, 8mm, twisted. The instructions would be clear as would be the purpose: you would be bringing to me rope that had been invested with a piece of your soul, ties that I would use to wrap you up in your own being, your own time and energy. Each step would be spelled out for you. When the rope arrives, whipstitch the ends. Diagrams and instructions, of course, would be provided for you, as would the extra command that, should you prick your finger in the process, you should soak whatever blood seeps out into the rope. And then, then you boil it. Hang it to dry. Boil it again. Hang it to dry. Boil it a third time. Hang it to dry. (Three times, really, is more than is needed, but I never discount the power of three—the immediate hold that simple number has on a mind.) Successive nights spent with the green-grass smell soaked through your home, the sight of the rope hanging as you yourself might come to hang when in my hands. And then, one tall black pillar of a candle, lights low, you alone in the quiet of the evening, singeing the rope's fine stray hairs, bringing order to its fringe of chaos, taming it and grooming it, knowing that the smoother the rope is in the end, the happier you will be enwrapped in its embrace. Bayu Oil, which I may be so generous to send to you, is the final step. Smoothing it into the rope as it runs slippery through your fingers.

Now, should I have particular designs on you, should I wish to turn you into more than an object at my booted feet, to turn you instead into a punching bag, for example, then the dyeing would start. Black should you be destined to suffer pain at my hands. Blue should my cock hunger for your ass. Red should your hole twitch for my fist. You purchase the dye and the process begins again: boiling and soaking, hanging to dry, three times. My favorites, aesthetically, are black and red. Hemp itself seems to love the black, soaking it in and through, and the red, when married to the golden fibers, produced not a blaring brightness but a brooding depth—not fire engine red, but blood red.

So you see, before you even reach me, before you show up before my door nervous and excited and hungry, I will have taken control of some piece of you. And you will hand that piece to me (and so much more) the moment you arrive, dropping to your knees and presenting the rope. Of course I take it. Taking comes naturally to me; in fact that's why you've sought me out—because you're so tired of just giving, because you need someone who takes, and someone who knows what to do with it once it's taken.

Naturally, you strip. Can you imagine how it will feel to be naked and kneeling before me? Can you smell my leathers even now, see the glint off my boots, feel the warmth of my gloves as they reach down to stroke your face? You'll wait there, of course, as I uncoil the rope, test your work, feel for you in the strands. And then, only then, we begin.

It could be *mune nawa* or *kaikyaku kani* or *kikkou* or *gyakuebi*. To be sure, I know these classic forms of Japanese rope bondage and appreciate them the way I appreciate the way my leather pants hug my crotch just so. But, more often, I improvise. No. That's not quite right. It's more accurate to say that what I do is *respond*—to your body, and to the rope. So, for starters, my hands would explore your body. Not romantically and not exactly clinically. It's more a process of possibilities: how far will this arm bend up? can your knees reach your chest? how far apart can your legs be spread? All the while, I'm exploring you, too, through conversation. 'Cause good bondage is a journey, you know, and I need to know where you want to go. It might be that I snuggle you into rope, hood you, and leave you to float on some inner stream. It might be instead that I tie you in a deceptively simple position that, with time, becomes increasingly painful. Don't worry, I get what I want—*always*, but you need to be coming along for the ride.

Your heart, I imagine, will skip a beat—precisely one—even as your cock jumps the moment I fold that rope in half, the signal that I have learned what I needed to learn and so am ready to start. I'll lay it to the side, respectfully, just long enough to take the gray bandanna, knot it, perhaps soak it in my piss, and tie it into your waiting and hungry mouth. As I pick the rope up again, I'll draw it through my hands, working out its kinks as I look at you more intently than ever, visualizing the first strands of rope stark against your naked skin. And then, finally, working from the bight, that simple bend where the rope folds over and returns to itself, I start the process of transforming you.



Your arm is bent up to your shoulder. The bight hangs down about a foot as I begin to wrap. One, two, three, four loops around your arm—positioned exactly so that the rope neighbors itself neatly with each pass. The ropes seem loose, though you soon learn they won't remain that way as I take up the dangling bight and wrap it over the strands that I have carefully layed just so, cinching the bight until the rope just bites your skin, then knotting it with the rest of the rope. Guess what? That arm ain't moving.

It's then repositioned until your elbow is in the air, pointing as straight up as possible. I guide the rope under the opposite armpit, wrap it across your chest just above yer pecs, back up under the armpit of your now captured arm, snuggling the rope even as I bend your free arm and position it in the air, a mirror to your other. Again the rope wraps your arm, again it crosses itself to tighten your bondage. The free ends return to the little "x" that has been formed at the nape of your neck as the rope crossed below one pit and up from the other. A simple knot around that "x" completes this piece of your torture.

One hundred feet looks like a lot of rope until you get it on a body. The rope you've brought, all one hundred feet, already encircles your arms and chest, keeping them just where the fuck I want them. Yet there's so much more in store, so I haul out more rope, rope left behind by so many other worshipful boys. But the coil I choose next is one I myself have prepped. This is a gift to you, though I don't tell you that. Still, you might feel it, might feel me holding you tight and close in the twine of this hemp.

Your eyes are a treasure. I delve them in my gaze as I pull apart the coil, match the ends, and stroke the rope through my hand. There's fear there—just a bit—but hunger, too, and just there, right *there*, is the spark of something that will become, I know, bliss.

This time the bight is placed around your neck, a loose hemp collar secured with a simple half hitch. A series of these simple knots begin forming down your body until I reach your crotch, with one final knot just above your hard and dripping cock. The rope then goes up your ass (I give it an extra tug there—no better way to say, silently, "You are mine.") and more half-hitches find their way up your back until the rope is married to the already-existing tie at your neck. This, son, is the start of *Kikkou*, the classic tortoise shell body harness. I pick up another coil of rope, another one from me but this one only fifty foot, and begin the slow but sure process of forming the familiar diamond pattern of ropes encircling your upper torso. To tie your torso this way is, on some level, meaningless—it's not like *kikkou* will limit your movements in itself. But I choose it, boy, so that your heart will beat just beneath *my* rope.

Another hundred feet of rope, this time a coil from one of my favorite boys, and one of my first. This rope is my softest but also, I am sure, my strongest—just right for securing your legs with their masses of muscle. I guide you to the floor, watching with pleasure as you



wince, the rope up your ass biting it that much more. Your ass firmly grounded, your arms secure and helpless, your legs stretched out before you, I continue.

I start at the feet. Bight hanging free, loops placed neatly around your ankles, bight cinched across and knotted. I run the rope up to just below your knee and repeat the careful looping and tight cinching—always the cinching, a punctuation mark to each piece of the emerging rope work. One more grouping, just above your knees, and this part of the whole is complete.

More rope.

I draw your knees up until they kiss my ropes crisscrossing your chest. A cow hitch down at the ropes of your ankles secures the bight and leaves me to weave with the “bitter” ends, the working ends of the rope. My hands move deftly now, driven by the rope itself, its need to enclose you more and more completely. I work the ropes from the diamonds across your torso and down to your legs and back again and again and again. When it’s done, your legs are firmly knitted to your chest. Your arms, essentially, are behind your neck in a classic position of submission, as though I were a cop cuffing a perp.

It’s done. I step back to admire my work, working my stiff cock out of my leather pants to stroke it appreciatively. You haven’t yet tested your bonds, but you will. You haven’t yet felt the pain of this position, the stress it will cause on your back, but you will.

So, I sit, and I wait. Your eyes look to me, questioningly. I know the question, and I speak the answer. “Naw, son, this is just the start. Stew in that for a bit, we got lots more to do.” Audibly, a sigh escapes around the gag as I watch you sink into the embrace of the ropes.

Yeah, we got lots more to do.



Open Letter to gmsma



recently learned that a major leather organization, NYC's GMSMA, was considering a ban on guns, breath control, and Nazi uniforms at their events. Since I have engaged in all three of these activities (and the first two with some frequency), I felt compelled to write a letter. I wanted to share that letter here:



Fellow Leatherfolk:

When I learned about the propositions before you concerning a ban on guns, breath control, and Nazi uniforms at GMSMA events such as demos, I felt compelled to write to you. After all, I have engaged in all three activities, and count the first two as some of my favorite play. I thought it important, then, that you hear from someone who engages in these scenes.

Let me begin by saying that these propositions, no doubt, seem political to you—in all senses of that word. In the most basic sense, every organization is a polity, and decisions must be made about how that organization should work and function. Moreover, as an organization gains standing in the community, these decisions have repercussions beyond the group itself through the example it sets. But please keep in mind, you're not simply voting on policies, but on *desires*. And, as soon as we (any of us) begin to legislate desires, to condone some and condemn others, *all* desires become vulnerable to judgment. So, while I know these are matters of business for you now, I ask that you keep, somewhere in the back of your mind, one simple question: What if this was about *your* scene?

That may seem ludicrous to you, but consider this: all sm play is an admixture of pain-play and power-play. Some scenes are all about pain, a painpig just wanting a good endorphin rush, but some scenes are all about power. Since I have never been into pain myself, I find it striking that all of the propositions before you concern power-play, which I find inherently safer than pain play (since pain, by definition, concerns damage to the body).

But let me address each proposition individually. First, guns (real, replica, or toy). I feel partly responsible for you having to consider this issue, since my understanding is that it flows in part from the gunsex scene I recently did at a GMSMA Dungeon Demo. The concern is that guns are powerful symbols of violence in society, that guns kill, that gunplay is inherently dangerous. True, perhaps. But, as I often like

to tell boys in my scenes, a gun may or may not be real, may or may not be loaded, but a knife can always kill you. Should knife play be banned as well? What about punching scenes? Surely those are violent as well. And spanking? That's seen as child abuse these days. These analogies may seem fallacious, but really it's simply a logical extension of the argument being made against guns. Where do we draw the line, and why do we draw it all? I might also note that all kinds of bodily damage (though perhaps none serious) result from "normal" scenes like whipping, flogging, spanking, or cutting, yet no harm results from a gunsex scene. Because it's not about the gun, it's about the power. Gunsex is about mindfuck, a kind of play as powerful and transformative as any sm scene. As such, it has every right to be included in GMSMA's educational mission.

Breath control is a kind of power-play as well, one that extends beyond mindfuck to be felt bodily. I understand that there are serious issues of safety and liability for the organization to keep in mind, but these issues exist, no doubt, for every scene at every Dungeon Demo. Surely, clamping my hand over someone's mouth represents less risk than even picking up a single-tail whip. If something like whipping seems to have less liability, I would argue that's because the men doing the whipping know what they are doing and the monitors can recognize that. Certainly, monitoring itself is not the issue, since serious damage can result from a single misplaced stroke, before any monitor could even have a chance to intervene. And how does one monitor for nerve damage in a bondage scene? Do the monitors check the tightness of the ropes at regular intervals? Or do we, instead, trust the Top and the bottom to know what they are doing? Isn't that, after all, what the demo is for? To exclude breath control is to say no Top can do this safely, every bottom is at risk. It is to conflate hanging and cutting off air in a gasmask. It is to pretend that any scene can be fully monitored.

But, undoubtedly, the question of Nazi uniforms is the most charged issue of this evening. Nazis after all, ruthlessly murdered millions, including homosexuals. Their politics of hatred are so vile that they insidiously continue today in neo-Nazi groups. Unquestionably, the politics of Nazism must be repudiated, but we should be careful not to conflate the uniform with the ideology. If we ban Nazi uniforms because of what the Nazis did, shouldn't we also ban police uniforms? Consider what the NYC police have done recently, or the history of racial profiling (as well as the history of violence and discrimination against gays and lesbians). And what about the US military, which institutionally discriminates against gays and lesbians in paranoid witch hunts and which frequently contains episodes of gruesome violence and murder against gays and lesbian officers? The politics of any military group should cause uniforms to be banned. And what of slavery itself? How can we allow such a thing in light of the legacy of African-Americans? What sort of political statement do we make when we call someone a "slave" (consider, especially, the latent messages of a black slave with a white Master)?

If that analogy seems ludicrous to you, if all of my analogies seem implausible if not impossible (knives are not at all like guns, breath control is not at all like whipping, Nazis are not at all like Marines), well, that's *exactly* my point. For all these analogies are simple extensions of the



arguments made, brought to their logical conclusion. If they seem ridiculous, it's because *we have made them so*. SM did not spring into existence with some set of "normal" practices. Instead, we have always *appropriated* symbols and practices and *redefined* them in terms of our desires. It's what we do, and it's what makes sm so powerful. No, consensual slavery is not the same as being a Nazi, but only because we have changed the meaning of slavery in our play, even as we change the meaning of something like a SS uniform in our play. And here I would want to tell you that the one time I did engage in some light Nazi play, it was at the request of my bottom, a Jew, who actually had to teach me what "kike" means. Is his desire illegitimate? Or did we transform a politics of hatred through our play? Redefine it into something that made meaning between *us*?

To ban these scenes is to deny what sm is, because it says that these things mean what society has made them mean and that's something we can't change. But we do change that meaning, just as we change the meaning of a dog collar, a whip, even a *clothespin*. Nothing in sm means what it originally meant, because we change meaning. That's true in these scenes as well.

In the end, if these activities seem dangerous, that's because they are. But, that's not a reason for *GMSMA* to shy away from them; rather, *it's the reason GMSMA should take the lead, because the most dangerous activities are precisely the ones that most need education*. Passing these measures won't change people's desires. Instead, they may feel ashamed of wanting to play with them, since the community says they're "bad." Or, they may pursue their fantasies without knowledge of how to do so safely, exposing them to even greater risk. There are unquestionable legal, moral, ethical questions for *GMSMA* to consider here. But policy, morality, and ethics are *not* *GMSMA*'s core mission. Education is.

Instead of banning, educate. Consider, for example, a program on gunsex, covering ways to do it without even using a real gun and ways to know if a Top is knowledgeable enough to perform the scene safely. Consider, for example, a program on the safety issues in breath control. Consider even a program on Nazi uniforms, where men can share what makes them desirable *and* where people can learn how to spot (and avoid) those who embrace the ideology and hatred behind it.

I asked you to keep your own desire in the back of your mind, and now I will ask you to consider one last thing. Imagine, if you will, that what gets your cock hard was "banned" before you got into it. Imagine you had no resources for education. What would have happened to you? Would you have abandoned the scene so dear to your heart, or would you have been exposed to greater risk because of the lack of information?

We can't choose our desires. But we can choose what to do with them. Nothing before you this evening is *inherently* unsafe, insane, or nonconsensual. I ask you to validate not these particular practices per se, but the right of every consenting adult to explore their sexuality



with other consenting adults. I know there are very practical concerns buried in these issues, but if they are also, indeed, political, then, please, consider the larger political issue, the one about pursuing our fantasies, safely, the one that brought us all into this community to start with.



The Path of the Work



Some scenes I have had, scenes with enormous transformation and catharsis, in which I had the definite sense that it was not me acting and guiding and making change happen, but something much larger than me, moving through me. These scenes are as close as I have ever come to a religious experience and my memories of them form the core of my spirituality, which is itself firmly grounded in leather. I consider such scenes “doing the Work,” and believe (mistakenly or rightly so) that at such times the Universe selects me to help another. So important are these experiences to me that I have worked hard to understand the Work. These are the few theorems I have been able to discern about the Work, and theorems they are, provisional and to be continually tested until such time as the fundamental axioms below them reveal themselves.



1. **The Work is.**

Call it what you will, process it as you can, name it whatever, but the Work is real. It exists. I know this from the truth of my lived life and should you come to the Work you shall know it from the truth of your own life. It may be spiritual for you, or psychological, or just good sex. No matter. The Work is; the Work is and moves in its own time; the Work is and cannot be resisted, stopped, or diverted.

2. **The Work creates.**

In a world of entropy, the Work is miraculous because it creates. The sum of the energy of both parties in a scene of the Work is greater than the energy either contributes. The Work changes—it changes you as it moves through you, it changes those you touch when within it. That is the nature and purpose of the Work, to create, to grow, to heal, to transform.

3. **The Work calls you; you cannot call the Work.**

If you are chosen to do the Work, then you cannot help but respond. Yet, you cannot summon the Work at your bidding. It comes only when it is needed.

4. **The Work is always being done.**

They always do the work, those who are so called. For the Work happens not simply in the crucible of the scene but in everyday life, in chats and encounters, the ones you're aware of and the ones that affect others without your knowledge.

5. **Expect no recompense for the Work.**

The Work is its own reward, for no greater pleasure is there than the sense of all existence moving through you, and no greater honor is there than to be present when a being grows and transforms before you. Ask nothing in return and take nothing in return, in any form. Don't expect those whom you help to remain forever in your life, though the Work forms deep bonds. Often, because you have done the Work they are free to move on in their path. Let them.

6. **Assume no titles.**

Take no titles for yourself in the Work; do not call yourself SIR or Daddy or Boss or anything. Wait to see what people call you, for it will tell you much about who they are and what they want and need from you. To assume a title for yourself would be to foreclose too many possibilities, too many paths, too many encounters. At the same time, accept the titles given to you, embrace the names others call you in the midst of the Work, for in naming you others empower you to the task at hand.



Memories



On February 2, 2001, at 11:33:37 PM, I made my first entry in my blog, named the Edge Diaries. I would continue to blog as LTHR EDGE until 2005, though at times somewhat sporadically, first using Blogger and then LiveJournal. Blogging was still relatively new and mostly unheard of in the leather world, but I wanted to use it to very specific ends, as recorded in my introductory page to the blog on my site:

I've come to believe that the web is the future of leather: porn magazines are dying, bars are emptying, and the entire kinky world can be found online. In some ways, this is a fantastic development: it's opened new worlds for me and I know for others as well. But, lately, I've come to realize there's a very big downside to our move onto the web. There's a new generation of leathermen on the horizon, and they're very *very* young. It once was that leather was something of a second coming out, and sometimes as painful as any coming out can be. But now, stories, videos, chats, and pictures abound, and people are exploring leather and entering our community at a younger and younger age. That's not a problem in and of itself, but they do so learning about leather from the online world, and it's a world filled with men who don't know what they're doing, a world in which fantasy is too easily taken for reality, a world in which experience can be faked as quickly as a profile. That *is* a problem.

The established leather community, I feel, has yet to see this emerging crisis. Most groups were formed at a time when real community was the only kind of community there was and so they continue to base the majority of their outreach and education in the real world. Very little exists on the web for the newcomer, and especially the very young newcomer, to really *learn* about leather, and what it means to be a leatherman.

I get all kinds of email from this site, but the ones that mean the most to me are from people telling me how much this site means *to them*. They find lthredge.com not simply hot and horny, but educational and resource-filled as well. I know I've been extraordinarily lucky in my experiences—I've had the privilege of playing with some incredible men, and I've learned something from them all. I always felt that part of what this page was all about was me giving back some of all that's been given to me. I now feel that's needed more than ever.

And so I give you the edge diaries, powered by blogger. I'll strive to record my thoughts daily. In part, they will be reactions to chats and men I meet online or in person; in part, they will record sites I've found that are interesting for some reason or another; but, more than anything, they will record me, the whole of me. When I am feeling down and shitty, you will read about it. When I am have self-doubts, they will be shared. Sometimes, I feel that LTHR EDGE has become some sort of unreal fantasy man. Don't get me wrong—I sure as fuck enjoy that. And, if you're on this site for that fantasy man, look around the other areas of the site, 'cause he's all over the fucking place. But if you want a peek behind the leather curtain, so to speak, read on. Your fantasies may be crushed, but it may just be that that's what you need. After all, by definition, fantasies are *never* real. I am.

So if you're ready, take a peak at the edge diaries.

Ultimately, I came so to believe in the power of blogging for recording the lived experience of leatherfolk that I spearheaded 100 Bloggers, a project to get more people in the community blogging. Cultural forces, already acting to expand blogging's reach, would ultimately make that project superfluous and, today, there's a wide spectrum of excellent leather blogs to peruse.

I cannot here preserve my entire blog. While I was blogging I had a man in service to me copy all my entries into a word processor and, at the time, it was over 300 pages long. But, some entries call out to me in my memory, and I share them with you here, unedited, uncorrected, just as they appeared on the Web.



2/26/2001 10:38:09 PM

Lagniappe Post ("Lagniappe" = "a little something extra." It's a New Orleans thing): I did manage to look at one email, from a man I now consider a very good friend. He's hot, smart, intelligent (not the same as smart), talented, a great writer/designer, and more. He finally got his personal page up (which, I feel honored, seems to reflect mine somewhat). It was great to learn more about him, but even better to find that he also has a blog. It was great to see into his life, to know that what bothers me can bother someone I admire and respect as well, without detracting from that admiration or respect one jot. I wonder if all of you feel the same with my blog. It was a wonderful voyeuristic glimpse into his life, and I know I will check it daily.



Anyway, I asked him if I could post a link to his page/blog here. I hope so. Trust me, folks, it's worth it.

This is what means most to me: not sex, not play, not scenes. It's connection, and it's also my vision of a new future for the leather community. I know I am tooting this horn a lot lately, but I still truly, truly believe that cyberspace is *fundamentally* changing the leather community in ways that traditional groups are not seeing yet. I look on AOL, LN, LT and I see slaves (and Masters!) in their very early 20's (and younger). Are they lying about their age? I doubt it. Let's face it, in the leather community (as opposed to a supposedly youth-centric gay community at large), age means experience, which for the best players, is what really counts, so really, daiming to be very young is more a disadvantage than anything. Yet, there they are. Young leatherfolk. Who is mentoring them? teaching them? learning with and *from* them (because we would be fools to think they have nothing to teach us as well)? If you spend much time online, you'll be as worried as I am about the next generation of leather. We're dinosaurs if we don't find ways to mentor, teacher, guide, shape, grow on the web. It. Must. Be. Done. I'm doing what I can, and this sweet hot man is as well. He has a great piece for novices, reminiscent of everything in my "learn" section. It needs to be read. And I hope that if perhaps I have inspired him to blog, to share what it *really* is to be a leatherman (for good and bad) then maybe others will start as well. Maybe, just maybe, I can make a difference and shape the community to come.

Grandiose, I know. Kinda like my special cadre of edgelings who have been taken under my wing. Yes, it's my entirely egotistical sense of self . . . that I can become a leader in a new kind of community, that I can be mentor, teacher, yadda yadda. Self-important simp that I am. Or not. Perhaps there is destiny, but perhaps it is shaped in part by what we imagine it to be. Sometimes, I imagine a day when I am gone, but someone somewhere blogs as a leatherman, someone somewhere builds a new map for a fetish, someone somewhere wants to be like me, like Edge. Fantasies of reproduction and immortality. It's the curse of anyone who writes, too--the idea that what you create will leave forever and therefore so will you. I dunno, folks. I just don't know. In the meantime, I do what I do *because it means something to me*. And that seems like a good enough reason for now. Does it mean anything to you, too?

I'm hoping to chat on the phone with sweet/hot fellow mentor. I don't think I have ever felt so fully connected to someone so quickly from a simple email exchange (not even online chat). Cool.



4/7/2001 04:51:15 PM: PRELUDE TO THE NIGHTMARE

rk is on the way here now. he should be here in about a half hour, maybe a bit longer. I am prepared.

I am wearing my tall engineers with my padded motorcycle touring pants tucked in. My old, faded Hot Ash T hugs my body and is only partially covered by the simple black leather vest. My rebel cap tops it all off, shading my eyes in the slightest. I am ready.

It's getting dark outside. I've already lit some of the candles for the evening. There will be, I believe, 38 total: tealights, votives, tapers, short, tall, and then the religious candles, enclosed in glass with strange prayers in Spanish and a picture of some tortured Saint or other. Each one will be extinguished in its turn, each smoky wick marking a moment of progress in this scene of transformation. A plain blue tarp covers the floor where we will play. On it, a steel dog bowl, paper, pen. The scene will start there.

Monkey Radio, spare and eerie with a steady beat, seeps out of the speakers.

The bedroom is ready as well--another blue tarp to cover the bed and a single, ratty pillow. Low, low light. Just enough for me to work by. We'll be moving there soon after he arrives. That's when I will have a break. More, perhaps, later.

I am ready. So is he. Let it begin.

4/7/2001 06:48:43 PM: THE NIGHTMARE BEGINS

rk arrived about an hour ago. We've already had some preliminaries. At the moment, he is wrapped in vert wrap (a veritable mummy), he is hooded, and there are headphones underneath the good taped into his ears. He's listening to a mini-disc I made for the occasion, aptly named (I think), MINDFUCK. The mini-disc has about 60 short .wav files, playing randomly and repeatedly. The sounds are about 1-5 seconds each, and range from children laughing to gunshots to people screaming to doors creaking to every other weird and disturbing and disorienting thing I could find. He's been in it for what? 45 minutes already? Nah... can't be THAT long. But he will be listening to that for 1-2 hours. It should be enough to disorient and unsettle him. I've also removed all my clocks from view, so he shouldn't have any sense of what time it is when he comes out of that.

That's when the real work begins.



The candles are going out. Some I have extinguished, some are just out of wax (the little tealights). From 38, we are down to 28. I've already told rk that each candle extinguished brings him closer to the ultimate end of this scene, and I wonder how many more will go out before I let him out of his MINDFUCK prison.

I feel good. The energies I needed for this scene are here. I am at "full Edge" mode, and I can feel everything I need to be saying and everything I need to do. The only thing I miss is the ability to check in on his head, ask him where he is and how things are going. That's just not right for this scene. So, I will have to read him, carefully.

More, later.

4/7/2001 10:22:33 PM: THE NIGHTMARE CONTINUES

Things are proceeding VERY well. You might even say I am "in the zone."

After 2 hours of the MINDFUCK tape and mummification, I brought rk out to find the night was here. He had (and still has) no idea of the actual time. Good. As soon as I let him out of the mummification, I slapped on the restraints and went right into my pain scene: inner thigh beating. It was intense, especially since I accompanied and punctuated it with a running monologue of somewhat severe psychological abuse. But, it worked. He broke. He let go. He felt. We connected. And when it was done, he wiped his tears into my boots.

He still has a ways to go, but his transformation has begun (there are 11 candles left). We rested for a while and then went into a stogie smoke feeding scene with the heavy respirator gasmask. He handled that well. I'm hoping he doesn't slip away, since I know that's so easy right now. I say away, but what I mean is that we may lose some of the ground we've gained. I hope not. He's close, close.

Still, I have yet to think of the climax for this transformation. I have one idea, but, to be honest, it scares the willikers out of me. Still, unless the universe provides something else, I will have to go with it.

Wish us luck.

4/7/2001 11:58:33 PM: THE DAYLIGHT DAWNS

It is done. He is transformed. I'd like to take credit, but I know I can't. It's amazing to me, because in some real ways I have been transformed as well. It's like I feel not only this connection to rk but also to something big and wonderful that was moving through me all



the time. It's hard to describe. I can only say that at times I was scaring even myself--that I pulled back because I could feel something in me almost stronger than me, something that threatened to break out and, well, break rk.

So, let's see... what else did we do... Well, we talked a lot. rk had some mourning to do for various things and I helped him, encouraged him to welcome the tears and held him while they came. There was quite a bit of that, and, as his mourning continued, the candles went out. Then I asked him if he was ready, really *ready*.

I found the climax I needed for the scene. I have to say it DID in fact scare even me, but it was good and right and I think we both felt that. It was as intense as it needed to be and, as rk said, we both knew that what would need to happen, would happen. After that, I brought him through to the other side by showing him the answer I had found to the problem of his own existence. I made him to understand WHY he was what he was and helped him (I hope) to not only accept but embrace that.

The "scene" (really, it was more than a scene) ended with some rituals of such intimacy that I won't share them here. Suffice it to say, W/we are and ever will be connected now.

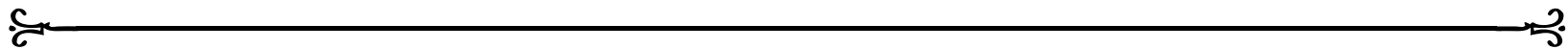
Tomorrow, I think, I will reflect on this scene. For now, W/we are in some sense basking in what W/we have accomplished. Goodnight all, and, more than ever, safe journeys.

7/19/2002 11:51:50 PM: Prolegomenon

Well, guess I'm as ready as I can be. More precisely, I am as ready as I wish to be. Thinking back on recent lessons from the universe, I realized that over-preparing was not the thing to do. I also realized that I was supposed to have fun with this and that, in fact, my pleasure is supposed to be at the center of tomorrow's scene. So I took it easy. Had an indulgent dinner with some frozen yogurt for dessert, a glass or two of Merlot, and some interesting and relaxing television.

Yet there will be work to do. I reviewed the pig's emails to me. He has a TRUE death wish, and I need to think (minimally) about how to negotiate that, how to tease it, how to bring it to some fruition that leaves him safe and sound and me out of jail. How do I spawn his fear, summon his demons, bring him to his abyss, and how I do take him safely through **TO THE OTHER SIDE?** Answers are not definite now--they shouldn't be. What matters this evening is know that these are the questions to be asked.

Because a good mindfuck scene is not about what you do as much as it is about the headspace you foster. The first rule of mindfuck? *Confirm*



nothing. It's corollary? *Let them believe everything*. You see, the trick is to let **THEIR** mind do all the work. For example, this pig is coming up here half-expecting never to go home again. Now, I could act mean and tough and threatening, and his mind will easily graft this onto those expectations. But, I could just as easily act kind and caring--the implication is more sadistic, as though I were making his last day on earth the best ever. If I make him eat oatmeal out of a dogdish, that works. If I treat him to the finest meal possible, that works. It's all in his head.

The work of a mindfuck scene, then, is keeping the head in that space. And that's why confirming nothing is so important. The less you say, the more they fill in the blanks with their own fantasies. No matter what reality presents itself, their desire and need to believe will twist it to fit their own ends. That's also why the other key to mindfuck is controlling all the information. **YOU** know whether or not the gun is real--they don't. **YOU** know whether or not it's loaded--they don't. **YOU** know what that pill was that you shoved down their throat--they don't. **YOU** know what's gonna happen after that hour of isolation bondage--they don't.

So, the mindfuck will happen. And from the moment I open the door. Some events will be carefully orchestrated, and the rest I will leave up to the pig. There will be more than just mindfuck. There will be bondage. There will be abuse. There will be, even, torture. And it begins in just about 12 hours.

Soon to sleep. Be well, all.

7/20/2002 11:16:32 AM: Prelude

I'm antsy, and horny. pig should be here in 45 minutes. Actually, he's sitting in his big butch truck now out in the parking lot, and has been since at least 9:30. I spotted him when I came back from getting my hair buzzed fresh. He's sitting, waiting, sweating, thinking, fearing, wanting, desiring, needing, dreading. And I'm here hungry, planning, plotting, centering, building, bulking, gearing, raging. Ready.

I'll be dimbing into gear soon. Lighting a fat stogie. Getting some trippy downtempo techno going. And then I'll let my head find the space it needs. I'll call out My Beast and put him on leash, so that he will be here when I need him.

Anticipation. That's what I feel. A wanting and needing to begin. I sit with this anticipation, grok it fully. And I, too, wait. Waiting is.



7/20/2002 12:19:46 PM: And so it begins

Turns out that wasn't the pig waiting since 9:30, but he did arrive, and right on time.

When he knocked on the door, I stood behind it--full leather uniform, boots, gloves, and big fat cigar. And the gun. As he walked into the room, the gun was right against his forehead. I could smell the fear on him. I had him empty all his pockets first, then dragged him over to some paper and a pen on the floor. That's where he wrote his suicide note--at gunpoint. Then over to the computer, where I made him watch as I emailed his lover/Master saying I was concerned because the pig had not arrived and that I was worried something might have happened to him. More fear. Threw him on the floor and shackled him. Went through his wallet and grabbed all the cash. Then I cut his clothes off with a very sharp knife. Finally, into the closet, which is where he is now, wondering and waiting and fearing.

I think we'll start with the bag.

7/20/2002 12:55:29 PM: Phase Two

Dragged the pig out of the closet and over to "the bag." Had him climb in (still in shackles), pull the bag up over his head, and roped it off.

Asphyxiation is interesting. Well, actually, the threat of asphyxiation is interesting. I simply had him sit and wait until his air started to run out. It's hot in the bag--always--and that made it (in the pig's words) "miserable." It was interesting to see him sitting there, knowing that his air was running out. Part of me wanted to really push that scene--see how close to true asphyxiation I could get. But it wasn't needed. As soon as I could tell he was breathing more heavily, and hence could tell that the air was getting stale, the oxygen being used up--as soon as that happened, I let him know he'd be dead in 10 minutes. Told him what it would be like, with his lungs feeling like he was on fire.

He wanted out.

That's good--very good. In some of the later emails from the pig, it seemed like he had a true deathwish, one he was hoping I would fulfill for him. But he wanted out. That means that I don't have to worry about that deathwish so much. I've found 2-3 mental strings that surround it, and I can tug at them in turn to produce what I want to produce--turn the pig into my marionette as I continue to work on him.

I let him out of the bag, and he sucked my cock. Did an OK job with it, but I think it only adds to everything that I only got half-hard.



He knows it will take more to please me--much more. Anyway, I led him, still shackled, into the tub, and then chained him to a carriage bolt I have in the wall in there. He's locked in, locked down, in the dark with the lights off and the door closed.

It hasn't even been an hour yet. This is the time that I start wondering--wondering how I can sustain all this for the duration (and I would think I need at least 12 more hours at this level). And, what's more, how can I do more than sustain? How can I increase, slowly, the intensity and the pitch? How can I elicit the right vibe in him, get the switches switched in his mind in just the right order?

I don't know. Honestly, my Topping skills are more of the sprinting variety than the marathon. I am best at quick, intense scenes, with all the energies focused like a welder's torch. This is different for me, and I am unsure of how to proceed. I remind myself, though, that I had some similar wonderings in the rk scene, and that one worked out to its best end. I am trying, continually, to simply let go into the flow of things, and to see where that leads me. And, I am keeping in mind that for HIM, the scene is about ME--whatever I want--whatever MY pleasure is. So, if I want to keep him chained in the tub for an hour--that works. To be sure, I am imagining lots of small and intense scenes interspersed with bondage and down time and reflection. But how many scenes can I generate?

I guess I already know the answer.

As many as are needed.

7/20/2002 02:42:02 PM: And then

Let him stew in the tub a bit. Came in and pissed on him some. I had wanted to drug him, actually, and figured I would just something simply like Tylenol PM. Of course, I checked the drug info first. Turns out any sort of antihistamine is a bad idea for someone with prostate problems (which the pig has). So, no drugging the pig.

Instead, I unshackled him and had him shower. Then I tied a nice, correct, hangman's knot for a noose and played with that around his neck while I ate lunch. From there, I moved into a "ground hanging" with the noose around his neck, his fists in mitts, and the loose end of the noose tied around his feet in a tight hogtie. It's simple, really, as long as your legs don't tire you don't hang yourself. I shoulda prolonged that scene, but I just let him have a taste of it. Finally, I locked on some restraints, threw on the hood, and spreadeagled him to the bed.

He's there now. More waiting.



The problem is that I know just where I want to go. I want an inner thigh beating and then the climax of this scene. But that's an hour max, and I want it all to end after midnight. That means a lot of time left to figure out what to do with him, and, well, with me too. I think I'll periodically terrorize him with the knife while he's in "storage" and then I might even lay out and take a nap myself.

Doubt. Uncertainty. These are things I am not oft comfortable with, but I must sit with them for about 8 more hours. This kind of scene teaches me as much as does it the victim.

7/20/2002 03:34:21 PM: Fun in Storage

While the pig was spreadeagled and hooded to the bed, thought it might be nice to have some fun with him.

A wet kitchen towel. What could be more harmless, right?

Well, take several of them. Take the hood off the pig. Put a wet towel on his face. He can breathe, but it's a little harder. Add another. Harder still. Keep adding them, layer by layer, simple wet kitchen towels. But the water's in the weave and there's less and less room for air to get in.

Fun.

7/20/2002 05:15:33 PM: The Secret is Emu Oil

Some time ago, I was watching an infomercial (actually, a minor hobby of mine). It was hawking something called "Super Blue Stuff" for pain relief. Well, given my headaches, I thought I would give it a try, so I ordered some of the sample sizes.

It is blue, and I can see how it might be nice for arthritic pain, but it didn't do much for my headache. But I remember wondering, "Gee, how might this feel on a boy's balls?"

I just found out. Burns. Like hell. Worse than Icy Hot according to the pig.

The secret, you see, is Emu Oil, extracted from those big goofy birds. It soaks RIGHT through the skin, and in Super Blue Stuff it's carrying a payload of capsaicin--you know, red pepper oil. I have to say, it's REAL Sadistic--even for me. 'Cause of course, with that special Emu Oil, once it's applied, that's it. The boy suffers and there's nothing he can do about it--nothing you can do about it, either.



Fun.

7/20/2002 09:45:11 PM: Endgame

Well, now it's over. In fact, has been for a while now.

Things just progressed... and then things just, well, happened.

I'm trying now to reconstruct all the events. I had released the pig from the spreadeagle on the bed for some downtime. I guess somewhere up in there, I let him know that the main event was coming at 11:00, with it all ending some time after midnight. Well, as he sat there at my boots, I could tell he was **NOT** relaxing (well, DUH, Edge). He was focusing on 11:00--fearing and wanting it in turn. But I sensed he was **TOO** focused on 11:00, so I let him know that what would come at that time was the inner thigh beating. Of course, I also told him that what came after that would end it all.

I had let him know before, and he reconfirmed, that he was free to end all this and leave at any time. I think, in the end, that was the secret but simple mindfuck. You see, it's easy to face your fantasies and your fears when you feel like you don't have a choice--that you're being forced into it all. But when you **DO** have a choice, well, then it's more complicated, and you need to find the strength inside to follow through.

He was scared, and he thought about leaving, I know. I also let him know that leaving would be the **WORST** thing he could do--that it would hurt more than anything I could do to him. After all, if I killed him, it would be over, period. If he lived, he would leave with the pride of what he had withstood. But if he wussed out and left he would 1)see a shattering look of disappointment in my eyes, 2)see a shattering look of disappointment in the eyes of his Master, and 3)be reminded of it all constantly. I stressed this last part, and upped the ante--saying that if he left I would place a notice about it on my page, so that he could never come to this site again and jack off without seeing my disappointment all over again. I also reminded him a **LOT** of edgeplayers come by my page--he might find himself with fewer play partners if he walked.

Somehow, that discussion, however it started, precipitated it all. Before I knew it, I was asking him if he wanted to skip all the waiting and get right to **IT**--the end scene. He was ready. I could tell more from some sense than from the words he used.



So I got the gun. When he arrived, I showed him it wasn't loaded, and then showed him one bullet--HIS bullet. Later in the afternoon, I made him watch as I loaded that bullet--HIS bullet--into the gun. Then, this afternoon, at the end point, I slipped that loaded bullet out of the magazine without him seeing. Then I handed him the gun, told him to put it in his mouth, *and pull the trigger*.

And he did.

He walked right through his desires AND his fears, and out the other side. When the time came to face it all, he stood up and he followed through. *Wow*.

After that, things pretty much ended. I held him for quite a while (he was shaking like a leaf at first (understandably)). Then he got all manic on me, talking on and on and wandering off on this or that topic. But he was OK overall, I knew, and perhaps even a little better than he was when he first arrived.

Did magic happen? Did the universe move through me? Was I able to heal, in some small way, the hole in the center of him? I'm not fully sure, but I do know that it seemed right at the time, and feels so now, too.

Anyway, we went out for Thai and just got back. Time to chill, and then maybe some play. But the danger is gone--he faced it down--and that, friends, is a good (if not magical) thing.

07:48 am June 11th, 2004: Cruising

Recent posts, LR, and a possible trip to the bar have me thinking about cruising. I miss it, and I wonder if the het/bi/pan's even have it.

I'm thinking they don't. I'm neither a historian nor an anthropologist, so I can't say for sure, but my guess is that cruising in gay leather culture, and in gay culture in general, began with a desire to find others like yourself. In a culture where the text of your desire is unpublished and unpublishable, you need become a particularly adept reader. You don't just read between the lines, you look for the smallest of signs, and you look to see yourself reflected back to you. Now, granted, het/bi/pan SM isn't exactly a bestseller in this society, but there are, in general, good modes of flirting for a man and a woman.

Because cruising is, of course, flirting. But it's more and it's less. Cruising DOES lead to sex, but it doesn't HAVE to, and that's the key for me right now. I don't know I am up for playing again right now (though I think I am headed that way), but I am up for the kind of



flirting that cruising embodies.

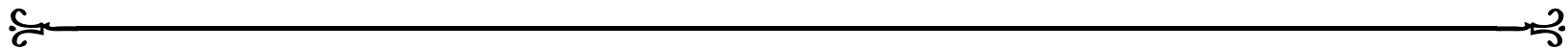
That kind of flirting is, first of all, subtle. It begins long before any words are said. It begins, in fact, before you even leave the house. To be cruised you must first make yourself cruisable. For leathermen that of course involves gearing up in leather (for the bar) or just having your hair buzzed just so, your jeans worn just tight enough, and your boots on--always your boots on--before you leave to walk down the street. You also need to be open to cruising. I know men who are just oblivious to being cruised, either because they're not looking or because they just don't know the dance.

It is a dance, you know. There is, for example, the classic street cruise. You're walking down the street and see someone approaching, who also sees you. The signs are there or there's some spark of interest. You make eye contact as you pass each other and then, 10 or 20 steps later, you turn back to look again only to find that he's looking at you, too. Then one or the other of you stops to look at a shop window. It could be for anything--even women's dresses--because it's a kind of looking that says "I'm not looking at this window, hot man." The other approaches and, for a moment, pretends to look at the window. Conversation ensues and the cruise is complete.

At the bar, the dance is a little different. First, there are two types at the bar: perchers and circulators. The perchers find just the right spot, with just the right lighting and just the right traffic flow, and there they sit as others stream by. The circulators move around the bar, looking and searching. Either way, it again begins with eye contact. That might, perhaps, lead to a subtle nod of hello (which is permission to approach). If the eye contact is avoided, that's a clear sign there's no interest there, but if it's returned the dance can continue. You might move to another part of the bar--just to see if the person who looked will follow. You might wait for them to stand next to you, should they dare. In any case, after the eye contact--which is SO powerful, you know--the bodies circle each other until some sort of contact is made.

I want to cruise and be cruised not because I want to have sex (or not always because I want to have sex). And certainly right now, I know there are men who would play with me if that's what I wanted. Instead, I want to cruise because I want to exercise my desires and because I want to know I am desired. But beyond that, under all those things, I want to cruise/be cruised because cruising is belonging. Cruising is confirmation that you have it all right--the leathers are worn as they should and suddenly you're more than a man. Suddenly, you partake of the archetype itself.

And that's what I need. It doesn't help to know, on an intellectual level, that I am desired. FEELING it is different.



You know, I like to say that leathers are alive, have a spirit, and need to be cared for because of those facts. The leatherman inside is alive, too, and he needs to be cared for, too. HE needs that space more than I do.

So, yeah, maybe I will go out tonight. I know, already, it will be disappointing. I know there will be few if any men in leather. I know that the men who WILL be there will find me on some level illegible. I know I will go home alone and perhaps even a little disappointed. But I also know that there is a pleasure in just gearing up and heading out and being in that space.

I don't think het/be/pan's have that same space. They don't have leatherbars (granted, we barely do now, either). I'm not sure how they meet and arrange for play. Perhaps there's a het/bi/pan cruising. Dunno.

In any case, still not sure if I will head out tonight or not. But I do know the impulse first came when I found out my lover J was making a surprise visit to see me on the weekend of Folsom East. We've been together so long that it's not a problem for each of us to wander alone through the fair cruisin at will. But, still, it means I am taken that weekend and that will filter through to whatever cruising I might do. And so tonight, I think, should it come to be, is all about me.

And it's about time that happened.

01:19 pm June 11th, 2004 : Edge's Guide to Leatherbar Cruising

Since my last post generated such interesting discussion, I thought I would step into the virtual leatherdojo and share some of my thoughts on leather cruising.

- Rule One: Be geared.
 - Corollary One: Even newbies can be geared. If you don't have a set of leathers (or uniform or rubber or whatever), you can still dress in a way that marks you as a member of the community. Boots are required, but can be had for under \$20 (try Ebay or Sportsman's Guide). Add tightish jeans (classically Levi 501s) and a plain T (preferably black--bar and event T's perfectly acceptable). Then, finish off with keys and the hanky of your choice. That's all it takes for someone to register on my radar because it tells me he knows what he wants.
 - Corollary Two: If worn properly, there is no such thing as too much leather. I don't care if it's the middle of summer in New Orleans, wear leather if you have it. I can say that because I DID wear leather in the middle of summer in New Orleans.



- Corollary Three: Consider what will be seen. I don't usually wear, for example, my best lace-ups to a bar. No one will notice them especially if the bar gets crowded.
- Rule Two: Make the bar your home.
 - Corollary One: Know the space. You should never look lost in the bar, or wander around looking for a bathroom. When I'm in a new city, I like to head to the bar early (or perhaps drop in during the day) so I can figure out where the bathrooms, coatcheck, etc. are all located.
 - Corollary Two: Know the flow. According to Joseph Bean, Chuck Renslow's genius with the Gold Coast in Chicago was understanding the need for the right flow. Knowing the flow means understanding where people will be and where they can be and how they get from the one to the other. It's looking for spots you want to stand or sit. For example, at the Lure my spot was by the pool table, just at the door into the main room, directly across from the coatcheck. The bleachers were there, so I could sit with one red spot (such flattering light) shining directly down on me. I was elevated, with a clear view no matter how crowded things got. And, most importantly, I knew people came in and went to coatcheck, which means I could check out people as they arrived.
 - Corollary Three: Don't rush. Never hurry to get to the bar when approaching. Walk slowly and confidently into the bar.
- Rule Three: A bar is a bar.
 - Corollary One: Drink appropriately. Avoid cosmos or any oddly colored drink. Ideally, drink beer, whiskey/scotch/bourbon, or water. Remember, a drink is a prop. I have several poses that work with a beer bottle [g].
 - Corollary Two: Drink responsibly. A tipsy Top is never sexy; a tipsy bottom tends to be a mess. You're at the bar to cruise. If you need to get drunk, do it at home.
 - Corollary Three: Tip generously. The bartender is your friend. He knows the locals and can help you out if you ask. Besides, there's something very big and gentlemanly about tipping with a bit of generosity.

Ugh. OK. That's all I can do for now, though there's a lot more. My typing fingers are sore and I should do SOME work today. If people want me to continue, I shall, but perhaps it's not needed or wanted. 's OK. Sometimes it's just good to get thoughts to virtual paper.

11:02 am June 12th, 2004: Before and After

So I did indeed go to the bar. It was just what I needed.



I was practically giddy before hand, just with the thought of going out. I'm not sure I remember the last time I was so excited and that in itself was a special joy. I moved from mutton chops to beard with a quick pass of the trimmer, lexol'd the leather uniform, geared up, and headed out.

Arrived around 10:30 (why do leathermen insist on not getting to a bar until midnight or later?), got a primo parking spot (just about in front of the bar), paid the \$7 cover (oh, for the days of leatherbars without cover charges!) and headed on in.

I was home.

The crowd was not mine, but the space was. And I moved into it. Headed up to the deck, grabbed a bear, lit an Excal#1, and relaxed into it all. Few prospects early on. A brief chat with a yuppified man who came right up and said hello (clearly, he doesn't understand leathercruising). A chat with a levi-clad biker. A sloppy kiss from a very drunk birthday boy.

And then I made my list. There were 4 interesting people at the bar: the bikesuit, the boots, the vest, and the bare chest. Made first contact with Bikesuit. From CT. Older but cute as fuck. We chatted, I offered him a cigar, and we ended up spending time throughout the night reconnecting, chatting, flirting. It's good to have a bar buddy. Bare Chest was next. Turns out we had some interesting connections, but he was looking to get fucked which I don't do. The Vest followed. That was nice. Extended bar play (shoving his mouth onto my cod, playing with his tits, feeding him some smoke, having him hump my boots) but I was there to cruise, not pick up so ended it before it got too far along. Then a couple of bonus cruises, from men who were not in leather. Both cute, both muscled. Didn't do much with either, cause ya see, Boots was still lurking.

He was wearing WESCO lace-ups, jeans, vest with no shirt. Every time I passed him he was looking down--not submissively, but at my BOOTS (18" High Shine Chippewa Engineers). But he never approached, even though I gave him full permission through our cruises. His signals weren't exactly clear, so I just figured he was a Top, too. But then, late in the evening, I saw him on the top deck--way back in the corner--but the back back stairs.

So I headed over.

Ah, friends, this is what the leatherbar, what leathercruising, is all about. There was not conversation because none was needed. He was in a dark secluded corner and invited me into that space. I headed in, came in close, whispered in his ear "You been looking at my boots all



night. Why don't ya taste them?" That's all it took. Some boot licking, lots of boothumping, some sloppy kisses, some titplay and--and this is the killer, folks--he shots in his pants.

NICE.

Only after all that did we chat and get names. The moment didn't need any of that. **THAT'S** what cruising is about for me.

By the time I left the bar it was 3:10 AM. I was shocked. I got home at 4:00. I didn't have sex but I had an incredibly good time.

I cruised.

10:01 pm July 27th, 2004: The Currency of This Culture

For some time now I've been thinking about the leather culture I know. At times, I've talked about moving in and out of various "erotic economies" and watching my personal stock rise and fall as I do. I'd like to extend the financial metaphor a bit more.

The currency of the leather culture I know is *respect*. Funny thing about it... *the best way to earn it is to pay it*.

- **RESPECT YOURSELF.** It begins by respecting yourself. By that I mean two things. First, respecting yourself means respecting your kink. Specifically, it means accepting it. It's not something dirty or shameful or something you keep in a corner of your life. It's a fully integral part of who you are. Respecting yourself also means accepting your body for what it is. If you want to get in better shape, fine--go for it. But to beat yourself up about your body is both disrespectful and pointless.
- **RESPECT YOUR GEAR.** You have to respect your gear, too. Respecting gear means appreciating it, wearing/using it, and caring for it. Note: caring **NOT** coddling. Are my boots all spit shined all the time? Hardly. But boots are made to be lived in, and the way I choose to pay respect to that is by, well, living in them. There's a line between leather that's lived in and leather that's uncared for. Where that line is drawn is unique to each item. Find the line, live in your leathers, but give them care enough to keep on living for you.
- **RESPECT SCENES.** This axiom, too, has a few meanings. First of all, it means that you need to respect the scenes/kinks/fetishes of others. Not into age play? Fine. But the moment you start judging that scene, you lose all right to defend your own. Respecting scenes also means respecting the space created between you and your partner. Act with reverence to the scene. Finally, never invade the scenes of others in public play spaces, and that's not always easy. For sure, it means you don't walk



up and play with someone somebody else is playing with. You don't distract the players. But don't violate their space at all. At Thunder, the dungeon was so big I had some trouble with this one. I felt like I was walking through a mine field, constantly looking around to make sure I didn't walk through someone's space.

- **RESPECT THE PARTNERS OF OTHERS.** Many people play outside of their primary relationships. Respect the fact that they have a primary relationship. If you should happen to play with someone's slave, thank not the slave but the Master, as you would if you had borrowed anything they own. Don't intrude on the relationships of others, though (granted) this may not always be easy since the boundaries are not always clearly drawn.
- **RESPECT OTHERS.** Treat all people with respect. There will be some (perhaps many) you don't care for. That's OK. Paying respect doesn't mean liking someone. It doesn't even mean accepting them. It means being civil, and giving people enough space to be who they are. So he takes off his leather to fuck... what of it? It doesn't lessen you or lessen your culture. It's just that he's in a different culture.
- **RESPECT THAT WHICH IS GREATER THAN YOU.** Greatness has many levels, from the Universe/God/Higher Power to the most esteemed leaders of this community. This is not a community with genetic succession, like a monarchy. If someone has reached a place of greatness, it's because that person has worked hard to achieve it. Respect that.
- **RESPECT THAT WHICH IS LESSER THAN YOU.** We all start out in kink knowing nothing. You, too, were a novice at some point. That doesn't mean you have to mentor anyone at all. But it does mean you should validate people in the pursuit of their fantasies and desires.

Of course, this doesn't represent "the" leather culture or even "a" leather culture. It's only what I know. Correction... it's only what I *think* I know. I could go through this list and offer example after example of how I have failed to do each and every one of these.

But that's the thing about an economy. It doesn't have commandments, per se. You accumulate respect, you stock it up, you save it, you're given credit. You might lose some, but like the stock market what counts is the long haul.

12:01 am July 15th, 2005: The Last Entries: The disappearance of Zona; Or, LTHR EDGE is dead ... Long live LTHR EDGE!

"And it didn't matter that she hadn't *been* Zona, because she'd made Zona *up*, and that was just as real. Just wait, Arleigh said, because somebody else would turn up, somebody new, and it would be like they already knew you. And Chia had sat and thought about that, beside Arleigh in her fast little car.

—But I couldn't ever tell her I knew?

—That would spoil it." —William Gibson, *Idoru*



This is the last entry of this journal, and the last words of LTHR EDGE. I'm me, and ever have been, but that doesn't make Edge any less real, nor does the fact that I "made him up." Indeed, he became more real (in some ways) than I myself am, and will continue to be so in the imaginary of many around the world (or so I would hope).

I won't rehearse all the reasons for ending Edge--they're in some old post somewhere and really the only reason that matters is that I know it's time. But, I will say some more on what I hope I am doing. I would argue, with just a pinch of conceit, that LTHR EDGE was the first leather cyber celebrity. I wasn't famous *at all* in the real world until I was famous (a bit) in the cyber world. The question I hope to answer, then, not just for me but *for all of us* (*When they fire those cannons, when the crowds sing of glory, it is not just for Peron, but for all of us! All of us!*), is whether or not we *can* recreate ourselves in this virtual space. I would argue that part of the problem for some of our more notorious leather leaders is that they can't stop being themselves; having been shaped in the real world they've become locked into roles and images that leave them not much room to wiggle (and here, in particular, I am thinking of this guy out in CA). Is the same true for the cyber world? Can I really be someone new?

I don't know. But I need to find out.

I thought about telling people about Ez, his online moniker, his URL, his blog and so on. But that would defeat the purpose of all this.

And yet (*and it's important to me that you all know this*) I'm not reinventing myself to lose all of you; I'm reinventing myself to find myself.

And you will find me again, too. It won't be that hard, after all. The virtual world is small, you know. Keep an eye on your friends list. You'll find someone checking in on *you*, and writing himself about life.

And when you find me (because I will make myself easy to be found) don't worry about "spoiling it" as my opening quote would suggest. Be open to who I am becoming, but remember I am still who I am. You can still call me Edge-- I won't deny my past--and certainly that's what I will always be known as in teaching circles. I'm open to how Ez evolves, connected to Edge and yet someone new. I just ask that you be open, too.

Edge has had a 10 year run. I'm proud of what he became. He literally changed the lives of others, and that fact still, to this moment,



humbles and astounds me. Remember him for who he was/is and come to me to see who I am/will be.

*I've heard it said
That people come into our lives for a reason
Bringing something we must learn
And we are led
To those who help us most to grow
If we let them
And we help them in return
Well, I don't know if I believe that's true
But I know I'm who I am today
Because I knew you:*

*Like a comet pulled from orbit
As it passes a sun
Like a stream that meets a boulder
Halfway through the wood
Who can say if I've been changed for the better?
But because I knew you
I have been changed for good*

Let Edge die, and in so dying, achieve a kind of immortality (note the megalomania [g]).

Let Edge die, and in so dying, let me be born again.

*These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadivam. Damyata.*

Shantih shantih shantih



Oracle



or some time now, the subtext of this site has been a soapbox. That soapbox is the simple fact that the advent of the web is radically altering our community. The community is experiencing a radical expansion, both vertically and horizontally across generations. Within a generation, more and more men are tentatively entering the scene, putting a toe into the waters and playing with kink. But, what's more troubling I think, a very young generation of leatherpeople is coming of age. After all, imagine what you would have done as a teen with all the resources available on the web!



I've done what I can with this soapbox. This site is meant, in part, to help mentor all those who are joining this community. But the "brick and mortar" community seems unaware of how serious a concern this is and will be. I may be Chicken Little, and the sky may not be falling, but I can only know what I see, and what I see is something very big, very new, and very outside the imagination of the community in the real world.

So, I thought I would treat my soapbox as something of a hypothesis. And, from that hypothesis, I am making some predictions—trends I see emerging even now, trends which I think are directly related to the interaction of leather and the web, and trends which I think will continue to grow. These are my prophesies, and I record them here. If I'm right, then forewarned is forearmed. If I'm wrong, well, I've been a fool before.

But, I suspect that:

Bars will continue to die but events will continue to thrive. Because the web enables connections across vast distances, events like IML become the chance to meet people you've been chatting with for a while. IML, MAL, Folsom, Folsom East, Dore—these will grow more and more. In New York, there's only one real leather bar, the Lure, and even that seems in danger of dosing [update—it *is* dosing]. This particular effect, however, will probably manifest in large cities first; in smaller ones, bars tend to have an amalgamation of populations that keep them afloat.

Identities and relationships will become more complex. Because you can have multiple identities online, people will increasingly recognize, explore, and integrate multiple parts of their desires. So, for example, you can be a SIR and a boy. This was reflected recently in the LeatherSir/Leatherboy contest—one of the SIRs dropped into the boy category, one of the boys dropped into the SIR category (and won). “SIR” and “boy” are neither as restrictive nor confining as they once were. We can also expect that leather families will be more and more common. The image of the leather couple was Master and slave, Mr Benson and Jamie. But people will increasingly form more complicated families: pups and boys and slaves and pigs and SIRs and Daddies and Masters and Uncles and who knows what else.

The community will be both larger and more fragmented. It used to be there were only leather groups, but the web allows for very focused and specialized groupings of desire. Look through the Yahoo Groups some time and you’ll see how very specialized these can become. As people identify more specifically via their fetishes, the community becomes more multiple, which may make political action more difficult.

Leadership will emerge through something like democracy. I call this the Google Effect. Google works like this: when you search for a term, it assumes the page you want is the page that everyone else who searched for your term went to. It works also through linking, so the page that everyone is linking to has a certain weight. This is a bit democratic—your traffic to a page is a vote for that page’s relevance. Similarly, there are a *lot* of leather pages out there with a *lot* of information (some of it not all that good). People will, *en masse*, decide which of those pages are worth something. These people will begin leading the community. The age of the title holder is closing, because now the means to communicate with the actual members of the community is more and more online.

More people under 30 will feel jaded. With the info on the web, people get into leather sooner. With the ability to learn and connect and *see* what’s possible, more people experience more sooner, faster. I’ve corresponded or chatted with men 21 *and younger* who already have an interest in edgy play like weaponsex. MAsT-NYC did a program on the challenges faced by young Masters. When people are finding their fantasies and roles so soon in life, how long will it be before they feel burnt out? The coming generation will need to find a way to deal with this. It may come through new fetishes and scenes, though I suspect there are other avenues and answers as well. I suspect, actually, there will be an increase in explorations of spirituality and sm.

So says the oracle. For what it’s worth.



Conclusion: The Return



worry about you. I worry about you more than I worry about myself—maybe even more than *you* worry about *yourself*. You see, journeyer, I came to all this in a privileged time. I came to leather when it was more visible, more vibrant, more alive in some sense. I answered ads in *Bound & Gagged* and *Drummer* (gone); I went out to the Spike and the Eagle and the Lure (gone); I went to meetings of the bondage club, of GMSMA. It was easier for me.

I fear it may not be so easy for you. I hope I'm wrong. I hope you've found a community that you can call home and that can teach you what you need to know. I hope that in the time that stretches between my writing of these words and your reading of them that things have changed for the better. I hope.

Where have all the leathersmen gone? Some have passed, and those we mourn. But many, many others have gone underground. I don't see them out at the bar, or at local events, or even online. They're there, I know, but I can't see them (have you?). I don't know what they're doing and I don't know if they're happy. I only know I miss them. Not that I ever knew them, or all of them (even most of them), but having them around me, in the world through which I moved, made me feel, well, *legible*. Maybe that's what a community is.

I can't help but feel that this whole book sounds elegiac, as though I've shored so many fragments against weathered and mossy ruins. That's not my intent. What is now is what is and what was then is what was. We each make our way, and this is no more than the fractured record of my own way.

I'm given to pronouncements of the oracular kind. So indulge me one last time, in these the last lines of LTHR EDGE:

Mourn not for those who have dived into the murky depths. Only learn the lessons brought to you.
They will return. They will rise from the cold deep.

They must.

Else, their desires will suffocate them.

Journeyer, above all else remember this: *every mammal must breathe.*

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