

I'm Commander Shepard and *This Is My Complex Relationship With (Alter)Humanity and the Fictionkin Community*

Page Shepard 11/05/2021

Fictionkin groups and spaces have been suffering in the alterhuman communities these past few years and it hasn't gone unnoticed by anyone with the eyes to see it: the "Kin for fun" or KFF fandom that cropped up back in 2016 and became a rolling tsunami of misinformation and misdirected aggression towards actual otherkin, therians, and fictionkin has done damage beyond what I can succinctly summarize. It's rare that I see new fictionkin pop up and stay around the community—and it's rarer still that I see projects or creations, either individually-created or through collaborative efforts, come up with fictionkin or specific fictionkin identities as the focus. A part of me likes to hope that I'm being cynical and that I'm just absent from important fictionkin spaces, but a part of me knows that's likely not the case.

As someone with a fictionkin identity myself, I've felt this loss hard and tried to ignore it harder, because it never felt like my "place" to poke or prod within the community discussions and discourses surrounding it. Even though I'm Commander Shepard, and even though I likely fall into some sort of Pokemon-adjacent form of identity, I've never *felt* fictionkin. This strange separation is something that I partially attribute to my origins in the alterhuman community, where I still carry internalized baggage around the word "fictionkin" in application to myself as someone who started in the therian community as a (then miscategorized) dhole.

It's a sentence that's harder than it should be to get out, saying point-blank that I'm fictionkin. In my earliest years within the alterhuman community, though anti-fictionkin attitudes had begun to dissipate, they were still astoundingly present and clear. *Especially* from old guard gatekeepers of therian varieties, and even some older members of the otherkin community. While those people are all long gone now (or, alternatively, have slunk away to rotting parts of the community well outside public eye), it's hard to forget the ways that even people who were then-respected would react towards fictionkin with belittlement and scorn.

And more than that, I'm an animal first and foremost; an "extranthrope," if one wanted to use the term, though I don't apply it to myself. Having a *human* fictotype in this scenario feels like it functionally has a set of contradictions that I just don't know where to even begin with, like being a reverse-otherkin. My Shepard shifts, rare and suppressed as they are, come completely out of left field and unsettle me in a particularly unique way. "Human" but not, "human" but wrong. It's the feeling of species dysphoria combined with uncanny valley, but aimed inward, at the human identity.

If the origin of this fictionkin identity is of a spiritual nature, then there's also the issue that it doesn't fit into my current construct of beliefs; meanwhile if it's psychological—which I don't think it is, but will include for the sake of the perspective—then I not only have to wonder both *how* and *why*, but I also have the added benefit of being a small minority in a primarily spiritual-oriented minority group. The punchline is stress and confusion in either situation, with me as the joke.

But the standup act doesn't just end there. Within the Mass Effect fandom, it seems that 90% of those of us who are fictionkin are various iterations of Shepard. For individuals familiar with the story, I'll give you one guess as to why. For those unfamiliar, it's sufficient to say that over the course of the three Mass Effect games, you're liable to get everyone you care about killed in the most gruesome ways, and then at the end you're almost guaranteed to die yourself, anyways. It could be argued that there is no happy ending for the Mass Effect series, just a galaxy devastated and a war hero either dead or unrecognizable. Most Shepards fall into the former category. to no one's surprise.

Writing out, it's decently funny: I almost went into the Marines in this life, spending a year as a pre-bootcamp poolee, only to have the realization years later that I might've in the past been a space-flavored Marine special ops. As Shepard I was romantically engaged with a scholar who specialized in understanding species outside their own, xenoarcheology especially, and now I'm dating a bunch of animals and humans who all define themselves by their studies of others. Both then and now, I was just some guy who kept walking into frankly apocalyptic scenarios and only getting out unscathed through sheer dumb luck and because of the people walking next to me,

though that's significantly more literal than it is now. Either way, the irony's bloody on the tongue, because obviously nothing's changed between that life and this one.

If I'm an animal trying staunchly to ignore invasive humanity, does that really count as an "alterhuman" experience? As a fictionkin identity? These are questions important on personal *and* community levels. Personal because I'm still figuring out to handle this part of myself: not only is it a strange, new experience on so many functional levels, but also because it's not exactly a happy or soft identity. Being Commander Shepard for me personally is almost something to mourn, in this context: it's the equivalent to doing a 13-card past life reading and somehow pulling out 13 Towers from a single tarot deck. It would be a past life that likely culminated in total, utter, failure and destruction. Not exactly the most fun thing to bring up at parties, here.

Important on community levels because I don't know whether I feel comfortable contributing to the fictionkin community and fictionkin spaces, given I feel so far removed from them, and I'm still internally petrified from how I've seen others treat fictionkin due to misconceptions around the identity. I've grown comfortable in the way I'm perceived in community spaces and that makes me hesitant to change the way I talk about myself. I'm also just generally paranoid when it comes to taking on larger terms that can morph in unexpected directions, or labels which can cause people to read into things that don't exist. This was a primary reason for me dropping the theriomorphic and otherkin labels, after all.

I've talked in my essays before about how much I enjoy seeing others talk about their experiences and I've been very vocal in my encouragements of others to create the type of content that they want to see, or that they resonate with. I don't want to be hypocritical in *not* exploring and putting out aspects of my own identity. And there's a sense of responsibility, too: the fictionkin spaces I've seen on Tumblr, Twitter, and elsewhere often look like they're treading water and just staying afloat amidst an enormous amount of long-standing shit-stirring anti-fictionkin attitudes (even from other alterhumans), and the surge of KFF that often end up inappropriately and uninformedly equating their fandom shenanigans to the fictionkin community. If I can do my individual part to contribute my content and help with those issues, then

shouldn't I? Isn't that the right thing to do, or is that just me personally overstating the community-importance of individual content? Or, like I said before, would that potentially be overstepping myself given the fact that I'm generally not a part of fictionkin communities? It's a hard line to walk, and one I'm still pacing back and forth on.

As of right now, I'm aware that the way I've been ignoring this aspect of myself is likely unhealthy, just on a baseline level. The best course of option, at least for myself, is probably to turn and face the music on self-identity, even if I'd rather avert my eyes. Writing and talking about my experiences and memories, accepting what's happened and happening, letting the noemata or memories or anything else come as they will. It's difficult for me to even consider, admittedly. The idea of it all is terrifying and leaves me feeling flayed open already. But this is an identity and part of myself I've been running from, ignoring, and downplaying since 2017 or 2018—I think it's about time I finally confront it and take it in by the horns (or in this case, by the omnitool).