

# The King of Serpents

*Dash L. Duke 10/29/2021*

Basilisks are considered the “king of serpents” in the land I originate from for good reason: older basilisks can exert some form of control over nearby serpent and serpent-like creatures, including other magical creatures, and it is not unheard of for wild basilisks to have dens and territories more heavily populated by snakes than other nearby regions. Basilisks are also the most venomous reptile, magical or otherwise, and male and intersex basilisks sport a “crown” of feathers which additionally reinforces this myth. It is understandable why humans bestowed this title on us from these features alone, but there is far more to it than what first meets the eyes (and perhaps more to it than any wizard from my home has yet realized).

As a basilisk, I feel a sense of kinship and responsibility to all snakes that is instinctual and integral to my being on a fundamental level. I identify with, almost so strongly to identify as, all forms of snakes. And I view all species of snakes, real or mythical, as my charges: individuals and lineages which I am duty-bound to protect and conserve to the best of my ability, especially against invasive threats such as humans and the species and other dangers they introduce to environments. This is not a feeling unique to me, but rather something all basilisks experience to some degree or another.

Interestingly, these feelings also seem to partially extend to some serpent alterhumans as well, though I am not sure why, precisely, they do. It seems that ‘linkers, furries/furry lifestylers, and most forms of serpentine legged draconics and half-human, half-snake serpentfolk (Yuan-ti, nagas as displayed in pop culture, etc.) are notably excluded from any extension, however watered down, of these instincts: I wonder where the line is drawn between “serpent” and “not-serpent” in these feelings and why the line is drawn where it is?

I am, admittedly, at a loss as to where this instinct originates from. There are a number of reasons that these feelings would be present in basilisks, as well as additional reasons they may be present in me in particular:

- 1) I currently do not know a majority of the process required to create a basilisk egg: the only ingredient I am fairly certain of at this moment is the need of a phoenix egg, although I do believe that ritual magic somehow incorporates aspects of existent species of reptiles into it as well. It is not impossible that this instinct originates from either phoenixes or from a species of reptile incorporated into the ritual that may occasionally operate in family or group units, similar to that of Cuban boas and

- gharials. These hold-over familial instincts could have easily combined with both the lack of natural kin that basilisks suffer from and the guardianship urges common to basilisks, mutating into an overarching taxonomical guardianship.
- 2) Rather than being a “bug” this could be a “feature”: as the ritual process of creation is unknown and ancient, it may be that the original creator intended for basilisks to function as guardian or steward animals over their smaller brethren. But that begs the question of: why? To what end would that achieve? And would that not potentially conflict with basilisks’ disposition towards the human they imprint upon at hatching, if the two instincts of obeying orders and protecting other serpents were to come to a head? I feel like this is unlikely, but I also do not know for what exact reason this ritual, and by extension my species, were created.
  - 3) Basilisks have courtship instincts and may not be as sterile as once thought; it is not impossible that this originates from instincts which would typically be aimed at theoretical basilisk hatchlings, but due to crossed wires or poor species recognition, ends up affecting the basilisk’s outlook towards all serpents smaller than it.
  - 4) I seem to have a particularly strong predisposition towards guardianship urges and the Sol System has had a love of serpents that goes back long before I arrived; I could have been influenced by this fondness once I entered and joined the system, and it could theoretically have influenced or reinforced an existing feeling of snake stewardship. As I never met another serpent in my previous life that I remember, I have no “control group” memory for my feelings and do not know if this is the case.

Because these feelings, for whatever reason they may occur, are directly tied to my identity as a basilisk, I am unsure what to label them as (or if to label them at all, since they arise specifically from *neomata*<sup>1</sup>). Because I am nonhuman on my most baseline or foundational level, where basilisk is my default starting point in selfhood on all functional levels, terminology which is reflective of otherkin and therian identities doesn’t fit, as those both require a human starting point on some level; indeed, alterhuman terms as a whole largely suffers from this issue. There’s also the matter that this feeling is closer to “identifying with” than “identifying as”, making otherkin and modern-day therian<sup>2</sup> vocabulary poor choices.

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<sup>1</sup> Noema (singular) or noemata (plural) is most commonly defined as knowledge or information gleaned about one’s kintype, or the life of one’s kintype, but as a non-otherkin I am in this case using it in regards to knowledge and information I have regarding my past life and species.

<sup>2</sup> I specify “modern-day therian” here due to the fact that older therian writings and community spaces seem to reflect ways of thinking around identity and feelings that often blurred the line between “identify with,” and “identify as.”

Animalhearted terminology seems to fit the bill much closer, given that so many individuals who are animalhearted describe their connection to their hearttype in one of two ways: 1) As something the individual feels *should* be a kintype because it is so integral to their sense of self, but which the individual does not identify wholly as even despite the intensity of this connection, and 2) Comparable to close relatives or another form of kin, where the connection is such an important, even foundational, piece of someone that it is similar in feeling or scope to the way we may view or treat cherished family members and ancestors that affected us in deeply emotional ways.

But there's something of a disconnect in this term, purely based on the ways in which I have seen individuals use it. For some, their 'hearted feelings were accidentally cultivated and became important to them through a combination of choice and chance; for others, their 'hearted feelings are related to pre-existing or parallel alterhuman identities. But I've never seen a human identify as otherhearted based on human biology and mammalian ancestry, much in the same way I've never seen an extranthrope<sup>3</sup> or other form of nonhuman systemmate identify as otherhearted based on similar. This could be because of my own limited exposure to 'hearted community spaces or simply because individuals who experience such have not been public about their experiences, but it still seems relevant and causes me pause.

As far as I know, there are no currently existing words to reference feelings and resulting identities which have their roots in noemata. Epinoema(tic) or ephnoema(tic) seem like good candidates for such, created through taking the ancient Greek prefix "epi-," "ep-," or "eph-" which means 1) (in regards to placement) on, upon, on top of, all over, covering, 2) (in regards to movement or motion) on, over, 3) in addition to, with, 4) (in regards to time) after, 5) (in regards to authority or superiority) over, at, for, and against, and 6) over-, and combining it with the word "noema(ta)." In this, we are utilizing the first definition of "epi-"/"eph-" to reference potentially building "on top of" or "upon" a noema through the realization, connection, and actualization of these feelings and combining it with the third definition to reference these feelings and any resulting identities having come largely from or having a direction connection to a noema.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An extranthrope (also called an extranth) is member of a multiple system who is nonhuman, or who otherwise experiences their body within the inner world of the system as being nonhuman.

<sup>4</sup> It could also be argued that the fourth definition is relevant, if one were to say that the noemata comes first and the feelings and any resulting identity labels come afterward. My only concern with this is that it's something of a potential "which came first: the chicken, or the egg?" scenario.

<sup>5</sup> "Epinoema(tic)" and "ephnoema(tic)" are also a play on the word "overthinking."

This is only a suggestion and not a term I feel that large-scale alterhuman communities are likely to pick up, but it is a term that I think I myself find personally useful: in combining it with a 'hearted narrative, I feel like this is something I could use to talk about my feelings and experiences in this specific area more at length, and that it gives me more control over how I can portray underlying intricacies of a 'hearted identity. Saying I have an epinoema or an epinoematic hearttype is something of a mouthful, but so is calling myself clado-serpenthearted, omni-serpenthearted, pan-serpenthearted, or other additional -hearted terms that I could use to describe my relationship to fellow snakes. So in for a penny, in for a pound, I say.

But with these feelings fully acknowledged, dissected, and an honest attempt made to label or otherwise categorize them...the question remains, what now? What have these feelings spurred me to do in the past? What do these feelings inspire me to do or change in my life for the future?

Given my limited time in my system as the only confirmed walk-in<sup>6</sup>, I haven't done much of anything yet besides write and adjust to my new human life. Had I arrived earlier, I am sure I would have spectacular tales to regale you all with about herping in the deepest swamps of the Everglades and wrangling Burmese pythons with my bare hands or something—but that's just not the case. Realistically, I'd like to get into the habit of hiking and herping with our system's in-laws and friend groups once the Covid-19 pandemic begins to wane and things are less stressful. However, I also recognize that, given how irresponsibly Florida has handled the pandemic by making it a fineable offense of \$5,000 to ask for proof of a Covid-19 vaccine and refusing to issue mask mandates or limitations of travel to the state by cruises and flights, it is likely that this pandemic will stretch on for several more years in our home state. So the magical idea of post-pandemic outdoor exploration isn't likely to manifest as a reality for quite a while yet. My systemmates have wanted to purchase a pet snake since before college and while I would love to hop onto that idea, we have similar roadblocks there: there have been shortages of various types of animal food (feeder mice, crickets, mealworms, etc.) in our hometown over the course of the pandemic and it seems irresponsible to potentially purchase an animal without a more guaranteed food supply.

For right now, I suppose I'm doing what I do best: I'm reading and writing about it. I can't engage with snakes personally at the moment, but I can engage with snakes from a

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<sup>6</sup> A walk-in is a systemmate who appears in a system post-birth, usually with memories of an existence prior to joining the system. Though perhaps calling me a slither-in would make more sense. (Ba dum tss, Harry Potter-Slytherin-basilisk joke.)

thematic and fictional standpoint in the content I create and learn more about the snakes of this world from the literature I read, and I can reach out to serpenthearted individuals to compare my experiences to theirs. I'm also quite excited to use my newfound epinoema as a jumping-off point to further investigate and record other epinoemata, such as relevant "king" or "divine leader-protector" archetypes and even my potential phoenix paratype<sup>7</sup> in future essays!

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<sup>7</sup> A paratype is a fictional character, a nonhuman creature, an object, or a concept which does not fall into any pre-established category of identity such as kintype, theriotype, fictotype, nor hearttype, but which feels important to one's established identity.