

# To Pokémon, or Pokémon't

Who-is-Page 03/02/2021

Identity itself is unbelievably complex; trying to compartmentalize one's self into understandable, easily explainable pieces is difficult at the best of times, and when you throw the idea of nonhumanity within human identity into the mix--something which, for the most part, we largely lack predefined labels to accurately and fully describe--that only further complicates things. Taking that nonhumanity and connecting it to preconceived, human-made notions? Now that really makes folks' heads spin.

## The Fictionkin Phenomena

Fictionkin are definable as individuals who internally identify as a fictional individual or species on an integral level. That is to say, fictionkin identities are not comparable to roleplay or other forms of 'playing pretend,' but instead are very real, very lived feelings and understandings of one's "self" to be, on some functional level, that of a fictional character or species.

Fictionkin have had a fraught past in online spaces. They've been mocked, belittled, and invalidated even within other alterhuman<sup>1</sup> communities for longer than the term "fictionkin" itself has existed, with past, less-accurate, iterations of the terminology such as "otakukin"<sup>2</sup> and "mediakin"<sup>3</sup> suffering much the same. It's a problem that persists to the present within modern nonhuman and alterhuman spheres as well, as it's not terribly uncommon for fictionkin to be excluded or left by the wayside depending on

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<sup>1</sup>"Having an identity that is alternative to the common societal idea of 'human'; a person who identifies as such." Definition cited from The Alterhuman Advocacy group at <https://alt-h.net/educate/glossary.php>

<sup>2</sup>"*Otakukin*-a combination of the words *otaku* and *otherkin*--was coined to **specifically** refer to those otherkin who are heavily influenced by, live with/in, deal with, or are otherwise intimately connected to an Anime/Manga/Live-Action/VGM or related 'dimension', 'world', or paradigm. The initial concept of a supposedly 'fictional' paradigm and/or cosmology having partial or complete basis in an alternative reality is not uncommon among otherkin." Also referred to as "Ota-Kin" in earlier versions of the website. <http://otakukin.otherkin.net/> Earliest archive: December 14, 2002

<sup>3</sup> Mediakin was coined "sometime during the mid 2000s [sic] due to some feeling uncontrolled with the use of the word "fiction" being used," (<https://houseofchimeras.weebly.com/a-history-of-the-fictionkin-community.html>) but I cannot find an exact place or date. Older nonhumans have claimed they remember mediakin being coined on LiveJournal, which seems likely given the time period, but I don't know the validity of these claims or where to find the posts/threads/links in question. It also seems like mediakin and fictionkin as terms came into being at roughly the same time, given that the earlier recorded use of fictionkin dates back to 2004.

the specifics of their identity-- comments claiming that most fictionkin are merely “confused” and “pushing the limit[s] in regards to identifying with/as said character”<sup>4</sup> are still rife within certain nonhuman and alterhuman communities, especially regarding what can be referred to as ‘character-specific fictionkin,’ in which someone identifies as a specific character from a fictional series, whether that be a main character or background moth #12.

But I’m not here to talk about the undeserved contempt that fictionkin as a community gets; rather, I’m here to talk more on the undeserved contempt that the idea of nonhumanity within the realms of human-created fiction gets, and around portions of my own nonhumanity that fall under this umbrella. Fictionkin and their experiences are merely a prime example that the sort of feelings I have are not altogether unheard of, novel, or inventive, and that I already am aware of some of the potential pushback I would be likely to receive should I ever try and make them a more formal part of my identity.

### **Personal Pokémanity**

The wonderful world of Pokemon. I was raised by it, alongside it, within it, even-- Pokemon Gold is how I learned to read, and my first starter, a Charizard from Pokemon FireRed, still remains with me to this day. I still collect cards and play Pokemon Go occasionally, and as an adult have an enduring fascination with the workings of Pop Culture Poké-Paganism and of Pokemon fictionkin experiences. To say I feel a strong association with Pokemon and its collective lore and universes would be an understatement.

I know what it is to have an internal and consistent nonhuman identity: I have identified as nonhuman since 2014 on the basis of phantom limbs and psychological experiences I ascribe to a spiritual animality. I am part of a plural system where, internally, I look, feel, and act like a canine psychopomp (and, when not a canine psychopomp, an asian dragon).

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<sup>4</sup> LycanTheory, 2016.

I do not experience this with any Pokemon; no phantom limbs, no mental shifts, no consistent internal picture of myself as a Pokemon. I don't have any of the other common traits associated with certain types of consistent nonhuman identities, either--things like, to use a spirituality-based nonhumanity example, past life memories. And yet, for reasons unknown, I find myself expecting these experiences and being startled and confused by the lack thereof. It's pseudo-dysphoric in how it feels, akin to a small container of ice being dumped over my head at the realization; something that I look for and that should be there but, for whatever reason, simply isn't. It's a similar feeling to the one I get when I walk in front of a mirror and am startled to see a human's reflection, rather than the reflection of my internal image or phantom body.

Picturing myself as a Pokemon feels right, in an intimate way that human vocabulary struggles to describe, in a way driven by forces that exist outside of language. Unlike seeing myself as a human, and as certain other species, it doesn't spark discomfort or unease--I feel as though I should be a Pokemon. And, in some small way, I do believe that this therefore makes me a Pokemon. Any explanations or justifications to this are secondary: those are the emotional understandings of myself I am stating as lived realities within my current understanding of who I am, and what I am.

And it's not with any specific Pokemon either, but with all of them. I identify so strongly with Pokemon as a whole so as to slightly identify as them on both species-level and on a conceptual level, though not in the qualitative ways I am accustomed to, and not for the spiritual reasons I've assigned to my other identities.

Phenomena like this have been defined in the alterhuman communities before within the words *otherhearted*<sup>5</sup> and *otherkith*<sup>6</sup> respectively and, if I were to argue that these feelings were more strongly within my control, *copinglink*<sup>7</sup> might also be

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<sup>5</sup> "When an individual strongly identifies **with** a species of creature. It's more than a fascination or like of the creature, like in the furry fandom, but not quite to the point of being something you identify **as**, like with a therian or otherkin." Definition cited from the Therian Wiki at <https://therian.fandom.com/wiki/Other-hearted>

<sup>6</sup> Coined at a different time, but with a fundamentally identical definition to *otherhearted*.

<sup>7</sup> "A non-human identity (or in some cases, relation) which is consciously created. The creator is able to change and pick who/what they identify as/with as need dictates. This identity can be created by anyone, and thus, is not dictated by one's mental health." Definition cited from the coining post at <https://who-is-page.tumblr.com/post/139871297049/clinkers-and-copinglink>

considered applicable. But I'm not particularly interested nor confident, at least at current, in slapping any of those words on what I'm feeling.

Trying to decipher some sort of way to easily compartmentalize my experiences doesn't do them justice. Something I gained out of my time within the otherkin and therian communities is the realization that you don't *need* to start with a cosmology, a defined, specific concept assigned the purpose of acting as a rationalizing enterprise, and that--for me personally--attempting such can often be unhelpful and further muddy the waters of understanding. The idea of "an epistemic regime that divide[s] the cosmos into meaningful parts"<sup>8</sup> is one I've seen a lot of nonhumans base their identities off of, and certainly is something I've used myself. It's not something I'm seeking to disregard or disavow. But the idea of that as a starting point is something that's never quite worked for me.

Nonhumanity pushes and pulls at existence, sustained and sustaining; motivated and motivating, existing prior to words and formal thoughts, in a nonlinguistic and uncategorizable way. I hope to examine this drive of feeling, the tensions between myself, this part of me, and the world around me, and I hope to witness the development and hidden aspects to it that I do not yet know. It is a cactus, firmly rooted in the pebbly, dry soil of my self, and instead of trying to assign it a species, to a formal genus, take notes on its habitation and preferred light levels, I am content to sit here and watch it slowly bloom before I begin tackling any sort of divisions into bits and bytes of information. And maybe I'll never bother with any sort of formality with it, either, whether because of others' discontentment or another reason entirely. Though formality is still an option I'd like to have.

### **'You Can't Use That ~~Item~~ Identity Here!'**

Formally labeling my experiences with preexisting terminology and trying to talk about them in nonhuman and alterhuman spaces is a multi-layered problem.

Putting aside my current feelings around the idea of labeling such an identity--my feelings that that is something I can put aside for later, once I better understand this

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<sup>8</sup>Donovan O. Schaefer, *Religious Affects: Animality, Power, Evolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2015), p. 5

part of myself, if I truly desire it--I have to consider the modern limitations surrounding preexisting terminology. Should I decide to label these experiences and how they contribute to an overarching understanding of myself, I have to consider not only whether I will feel like any of the existing terms out there fit me, but whether I feel like they will be *useful* to me.

Certain terms might apply or fit well at first glance, but then have undertones or built-in assumptions to them that are not immediately apparent, and that go against the grain of what I am trying to describe. Additionally, I have to consider whether or not the terms itself will be worthwhile to use from a collective-oriented standpoint: Will the communities around those terms be communities I want to actively participate in? Be associated with? Where within nebulous digital spaces do these communities exist, and how are they treated? Do these communities have any physical aspects to them--gatherings, meet-ups, groups--or are they wholly confined to online existences?

Even on the chance that I find already-existing words which readily fit my experience, there's a hearty discussion to be had about reactions to nonhuman and alterhuman identities and experiences that are directly intertwined with published fiction, as was touched on earlier.

Within no small amount of alterhuman, nonhuman, and adjacent circles of communities, it has always seemed to me that a nonhumanity which primarily understands itself through the lens of assuming it is from that of a fictional canon is looked down upon as intrinsically lesser than a nonhumanity which understands itself through a lens of academically-sourced biological animality. I wouldn't say these attitudes are necessarily completely conscious, either-- it feels, in my experiences, comparative to the mid-to-early 2010's, we see markedly fewer direct comments within these circles that are "calling out" fiction-related identities based on perceived notions of illegitimacy, or justifications for exclusion based on a range of perceived difference (the idea that these identities are so different as to not be welcomed into such spaces, even if they fit well within the definitions and historical notions within them). Instead, we just largely see such identities left by the wayside in discussions and group spaces, or framed as being "uncomfortable" or "problematic," to quote certain words I've seen

used previously. It has, in the past, seemed to me that such identities are viewed by some as a vocal minority in the nonhuman communities to be appeased, but not to be engaged with on equal footing and treated as fellows.

There's also a conversation to be had about the way "identify as" language is used and prioritized in these communities, as well. I personally don't utilize "identify as" versus "identify with" language nearly so staunchly as I did when I still identified as an otherkin and therian, but it's created a sort of hierarchy within these and related communities and their resulting terminology that is difficult to disentangle from. The fact of the matter is that, for whatever reason, vocabulary which utilizes "identify as" language--fictionkin, fictherian, theriomythic--is oftentimes viewed as much more serious than vocabulary which utilizes "identify with" language--words such as fictionhearted, fictionkith, and similar. That fact can make it difficult to find spaces in which to seriously engage with one's experiences when they are directly outside of what is perceived as the norm or standard, in this case being "identify as" terminology.

And while it naturally isn't everyone, it's enough. It's a consistent enough pattern of subtle dismissal and, on the rarer occasion, outright gatekeeping to make me pause in labeling and engaging with this portion of my identity outside of very tight-knit nonhuman spaces. To have aspects of myself rejected on the basis of misconceptions or elitism is significantly more upsetting than to just simply not mention it and avoid the situation altogether. And I know from conversations with those close to me that I am certainly not the only one who feels such a way.

### **Conclusion (So What Now?)**

So where does this leave me? The honest answer is that I don't know. I didn't set out to write this with some grand finale in mind, with a newly-developed term or newly chosen community to align myself to, nor to make some substantial claim about fiction-related identities and the way they can often be (mis)treated by those who don't experience them. And so I'm in much the same place I started: the awkward position of waiting, watching, and trying to develop an understanding.

But at the very least, I hope to have clarified my current stances on an important, fiction-adjacent portion of my identity to be used for reflection upon in the years coming, while still being blunt about my qualms and concerns with future attempts at lablization. Because although patience isn't my strong suit, neither is memory, and these small forms of recording can be invaluable as the months blur into years, and the years into decades.

I'm also hopeful that this piece of writing may at least be useful for historical and archival purposes outside my own ramblings on my personal identity, as a recording of, at least my own perceptions on, fiction-related nonhuman identities and the way you often see them viewed within portions of the alterhuman and nonhuman communities. I have seen few essays and articles written by nonhumans touch on these attitudes, especially in the last several years-- perhaps this will work as some form of time capsule, though hopefully people who read it will not interpret it as an all-encompassing one.<sup>9</sup>

May this piece be relevant to the few who read this and have similar experiences to my own, to realize that they are not alone within the nonhuman and alterhuman communities even if they differ from more classical understandings of nonhumanity.

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<sup>9</sup> This essay is very light in its details and citations. Given this is meant to function largely as a personal essay, I tried not to dive too deeply into historical and modern events that have affected the fiction-related communities, as they are both not well-recorded and/or too complex to explain with any simplicity. I, for example, refused to engage with the phenomena of "kinnie culture"--also referred to colloquially as "kin for fun culture" and which is very possibly classifiable as a part of the 'funlink' otherlink community--and how I have recently seen a resulting spike in anti-fictionkin rhetoric both within nonhuman and alterhuman circles *and* outside of them because of its prevalence, as the consequences of such is a topic for another whole essay by itself.