

## **Is That a New Guy or Am I Losing My Mind: or, A Beginner's Guide to Finding Headmates**

Written by Roger de Camden of the Draconic Wizard Workshop

Hello, everybody! This is an essay for both plurals who might struggle finding, identifying, or confirming headmates, as well as people who are questioning whether or not they're plural. Certain pieces of advice may apply better to questioners than established systems, and vice versa, but rest assured, it *is* intended for both!

This essay will be broken into several sections for various “phases” of discovery and working things out, but a disclaimer before we get to that: this is heavily based on our *own* experiences. This is not a one-size-fits-all kind of guide. I'm going to *try* to make it such, but, well, I can't make any promises, because there are infinite ways of being a system out there, and everyone's a little different. This is just what I've found works for *us*, and, to a large extent, many of our system friends! That being said, if you try to start syscourse or invalidate other systems for any reason in response to this essay, I'm going to block you and that's that.

Also, sorry if I go between spellings for words. I'm English, but the body is American and that means that I don't know how to spell certain words anymore.

So! Onwards, towards discovery!

### **Step One: Getting an Inkling**

The first step to figuring out whether or not you've got a headmate (new or otherwise undiscovered; I'll mostly be calling them “new” as in “new to you”) is having an inkling that one might exist. This is mostly a passive process, and you're probably familiar with it if you're reading this guide. Maybe you felt something scuttle through headspace (if you have one) or through the back of your mind. Maybe you felt a presence looming behind you, mentally, that bolted when you “looked.” Maybe you had a very strong emotional reaction to something that makes no sense for you to react to, but would make sense for a character you've been really

attached to in a show. Or maybe you slipped into an unfamiliar accent, had a loss of memories and woke up with nail polish on in a colour you hate, or just felt an opinion about something that doesn't match your usual one. Sometimes, you may even "hear" comments about things going on in your mind.

There are a *lot* of little things that can tip you off. Most of them are going to be things that are misaligned with your own perception of yourself, your opinions, and your behavior. This is usually a sign that someone is co-conscious or co-fronting with you without you being aware of it. Some headmates are *very sneaky* this way, and some may not realise that they exist at all while doing this! Don't hold being hard to notice or get a hold of against your headmates—many of them don't realise that they exist, don't know how to not be this way, or are doing it for what they perceive to be a good reason (this last one is especially common in disordered systems). Maybe they're scared, or just not ready to be confronted yet. Don't worry—remember, you have your whole lives to figure out everyone who's in there, and the time will pass anyways! Take it easy.

One specific thing that tends to tip us off to a new fictive is that we realise that... no one is aware of running a character that we're playing in a tabletop roleplaying game. Maybe someone started off running them, but they sure seem to be doing their own thing now! That character may be hard to "turn off" or "put on the shelf" when you stop playing them—and they may continue to make comments and have opinions about things in your life. This is a dead giveaway! Sometimes when we think about a character, we feel a "movement" or interest somewhere in our mind that doesn't match anyone else's pattern of thinking or interests, which also can be a giveaway that they're scuttling around somewhere. Also beneficial, for us, is our synesthesia—every headmate has a colour associated with them, and when we get a thought pattern that *seems* to match someone but the colour is off, it can make us realise that maybe there's someone else in here. For example, if someone were to be really interested in jellyfish,

we might think that it's Caspian, but if the colour comes back as red and not blue, then we know for certain that it's not him.

This first inkling of a new headmate may be obvious or it may be subtle. You may question yourself repeatedly, but remember: if you feel like you are "accidentally faking," that's not how faking works. Faking must be done intentionally and on purpose. You could be *wrong*, yes, but being wrong isn't inherently bad. It's just that you were mistaken about something. Nothing wrong with that! We're all mistaken about all kinds of things every day! Be kind to yourself while trying to figure things out.

### **Step Two: Are You There, Headmate? It's Me, Your Other Headmate**

Steps two and three are interchangeable in order, but I thought I'd put this one first because it tends to be the one that's hardest and most distressing, rather than step three, which is about identifying who the hell your headmate is. We'll get to that, never fear!

So, let's say you think there might be someone in there. How can you tell for sure? How can you open communication? How can you get them integrated okay?

The bad news is that this depends heavily on the system. The good news is that there's no need to panic, rush, or be afraid, because once again, you'll figure it out eventually, and it will be okay!

My first suggestion is to take note of everything that's made you think there might be someone else in there. Write it down, if that helps! Write down everything that seems to get the entity's attention, if anything. Write down anything that might help you identify who it might be! In some instances, you might have a character that seems a little independent but you can't tell whether they're *really* a headmate or not. In my experience, this is often how many non-disordered systems (but it's not exclusive to them!) realise that they're plural. Knowing *who* it is will make this step easier, but it isn't necessary! After all, if you know who it is, you can also

write down things that might bait them into responding. Interests and friends of theirs are good examples.

Your goal in this step is to try to draw them out into doing things, speaking, or acting in ways that will give away that they are for certain there. For systems with heavy amnesia or dissociative barriers, this might be significantly harder, but my best suggestion there is to jump straight to trying to communicate, however you can—and this isn't a bad approach for other systems, either. You can try internal communication, although you might get no response, or an abnormal one, if the headmate is new. For example, with us, new headmates usually respond to direct queries with anxiety—which, while not good for communication and not ideal for the headmate in question, *does* help us key in on the fact that they definitely exist. You can also try external communication, if internal communication isn't working or is difficult for you. Write a note in a journal or a sticky note, or even in a notes app or a private Discord server. Sometimes, headmates can find replying over text to be easier. If you're a high-dissociation and high-amnesia system who is trying to figure out if it's someone old or new who is fronting and doing things while you're unaware, leaving sticky notes places asking people to write down who's fronting when they see it (if they even know who they are) might be helpful. Keep experimenting, and do what works best for you!

As a last resort for uncertain, new, or inexperienced systems, you can try something called "puppeting" on a suspected headmate, especially if you know who they are and just aren't sure whether or not they're *here*. A warning: this is rude and not advised under most circumstances, but sometimes it's the only way to make absolutely sure that someone is in there with you, especially when you're not used to it. Have an apology ready and mean it. Puppeting is when you try to force a headmate to do something, especially something unusual or out of character for them. For example, if I thought I might have my character Gorka as a headmate, but I wasn't sure, I might try to call up a scenario involving Gorka and then try to imagine her doing something wildly out of character, that she would never, ever do. If I couldn't get a

response out of that, or if I had no idea who this new headmate might be, I might just try to make them physically do something—strongly imagining them doing a stupid dance or similar! No response doesn't necessarily mean you do or do not have a headmate, but a strong response—usually of anger, offense, or “slapping” your “hands” away—indicates someone separate from yourself! Apologize immediately and then attempt to engage in communication once they've calmed down a little, or try to transition into it through an explanation.

There are a lot of reasons that a headmate might not respond to puppeting, though. They might be non-confrontational, or hiding their presence from you intentionally for any number of reasons. (Maybe they're nervous, not ready to exist yet, afraid of how you might respond, afraid of accepting that they're in a system—it could be anything.) In cases like this, you might just get discomfort instead of a strong response, which is easy to confuse for being your own rather than theirs. Try to sort out whether you just feel strange doing it, or if it's someone else's discomfort bleeding through. I know it's hard, but that's a difficult thing to give advice for, I'm afraid! Other reasons may be that they just dip from the front when you try (removing themselves from your sphere of influence completely), or if they're a character you frequently play, they might be so used to being pulled around into doing things that it doesn't bother them, or bothers them so little that you don't notice.

Usually, if you're at the point of trying puppeting, there's enough signs that this person really is a headmate to dissuade you from trying it once you're a little more used to it. It's a temporary and unideal tool that should leave your toolbox as soon as you become confident enough to identify new headmates without getting grabby with them. Undoubtedly, trying to establish communication is a better approach, if you can get it to work.

Usually, once we've properly spotted a headmate and made it clear to them that we know they're there, one of two things happens: either they come sit in the front for a few days or weeks to settle in, let us identify them, and get used to being a full active member of the system, *or* they realise that *they* exist and have a panic attack. This “new headmate panic” can last

anywhere from a few minutes to multiple days, and may fluctuate in strength. Sometimes, a new headmate might seem fine early on, but have this panic after a few days, weeks, or even longer. *Be gentle* during this time, especially if you yourself have a strong reaction—be gentle with both, or all, of you! Realizing that you're in a system can be very distressing, as can realizing you have a new headmate, so try to be gentle, let yourself feel what you're going to feel, and work through it in the best way you have. Try not to direct any anger or negative feelings towards anyone else in your system during this time, and just let the storm pass before really trying to get to know each other.

### **Step Three: Who Is This Guy, Anyway?**

Once again, you can do this step before or after step two, but I put it here because I decided to include some tips for getting to know your headmate, not just identifying them (if there is anything to identify). If your system is introject-heavy, or if you're asking yourself if you're just really interested in a character or if they're a new headmate, this is an important step! Who is this? Are they an introject of some kind? Are they something or someone else? Is there anything *to* identify, per se, or is it just a situation of getting to know a whole new person? This is a very, very different step depending on your system, and is going to skew very much towards my own experiences. I'm sorry about that, but I will do my best!

If you've already established communication with this headmate, even if it's shaky, you can try to get information from them that way. They might be willing to give you a name, a code name, a colour, an aesthetic, likes or dislikes, *something* you can use to familiarise yourself with them or identify them from a list of "suspects" if you have such a thing. (We always do, because we're almost all fictives, and we know our own patterns at this point.) For us, new headmates almost never actually identify, and just sullenly sit while trying to figure themselves out and will only confirm who they are once we figure it out. It's sort of like playing a mystery game, assembling clues based on a myriad of factors. If you have some suspicions, just like the

previous step, you can try to bait out responses by doing things that might interest who you suspect this headmate might be.

Again, I suggest writing things down! Write down likes and dislikes, things that get their attention, interests, even things that make them anxious or afraid. Whether it's a case of identification or just getting to know them, this is invaluable information for interacting with someone sharing a head with you, and it may even be helpful for them as they get their feet under them.

Another invaluable tool is talking to people outside of your system. They can help you identify when you're acting unusually, when you might have someone unfamiliar riding co-conscious, and even who that person might be. You may be too tangled up in your own feelings, your dissociation, or the desperation to understand who is in your head with you. It's easy to get lost in the weeds and lose sight of the big picture, but another friend, *especially* another system that knows you well, can be extremely helpful! One of our system friends has clocked many a headmate of ours before we were even certain they were there—just “hmm, you've been very much like X lately” and they were absolutely right.

Regardless, taking notes on your new headmate, asking them about themselves, and sharing things about yourself are all important steps to getting to know them! They may be uncomfortable, they may distrust you, they may be afraid—or they could be friendly and excited to be here! It really depends on who it is and their comfort level. Don't push—if they're not comfortable talking yet, don't make them! Let them adjust at their own pace and get to know them as they're willing to let you. I know it can be distressing to have a totally unknown entity co-fronting with you, but sometimes it's one of those things that you have to take a deep breath and carry on through until they're willing to talk. I know you can do it! Talk through it with someone outside of your own head if it's difficult to give yourself some fortitude if you need to. I know it helps me.

#### **Step Four: Now What?**

Let's say that you've confirmed that you do have a headmate, and either have or are on the road to identifying them, if applicable. Now what?

As I've said before: be gentle with yourselves! Especially for a new or inexperienced system, and *especially* for someone who is just *realising* that they're a system, this can be overwhelming, distressing, or any other number of emotions. Remember that having or gaining headmates isn't inherently a bad thing, and while this all might take some getting used to, it's going to be okay. You'll figure out an equilibrium eventually, and it is absolutely possible to live a long, happy life with your headmates. Remember that you're all in this together, and you're a team.

People may not want you to notice them, may not want to be in the system, or may avoid attention as best they can for a lot of reasons, and trying to make them feel at home, or at least more comfortable, is essential. It can be scary being in a system all of a sudden, especially if they're an introject or otherwise had a life outside or before this one. Maybe they don't like the body, or are afraid of another headmate, or are terrified of a negative response from you or someone else. Don't force these people into situations they're not ready for! If you're looking for someone, trying to identify them, or trying to help them, and you're just causing a lot of distress, back off for a while. Let them calm down and come to you in their own time. Sometimes, you have to do the system equivalent of leaving cookies out on a plate and turning your back to them so that your new headmate can take them without being watched. Take things at the pace that you're all the most comfortable with, and as always, be kind.

I really do suggest talking to someone about this process, if you can. Journal if you'd like, especially if you can't trust anyone with this, or don't feel comfortable doing so yet. Getting your words out of your head helps you sort them out a *lot*, especially in the case of systems, where a lot of people's thoughts can get jumbled together. Writing them all down, even if you don't know whose they are, can be helpful. We find that talking to other system friends is of the



most benefit, and our new members are far more likely to speak to them first rather than us, because there's a degree of separation and that's more comfortable for them. Whatever works for you, do it! The idea is to get comfortable with each other, and with being here together.

Find things that your new headmate likes doing. Goratrix has a [whole panel](#) about this aimed at fictives, but essentially, if your new headmate doesn't have reason to front and isn't interested in anything, you probably won't see much of them, and they may end up miserable. Make sure you engage with them and their interests. Let them make friends if they'd like. Get them snacks. Again: whatever works! This is going to depend very heavily on your system, so follow your gut instinct on this one, I think.

Absolutely essential, though, is to not repress anybody. I know sometimes getting a new headmate can be scary, especially if they're unfamiliar, frightening, seemingly monstrous, or a persecutor, but remember: they're probably just as freaked out as you are, if not more so, and they need patience and understanding. Statistically, if they're doing something troublesome, they're trying to help and just don't know how, or are misguided on what "help" looks like. Be kind, and try to find a solution that works for everyone.

Past that... just get to know each other. Figure out how to live together and how to make your combined life the best life it can be. For us, there's so many of us that someone new can almost always find a fast friend in someone else, and sticks with them for a while until they're more used to the system and more confident fronting and doing things without their buddy. Other systems may be able to mimic this approach, or may need to do something very different. Again, again, again, *do what works best for you!* If parts of this guide seem unhelpful or counterproductive, ignore them! This is based on *our* experience of plurality, not yours. Always do what's best for you, what helps the most of you, and what causes the least distress while still letting you function as much as you need to.

Being plural is a very personal experience, in a lot of ways, which is pretty funny because sometimes that personal experience is spread across two or twenty or five hundred

people. It's also a very *personalized* experience, meaning we're all quite different. Your "now what?" might look very different from ours, and that's okay. We can only do our best, and that's always good enough.

I hope this is helpful to someone! If you have any questions, please feel free to ask, and I may edit this guide in the future if it seems that I left something out or think of anything to add.

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