

Sometimes an Angel Dragon is a Gryphon: The Intersection of Identities in Alterhumanity

By Goratrix *bani* Tremere and Raphyel Snyder

Text in red is Goratrix (he/him). Text in blue is Raphyel (xe/xem).

Introduction

Greetings, assembled attendees of the Centaurus Festival. Welcome. My name is Goratrix *bani* Tremere, he/him. I am the co-host of the Draconic Wizard Workshop, and have run panels before, at Othercon. This one, however, will be slightly different—I have a co-panelist in this, a headmate of mine.

I'm Raphyel Snyder, xe/xem, one of the DWW's protectors. Hopefully you'll be able to tell us apart by voice, yeah? Let's just hope we don't have another incident with Goratrix's voice comin' out with my accent. That's happened to us before, and it ain't pretty when it does.

Now, a little about us before we get started: we're both fictives, vampires, sourcemates to an extent, but have a few differences. We're different types of vampires, sure—he's a Tremere, I'm a Salubri—but we also have nonhuman identities attached to all that. I'm an angel, he's a dragon, and both of those aren't kintypes so much as archetropes. We'll get deeper into that later, when we talk about where those identities came from, as well as their overlap with other identities, both ours and our headmates'.

We wanted to work together on a panel because this is a topic that is near and dear to both of us: intersectionality of identity. Do identities that an individual holds affect each other? We think they do, inevitably, because things that are a part of you are bound to affect other parts of you. What about systems? Can there be identities held by multiple members, or only while some are blurred or in the front together? We think so. Can mental illness or queerness play a role in alterhuman identity? We would like to convince you that they can.

And, for the record, yes. We both always sound like this.

You'll get used to it.

The False Dichotomy

Ultimately, I think we should begin at the basis of how most alterhuman identities are defined—which is to say, most are sorted into being considered either “spiritual” or “psychological.” I will not spend time defining either, and will proceed with the assumption that the audience is at least passingly familiar with these concepts. It is essential to understand that these are not your only options when seeking to define or categorize an identity—there are many reasons why an identity may exist, or it may exist for *multiple* reasons. I do not find dividing identities between spiritual and psychological to be useful, as they can be intertwined and are not inherently opposites. Additionally, it can be difficult to tell whether an identity is one or the other, which does not support the idea of them being opposite and completely distinct. For example, the DWW’s host, Tanix, has a kintype of a silithid that he cannot determine the “origin” or “type” of. Was he drawn to silithid hives because of a spiritual connection to them, because of his kintype? Or did the kintype form *because* the hives were so essential to his psychology growing up? Or, perhaps, was it something different entirely?

This is most commonly discussed in terms of otherkin, but there are many other causes for identity beyond spiritual and psychological: archetypal, biological, magical, energetic resonance, and neurological, as just a few examples.¹ Additionally, these may be mixed: perhaps you believe that your energy resonates at the same frequency as your kintype’s, and this is due to some kind of psychological quirk you have. There is no reason that one cannot mix beliefs in this area, nor any reason why one has to label an identity under *any* of these. Perhaps

¹ Poppy Hapalopus (aestherians). “These are the main beliefs I know of...” *Just your friendly neighborhood bison* (personal blog). December 13 2020.
<https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/637387658755178496/whatre-the-different-ways-to-be-kin-besides>
Archive date February 21 2024:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20240221200205/https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/637387658755178496/whatre-the-different-ways-to-be-kin-besides>

nothing resonates with the *why* or *where from*; or perhaps you just don't consider it relevant and thus ignore it.

In any case, this false binary and dichotomy of spiritual vs psychological is just the tip of the iceberg, as is this: just as we have to tear down the aforementioned, we must dismiss the notions that all plural systems are either “traumagenic” or “endogenic” with nothing in between, and no room to simply not care about system origin. There are infinite ways for a system or for individual members to form, with many documented and given flags by those who identify with the label.² These labels—spiritual, traumagenic, psychological, magical, endogenic—are all meant to be useful, to tell something about yourself in a single word. They are not meant to be cages for you to be locked in—never *ever* should you be forced to use or identify with a label that does not ring true to you. Discard labels entirely if you wish, or collect a hoard of micro-labels if that is what you feel expresses you best. Describe yourself as a mix of two labels (for example, a system that was born with four members but split into sixteen due to trauma could call themselves a mix of endogenic and traumagenic), use a third label, make your own, or disregard them altogether. Identity is **for you**.

Why am I talking about all of this? What does this have to do with the topic of this panel? I need to establish groundwork with you, an understanding that we are approaching this from an angle of identity and its labels being for you and you alone, and if anyone has a problem with it, block their ass. Fuck 'em. You do not need that kind of behavior in your life, not about something so fundamental to you. The strange twists and turns of your identity are something to toy with, pull at, play with, explore—not to lock away under an ill-fitting label that others have thrust upon you. Just like there is no gender binary, there is no identity label binary, and to properly engage with the rest of the panel, it is my belief that you need to keep an open mind to that.

With that established, let's talk about some identity intersection.

² The Plural Dictionary. “Origins.” Last updated April 6 2020. <https://system-dictionary.carrd.co/#origins>
Archive date January 26 2024: <https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://system-dictionary.carrd.co/#origins>

Queerness and Alterhumanity (And most of all xenogenders)

We're gonna start on a topic near and dear to my heart, which is queerness. Sexuality, romantic attraction, gender, all of that—it can all have an effect on each other, but so too can it have an effect on mental health (which I'm not going into in this panel, there are real professional studies done about that) and alterhuman identity. A common kind of way this manifests is gonna be with xenogenders, as well as similar gender identities.³ How often in the alterhuman and nonhuman communities do you hear someone say something like “my gender is robot” or “my gender is a dog?” I don't know about you, but I see it a lot—enough that whole projects have been launched to collect those experiences!⁴ It is *absolutely* worth examining the ways that species can have an effect on your gender, or vice versa, or even both. Statistically, most of you here identify at least partially as a species other than human. Does that interact with your gender at all, do you think? What about your expectations of gender from other people, or for yourself?

Let's take an example from my system, and go with my headmate Serinoth, a D&D gold dragon. He considers his gender to be “gay male dragon.” The reason for that is because a *male dragon* is gonna have different expectations placed on him than a *male human*, societally and culturally. Presenting those genders might be completely different, and they *are*—Serinoth is used to males being smaller and more lithe, while females are tankier and stronger, while in humans, the sexes are more similar (and not as binary) as many would think, but the stereotype

³ LGBTQIA+ Wiki. “Xenogender.” Last updated February 4 2024.

<https://lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Xenogender> Archive date February 21 2024:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240221210048/https://lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Xenogender>

⁴ At the time of writing this panel, Nova has submissions open for a zine entitled My Gender is [NOT] Human, and it will be released months after the Centaurus Festival. As a result, we can't read its submissions or cite them here, but do want to provide a link to the zine's submissions post in case anyone who finds this resonating with them wants to do something with that and send in a submission. It can be found here: <https://nova-dracomon.tumblr.com/post/741325813857812480> or at an archived link here in case you are reading this far in the future and just want to see the post for curiosity's sake: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240221210935/https://nova-dracomon.tumblr.com/post/741325813857812480>

is the other way around. The way a male dragon performs masculinity is gonna look different from how a male human performs masculinity, and maybe in a fully draconic society, Serinoth wouldn't need to emphasize the *dragon* in his gender, but he does because he's in a largely human-centric society at the moment. He also includes "gay" in there because, again, of expectations and how he's supposed to perform masculinity. Where he's from, dragons are expected to be near-aromantic, only becoming someone interested in a dragon of the "opposite" sex once they're at breeding age *only* to reproduce, maybe make a friend. That's about it. But that's not how he works—he's flamboyant, he's a flirt, he's gay, he *likes men*, both dragons and humanoids alike. That *completely* changes the way he presents his gender to others, and doesn't feel like he's necessarily a "cis male" despite being assigned male at birth and still identifying as such. He's not *trans* either, mind, but he's something else completely.

I think a lot of xenogender and transspecies identity gets covered up in throwaway jokes or comments about someone's gender being dog or whatever to piss off transphobes—but it's very, very real, and important to a lot of people. (Not that I'm saying don't have fun with it—I love joking about my gender.) Many don't look past the surface, and see it as absurd, but just peer a little deeper and you'll find whole worlds of interesting stuff inside any gender that describes itself even a little atypically, and even a lot of "typical" ones.

Let's play with another example: me. I identify as a human (I was born as one and still like 'em), a vampire (got turned into one), a Salubri (that's my vampire clan), and an angel (archet trope). I'm intersex in such a way that I was assigned one thing at birth and then, as I grew up, abnormalities began to crop up and it became clear that I was different from my peers. I was suddenly separated from the gender I'd been told all my life that I was, and it made me stop and wonder: *what am I, then?* I asked myself that for a long time, eventually decided I was never gonna reach a real answer, picked up xe/xem pronouns and renamed myself Raphyel and got ready to fight for my life in a world that didn't want people like me. When I became a vampire, a Salubri, I got a taste of something beyond myself—the idea of healing, of protecting,

of doing something for other people and being and meaning more than I ever had before. That changed me in a fundamental way, but it also answered my question: I'm an angel. I'm a protector. I'm a guardian. Is it my gender? I don't know. But it's sure had an effect on it, 'cause I don't take on most gender labels beyond "trans" and "queer," because even "nonbinary" doesn't suit me. It's like it suggests that I'm some kind of human gender that isn't one of the two usual, and that doesn't feel right to me. I'm *something else*, something... not inhuman, per se, but *beyond* human, not in the way of being "better" but in the way of being further down one of many paths.

Does that make sense? Do you see how these things can all tie into each other? Do you see how someone might have a kintype whose gender they identify with that has such different gender roles and presentations to humanity that they call themselves transspecies because there's no other label for it?⁵ What about people that, through their connection to some kind of nonhuman or alterhuman identity, can reframe their gender and become more comfortable with it, or shift it to a new angle and find some kind of new joy in it?⁶ These things overlap, hold hands, alter and change each other—and I think that's something to embrace, because hearing about this kind of thing can change you, can change how you look at species and sexuality and gender all over again just like the first time you read something written by a trans or nonbinary person and realized that what you'd thought all along wasn't quite the lived experience of everyone in the world.

⁵ For example, Poppy Hapalopus (aestherians). "I don't feel like transgender is a fitting term..." *Just your friendly neighborhood bison* (personal blog). February 27 2021.

<https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/644233894773833728/i-dont-feel-like-transgender-is-a-fitting-term>

Archive date February 21 2024:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240221214156/https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/644233894773833728/i-dont-feel-like-transgender-is-a-fitting-term>

⁶ For example, Sarabi (purrianthropy). "Reclaiming "Female" Through Therianthropy." *Sarabi* (personal blog). January 30, 2024.

<https://purrianthropy.tumblr.com/post/740922572004278272/reclaiming-female-through-therianthropy>

Archive date January 31, 2024:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240201004413/https://purrianthropy.tumblr.com/post/740922572004278272/reclaiming-female-through-therianthropy>

Alterhuman Overlap

It is not just queerness that can have an effect on an alterhuman identity—so, too, can *other* alterhuman or nonhuman identities. First, I will talk about how identities can overlap and produce unique experiences, and then Raphyel will discuss how one identity can create another.

I feel like identity overlap is something that the community typically understands quite well, usually when one has mixed shifts from two different identities, usually kintypes, at a time—for example, having draconic claws and horns but a heron's face, neck, and wings. A silly looking creature, perhaps, but something that someone here may very well have experienced. I want to encourage everyone here to cherish moments like this—by all means, be annoyed if they are annoying, but acknowledge what a fascinating and unique experience these things are. How strange and interesting for Tanix's wasp mandibles and draconic jaws to merge and become some sort of split-lower-jaw situation, how fascinating to feel my draconic jaws and my vampiric fangs and to know that this is the only time that my dragon-shape has fangs. Feel how these merge and change in the context of one another, and know that you are a creature unique, as no one else will ever quite be *exactly* like you.

So, too, can behaviors overlap, or even cancel each other out. Dragons and vampires are both famously territorial creatures, and I am both—and yet, the territorialism is different. Vampires dislike *rivals*, dragons dislike *intruders*. Existing in my space is not a violation of my territory as a vampire unless I view you as a credible threat, and then I bare my fangs and growl, but to merely be in my area uninvited is a grave sin where my draconity is concerned, causing tail-lashing and flared crests and, again, growling and even hissing. My territorialism is wholly different than anyone else in the system's, due to this overlap of identity, *except* Keladarn, who is a dragon-turned-vampire (unlike myself, who is a vampire who stumbled into the *archetype* of a dragon), but even so, we experience it very differently.

Equally unique is when these things cancel each other out. A dragon is a ferociously independent creature, but many wasps are far more communal. Tanix has had his desire to be around others strengthened or weakened by being in one shift, and then abruptly flipped when another shift takes over to be more prevalent. Other times, he can grow increasingly frustrated, as he is driven to cooperate with others just as much as he does not want to be in the presence of anyone else and wishes to lounge on his own. Perhaps this is more annoying than my double-territorialism—but perhaps not, depending on who I just snapped at to get away from what I perceive to be mine. Both are worth documenting, noting, celebrating, even—proof of you being alive, of these being real, tangible parts of you. No matter who or what you are, every part of you affects every other part, even if it isn't obvious or drastic. What happens to one part of your body affects the other parts, and the same is true of your mind and your very being. It's all interconnected, and it all makes *you*. And you are worth celebrating.

And in the wake of identities affecting each other, is it any surprise that they can create each other, too? A lion therian may have a deep, unwavering connection to zebras, but not necessarily *be* one. The connection to the zebra comes *from* the lion theriotype, because of how important zebras are to the life of a lion, possibly even to *this specific lion*. This could be a hearttype, but a word I like is paratype, specifically because it's vague, open, and leaves a lot of room for interpretation of these kinds of connections or identities, depending on how you want to define them.⁷ A paratype or hearttype can be just as meaningful to someone as a theriotype, linktype, or kintype, and we should embrace that, and embrace hearing about it—I'd love to hear more in this vein, because I think there's little more interesting than hearing about how someone can have something be *so important to them*, but only because of something else about them

⁷Poppy Hapalopus (aestherians). "Defining Paratypes - Once and For All" *Just your friendly neighborhood bison* (personal blog). June 22 2023.

<https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/720841647487860736/defining-paratypes-once-and-for-all> Archive date November 7 2023:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20231107005427/https://aestherians.tumblr.com/post/720841647487860736/defining-paratypes-once-and-for-all>

that might seem unrelated on first glance, but makes perfect sense when you hear the explanation. Hell, this happens all the time with animal ‘types and other, similar animals—how many cats of various descriptions have a connection to other kinds of cats?

I think this is all the more likely to happen if whatever identity is being formed by something archetypal in some way—if you’re a villain, you might find yourself fascinated by knights or paladins, if you’re a knight, you might have a deep connection to squires or horses or dragons. I think that mythological and folkloric creatures and identities are archetypes in a way, too—they crop up again and again in folklore, in myths, in stories, often playing a lot of the same roles. Isn’t that the definition of an archetype? Isn’t it easier to trip ass over teakettle into being connected to dragon, a wolf, or a faerie than a carpenter ant or a nerite snail? I became an angel because I was given immortality and the ability to protect and heal. I was turned into a Salubri, a healing vampire, and so I turned to an angelic mindset, because they seemed so intertwined for me right off the bat that I felt like this is what I was always meant to be. Isn’t that just falling into an archetype, letting it become you? Don’t any of you out there experience this? I’m sure someone does. I know that Vyt’s panel on archetropy from last Othercon blasted my brain right off its hinges as I *realized* this about myself, despite it being true for decades in source and for the year that I’d been in the system.⁸

And these identities can reinforce each other, over and over, until it’s unclear which came first. Did I really become an angel because I was turned into a Salubri, or did my sire turn me into a Salubri because she already saw the makings of an angel in me? I was already strong and protective—did she think she just needed to give me a nudge to get me the rest of the way there? Is the lion drawn to zebras because they’re a lion, or are they a lion because they are drawn to hunt and interact with zebras in the same way a lion does? Does it matter, either way? You are who and what you are, no matter what that is, *even if it’s temporary*, and it’s my belief

⁸ When writing this panel, I was unaware that Vyt was going to present this panel again for the Centaurus Festival. If you missed it, here is a recording of that panel at Othercon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_XBbifDy-A

that you should hold that tightly and dearly, because there's nothing else more you than yourself, and that's worthwhile.

Neurodivergence and Alterhumanity

This topic may be the most controversial of the lot—and, as a result, I think that it is one of the most important to discuss. Alterhumanity can be influenced, affected, or even *caused* by neurodivergence. What this looks like can vary extremely, *extremely* widely, and I can only cover so much, so feel free to talk about your own experiences in the chat during or after the panel.

I believe that the way that these things can be related that is the easiest to understand is *overlap*. Similar to the overlap of alterhuman identities, there can be overlap between an alterhuman identity and the symptoms or effects of a neurodivergence. For example, many behaviors or desires can be tied back to an individual's alterhumanity, their autism, or both—there is a lot of overlap in growling, hissing, or making other noises, walking “on your toes” (or as close to digitigrade as a human body can), sitting in odd positions or places, struggling to socialize or “fit in” with “normal” human society, and other behaviors or feelings.⁹ Not all alterhumans are autistic, nor are all autistic people alterhuman, but there *are* many autistic individuals and systems within the alterhuman community, and many agree that the two can on occasion intersect, some even saying that, if they are going to be dehumanized for their autism, they might as well *not* be human, and instead be something altogether different that they find more comfortable.

⁹ Thetadelta. “Therianthropy & The Autism Spectrum - A Dissection.” *Inside Out* (personal blog). April 9 2023 (this version).

<https://a-dragons-journal.tumblr.com/post/714096573517316096/therianthropy-the-autism-spectrum-a-dissection> Archive date February 21 2024:

<https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://a-dragons-journal.tumblr.com/post/714096573517316096/therianthropy-the-autism-spectrum-a-dissection> (This version was used due to a) the original post no longer existing and b) the commentary on it. This is excellent reading on this topic and I highly recommend it.

Unfortunately, we do not have the date on the original post, and thus must use the date on the version reblogged by Rani, whose blog we got it from.)

We, ourselves, are autistic, and find the two intersecting constantly. Maybe Tanix drives us to walk on our toes because he is autistic, or perhaps because he is a dragon, or both—but we are prone to doing it no matter who fronts, but many of the dragons in the system, Tanix especially, drastically increase the frequency with which we do it. For Tanix, his autism and his draconity are completely interwoven—there is no one without the other. He does not personally believe that his draconity *stems* from his autism, but who's to say it couldn't, in theory? Some autistic alterhuman out there almost *certainly* feels as though their alterhumanity stems in some way, even if not completely, from their autism.

That is, after all, how I feel about my draconity and my borderline personality disorder.

That seems like a stretch, doesn't it? A personality disorder causing a species identity? But hear me out—I believe that *anything* can cause an alterhuman identity, of nearly any type. I, again, do not see why we need to remain bound to firm binaries and ideas of “correct” origins of identities. I have a dragon archet trope—as in, I am a dragon in an archetypical sense, less a literal one. I do not experience draconic urges or instincts most of the time (although they do happen), but I get phantom limbs and sensations, and I simply feel as though looking like a dragon is as *right* to me as looking like my usual human-adjacent self. (Vampires mostly look the same as we did prior to our Embrace... although the fangs are new.)

Why do I not consider myself dragonkin? Because I do not feel like a “real” dragon, precisely, although I *am* one. I am the *idea* of a dragon, the *role* of one. I am an archetype, and that archetype is *dragon*, and that is part of my identity, but not in the same way that Tanix, who I would consider to be a “run of the mill spiritual dragonkin.” (He is fine with me calling him that; he says “it's true!” from where he's sitting at the moment.) My draconity is wholly different and *means* something different to me than it does to Tanix, or the other dragons in our system—and that is because of how it was created. Most of the dragons here are dragons because they are fictives and were dragons in source, and the others are typically dragonkin, “should have been”

dragons that ended up in human bodies for one reason or another. **I am not that way.** I have not “always” been a dragon, and, indeed, believe I was shaped into one.

For those unfamiliar, borderline personality disorder—or BPD—is a cluster B personality disorder that has a wide variety of symptoms, but one of which is having a malleable or unstable identity. Part of who I am desperately wishes to change to match the desires and expectations of those around me that I care about, and while I am much better about that nowadays than I was back before I knew that I had a personality disorder, some part of me is still malleable. My husband, the love of my life for a over thousand years even if we had a messy centuries-long divorce in the middle, is a dragon. Not exactly, not bodily completely in-source, but he is, I would say, dragonkin, and that *means he is a dragon*, no questions. His soul is that of a dragon, and with me being so close to him, for so long, and so admiring—of course I changed to match him. I have described this as my being soft clay and being pressed up against his scales, and when he pulled away, it left a negative of his scales in me.¹⁰

Of course I am a dragon, reflecting one, filling the role of one. Both he and the host of my system, Tanix, to whom I am co-host and partner in all things, are dragons. My main partners in crime are dragons, and I love them dearly. With my malleable and uncertain personality, *of course* I began to reflect them. It began with Tremere but ended with Tanix, the final nail in the coffin of draconity, living in his head and alongside him at all times for all things.

Did Tremere and Tanix “make me” a dragon? Did my personality disorder “turn me into” a dragon? I think that I became one because of a mixture of both. Call that a psychological origin if you want, but I would protest to it being boiled down so simply into a label that can mean so much but define so little. Similarly, I would also protest to the idea that I am the only one like this—surely someone else has an experience similar? An identity crafted or drawn from a psychological quirk, a disorder, a neurodivergence like this? I refuse to believe that I am

¹⁰ If you are interested in reading the essay I first wrote about this back in August of last year, you can find that here: https://draconicwizardworkshop.neocities.org/html/writings/goratrix/dragons_clawprints

alone, just as I refuse to believe that I am “just normal otherkin” and am attributing this to the wrong source. I know why I am this way, I know it better than I know some other parts of myself, and I tell you this so that you can peer into yourself, too, and ask: is this how I am? Do I have anything like this? I encourage you not to dismiss it if you have an inkling. Identity can spring from anywhere, and no matter where, it is just as valuable to you.

Alterhuman and nonhuman identity can even stem from, or otherwise be related to, delusions. There is a term for this: endel, or as a modifier, endelic, as in, endelic otherkin, or endelic therian.¹¹ This is a self-identifier *only*, as in, it should not be used to *imply* that someone is delusional—not that you should be doing so anyway. There is a long history in the alterhuman—mostly otherkin, but other alterhuman as well—community of being called delusional for our identities, then raising a defense of “no, we’re not delusional, here’s the definition of this identity versus the definition of delusions, they’re different!”, essentially throwing delusional alterhuman under the bus. Identities based in delusions are not inherently bad or harmful, and frankly, it is best to let those *with the identities* come to a conclusion about whether or not something is helpful, harmful, or simply there—just like with every other aspect of their lives.¹² Just like other alterhuman identities, endelic identities are often enriching to the lives of those who hold them, and the fact that these individuals are delusional *does not make the identity less real or less important*. I absolutely cannot stress this enough: no matter what identity someone holds, no matter the reason, they know themselves better than you do. Even if you do not believe them, at the very least be polite and be quiet. Still, though, I urge you to try to believe people; after all, you may learn something.

¹¹ Babydog. “Endel.” Accessed February 28 2024. <https://endel.carrd.co/> Archive date January 2 2024: <https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://endel.carrd.co/>

¹² Mord (vagabond-sun). “hey, otherkin community? can non-psychotic folks...” *THE GODS WAIT TO DELIGHT IN YOU* (personal blog). March 12 2018. <https://vagabond-sun.tumblr.com/post/171799655665/hey-otherkin-community-can-non-psychotic-folks> Archive date September 5 2023: <https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://vagabond-sun.tumblr.com/post/171799655665/hey-otherkin-community-can-non-psychotic-folks>

There are a thousand ways you might derive or relate an alterhuman identity to a mental illness—autism, a personality disorder, or delusions, yes, but also OCD, ADHD, or anything else. Once again, I am here to remind you: the limits aren't real, and not only can you do whatever you want forever, but you can *be* whatever you want forever. If you feel you are something for a particular reason, but have never given it much thought... maybe you should.

Blurring and Sharing: Identities in a System

There's an aspect of identity that Goratrix briefly touched on while discussing Tanix, Tremere, and himself in regards to his dragon archetropole—headmates having an effect on each other's identities. I'm going to put that back in the forefront and talk about that some, because it's fascinating and something that I think gets overlooked when talking about systems and collective identity.

First, let's talk about identities held by an individual that are affected by other members of the system. I think that Goratrix's example above is a good one—he was affected back in-source by Tremere's draconity, but his own didn't really settle in until he shared a head and fronting time with Tanix and Tremere, two dragons, who very clearly helped define his draconity. But there are other things, too, other ways this can manifest—for example, sharing phantom limbs. That's an easy one, right? Let's say Japheth, who has no phantom limbs on his own, is fronting, and then Tanix rolls up into the front alongside him to hang out. Tanix has a whole lot of phantom limbs, and sometimes those are going to show up on the body whether or not he's primary fronting—Japheth is still mostly in control, but now he has Tanix's limbs under his control, too.

Is that an identity? I don't know. I don't think so, inherently, but is it important? Is it worth talking about? Not to Japheth—he finds it kind of annoying and hates primary fronting because of it. But could it, to someone else? Absolutely. Tanix loves feeling Valence's tail instead of his sometimes, since it's much more expressive and flexible, and they mesh really well because of

it. Maybe that's something to celebrate, even if it's not an aspect of identity, per se. We don't experience any kind of identity from feeling each other's limbs, usually, but, well, I guess I'd better talk about myself.

I'm an angel. I've had phantom feathered wings for a long time, although I don't know if I had them before I became a vampire, but I *do* know I've had them for longer than I've been in the DWW. That was *all* I had, though—at least at first. For a long time now, I've been co-fronting with all these damn dragons off and on—we have nearly a dozen dragons, if you can believe that—and that's had an effect on my body map, or at least, how I perceive it. We're so used to people having wings, digitigrade legs, and a tail, that *I automatically adjust to be that way, particularly around dragons*, and it's *weird*. But my tail isn't a dragon tail—it's feathered and/or furred (kinda hard to tell)—and my feet are like a cat's paws more than a dragon's toes and talons. My wings are mine, still, white and sometimes red and feathered, but what gives? What's goin' on?

The best I can figure with what's going on with my internal body map—especially with the moveable ears or the muzzle I sometimes get—is that I'm combining how feathery and mammalian I am (and I am firmly both) with general humanoid dragon body shape and getting some kind of weird gryphon out of it. And the weird part is, *I like it*. It feels like the “most correct” version of myself, to the point where I tend to feel like that even if I'm in the front without any dragons around. It's less strong, sure, but it's there, and I like it. I like being some kind of bipedal, humanoid gryphon thing.

Now... does that make me a gryphon, or anything else? I dunno. I don't think so, not necessarily. I don't really have any special connection with gryphons, I don't feel like one outside of my body map and phantom limbs, and I've never identified as one before. So, then, am I wrong to say that I sort of am one? Where's the line?

I feel like there's a lot to think about, there, and if you have anything similar going on, the answer might be different for you than it is for me. Everyone's gonna to be different, everyone's

approach to this is gonna be different, and that's okay. Personally, if someone said that this made them a gryphon, I'd just take it at face value. I don't know if it fits for me—I don't know if it feels right—but I suppose I'm trying to argue for the right to say it if I want to. Is there a word for this? I don't know. If there isn't, maybe there should be. I don't feel like I *am* a gryphon so much as I *look like one*, but that's essential to my identity, too, you know? How you look is important, one way or another, to how you see yourself, and thus this is an important part of who I am. It sure wasn't voluntary, but I wouldn't go back even though I'm sure I could if I really, really tried, fought and clawed and howled to get away from it—but I don't want to. Not even a little bit.

If you've got something like this, I encourage you to play with it. Poke at it. Learn a little about yourself. Embrace it and feel it, if it's enjoyable—let yourself sink into it if you want. I think it's worth exploring, documenting, and living.

Now, similarly, let's talk about identities held by multiple members of a system. This could be anything—a handful of headmates having a wolf kintype when they're together but no other time, a system that collectively identifies as a grim reaper but individually are all separated from that, a system with dragons in it that, together, form a hydra linktype.¹³ Hell, in our system, Anadox and Varian together feel like they have some kind of hero archetope, but alone, they've only got pieces of it.¹⁴ I feel like these identities get talked about some, especially static, collective identities—but ones shared between only certain headmates (or ones that only exist off-and-on) tend to get left a little more by the wayside. Maybe they're not common, I don't know—but I've heard enough about them in the past, during brief conversations in Discord servers and on my dashboard that I think they're more common than people believe.

¹³ For example, Nova. "Me, Myself, and I: When I'm you, but also me." *Discount Ghidorah System* (personal website). January 27, 2024.

<https://nova-dergs.weebly.com/me-myself-and-i-when-irsquom-you-but-also-me.html> Archive date January 29, 2024: <https://web.archive.org/web/2/https://nova-dergs.weebly.com/me-myself-and-i-when-irsquom-you-but-also-me.html>

¹⁴ They intend to write an essay about this at some point. Keep an eye on our website for that if you're interested.

I think that temporary identities aren't acknowledged or celebrated enough as they could be, if I'm honest—so what if Zakarith and I blur so badly that me-as-an-angel and he-as-an-anchiornis makes us into some kind of humanoid bird, and it happens once but never again? Is that really nothing? Should we just move on like that never happened, like we weren't truly, together, a bird for an hour or two? People love the idea of “fusion” in shows and fanfic—why can't we celebrate these brief moments of blurring so hard we practically become one new person until we unblur and become ourselves again? Sure, it's not something you can write in your bio, but it's worth thinking about, I guess, and maybe worth writing an essay about. Fictionflickers can be absolutely essential to someone's alterhumanity (also not acknowledged enough)—so why not flickering identities in systems?¹⁵ Some may come back (the hydra reforms, the pieces of the wolf front together), but others may not (Zakarith and I haven't been that blurry again since the one time), and either way, I think that's okay. I think that temporary identities are worth enjoying, whether or not they're repeatable, and I think that collective identity, temporary or permanent, is something worth playing with.

After all, don't most systems come up with some kind of name to call themselves? Don't they figure out collective pronouns? Don't many either come up with or settle on a single identity to use for the outside world, if they're not out as a system? Collective identity is well and truly an established concept—so I think that could be played with more in terms of alterhuman identity. If you experience anything like this, I encourage you—write about it! I want to hear it, and I know other people do, too. It doesn't have to be a nice big polished essay, just... scribble something down. Get your thoughts out. Tell people what you felt, or are feeling. That's all you have to do to have contributed to the community and to help normalize some aspects of identity, some kinds of it, that some people may never have considered before.

¹⁵ Swift (stillflight). “Flicker is short for ‘fictionflicker...’” *I am a visitor here; I am not permanent* (personal blog). October 9 2023. <https://www.tumblr.com/stillflight/730683315093471232/i-saw-an-older-post-of-urs-taking-about-alterhuman?source=share> (For some reason, the Internet Archive absolutely *refused* to archive this page or any reblog of it, so if anyone can get it to work, I'd very much appreciate it.)

Conclusion

So, why talk about all this? Why'd we get into it? Well, partially to share some experiences we'd seen and felt, get it out there that it's possible... but also to inspire people.

We want to see more community writings. Long essays, short essays, blog posts, journals, pieces of artwork, submissions to zines—anything you want to create. We want you to explore your identity with greater horizons in mind, and interact with others with that same mindset. We want you to be able to look at your identity, wherever it derives from, and enjoy it, poke at it, prod it—and understand it. Whether it be permanent or temporary, only your own or shared with another, it is still a part of you, and that is worth celebrating.

Don't you enjoy spring flowers, even if they only last a little while? Isn't the mushroom that emerges after a rain but is gone in a day or two worth admiring? Even a temporary identity—a flicker, something shared with a headmate when only you two are fronting, anything—is worth exploring and acknowledging, even if it leaves and never returns. Hell—with identity, get silly with it! By all means, keep taking yourself seriously—don't just pick up saying you're 'kin with something just because you like it, I'm not trying to say to "kin for fun" or nothin', but, enjoy yourself. If you're a dog, even for an afternoon, why not have some fun with it? Enjoy it. Enjoy *yourself*. Maybe you'll find new ways to enjoy being alive, and enjoy being yourself. I know it's hard, sometimes, but this might just be a step to making it a little bit easier.

You are what you are, no matter what that is or why. You can be something, any number of somethings, for any reason—and you can be wrong, too, and that's all right. There is no harm in exploring something only to find out that it isn't what you thought, or that it was temporary. Spend time with yourself and every aspect of your identity, if you can—and acknowledge where things intersect, overlap, and interact. You might just be surprised.

Where to Find Us

Our personal website: <https://draconicwizardworkshop.neocities.org/>

Our main alterhuman tumblr: <https://tanix-dragon.tumblr.com/>

Goratrix's tumblr: <https://goratrix-betrayed.tumblr.com/>

Raphyel's tumblr: <https://unlikely-archangel.tumblr.com/>

Fictionkind dreamwidth: <https://fictionkind.dreamwidth.org/>

Goratrix's email: calcifiedluminary@gmail.com

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