

A Field Guide to Otherkin

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By Lupa

Megalithica Books, an imprint of Immanion Press
Stafford, UK

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Typesetting: Lupa

Set in Garamond and Bradley Hand ITC

First edition by Megalithica Books, 2007

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A Megalithica Books Edition

An imprint of Immanion Press

<http://www.immanion-press.com>

info@immanion-press.com

ISBN 978-1-905713-07-3

Praise For Lupa's *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic*

An extremely well put-together manual of animal magic. Most books on the subject are encyclopedic descriptions of animals, and their 'traditional' symbolism and power. While some of those books are interesting, Lupa's *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone* makes them useful. The best part is that the book is written from hard-won experience in the field; I can personally vouch for that.

--Nicholas Graham, author of *The Four Powers*

Unlike pretty much everything else out there on animals and magic today, it's not a "totem dictionary" in any sense of the word. Instead, Lupa presents a variety of approaches and techniques ranging from a guided meditation suggested for finding a totem to a chapter on the legalities and practices of animal sacrifice...Lupa tackles things from a very practical and experiential point of view, and talks about her own practices and experiences, giving a strong grounding to what could have otherwise been a book largely on theory...Well worth the money spent. Good job, Lupa!

--Erynn Rowan Laurie, author of *Path of Fire: A Celtic Reconstructionist Guide to Ogam*

When Lupa asked me to do this review, I was of two minds. I thought "well a GOOD book on animal magick would be a wonderful thing for the community." The other part of me thought "I doubt this is going to be that book." I LOVE it when I'm wrong.

This is not a book that is an encyclopedia about the Spirit Animals or what they do or don't do. There are tons of other resources for that... This book gives you practical information on working with not only the Spirit Animals, but also with familiars and those who see themselves as being animals in some regard...I am very glad I have a copy of this book and it will be one book I am sure to reference many times in my own works with my cats and with my Spirit Animals in the future.

--Daven of <http://www.davensjournal.com>, The Wiccan/Pagan Times (<http://twpt.com>)

Other Books by Lupa from Immanion Press/Megalithica Books

Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic (2006)

Magick on the Edge: An Anthology of Experimental Occultism (contributor of
“Totemic Alchemy” essay, co-contributor with Taylor Ellwood of
“Evoking Lupa” essay, 2007)

Kink Magic: Sex Magic Beyond Vanilla (cowritten with Taylor Ellwood,
November 2007)

For more information please visit <http://www.immanion-press.com> or
<http://www.thegreenwolf.com/books.html>

Dedications

To my husband, editor, and fellow author, Taylor, without whom my writing would be a lot less thorough and my life would be much lonelier. Thank you for being my mate—I couldn't do it without you.

To Storm Constantine and all the other great folk at Immanion Press/Megalithica Books, thanks for taking a chance on an unknown author and publishing *Fang and Fur*, and then having enough faith to contract this one as well. It is an honor and a joy to write for you and to offer my support where I can. Thank you for everything you do!

And to Otherkin, whether you consider yourself a part of the community or not, whether you use the term or something entirely different, whether you're just starting on your journey of self-discovery and development, or have been doing this for years, whether I've met you in person, online, or not at all—thank you for being you. It's helped me many times knowing I'm not the only one, and for knowing that there are some really fascinating people out there amongst us.

Acknowledgements

First, I'd like to recognize everyone who took the time to fill out one of the ubiquitous surveys for this project. Your answers, almost universally, were well-thought-out and thorough, and really helped me to make this a much better book. I hope you like the result, something that every one of you contributed to.

I'd also like to recognize those who helped out with information and random bits of help, as well as support: Rialian (foreword, march!), Chris Carter (yay, essay!), Storm for the excellent copy edit, Taylor for patiently editing and reediting, Jim for the cover and and for adding your contributions to those of Naryu, sade, Colleen and Holly for the interior illustrations, Solo and Duo, Lyssa, Orion Sandstorm (that booklist is a true gem!), Malcolm and all the other folks involved in Otherkin.net in various fashions, Nicholas Graham, a whole bunch of folks on my Livejournal friends list who helped with questions and reviewing ideas, and everyone who acted as moral support, especially when I hit rough spots. I know there are others, those who asked tough questions and who cheered at the victories, who I'm forgetting, and I apologize if I've omitted you; 'twas nothing personal, just a lack of room (or memory!)

Finally, I do want to thank author Patrick Harpur. I am horrible about coming up with titles for things I've written, and when I was trying to

find a good title for this book, I allowed my mind to simply let words and phrases float up at random. It wasn't until I'd fallen in love with *A Field Guide to Otherkin* that I realized that it was most likely unconsciously influenced by Harpur's *Daimonic Reality: A Field Guide to the Otherworld*. So, Mr. Harpur, if you happen to read this, I just want to thank you for the inspiration. (And to all my readers, I would highly recommend his works for anyone with any interest in the Otherworld whatsoever!)

Read Before You Proceed...

As much as I hate writing disclaimers, I felt the need to include one, just in case my faith in people's ability to make sound judgments for themselves is rudely shattered.

The following pages include material that deviates heavily in psychology and philosophy from the status quo. However, none of these beliefs are really any more potentially harmful than most religious beliefs. It is no more detrimental to believe that you are a reincarnated animal or other nonhuman entity than it is to believe in being a reincarnated human, or in animal totemism, or in nonhuman entities such as angels or faeries, or in deities/higher beings that manifest in human form (i.e., certain Hindu deities, the Dalai Lama, Jesus Christ, etc.) The author, publisher, and any other person involved in the creation of this book are not responsible for the actions of anyone who uses it, or the concept of Otherkin in general, as an excuse to commit criminal actions, cause harm to themselves or others, get into arguments, lose jobs, friends, or popularity, or otherwise be irresponsible little twits by saying "The book made me do it!" In other words, it is not our responsibility to make your decisions for you, just as it's not our responsibility to make sure you eat the required number of calories every day to keep from starving to death.

Finally, let me say it now: I am NOT the ultimate authority on Otherkin. This book is written through the filter of my own experiences, and while I've worked to maintain a balanced view of the topic, to include a variety of ideas that may be seen as unorthodox, it is not the do-all and end-all of the topic. Realize that not all Otherkin will agree with this material, and that I am no more or less right than anyone else.

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Foreword

Why Otherkin?

Perhaps because it is not worth the energy to argue against it?

This is pretty much how I started working with this concept. I consider myself on an elven path, not because of way too much Tolkien (although my parents are very deep fans of Tolkien and Lovecraft, which apparently is explanation enough for me to some), but because it felt like the right path to work with. Was it worth the effort and time to deny that odd feeling of identity, when I could be exploring and working with it to get to someplace interesting?

Well, you can likely guess my answer to that question.

I decided a long time ago that that I would be guided by that inner pull, that feeling of rightness, balanced with an equally strong sense of reason. Too often, folks take a path and accept all the rules that they imagine that should be there, and those “rules” and perceptions are all too often servants of personal issues that have not been dealt with in an aware way. This is true whether you are someone that thinks they are an elf, or if you are someone that mocks anyone not like you.

Otherkin is a concept that is very individualistic...and I think that Lupa has approached her topic the right way, and with the proper attitude. Over the years, there has been many an attempt to delineate, codify, or otherwise organize folks that might consider themselves “otherkin”, some of which have been (or continue to be) what I would consider insane. Thankfully, Lupa is more into reporting the data, and presenting ideas...and not into the ideology that something has to be explained and packaged. It is not a movement so much as a culture of concepts that have an interesting ecology. A field guide is perhaps the only real way to go in this case, as anything else misses the point.

There is no one accepted definition of what it is to be otherkin. I personally tend to use it as a descriptor of a bunch of folks that have a bit of that mythic feel. It fits (for me) a sub-set of what others use the term for. Ask someone else, and it will involve reincarnation, dragons, perhaps other worlds and dimensions. A third might be into the building of a spiritual movement, and think it is all about ascension (whatever that actually means...) I happen to think that the definitions are interesting, but they read as shopping lists....and my life really is not a shopping list, or a contest to see who has the most “traits”. What does the person FEEL like? How do they express that essence in the world?

I call myself elven because it feels right. I did not go looking for it. This overall path is not about how many identities you can put on. It is not about making yourself important. Most of the folks I respect are rather similar in this regard. We did not go decide one day that being this way would be nifty. We do not bother arguing with those that say we are insane. There really is no point to do so. We accepted when we decided that it was not worth the waste in time, energy, and life worth living to argue with this understanding that others put a lot of effort into mocking others. We would rather put that energy into living our lives, and connecting to others that might have something to add that will enrich. If we needed validation, we would have likely chosen a bit more conventionally...most of us are not all that unintelligent, if our chosen occupations are any indicator of competence. (soft chuckle)

Do I agree with everything in this book? Most assuredly not. Neither should you. I can attest that Lupa has done a rather good job being objective in her research and presentation, and that already places her well ahead of most folks that I think would be writing on this subject. Someone had to write it...I am glad that it was someone that is not out to organize the folk that she is writing on, nor was it someone that did not actually understand what they were trying to write about.

Rialian Ashtae
Rockville, Maryland
January 1, 2007

Introduction

Rialian started his foreword with the question, “Why Otherkin?”

This is a question with several answers. The first answer I have is in regards to why, specifically, I wrote this book. It’s my second published book, my first being *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone: A Primal Guide to Animal Magic*. Getting the first one published left me on a creative high, and I wanted to put that momentum to good use.

I can’t remember just how many times I’ve seen posts on the Internet about “Hey, I’m writing a book about Otherkin! Wanna fill out my survey?” Admittedly, I didn’t come up with anything different—I used the survey format as well. And I quickly found out just how valuable that primary source of information is! There’s not much in the way of printed resources on Otherkin, and what is out there, in my opinion, ranges from good to bad to downright scary. Fortunately I got a lot of really good survey responses as well as plenty of great suggested support material. The bibliography is pretty heavy on internet source material, but that’s out of sheer necessity. The Otherkin subculture has blossomed primarily because of the internet. The vast amount of information that is freely available, as well as the opportunity to disseminate personal experiences and discuss it all over virtual coffee, has helped ‘kin make connections and further our journeys to a great degree. But as with anything on the internet, the information can be spotty as it’s pretty much unedited, so I had to be selective about what online resources I used.

As for books, Otherkin are mentioned in a few odd places. Christine Wicker’s *Not in Kansas Anymore* and *The Veil’s Edge* by Willow Polson both mention Otherkin, though from a non-’kin viewpoint, and as parts of books that deal primarily with other topics. While Doreen Virtue never uses the word “Otherkin” in her book *Earth Angels*, the concepts she describes will be very familiar to most ‘kin (albeit heavily influenced by the New Age). And there are several books about specific types of Otherkin written by ‘kin themselves; you’ll find a number of them referenced throughout this text as well as in the annotated bibliography.

I do want to take a few sentences to mention something about my approach to therianthropy in *Fang and Fur, Blood and Bone*. My primary intended audience for the entire book, that chapter included, is people who work magic, particularly those who are willing to push the boundaries of magical practice. Therefore some of the material on

therianthropy is admittedly rather unorthodox, especially when I start talking about experimenting with personality aspecting. However, my audience here is different; whereas for the last book I was writing as a magician who just happens to be a therianthrope, here I'm writing as a therianthrope who just happens to be a magician. The therianthropy chapter here is a lot more straightforward and less ensconced in experimental magical techniques.

That and a few more entries in the bibliography pretty much sum up the books that exist on the subject at the time of this writing, at least to my knowledge (not including books on folklore, mythology, and related areas of study).¹ I do know of a couple of other people working on books on Otherkin as of this writing; I see this as a good thing. After all, the more material we have to work with, the better, as far as I'm concerned. Even if not all people agree with everything that's said, it still sparks conversation and thought. And for all those hopeful authors who just never quite got around to it—I hope my success will inspire you to add to the bookshelves!

That's one answer. Another is that I myself identify as Otherkin—a wolf therianthrope, to be exact—and I find this particular subculture to be absolutely fascinating. I wanted to use this project as a learning experience, because while I had a pretty decent handle on the concept of Otherkin at the start I still had a lot of blanks to fill in just in my personal knowledge. In my opinion, if the author doesn't learn anything from writing a book, s/he's not trying hard enough! I do have to say that this was an enjoyable learning experience, and I hope my research is beneficial to others.

And finally, the third answer is that I believe there needs to be more information about Otherkin available to those exploring the subject. For many of us, Otherkin is an identity that answers a number of questions we have about ourselves. In my experience, as an example, I have always resonated strongly with wolves. Even as a young child I identified as a wolf—though I knew I didn't have fur and walked on two legs instead of four, I still thought of myself as a wolf. When I discovered the concept of therianthropy it was like I'd finally found my home. Everything clicked into place: “Aha, so *this* is why I am the way I am!”

I do understand that there will be people who look upon this project with some trepidation. One concern I've seen floating around is whether or not the publication of a book will suddenly thrust the

¹ I do highly recommend that you check out the Otherkin and Therianthrope Book List maintained by Orion Sandstorm, which was a huge help to me in finding good books to use as source material. At the time of this writing the URL for it is <http://therithere.comicgenesis.com/kinbooks.html>.

Otherkin community into the media spotlight. From my own perspective, we're already getting more exposure to the mainstream, thanks to the internet, where anyone can plug anything into any search engine and find information. While I'm sure some people would be quite happy to stay closeted, for better or for worse we're slowly getting brought out into the light as it were. I detail some of the recent (relative to this writing) appearances we've made in the media in the first chapter. I figured that since people are going to find out about us eventually, we may as well let them be informed by us, rather than by third parties who may not always understand us. This is another reason why I encourage other people with manuscripts in the works to go ahead and get published—one book is not sufficient to explain an entire subculture.

I want to make a couple of comments on the composition of my primary source material. I relied heavily on the responses I received from the survey. I figured that the best way to research a topic on which there's very little published information would be to go to Otherkin themselves. This means, however, my results were dependent on the responses I got. Since I couldn't just force every single Otherkin-identified person in the world to fill out my survey (and I surely wouldn't want to try!) my results probably vary to some extent or another from the community as a whole. Some chapters are more quote-heavy than others. Since they are the closest I get to actually defining different types of Otherkin, I figured I'd let the Otherkin speak for themselves. Again, I want to present a spectrum of examples, rather than hard and fast rules of what each type of Otherkin is or isn't.

The amount of information varies on each type of 'kin. This roughly mirrors the number of respondents of each type I got for my survey, as well as the amount of available information to be found otherwise. It's not that therianthropes are any more interesting than gryphons, but simply that I had access to a lot more information on therianthropes than gryphonkin for this book. If you feel underrepresented, please feel free to answer the survey which is in Appendix C, as I intend to add information to subsequent editions of this book. Also, if you filled out a survey and I didn't quote you, it's simply because I got a LOT of good responses—there were 130 survey replies, and the vast majority of them were very detailed. This is particularly true for larger groups, such as therianthropes—I simply couldn't find room to quote everyone! But, regardless, I do want to thank everyone who sent in answers, and you can check out the raw data in Appendix D.

You'll notice that I'm fond of citations in the form of footnotes. There are over 300 of them, in fact. The only source material I have not used citations for are surveys, and that's simply because were I to create a footnote for every single piece of information I got from a survey, the

number of footnotes would more than double. Suffice it to say, if someone says something, and there's no footnote, it came from a survey. I have used, for the most part, APA style citations, and modified the citations to footnotes, simply because 300+ in-text citations would break up the text too much. Additionally, I have cited any quoted or paraphrased material from books and from websites. Internet-published material, even if it has never seen print, is still owned by someone, and is subject to the Fair Use Provisions of the U.S. Copyright Act. Therefore, I treat it the same way as I treat book-sourced material.²

Also, you'll note my use of the gender-neutral pronouns "hir" and "s/he". It's easier for me to use them than to try to decide "Hmm...he or she? His or hers?" Feel free to make use of them—they're not my creation by far, but they are very useful in a day and age where the ideas of sex and gender are becoming less like a dichotomy and more like a continuum. And while we're on the topic of words, I use 'kin as an abbreviation of Otherkin (as you've probably already noticed). I use it as an adjective ("the Otherkin community" or s/he is Otherkin"). However, I personally only use it as a plural noun ("they are Otherkin" as opposed to "he is an Otherkin"). I have seen some people use it as a singular noun; I personally choose not to, but I am not any final authority on what part of speech the word "Otherkin" is. I do, however, always capitalize it, another personal preference; Rialian's preface, for example, uses "otherkin". Additionally, sometimes I write "Otherkin" and sometimes I write "other 'kin". These are not interchangeable. The former is a proper noun; the latter is a shorter way of saying "other Otherkin". And if I refer simply to someone being Other, I'm emphasizing that which is not human in that person.

Finally, I've occasionally had people ask about my inclusion of guest essays in my books. I like getting people addicted to their creativity. Nicholas Graham, for instance, who wrote a guest essay for *Fang and Fur*, went on to finish the manuscript for his own excellent work, *The Four Powers*, and it was published by Immanion Press/Megalithica Books in 2007. I like showcasing some good thoughts that aren't my own. It's the same reason I like giving new artists a shot with my books when I can—it gets some variety in there, and it also gives someone else a new piece or two for their portfolio. So if you like the guest writings and artwork, feel free to contact their respective creators whose information may be found on the back side of the title page.

² There's a ton of information available about copyrights and Fair Use; including online. I've found that <http://www.templetons.com/brad/copyright.html> is a good place to start, with links to further exploration.

I certainly can't define Otherkin for everyone, but I do hope this book helps you with your own study, whether you're 'kin yourself, or just curious. Feel free to shoot me an email at chaohippie@excite.com or friend me on Livejournal (my username is lupabitch), and, if you like, take a peek at the website I maintain with my mate, Taylor Ellwood, at <http://www.thegreenwolf.com>.

Chapter 1: What Are Otherkin?

Welcome to *A Field Guide to Otherkin*. This isn't a traditional field guide, with tons of statistics and taxonomy and full color pictures of assorted species. It is, however, a practical guide to the Otherkin subculture, designed for use by both 'kin and non-'kin alike. In the following pages you'll read about who and what Otherkin are, who or what we identify with, what brings us to our conclusions about ourselves, and what we can do with that identity.

However, like a traditional field guide this book is presented as information gained from experience in the field itself. I've been exploring my wolf side for over a decade, and have interacted with numerous other 'kin both in person and online. In addition, I'm presenting the information as an invitation for others to explore, whether 'kin or not.

If you identify as Otherkin (or at least suspect that you may be) then some of this book may seem quite familiar to you. You may have read something on the internet, or happened across an article or book that mentions us. Or you may simply suspect that there's something not quite human about you, and are curious to see if others' experiences match your own. On the other hand, you may even already be immersed in the Otherkin community—or someone who decided to drop out for whatever reason.

If you're not Otherkin, chances are good that you may look askance at whoever introduced you to the idea of Otherkin (even if it's your dear author, and you just happened to see this book on a shelf). Don't feel bad. A lot of us question the concept heavily when we first encounter it, too, even if we like the idea of it. In fact, some of the Otherkin reading this may be wondering if this isn't all just in our heads. Being nonhuman in a human society is a concept that can be a little tough to wrap your mind around if you're new to it. That sort of thinking tends to get relegated to ancient mythology or mental insanity—either way, it involves detachment from the common perception of reality. The key to understanding, however, lies in the open mind.

When studying any subculture it's important to approach it with cultural objectivity—judging the people by their own standards instead of yours. It's especially important in light of the fact that the very basis of Otherkin—the belief that a person can be something other than human—is easily labeled as delusional. Looking at the belief objectively,

however, how is believing that you were an elf in a past life any stranger than believing that a deity manifested on Earth in human form, or that certain humans chosen by the Divine were taken to the Afterlife corporeally, or that ordinary bread and wine can be transmuted into literal flesh and blood? Or, for that matter, if you're a neopagan who believes in faeries and dragons and animal spirits, is it that much more difficult to believe that such beings can manifest into human bodies, particularly if you believe that it's not just humans that reincarnate?

Still, people have a tendency to judge by their own standards. It's imperative that in order understand Otherkin in a relatively objective manner that this tendency should be set aside for the time being. This doesn't mean that you have to automatically believe everything that's said—or even any of it. But true skepticism (not debunking, with which “skepticism” has been mistakenly interchanged) demands entering into a discussion with as little bias as possible so that all arguments may be accepted and weighed equally (This applies to Otherkin as well as non-kin, by the way.).

I will admit my own bias. I am writing this as someone within the Otherkin subculture. In fact, as balanced as I've tried to be as an author, it's pretty well impossible for me to completely eliminate my voice from the work. In addition, my tendency to avoid dogma has led me to present a wide variety of viewpoints rather than stating what Otherkin absolutely are or are not. I can't write a book that will please everyone, so, as with anything, I urge you to grab your shaker of salt and your Occam's Razor³ and apply where you see fit. *This is only one viewpoint on the Otherkin subculture*, not the One True Way of Otherkin.

A Few Terms

Amid the wide spectrum of 'kin, there are some general categories into which people can be divided. I'm dedicating more space to these later on but I wanted to summarize them briefly here to allow for better understanding of subsequent material.

Elves and fey: While some elves tend to see themselves as a separate group from faerie beings, others include themselves under that heading. Some elves have recreated a number of possible historical details from past life memories involving their cultures and worldviews. Fey can refer to everything from pixies to trolls to phoukas. Many resemble Euro-centric mythos, particularly Celtic, Norse, or Germanic folklore, or modern derivatives such as Tolkien.

³ Sir William of Ockham was a 14th century scholar; Occam's Razor basically states that the simplest answer is the most likely.

Therianthropes: These are people who identify as Earth-based animals in some respect. The species represented tend to be wolves, big cats and other more impressive animals but I've seen horse, rabbit, deer and even dinosaur, earwig and kiwi therians, either in person or online. Some therianthropes distance themselves from the Otherkin heading, finding it to be too fantastic to be believed or just considering everyone else to be a little too flaky since they identify with "make-believe" beings, though others are content to be included in that group. In addition, some sectors of the therian community tend to be very stringent in questioning themselves and others as to what exactly defines therianthropy.

Mythological animals: Less common but still a sizable group, these are 'kin who resonate with animals not native to Earth. Dragons are most common, but gryphons, unicorns and others pop up on occasion. Also included are variations on mundane animals, such as faerie hounds.

Vampires: Vampires tend to be categorized into two groups, psychic and sanguine. The former feeds primarily on pure energy while the latter must take energy via blood to be healthy. While there may appear to be some amount of organization and division among the vampire community, there are numerous vampires of both types who make no allegiance to any house or other formality. Some prefer to distance themselves from vampire "lifestylers", a subsection of the Goth subculture who adopt dress and mannerisms that are associated with popular depictions of vampires, but who do not share the need to feed to remain healthy.

Angelkin and Demonkin: Not always as dualistically defined as the traditional Judeo-Christian ideas of angels and demons, these 'kin may resemble a variety of cultural definitions of similar beings. Angels may also refer to themselves as avatars or celestials.

Kitsune: Not precisely fox therianthropes and not quite purely mythological animals, kitsune are a unique group of fox spirits with a rich mythos of magic and cultural lore from China and Japan. Included in the chapter on miscellaneous types of 'kin.

Multiples and Walk-ins: I've included these two groups in the origin theories chapter rather than categorizing them as a type. They're not necessarily always Otherkin, as both groups have folks who are entirely human. There is a sizable portion of the 'kin community, though, who attributes their being Other to being walk-ins and/or multiples.

Otakukin/Mediakin: A highly controversial group, opinions vary as to whether or not they're Otherkin or a separate phenomenon. These are people who identify with characters or species from various media, such as anime/manga, fantasy books and movies, and video games. Many maintain that these media are just modern mythology, and that traditional mythology was just our ancestors' version of pop culture.

Definition, Identity, and Belief

I've already answered "Why Otherkin". But that still leaves another query: What are Otherkin?

I'll be honest: it took me quite some time to formulate a decent answer to this seemingly basic question. The problem is in defining a respectively small minority of people who manage to represent a broad spectrum of backgrounds and viewpoints. I wanted to create a definition that would express the idea behind being Otherkin without excluding key subgroups while acknowledging a working boundary of the term. At the same time I also wanted to be sensitive to the fact that some members of some groups—certain therianthropes and vampires, for example—don't consider themselves to be under the Otherkin umbrella. Add in that just about every person who's ever thought about the concept of defining Otherkin usually comes up with more than one theory as to what Otherkin are, and I found myself with quite a task.

In addition, to be a bit cruel, but up-front—it's tough to write this without it sounding like a manual for a roleplaying game or a collection of ideas for fantasy novels. In this day and age the first thing most people think of when someone mentions elves is *The Lord of the Rings* or *Dungeons and Dragons*. Sure, *we're* serious about what we are—but keep in mind that the rest of the world (when they find out about us, that is) often sees us as overactive roleplayers at best and drug-addled, paranoid, delusional schizophrenics at worst. Even within the neopagan/magical community, which tends to be on the tolerant side, there's a definite note of disbelief and even ridicule among some folk.

The definition for Otherkin I will be using for this book is: a person who believes that, through either a nonphysical or (much more rarely) physical means, s/he is not entirely human. This means that anyone who relates internally to a nonhuman species either through soul, mind, body, or energetic resonance, or who believes s/he hosts such a being in hir body/mind, is in my own definition of Otherkin. Some people do have more stringent standards. However, for the purposes of this book, I am including a wider range of people.

This is not a roleplaying game. When a person says s/he is a dragon, or a wolf, or an elf, s/he is not referring to a character that s/he only becomes during a gaming session. That which is Other is a constant

part of the person; s/he is the Other at all times. Grey, a wolf therian, says it marvelously: “Perhaps I should say that if a being is a color, or a sound, I am two items merged to form a different color/sound. The two are within each other. Sometimes plain to see, sometimes deeply mixed.”

Being Otherkin does not necessarily mean to deny being human. To be Otherkin is, as Jarandhel Dreamsinger says, to be “Kin to the Other.” In his essay of that title, he explains how being born into a human body does not negate being Other:

One of the most important things to note about the concept of “Kin to the Other” is that it is not a negative definition. Many interpretations of the term otherkin take it to mean little more than a denial of one’s humanity, in part or in full. “Kin to the Other” carries no such implication. One can be kin to something else without being that thing themselves. A human can be adopted into a nonhuman family, or adopt nonhuman beings into their own, and establish kinship that way. The same is true for marriage. They can even inherit a nonhuman bloodline in their ancestry without considering themselves nonhuman; as many tribal cultures believe. And, of course, they can have a similar character or nature to nonhuman beings, as of kindred spirits, without being anything different than human. All of these are valid forms of kinship with the Other.⁴

I am a wolf therianthrope, someone who identifies as a wolf in some ways, but I know that my body is human. I don’t have fur (no more than the average human), I can’t live on raw meat alone, and I menstruate every month rather than once a year. Physical wolves will still react to me as they would any other human; I look, sound, and smell human, and I cannot change that. But the spirit of Wolf still resides within me. I’ve tried repressing it, and it only made me miserable. I felt like I was denying a key part of who I am, as if I was lying to myself. Eventually that part of me came welling back up despite my best efforts, and so for my balance and happiness I found that accepting it was the course for me to take.

Indeed, identifying as Otherkin is a way for us to embrace the parts of us that simply don’t fit into the human paradigm. Sure, we can explain it away as imagination, but repressing anything completely inevitably leads to ill health, whether the repression is physical or psychological. We need to play, and Otherkin allows us to express that within safe boundaries. Adults enjoy having fun as much as children, though we’re told that at a certain point we have to put our toys away and we can only concentrate on certain types of fun, such as sports, sex, or television. Those who engage in “idle” imagination are passed off as being immature.

⁴ Dreamsinger, 2005.

And yet being able to play with our identities is not only fun, but it also answers a deep-seated need within us. Among other animals play is simply a test run for more serious actions; young predators play to practice their hunting skills, while baby prey animals use their play to hone their own survival abilities. For Otherkin, some of what may seem to be games to the outsider—things like creating costumes that reflect our ‘kin-selves, writing stories centered around our memories, or collecting images that remind us of ourselves—are tools that we use to become more comfortable with who and what we feel we are.

In some ways children have a much wiser perspective on the world than adults. To a young child, who may not yet have really developed his individual identity, the world is a much less partitioned and pigeonholed place. What is in books and on television is just as real as the child’s parents, the front door, the family dog, and the child himself. Imaginations and dreams are no less relevant to the child than everyday “reality”, a viewpoint that only a certain number of adults still possess. One of these was Joseph Campbell, whose works on mythology are what I believe to be essential reading for Otherkin. One particularly noteworthy idea which I find particularly relevant here is that:

Biologically, the individual organism is in no sense independent of its world. For society is not, as Ralph Linton assumed, “a group of biologically distinct and self-contained individuals.”...Between the organism and its environment there exists what Piaget has termed “a continuity of exchanges.”...it is only relatively slowly that a notion of individual freedom and sense of independence are developed—which then, however, may conduce not only to a manly sense of self-sufficiency...but to a deterioration of the unity of the social order as well; and to a sense of separateness, which may end in a general atmosphere of anxiety and neurosis.⁵

A perfect example of this is modern American culture. Focused primarily on the needs and desires of the individual, mainstream Americans generally have loosely knit extended families who may be scattered across the country—or even the world—and the nuclear family is less and less an influence in people’s lives. Compare this to the rising number of cases of anxiety, depression, and other insecurity and stress-related disorders. While this is not the book to prove whether or not extreme individualism creates neuroses, I do believe that it’s not too far a stretch to say, in this case, that there is definitely something healthy to be learned from the innocent worldview of children, so often passed off as something to be outgrown entirely.

In addition, play is the foundation of many deep roots of spirituality. Campbell explains how the suspension of disbelief through

⁵ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 81.

imagination, which is usually relegated to the realm of children, is actually the foundation for ritual. It is within the drama of ritual, whether it is the Lakhota version of the Sun Dance, the Catholic Mass, or the Wiccan Drawing Down the Moon, that "...we are to carry the point of view and spirit of man the player (*Homo ludens*) back into life; as in the play of children, where, undaunted by the banal actualities of life's meager possibilities, the spontaneous impulse of the spirit to identify itself with something other than itself for the sheer delight of play, transubstantiates the world—in which, actually, after all, things are not quite as real or permanent, terrible, important, or logical as they seem".⁶

So it is that while the imagination does indeed allow children to be children, it also allows adults that freedom as well. This is not mere escapism; it is something that is ingrained into human nature, something that can be traced far back into our genetic and social heritage.

The Otherkin community is similar to neopaganism in that for many in these subcultures, being 'kin, or being neopagan, is partially a way to embody ideal selves we discovered in childhood. Sarah M. Pike, in studying neopagans within the context of gatherings and festivals, dedicates an entire chapter to how much of neopagan culture is shaped by our experiences as children:

Neopagans' childhood stories are narratives of loss and redemption in which childhood embodies the storytellers' most profound ideals and desires. Neopagans tell each other that innocent appreciation of nature and sensitivity to the supernatural characterized their childhood. As they were socialized into a predominantly Christian culture, they say they lost these qualities, only to regain them when, as adults, they discovered Neopaganism and began to draw on cultural traditions that resonated with their childhood world. Neopagans also tell each other that the world should be as they remember seeing it as children, and that childhood experiences play a central role in who they are now [emphasis hers].⁷

In light of this, we should take into consideration that a large portion of the Otherkin community reported feeling "different" as children, as well as often being entranced by stories, toys, and other things that related to our Other selves. In fact, it's not uncommon for 'kin to say that we always knew we were not human from an early age, but never had a name for it or a safe way to express it after a certain age. While not all Otherkin—or neopagans—agree with Pike's assertion, it is a very common trend among both subcultures.

⁶ Campbell, 1984-B, p. 28-29

⁷ Pike, 2001, p. 157

The Otherkin identity is a safe haven for us to express the aspects of ourselves that don't fit into the everyday world but that need to have a place nonetheless. Does it really matter, in the end, if it's all in our heads? If it brings contentment, pleasure, and even enlightenment without causing harm to ourselves and to others, where is the wrong in it? Certainly some may question our sanity, but if we are able to function well within whatever culture we reside in, where is the harm in eccentricity?

Being Otherkin gives us a structure upon which to build the parts of us that human society offers us no resources for. Regardless of what the origin of our desires, memories, and patterns are, they are there, and in order for us to be truly healthy individuals we need to accept them and allow them a place in our lives that neither impedes everyday functions nor forces us to repress what we see as fundamental parts of ourselves.

All this talk of play and children and imagination should not be misconstrued as a way of passing off the idea of Otherkin as having no foundation in what we often term "reality"—that which is mundane, physical, tangible. Rather, its effects are similar to that of religion. The vast majority of people who profess a particular faith do not make it the entirety of their lives. While they may believe fully in such intangible ideas as transubstantiation or guardian angels, they still maintain everyday physical lives with families, jobs, and so forth. However, their beliefs often do influence everyday choices. A person who believes very strongly in Jesus Christ's example of feeding the poor may choose to donate time or money to a soup kitchen. Likewise, a parent who follows his Christian churches' railings against homosexuality may disown a child who comes out as gay or lesbian. These people may believe very literally in what their bible says—that Jesus Christ did indeed live on Earth for three decades and perform acts of kindness, or that the Christian God hates anyone who isn't heterosexual, and his followers should do the same.

So it is with Otherkin. Believing one is a dragon (and I choose the word belief both for comparison purposes and because of a lack of indisputable proof) may not be the do-all and end-all of someone's life. However, a person's belief that s/he is a reincarnated dragon may influence—consciously or not—behaviors or personality traits. Someone who identifies as a Western dragon, for example, may collect jewelry or other shiny objects and be quite picky as to who may handle them, while a person who believes himself to have once been an Eastern dragon may be fond of intellectual conversation and the pursuit of wisdom. And again, the use of the word "belief" should not automatically place the idea of Otherkin firmly into the realms of the mind. While there's no "Otherkin religion", the function of belief is similar. A person