

Animal Identity vs Theriiform Animals

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Content Warnings:

- Mentions of species dysphoria.
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Being a warrior(cat) in a body that owns a cat is weird.

First of all, I'm stuck in the shape of a twoleg. Anyone who comes near me will perceive me as such. No matter what I wear, or how I dress, or what I say, strangers first impression will always default to "this is a human", so much so that there's not even a question in their minds about it. This is much the same with literal non-alterhuman cats, they'll see me the same.

Second, there's a kittypet here and I can't talk to him, he doesn't see me as a cat, he sees me as the thing that gives him food and a warm lap. There's no way to have a conversation with him. He's able to convey certain things, like sitting near his food bowl meaning he wants food, or meowing at me for attention, or if he's happy, hurt or angry via his body language. This isn't a conversation, though--not in the same way I'd expect to be able to have one with another cat.

Third, we *own* this cat who I can't talk to, and I'm just supposed to. Brush that off? We're responsible for feeding him, his health, keeping him warm and safe, and keeping him clean if he needs help with that. He's a pet. A member of our family, sure, and a valued one at that--but he's still *owned* by us. And by proxy of our collective, he's owned by me, another cat.

I don't mind too much, it doesn't disturb me really. That's part of being in this brain--foreign things become benign and mundane pretty quickly. We love our cat, so do I, in the same way any owner loves their pet. But when I think about it in-depth? I can't love him in the way I'd love a member of my clan, and I can't get to know him as such. It's very strange to be a member of a specific species that in your noemata *has* autonomy and *has* "human-level" sapience, while.... Owning another member of that species who can't communicate with you in any of those same ways. This is a cat, not a fictionalised cat who lives in a mini society with complex rules and wars out in the middle of the forest--he doesn't know what war *is*, much less politics and clan leaders. He can't think like that, though he's complex in his own way--it's nowhere near the same. You simply can't treat another non-alterhuman member of your species as you might be used to, and it's a weird feeling.

I don't think I'm alone in feeling weird about it either. From what I've seen over the years of my system being in the community, a lot of nonhuman animals seem to struggle with the concept of still being different to a theriform animal despite your species identity. If you're a wolf therian, you can't communicate with other wolves as you normally would. If you're a bird therian, birds won't recognise you as one of them and you need to interact with them from a human perspective to preserve their safety or comfort. If you're a fish therian, you can't join up with the school and become accepted into their group. This is true for any theriform animal, really. As an alterhuman, you can't trust that you inherently know the body language, calls, actions or feelings of any theriform animal even if you're one of them too. You need to study these things, learn about the nuances of their actions. You need to interact with them through the lens of a human--at least to a degree--so you can ensure they're safe and comfortable. That's hard to do and feels damn weird, uncanny or even invalidating, and we've seen a lot of people struggle with accepting it outside of our system. It's not a great feeling.

But... It's nice to have cats around though, of course. Even if they bring a sort of uncanny valley esque vibe if I think too hard about it, it feels right to be surrounded by my species. I can relax in the company of other cats and feel a little more normal, a little less twoleg even, for a little while. And there's something very rewarding about putting time and effort into understanding an animals behaviours and learning their body language and such. A lot of people don't know all the nuances of animal behaviours, but by educating yourselves on what it means when a theriform animal does xyz thing... You bring yourself as close as you can get to an understanding of them, on their level. Not all animals are extensively studied in this way so for some, finding information might be hard, but it's really rewarding in our experience. You can help others to understand animals too--explaining better safer ways to handle animals or interact with them, what to and what not do do, how to tell if the animal is showing signs of stress.. These are all important things for anyone who interacts with an animal to know or learn.

This shifted from personal experiences to rambling, but... I guess the bottom line is--don't be ashamed of not knowing what some things mean, or needing to research your 'types or identities. This is normal, everyone needs to do it. No one is born with inherent knowledge. It might feel clunky and weird and awkward, and those feelings of being alienated might not ever go away when interacting with theriform animals of your species... But there's ways to prioritise learning about their behaviours and preserving their safety, and none of that is at the expense of your alterhuman identity. Needing to do research on your 'type doesn't take away from your identity. Ever.