

# *Otherkin & Society*

*aka "Waiter! There's an Otherkin in my Medieval Soup!"*

*Alyessa Oaktree is a persona based on the personality of a tree-spirit guest in Criss' body. While the persona is a medieval human gypsy (Romane) of undetermined place and time, the person within the persona is Otherkin.*

There are two problems which occur when you bring Otherkin into the Society for Creative Anachronism. They depend on your point of view. From the SCA's point of view, there should not be elves, vampires or werewolves walking the streets of the Pennsic Marketplace, everyone is "supposed" to be a persona from the Middle Ages, someone who really "could have been". From the view of the Otherkin, they have finally found a safe space to "be themselves", and they are treated rudely, ostracized, or downright condemned for their actions. Such strong reactions make this a very difficult subject to bring up. It is a source of contention between the SCA and Otherkin society. This essay is an attempt to work it out.

## *What is an Otherkin?*

Like so many other terms introduced on the Internet, the term Otherkin is new and evolving. It is used to describe a person whose spirit is a different species than human. This can be very confusing, since technically people who claim to be Otherkin are probably running around with human parents and human DNA. I have encountered three distinct types of Otherkin, so I will come up with terms for them: Reincarnated Otherkin, Otherkin Hosts, and Otherkin in Exile.

I will discuss the easiest of these first: Reincarnated Otherkin. These are people who remember their human life normally, but whom also experience flashes of memory of a time before this life where they were not human. Their spirit was once not human, and has been reincarnated for some reason into a human form. Often the past-life memories are strong and compelling.

I am an Otherkin Host. The circumstances for hosting probably vary considerably. In some cases I have found that the human soul that becomes the host is damaged in some way, and that the Otherkin spirits are in some way restless or unfulfilled souls. The visitors and the host form a symbiotic group which co-runs the collective human life-experiences, sometimes taking turns at controlling the body. Like all relationships, this can range from hostile to peaceful and mutually fulfilling.

Otherkin-in-Exile are probably the rarest form of Otherkind I've come across. Somewhere in an Otherkin's lifetime, someone (or something) kicked their spirit out of their body and into the body of a human on our planet. The human spirit is dormant or missing, perhaps the memories of that soul are gone or foggy, and a person is left who is totally non-acclimated to our life and society remains.

Many Otherkin experience homesickness and are outcasts within human society. For some, finding other people like themselves is difficult, frustrating, and often painful. Some try to accept their lot, while others fight it with an Out-Loud-and-Proud attitude. It is this In-Your-Face attitude, and the strife it causes, which inspires my discussion today.

## *Otherkind in the SCA*

We have seen the Otherkind in the SCA. There are some in the goth "Vampire" crowd who really are (were?) vampires. There are some Rennies (as I like to call the Renaissance-Faire Groupies) who are elves and other kinds of beings too numerous to list. Some wear the ears and tails and horns and wings...some don't. For instance, since I am Hosting for 22 Others, I am never quite sure WHAT to dress up in.

Otherkin are scattered across the globe. Some are lucky enough to have found people like themselves, and are forming their own small groups and trying to cope with their feelings, their past lives, and the discomfort of their current life. The mediums most likely to attract Otherkin are what brings them together: internet mailing lists and web pages, Role-Playing Games (live, online, and table), Ren Fairs, Sci-Fi & Comic conventions, and the recreation groups (S.C.A., Civil War, fantasy groups etc.). Some people used these mediums just to find kinship and then left them, others liked the atmospheres and stuck around.

The S.C.A., and especially it's largest events (namely Pennsic, since that is the largest event I've ever been to) are most likely to attract these roving bands of Misfits (hey, I'm one of them, and I use the term affectionately!). There are two problems with what happens at these events: normally the Otherkin are there in all their glamour, and the medievalists are there trying desperately to ignore such a blatantly anachronistic scene.

The problem of a disruptive Otherkin was brought up at a Chatelaine's meeting. The problem of the SCA being unwelcoming to Otherkin was brought up on an Otherkin e-mailing list. Both are issues that should be dealt with as soon as possible, with as much compromise as possible.

## *To the SCAdians*

The SCA is non-profit. I don't think we have the right to kick out people unless they are hazardous to themselves or to the group at large. The only requirement we profess to people to attend our events is "an attempt at a medieval costume". Of course, pointy ears and fluffy tails, etc. don't really fit that image. But that is no excuse to be nasty! There are other choices: A) remind yourself "I'm from the middle ages, and I don't see tree spirits and elves, even if they DO exist, except maybe out of the corner of my eye." B) These are the Middle Ages as we would have liked them to be, and maybe the romantic qualities of having the elves and fairies around is just as nice as having flush toilets and no plague! C) Be patient: Otherkin are gathering on their own now, so hopefully they won't need to "take away" from the Current Middle Ages to carve out their Otherkin spaces. Otherkin are very uncomfortable in contemporary society and they can sometimes let down their guard in safe spaces created by the SCA. D) Take the person aside, and explain to them what I am about to say to them below, in a very civil manner. Pretend you're a chatelaine and you WANT these people to remain members in good standing.

## *To My Kindred*

I have been to an Otherkin gathering. During one of our slightly more public moments, outside of our private campsite, a group of (I assume) wicca practitioners came to our dancing and drumming circle. There, they began to sing and dance and their energy was overwhelming. Many of my kinsfolk fled the area. I have humans inside of me along with all the Otherkin, and I can deal to some extent (although it took a lot of practice, and nearly cost me my life) with such disruptions: It's a survival trait for an Otherkin in NYC. Regardless, back at the private campsite, there was murmurs and complaints of "the HUMANS" coming into our semi-private space and taking it over from us. I didn't appreciate the derogatory comments, but I did appreciate the problem:

Reverse the roles, and you have the problem of out-LOUD-n-Proud(!) Otherkin being in the middle of the Middle Ages! Next time an occurrence like this happens, it might be YOUR Otherkin convention being crashed by humanity, taking away from your illusions and your peace of mind. There are more appropriate ways to be an Otherkin at an SCA event: A) If you really were an elf (or whatever) in the Middle Ages, you would probably disguise yourself as human in some way in order to survive and not cause panics and stirs. That rare flash of pointed ear under your hair, hat or hood is enough to cause whispers which will become the legends of the future...be tastefully understated, and see just how well you can "play human" to the SCAdians B) Keep your OUT & LOUD-nesses to your private camp, to times when you are "out of persona". C) We should come up with a token or symbol (perhaps the 7-pointed Sidhe star, or something similar) so that we can "know" each other. D) Sing a song or tell a tale (in a Medieval style) of the species to whom you belong without ever giving yourself away....

## *In Summary*

It is my hope that the Otherkin can also be SCAdians, and that both groups can carve out their personal niches in the world without taking away from each other. Perhaps one day, SCAdians will be giving referrals to Otherkin groups to aid them in getting sites for their gatherings, and Otherkin will pretend to be humans from the Middle Ages so well that they will become SCAdians in good standing, with many awards and medallions to rest on their breasts besides their Otherkin symbol.

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