

Beneath an Ever-Shifting Gaze

"Shifter." You have no idea how much I hate that name. It sounds like an expletive, almost, like something unpleasant that schoolboys call each other, for which their mothers wash out their mouths.

Not only does the very name itself sound unclean, but it doesn't describe anything. "Ley Line Walker" describes something. If you've ever talked to a "Mystic", you know that name is much too appropriate, as the thrice-damned panty-waists never make a single ounce of sense when talking about the Craft. Techno-wizard, Headhunter, Burster... all of these say something about who they are and what they do. But not Shifter. I've been many places, many worlds and times, and I've always remained the same, never shifted, as the name would have you believe. I hate the name, because it doesn't fit; a name that doesn't fit shouldn't be worn by anyone.

No one in this job ever really shifts. Sure, we move around a lot... not all of us are sterling examples of the best in humanity, you know, but we always remain ourselves, never really shifting. What we are, I think, is Seekers. Every person who I've met on this job has been seeking something. A lost love, ultimate power, or the perfect meatloaf recipe... something in our spirits drives us to seek out what we don't know, what our heart desires. I don't think I could stop looking any more than I could stop breathing. Everything is something to poke your head into, look around, and try and understand it. You just never stop looking.

Sure, there are a lot of folks who never stop looking, but don't go the way we go. Rogue Scholars and Scientists, Wilderness Scouts, Psychics... all are types of people that try to understand the world around them, but they don't go the way we do. Its because they don't have the heart for the magick, the Craft. You have to have a love for the Craft to make it work for you, you see, and you have to have a love for knowledge to have a love for the Craft. And every Seeker has a love for knowledge, which is why I think a lot of us turn to what magic we do.

A lot of people look at the magic we do, and see only the form of it... makes sense, because a lot of people are mundanes. They see us summoning creatures from beyond, and giving them orders, and they blame us for consorting with demons. They see us prying into the past or future with our spells, and call us nosy or twisted. What we're doing, though, is Seeking. Some of us will call up a demon in order to learn from it...after all, who knows more about demons than one of their own? Others will call one up, ordering it to perform tasks...and if you're Seeking power, what better servant than a creature formed of power? A few... but I could go on for decades about the reasons you might call for such a creature. The simple fact of the matter is you call it because you're Seeking something, and you hope that it can aid you in that Seeking. It's that way with every magick we might use. We're Seeking something, and the magicks we use are a means to that end. Seeking means travelling, so we learn the ways of rifts and dimensions, and always know a way home. Seeking means something worth looking for, so someone else might be Seeking the same thing, so we learn ways of determining if we can trust them... and of defending ourselves if we can't. For some, for the most infamous, Seeking means taking, so they learn things that will help them take what they Seek.

Most Seekers you'll meet will have a pet, a familiar. That's part of being a Seeker, and its part of being human. Seeking, you see, means the kind of life that most people who don't Seek won't want to live, and those that do are likely Seeking something else entirely, so you won't see them much. A familiar, though, is always with you, and is bonded so close to you that they understand the need to Seek, and want to see the things you Seek as much as you do. A Seeker with a familiar doesn't have to worry about being alone, because there's always that awareness on the edge of thought, just a little brush on your mind, that lets you know someone shares your thoughts, and is concerned about your life. It's a damn callous Seeker who doesn't come to love the familiar, at least a little bit, and that's why most familiars you meet aren't going to be the same as other animals... the Seeker pours some of his energy into the animal, nourishing him on his strength. In the end, Seekers who do so are glad for it, because they now have someone who can be more than just some remote pair of eyes... they can be a true friend, likely an only friend, linked body and soul.

There's one last aspect of the Seeking, though, that not many know about, and most Seekers don't mention around. There is a way for a Seeker to stop being just a Seeker. Even now, I find it hard to talk about, so deeply into the Seeker culture is the code of secrecy about this rooted. Perhaps, they, if I approach it from the side, I'll be able to talk about it.

When a Seeker looks for a familiar, they look for a certain something about the animal. A certain quality that they feel will mesh well with them, that will compliment their own personality. Opening a link to a familiar is a delicate process, in which you find out if this animal is really something that will blend with you. Sometimes, though, some Seekers aren't content with just companionship. Maybe they're looking for power... far too many of us are. Maybe they're looking for acceptance. Maybe they're looking for something to structure their lives... what ever it is they seek, though, they often find it in the darkest of places. They extend the bonds of a familiar to something from beyond, something powerful, and accept whatever that creature wants of them, if the creature will have them. Often, those creatures are only too delighted to have an agent on this world, and so offer whatever the Seeker desires. I've never done it. I can't see any case in which I would do it, because I've seen what happens to those that do. They start to fall away from themselves, become more and more like the lord they've offered themselves up to. I knew one Seeker who had linked to a dragon, an ancient beast, and he'd changed so much since I knew him before. He thought himself a dragonling, and he thought himself favored. But his master held him in contempt, and treated him with no more respect than one gives a dog that comes back to a master who beats him.

Its ones like that, I think, that give us the name Shifters. While the Seekers stay true to themselves, and only the Seeking changes, the Shifters always change, as surely as the sun moves through the sky. They twist down to whatever it is that they have sought, until they can't break free, can't Seek anymore. And then they truly have Shifted, into something that really deserves that ugly of a name.

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