



The Shifting

Greetings, fellow seekers of knowledge! The Librarian has commissioned me, the redoubtable sage and explorer Adolphus Quint, to provide here for you a brief primer into the strangeness afflicting these lands, and to hopefully answer some questions for you!

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Adolphus Quint



In this brief document, I seek merely to shift – or indeed to Shift – some of the ignorance you doubtless have about the Shifting and those who labour under its cruel burdens, and hopefully leave you enlightened and your appetite for understanding sated – for now, at least!

What is The Shifting?

A thorny question indeed, and one which has baffled the finest minds of all universities and scholars! In its simplest terms, The Shifting is a potent magical effect, foreign to our lands, which descended unannounced some 200 years ago. It ravaged the land, and those who were afflicted by its insidious touch *changed*. More on this can be found in the sections below.

The Shifting manifests itself, most commonly, as an area of mist or smoke, rising from nowhere and tinged with odd colours. However, this is not always guaranteed, and more worrying still is that, when inside the perimeters of The Shifting, oft times this mist vanishes from sight entirely, so it can truly be hard to know.

Its touch changes and mutates all those within its boundaries. Some change immediately, while others may take even years to show the effects – indeed, in the famous and documented case of Herod Flynn, one brief exposure to The Shifting manifested itself suddenly and unannounced, some 12 years



later, during a dinner party thrown to honour Lord Blackpool or Croxin.

That said, any exposure - without suitable protection – can be sufficient to trigger a Shift, and those who spend longer than a few moments within the boundaries will almost certainly begin to find the evil touch working upon them and reshaping them.

As may be expected when dealing with such an unpredictable and fluid thing, it is truly difficult to detail the progression of Shifting and the effects it has. Certainly, evidence seems to suggest that the more exposure a creature or place has to The Shifting, the more sweeping and pronounced the changes, but aside from that it is hard to say.

It is generally known, also, that the magical creations known as Anchors force the Shifting back, and keep it from wider Human society. Indeed, it is only through the action and effects of these artefacts that Human society still exists at all, and that unShifted lands yet remains.

However, it does no-one good to become complacent – there have been reports where a localised intrusion of The Shifting has occurred, sweeping away villages or settlements caught unawares, and birthing monsters to ravage the lands. How The Shifting manages this, we do not know, but it certainly lends credence to the arguments that some unknowable and malevolent intelligence lies behind The Shifting and directs its works.

For more information, I recommend the budding scholar investigate Plutan's 20-volume masterwork "The Shifting: Its Origins, Effects and Theories"



*Arm recovered from a Therian
Nr. Chasco, the distally located
eye was myopic, the proximal eye
was claimed to be capable of
normal sight.*

What exactly *is* a Shifted?

All Humans are born allied to one of the six great Elements – what is known as their Affinity. This was known when the Human nations were first crawling out of caves and began making tools, and was confirmed by the Five Gods of Enlightenment when mankind first discovered Their existence and learned how to speak to Them.



*Skull recovered from a Therian-
note the posterioally distended
temporal bone and duplicated
zygomatic process with fang.*

A persons Affinity will always have some impact on their lives, will always guide them to a greater or lesser degree, and it has traditionally been used by the Coral Seers and others as methods of predicting behaviour and personality. For example, an Earth-aligned person will often be slow to act, and good with their hands; and an Air-aligned like myself frequently search for meaning and understanding, preferring the lofty heights of

intellectualism to the base work of the fields.

When exposed to the Shifting, however, this Affinity is dragged rudely to the fore. The poor souls body turns and twists, changing and warping in alignment to their Affinity, and when the initial change is done, they are no longer a proud and beautiful human, having become one of the tragic misshapen beings known as a Shifted.

While it is true to say that Shifting may carry great physical benefits, the social consequences alone more than outweigh those benefits, as does the sad truth that the act of Shifting is well documented to consume the soul of the poor person, forever barring them from the afterlife.

To date, there is no known way to reverse this effect. There are rumours that some Fire mages – high ranking and secretive – may have discovered a new and forbidden spell which can effect this change. If so, they will be much in demand, I'm sure!

*Preserved finger of a Dwarfrow,
the attached tendon and phalangeal
bone prov'd impossible to cut.*



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Becoming Shifted

While I myself cannot, of course, detail the sheer terror and pain which accompanies a Shift, there do exist records and anecdotes which detail some of the transformations. I have collected some below, for your edification and education alike:

I will never forget that day. I was a simple man, a farmer, working my fields in western Fallowmere, me and my son and my wife. I was tending the cows, when suddenly this... fog rolls in. No warning, no sign, just nothing, then this bluish fog. I could hear my son screaming, and running, and praying.

Then, all I heard was a roaring sound in my head. I felt myself getting... heavier. I couldn't lift my limbs, my eyelids, my head. I sank to my knees, under this crushing weight. There was no pain, just pressure. The next thing I knew, I opened my eyes, and stood.

My skin had turned to... well, stone. Rock. Grey as granite, with clumps of sharp edges sticking out. My feet sank into the mud as I walked. My son was untouched, unchanged, so were my crops and my cattle. I never did find my wife, though. The mists just took her.

- Gilbert, a Dwarfrow.

It was with great alarm and distress that I found myself Shifting, one cold morning in October. I had been in the Shifting two months before, true, but had manifested no change, and it was thought I had escaped its touch. Alas, it seems I was not so lucky.

As part of the Enlightened College, I had long studied the Shifting and its effects upon Human physiology, so it is with cruel irony that I found myself becoming one of those I had studied and experimented upon.

The pain was, quite simply, indescribably, even for one such as I. I could feel my blood turning to ashes in my veins, my skin ripping and tearing as my body reconfigured itself. My eyes grew large and sensitive, the bright sunlight piercing me like golden needles. I could feel parts of me simply evaporating into mist and ash, and I screamed so much my voice – once a thing of rich vibrancy – is now little more than a whisper. My fingers withered and bent, yet still able to hold a quill. It is no great thing to become that which you study. Beware.

- Magus Olryn Havillan, a Ramanga.

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The Shifted and the Shifting.

*The pain, the pain.... voices in me
 shrieking, tearing... must write this while I
 still have hand with which to write... it
 burns it burns IT BURNS... my blood
 like fire... my bones, cracking... I CAN
 HEAR MY FLESH SINGING
 SWEET WHISPERS... kill m-*

***(Author unknown, found
 written on a scrap of
 bloodied parchment in an
 abandoned farm.)***



Female Efreet

The Shifted have a unique relationship with The Shifting, as one might expect. It is a well-researched fact that those who have Shifted have an affinity with other Shifted and indeed the Shifting itself. In many, this manifests itself as a “sensitivity” to the touch of the Shifting. With practise and dedication, this can be developed into a keenness of sense which enables them to pick out those who may otherwise appear completely human, by whatever mystic art.

The act of Shifting also seems to convey some resistance to future transformation when exposed to The Shifting. This is by no means impervious or exhaustive, and even an aged and experienced Shifted may still find themselves changing even further upon repeated exposure, but it does seem that they can tolerant brief jaunts into the outlying areas of The Shifting without immediately succumbing.

However, while this protection may grant them some limited physical immunity, it does not seem to do so to the mind of the Shifted. Upon repeated exposure, even if the body does not twist and change, the incidences of madness become more frequent and pronounced – perhaps an even more invidious change than the simply material.





Shifted in Human Society.

As may be expected, given their provenance of fear and revulsion, those unfortunate to be Shifted do not find a happy place in Human society. By law laid down shortly after the initial outbreak of the Shifting, those thus affected are no longer treated as Human – their stigmata worn clearly on their skin. Add to this the knowledge that a Shifted does not have a soul or hope of eternal glory, and it is no surprise why they are feared and mistreated.

By Crown law, they are barred from holding office in any organisation (save the rare sanctioned Guild and, of course, the Order of the Gryphon) and, were they once graced with such heights of influence and standing, that is stripped from them as soon as they manifest the change. Those who once called them friend have even been known to shun those afflicted, and even the highest noble rank is no protection from this decree.

Sorry, then, is the lot of a Shifted in Human society. Even in the more enlightened Dominions, they are second class citizens – denied a vote, a voice, and representation. They are treated as servants and peasants at best, and their legal rights are also constrained by Crown law.

In some of the more barbaric Dominions – Scarrow, for example – Shifted are treated like property, slaves to the whims of Humans. They are used for menial tasks, drafted forcibly into the Border Guard which defends Scarrow from the Shifting which cuts across its lands, and even killed on a whim.



The Shifted Races:

Now gather round, my friends, and I will tell you of the six Shifted races – the physical effects they labour under, any commonalities of appearance and demeanour, and the terms by which they are known.

Therian

Of all the Shifted, those with an Affinity for Wood are amongst the most varied in physical appearance. The Shifting causes the primal nature within them to come to the surface, twisting their form into a repulsive hybrid of man and animal. Even the lightest-touched Therian will display some animal traits – be that pointed teeth, fur instead of hair, the eyes of a cat – but far more common is a full facial reconfiguration, with a muzzle and snout replacing the nose.

Do not be misled by the name, either. While “Therian” is the accepted nomenclature for a Shifted of this Affinity, the changes wrought are not limited to merely mammals. There have long been encounters with Therian with avian features, and there are unconfirmed reports of Therian with insectile and even squamous features! Those so afflicted, however, also seem to show a more pronounced shift in reasoning and personality, and so tend to shun Human society.

It is my experience that the physical shift is oft-times mirrored by a mental shift also, with many Therian also manifesting personality traits of the beasts whose forms they mirror. In some cases, this can be as simple as a few ticks and mannerisms – in others a complete change in personality and demeanour.





Dwarrow

Those people with an Affinity for Earth become known as Dwarrows when they Shift. This Affinity manifests itself in yet another gross physical change, as their skin becomes incredibly tough, like flexible stone. There usually follows a concomitant increase in weight and decrease in agility – although it has to be admitted that, for a person who's skin is essentially rock, they retain an extraordinary amount of flexibility and range of movement.

It is my general experience that those who become Dwarrow already exhibited many of the personality traits one has come to associate with Earth-aligned people: a dry sense of humour, an overwhelming patience, a desire to protect others, an obsession with finishing tasks when started. When they Shift, this becomes somewhat more pronounced than it used to be, but unlike Therian and others, it marks less a change in attitude and more a focusing of it.

Efreet

Named after the legendary creatures of old, those mercurial individuals with an Affinity to Fire become known as Efreet after they Shift. Unlike many other Shifted, the physical changes manifested by Efreet is usually limited to a drastic change in skin colouration, but little else – at least initially.

When they Shift, their skin takes on one of the tones most associated with Fire in general – red or orange being most common, but with yellow also not being unusual. In some extreme cases, they may even take on a metallic tinge – limited to copper, bronze or gold – but this is more commonly encountered (if any such occurrence could be said to be common) in the older and more experienced Efreet, or those who have suffered repeated exposure to The Shifting.

As with the Dwarrow, rather than a sea-change in personality upon Shifting, Efreet seem to refine and focus their existing personality traits. While not usually known for flights of high intellect and study, Efreet are responsible for creating some of the finest art, poetry and music of the current age, and – in Scarrow especially – Efreet are often favoured slaves and seen as a sign of prestige.



Ramanga

Of all the Shifted, the most vilified and feared are those with an Affinity for Shadow. While the visible changes are amongst the least obvious – their skin fade to a pure alabaster white, and takes on an unpleasant, spongy texture – it is the internal changes which cause the greatest concern.

From the time they Shift, the Ramanga grow a new organ known as a Vitaphagic Oomphalos, found between the stomach and the lungs. As they grow and age, this organ enlarges and becomes more dominant while other organs wither away and become redundant. Indeed, there comes a time when the only way a Ramanga can gain sustenance is by consuming the life force of other living things. This process is extremely painful to the hapless victim.

Despite this, many Ramanga still manage to find a living in Human society as long as they are capable of restraining this urge, with some even paying people to feed upon so as to break no laws. It is also worth noting that, due to their general lack of squeamishness, they often find gainful employ as forensic necromancers and the like for militias.

Sylphs

Those Shifted with an Affinity for Air become the creatures known as Sylphs. In Sylphs, the physical changes are extremely pronounced and very difficult to hide – their skin pigmentation changes into a shade of blue, their ears grow long and pointed, and their overall body mass decreases as their bones become hollow. However, despite this, the overall structure of the bones remains unexpectedly rigid and firm, and as difficult to break as that of a normal Human. The skin of a Sylph, as mentioned, changes hue to that of a shade of blue, usually towards the deeper end of the spectrum, and is constantly slightly cold to the touch.

Shifting into a Sylph does seem to have some distinct advantages for the scholarly mind – not enough, I should add, to outweigh the loss of a soul and social standing – but still present. It is generally found that the mind of a Sylph operates somewhat faster when learning and recalling information, albeit this does not seem to apply for physical skills or training. Even those who had never glanced at a tome in their life find at least some appreciation for the written word and science, and find reading an easily-learned skill.



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Rusalka


Rusalka is the term given to those Shifted with an Affinity for Water. Of all the elements, Water is one of the harder to classify – sharing traits as it does with Shadow, Wood, and – ironically – with its oppositional element of Fire. So too is it difficult to classify a Rusalka. Of all Shifted, Rusalka are the ones most likely to retain their original personalities and drives, although – as may be expected – their physical forms do undergo a dramatic shift, with their skin turning thick and leathery and their pigmentation shifting into a startling hue of green.

One of the more fundamental changes seen in Rusalka is a tendency to do nothing by halves. If a Rusalka decides to do something, they will focus on that to exclusion and work until it is done. Unlike the patience and stoicism often seen in Dwarrow, a Rusalka is generally passionate about this, and while they will carefully consider the angles before acting, once they commit they commit for good. This is not necessarily to everyone's benefit.

In Conclusion:

Well, friends, this concludes my introductory treatise on the subject of The Shifting and those who have succumbed to its insidious and warping touch. I urge once again that all contained within here are theories and generalities – each individual Shifted is as different as each individual Human – but hopefully this contains sufficient information to give you a grounding and mayhap enlighten you to some learning previously missing.

Aldolphus Quint, Purple Sage of Arador.

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