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**“NONE WHO ENTER WILL LEAVE
UNCHANGED”: HYBRIDITY,
ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND HUMAN-
NONHUMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN BRANDON
MULL’S *FABLEHAVEN***

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ABSTRACT

Sofia Hanhikorpi: "None Who Enter Will Leave Unchanged": Hybridity, Anthropocentrism and Human-Nonhuman Relationships in Brandon Mull's *Fablehaven*
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Within the fields of posthumanism and critical animal studies, children's fantasy literature has been recognized as a genre rife with subversive potential. Children's fantasy fiction frequently breaks the binaries of human/animal or human/nonhuman, presenting the reader with characters who bend our definitions of what is human and what is not. These hybrid beings challenge human-centric conventions both by their very existence as well as through interspecies cooperation with stereotypical human characters. Brandon Mull's *Fablehaven* not only demonstrates a profound subversion of anthropocentrism and the human/nonhuman binary; the novel also explicitly discusses mass extinction and the rights of nonhuman species. This thesis analyses the topics of hybridity, anthropocentrism and human-nonhuman relationships within *Fablehaven* and utilizes scholarship from the fields of posthumanist literary theory, critical animal studies and ecocriticism to support an environmentalist reading of *Fablehaven*.

The analysis indicates that *Fablehaven's* hybrid magical beings resist categories and hierarchies alike, and even the conventional humanity of the novel's human characters is undermined through both ideological and physical transformations. The narrative shows that actions based on an anthropocentric premise result in disaster, and the only way to remedy the catastrophic consequences of human folly is to decentralize humanity and cooperate with nonhuman beings. Hybridizing transformations allow *Fablehaven's* human characters to experience the perspective of nonhumans, and even the conceptual hybridity of the novel's child characters as a bridge between the human and the animal facilitate empathy and respect for nonhuman beings through mutual experiences. *Fablehaven* takes a radical stance against human hegemony by emphasizing the rights of nonhuman species and suggesting that the lives of endangered species should be prioritized over the lives of humans who would pose a threat to these species. Mass extinction, symbolized within the narrative by a powerful and malevolent demon, can be averted if humanity abandons its notions of human superiority and begins to live in symbiosis with the biosphere.

Keywords: Hybridity, Anthropocentrism, Human-Nonhuman Relationships, Human/Animal Binary, Children's Fantasy Literature, Environmentalism

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Sofia Hanhikorpi: "None Who Enter Will Leave Unchanged": Hybridity, Anthropocentrism and Human-Nonhuman Relationships in Brandon Mull's *Fablehaven*

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Kriittisen eläintutkimuksen ja posthumanismin tieteenaloilla on tunnistettu, että lasten fantasiakirjallisuus tarjoaa kumouksellisia näkökulmia ihmisten ja eläinten väliseen vuorovaikutukseen sekä valtasuhteisiin. Lasten fantasiassa usein rikotaan ihmisen ja eläimen (tai ihmisen ja ei-ihmisen) välinen raja, ja tuloksena on hahmoja ja olentoja, jotka eivät sovi totunnaisiin lajiluokitteluihin tai käsityksiin siitä, mitä ihmisyyttä on. Nämä hybridioleudet horjuttavat ihmiskeskeistä maailmankuvaamme sekä pelkällä olemassaolollaan että kyvyllään tehdä lajienvälistä yhteistyötä tavanomaisten ihmishahmojen kanssa. Brandon Mullin fantasiaromaani *Myyttihovi* kyseenalaistaa ihmiskeskeisyyden sekä kahtiajaon ihmisen ja muiden lajien välillä, mikä kytkeytyy lisäksi kertomuksen avoimesti esille tuomaan massasukupuuton ja eläinoikeuksien tematiikkaan. Tämä tutkielma käsittelee hybridisyyttä, ihmiskeskeisyyttä sekä ihmisten ja ei-ihmisten välisiä vuorovaikutuksia *Myyttihovissa*. Temaattinen analyysi peilautuu tutkimukseen posthumanistisen kirjallisuustieteen, kriittisen eläintutkimuksen sekä ekokritiikin aloilta ja tarjoaa ympäristötietoisuuden tulkinnan *Myyttihovista*.

Tutkielma osoittaa, että *Myyttihovin* hybridiset taikaolennot horjuttavat sovinnaisia luokitteluja ja valtasuhteita lajien välillä, ja jopa romaanin ihmishahmojen ihmisyyttä joutuu kyseenalaiseksi niin ideologisten kuin fyysisten muodonmuutoksien kautta. Kertomus havainnollistaa, kuinka ihmiskeskeistä ajatusmaailmaa heijastavat teot johtavat katastrofiin sekä taikaolentojen että ihmistenkin kannalta; ihmisten hölmöyden tuhoiset seuraukset voidaan korjata vain hylkäämällä ihmiskeskeisyys ja sen sijaan tekemällä yhteistyötä muiden lajien kanssa. Lajienvälisten rajojen hämärtämisen lisäksi *Myyttihovin* ihmishahmojen kokemat hybridisoivat muodonmuutokset tuovat taikaolentojen ja eläinten näkökulmat konkreettisesti esille. Romaanin lapsihahmot oppivat kunnioittamaan sekä kokemaan empatiaa ei-ihmisiä kohtaan, mikä ilmentää lasten käsitteellistä hybridisyyttä siltana ihmisen ja eläimen välillä; lapsilla voi olla enemmän yhteisiä kokemuksia taikaolentojen ja eläinten kanssa kuin aikuisilla. *Myyttihovi* esittää jyrkän vastalauseen ihmisten ylivalle painottamalla muiden lajien oikeuksia sekä vihjaamalla, että uhanalaisten lajien elämät täytyy asettaa etusijalle – varsinkin, jos puntarin toisella puolella on uhanalaisia lajeja sortavia ihmisiä. Massasukupuutto, jota kertomuksessa edustaa voimakas ja pahantahtoinen demoni, voidaan välttää hylkäämällä ihmiskeskeinen maailmankuva ja pyrkimällä yhteiseloon Maan eliökehän kanssa.

Avainsanat: hybridisyys, ihmiskeskeisyys, ihmisen ja eläimen välinen vuorovaikutus, ihminen/eläin, lasten fantasiakirjallisuus, ympäristötietoisuus

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1 Introduction

The Earth's biosphere has experienced multiple mass extinctions; events in which a significant amount of life on Earth dies out. The extinction of the dinosaurs marks one such catastrophic event which most people are likely familiar with. Curiously, however, one is perhaps more likely to encounter a reference to the extinction of the dinosaurs than to the mass extinction that we are currently experiencing firsthand. As Crist and Kopnina argue, this mass extinction is characterized by its "public invisibility" (391). The reason behind the shroud of silence that surrounds the contemporary threat to life on Earth is not, however, difficult to deduce. It is perhaps easier for us to discuss an extinction that was caused by an object from outer space, an asteroid, than one which is caused by the actions of humanity itself. Becoming blind to the consequences of your actions, to deny their existence, is more comfortable than it is to face what you have done and to try to make amends. Crist and Kopnina attribute this indifference to the larger disconnection of humanity from nature and nonhuman beings that our anthropocentric worldview has produced (388). By conceptualizing humanity as the center of the world, humanity becomes prioritized while the rest of the natural world becomes secondary, "displaced to the periphery" (Crist & Kopnina, 388). Turning a blind eye to the suffering of nonhumans is therefore not so difficult when we believe them to be insignificant compared to humanity.

Brandon Mull's *Fablehaven* is an example of a novel that unveils the shroud of silence surrounding the current mass extinction. The theme of extinction is brought up in explicit terms in the synopsis on the back cover of the novel: "For centuries mystical creatures were gathered into a hidden refuge called Fablehaven to prevent their extinction" (Mull). As the synopsis and the novel proper reveal, however, the subjects of the threat of extinction in *Fablehaven* are magical creatures as opposed to conventional animals. Thus, a parallelism is formed between the threat of extinction faced by the novel's magical creatures and the mass extinction affecting nonhuman species in the real world. A resemblance can also be seen between Fablehaven, the sanctuary for magical creatures, and wildlife preserves as well as other conservation efforts founded in our world. It would therefore be plausible to read *Fablehaven* as an allusion to the contemporary mass extinction, the endangered magical species of the novel in a sense representing real-life species who are under threat of extinction.

The rather explicit parallelism between magical creatures and real nonhuman species in *Fablehaven* may perhaps be extended further to various other aspects of the novel and to the themes

that arise from interactions between magical creatures and humans. This extension can be justified due to another peculiar detail about the novel's magical creatures, namely, the fact that without the aid of magic, these creatures appear to the human eye as regular nonhuman beings like butterflies, toads, boars and goats. Not only is the connection between magical and nonmagical creatures allusive; it is also a physically perceived connection within the text, a hybridity of the magical creatures in the eyes of humanity. Hybridity can in fact be understood as one of the key themes that arise within the novel and connect to the larger topic of human-nonhuman relationships in *Fablehaven*. In addition to hybridity, and perhaps even more crucially, the novel forms complex depictions of anthropocentrism and connects human-centric thinking to the novel's representations of nonhumans, often subverting anthropocentric attitudes and actions. The notion of human superiority and the attempt to trivialize or commodify nonhuman creatures often backfires on the novel's human characters, and rather than being able to turn a blind eye to the consequences of their actions, *Fablehaven's* human characters find that they must face their own errors and do their best to make amends, lest all is lost. It becomes evident that relationships between humans and other species must be forged on equal ground, by removing humanity from the center and by imagining oneself in the position of another. The role of *Fablehaven's* child protagonists, Kendra and Seth, is particularly crucial for the subversion of an anthropocentric worldview, as Kendra and Seth prove to both conceptually and physically occupy the boundary between the human and the nonhuman throughout the novel's events.

2 Hybridity and the Human/Animal Binary

What is a human? What is an animal? How do humans differ from other animals and how do nonhuman animals differ from each other? According to Dawne McCance, dictionary definitions of the word “animal” reveal that the word is not just used in a biological sense about species whose cellular structure consists of animal cells but is often also used to separate humans from other animals or to degrade humans by equating them to other animals (57-58). In western tradition, the word *animal* has been constructed into a binary opposition between human and animal wherein *human* is hierarchically conceived as being above or superior to *the animal* (McCance 66). While human beings are commonly described specifically as humans, nonhuman animals are instead often generalized and grouped together under a single term, the animal, “blurring differences in favor of one unifying term” (McCance 58). The hierarchy between humans and nonhuman animals is, therefore, usually evident even in modern thought and language: humans are considered more important than other animals, which is why humans are conceptualized in specific terms while other animals are generalized as simply animal. The diversity of nonhuman animals is ignored – the only meaningful differences are those that are perceived to set humans apart from other animals.

In *Fablehaven*, before the child protagonists Seth and Kendra learn about the secret of the preserve their Grandpa Sorenson tends to as caretaker, Seth ventures out into the woods despite Grandpa’s rule against leaving the boundaries of the yard (33). Seth is soon approached by what appears to his unseeing eyes as a porcupine (34). The narrator curiously uses both the more specific term *porcupine* as well as the generalizing term *animal* when describing the porcupine: “It was a round, bristly creature no taller than his knees. A porcupine. The animal started down the path in his direction with complete confidence. Seth froze” (34). While the porcupine is sometimes described with the generalizing word animal, the same does not apply to Seth. Seth is an animal himself, a human, yet the nonhuman porcupine is the one who is being referred to as an animal. The human is conceptualized as significantly different from the porcupine who represents the assimilated group of nonhuman animals; therefore, it is the porcupine who is described as simply an animal while Seth maintains specificity throughout the interaction, either referred to by name or identified deictically with the pronoun *he*. This moment appears to reinforce the hierarchical human/animal divide, however, later moments in the novel have a more subversive effect. For example, when Kendra and Seth meet the satyrs Newel and Doren, they are described with an equal amount of specificity: “The two satyrs and two children charged recklessly through the woods for a few more minutes” (202).

Although *children* is arguably a more specific descriptor than *human*, it is nonetheless more general than Kendra and Seth's names. In addition, the satyrs are mentioned first; they are prioritized over the children. Furthermore, the narration takes the time to have Newel and Doren introduce themselves to the children (203). After Newel and Doren's names are made apparent, the narrator subsequently refers to them specifically by their names, only using the more general term *satyr* when describing actions shared between Newel and Doren or between them and the children. The narrator utilizes an equal amount of specificity when referring to the human and nonhuman characters, undermining the notion that humans should be described in more detail than nonhuman beings – although satyrs perhaps resemble humans more than porcupines do, which may still hint at some level of hierarchy.

In addition to its potential subversion of the hierarchical aspect of the human/animal binary, *Fablehaven* ventures further into the blending of categories. As mentioned in the introduction, the magical creatures of *Fablehaven* are hybrid beings in the eyes of humans, appearing to the novel's human characters as regular nonhuman animals until the humans drink milk from the magical cow Viola. When Seth and Kendra first taste the milk that Dale the groundskeeper curiously leaves out in the yard for the butterflies and hummingbirds to drink, their eyes are opened to the reality: instead of butterflies and hummingbirds the creatures in the yard are revealed to be fairies (72-73). David D. Gilmore characterizes hybrids as “bizarre composites, made up of pieces of a reassembled reality” (189). Gilmore further notes that hybrid creatures, such as monsters, tend to fuse features that are seen as typically human or nonhuman together, but they can also involve other types of combinations, such as being a fusion of several different real or imagined species (189). In a sense, then, the magical creatures of *Fablehaven* might represent a blending of the categories of real and imaginary: conventional nonhuman animals are revealed to be magical creatures, what Kendra and Seth previously thought of as imaginary. On the other hand, what the children initially thought of as real animals becomes an illusion while the true form, the reality of the creatures of *Fablehaven* is that of magical creatures. *Real* and *imaginary* begin to seep into one another, destabilizing the border between the two. As Gilmore proposes, hybridity and hybrid beings have the power to subvert “our cosmological assumptions and perceptions” (189), such as our metaphysical notions about what is real and our classifications of species.

Fablehaven's creatures challenge the concept of *the animal* because it is difficult to pin down whether the magical creatures are hybrids of real and imaginary nonhuman species, animals under certain circumstances and magical creatures in differing circumstances or simply magical creatures that only appear nonmagical to the unseeing human eye. Gilmore's observations about hybrid

creatures complicating the borders between not only humans and other animals but also between real and imaginary species apply particularly well to the creatures of *Fablehaven*, as the narrative presents beings whose characteristics reflect a wide spectrum of similarity to humans, non-human animals and mythological creatures alike. Viola, the giant magical cow, is a striking example of this blending of categories, as Grandma Sorenson notes that people “could see the cow, even without the milk, because Viola remains a mortal being” (279). It is difficult to determine, then, whether Viola is an animal, a magical creature or a hybrid, as her mortality and general cow-like appearance suggest conventional animalhood while her exceptional size and the magical properties of her milk invoke either a more magical nature or hybridity of some sort. The very concept of an animal becomes destabilized by the struggle to accurately categorize or conceptualize the peculiar cow. Such breakdown of conventions is not, however, atypical considering that *Fablehaven* is a part of the genre of children’s fantasy literature. According to Zoe Jaques, children’s fiction utilizes the powerful imagination of its young audience in order to explore and visualize all things seemingly unthinkable and surreal (6). The binaries of human/animal and real/imaginary are thus rendered absurd by the uncategorizable beings of children’s fiction, especially when taking into account Jaques’ suggestion that these creatures are no mere imaginative play but instead invite “readers to “believe” in them, or, at least, in their possibilities” (6).

Akin to Viola, most of *Fablehaven*’s magical creatures represent not only conventional mythological or fantasy creatures but often display a multitude of traits comparable to humans and/or other animals to the point where few creatures fully fit any real or imaginary species archetype. When Kendra first drinks the milk and sees the fairies, the first fairy she sees has the wings of a hummingbird as opposed to the prototypical image of fairies with butterfly wings: “A fairy with hummingbird wings was drinking from her cupped hand. Other than the wings, the fairy looked like a slender woman not quite two inches tall” (73). Upon further observation, Kendra notes that “some looked Asian, some Indian, some African, some European. Several were less comparable to mortal women, with blue skin or emerald green hair. A few had antennae” (74). The fairies are remarkably diverse with some individuals possessing biological structures from completely different classifications of animals – birds versus insects – while some appear more alien than human-animal hybrid, with distinctly coloured skin and hair. Even the supposedly humanoid aspects of the fairies are far from homogenous considering the connections Kendra makes to various ethnicities. Furthermore, some of *Fablehaven*’s creatures bear only a vague resemblance to humans; the cliff troll Nero, for instance, might be considered humanoid only in terms of general size and build: “Built like a man, the troll had reptilian

features” (249). Fablehaven is even home to hybrids with no recognizable human features or any immediate, direct comparability to any well-known real or fantastical being, such as one of the creatures who invades the Sorensens’ house on Midsummer’s Eve: “A twelve-foot centipede with three sets of wings and three pairs of taloned feet corkscrewed around the room in a complex aerial display” (174). Familiar categories and archetypes thus become obsolete in the face of Fablehaven’s biodiversity.

Lena the housekeeper takes the hybridity of Fablehaven’s denizens even further, as she has physically become a mortal human by leaving the pond she inhabited as a naiad – though she notes that she has aged more slowly than humans usually do: “I became subject to the laws of mortality, but they have taken effect gradually” (89-90). Lena becoming human (or close to one) challenges the notion that the human/nonhuman divide is mutually exclusive, as she has been able to inhabit both sides of the divide. Additionally, Lena becoming virtually a human being is represented as a transition, ‘a gradual effect’, rather than an immediate transformation, which perhaps emphasizes the idea that human and nonhuman (or human and animal) are not fixed categories or in opposition with each other, but rather, they represent a spectrum of features that might be considered more or less typical of humans or nonhumans. Lena, then, has the potential to serve as a sort of mediator between humans and magical creatures. In fact, Lena tells Kendra of her experiences as a naiad versus as a human, though she admits that her “mind transformed as well”, so it is difficult for her to recall or truly represent her experiences as a naiad with accuracy (91). What Lena can convey with conviction is that existence as a human is inherently dissimilar to existence as a naiad, as immortal beings do not, for example, conceive of time in the same way that humans do, seeking entertainment rather than planning for the future (91).

The idea of immortal beings living a care-free life without the constraints of time invokes the feeling of childhood, a time when the rush of adulthood was as distant as a concept could be, and one of the most important things was simply the ability to play, to create and to enjoy stories. It may not be mere coincidence, then, that Lena shares her thoughts with Kendra; there appears to be more potential for shared experiences between magical creatures and children as opposed to human adults and magical creatures. Jaques suggests that childhood signifies a sort of fluid state of being which precedes “a fully humanized adulthood” (9), and this distinction between children and adults can be seen, for example, in the convention of associating children with animals (13). Indeed, children’s fiction frequently features various animal and other non-human characters, *Fablehaven* being no exception. The proximity of *Fablehaven*’s child protagonists to the magical inhabitants of the

preserve, the narrative's focus on Kendra and Seth's perspective, as well as the similarities between the children and magical creatures might allow Kendra and Seth to form a bridge between humanity and nonhuman beings. To Jaques, children's ability to serve as a mediator between the human and the nonhuman can be "a powerful route to upsetting human dominion" as well as a means to subvert "attempts to police the boundaries between the human and the non-human as, indeed, between the adult and the child" (10). Child characters' affiliation with both adults and nonhuman beings represents yet another disruption to the human/nonhuman binary, Kendra and Seth themselves emerging as hybrids in a sense. The hybridity in *Fablehaven*, therefore, does not only apply to the magical (or formerly magical) denizens of the sanctuary but also to the novel's human characters, as will be further discussed later on.

3 Anthropocentrism

The type of blending between the human and the nonhuman which many of *Fablehaven*'s magical creatures exhibit might be understood not only as instances of hybridity but in terms of anthropomorphism as well. In Tom Tyler's "If Horses Had Hands" from *Animal Encounters*, anthropomorphism is described as a phenomenon in which animals, objects or some other nonhuman entities are assigned either agency, human-like physical attributes, or behavior that is considered characteristically human (14). Taking this definition into account, it is possible to argue that the various hybrid creatures in *Fablehaven* may merely represent various degrees of anthropomorphism, as many can apparently speak human languages and possess both physical features as well as mental qualities or motivations similar to humans. For instance, a description Grandma Sorenson gives of Nero the cliff troll's personality bears resemblance to the archetype of a cutthroat businessman: "Cliff trolls are miserly creatures. Treasure hoarders. Cunning negotiators. They relish the thrill of besting an opponent" (242). The apparent anthropomorphism of *Fablehaven*'s denizens raises concerns for the scope of the novel's subversion of the human/nonhuman (animal) divide, as one might interpret that only by utilizing human-like qualities can the magical creatures of *Fablehaven* call into question harmful notions about human uniqueness and superiority over nonhuman beings. Lena's transition into mortality, for example, destabilizes the uniqueness and exclusiveness of being human – yet this disruption, rather than inviting the reader to look beyond the lens of humanity, merely allows someone outside our species to experience life from our perspective.

While certainly the physical and mental resemblances between many magical creatures and humans represents a rejection of the anthropocentric notion that traits such as thought, speech or culture belong to humanity and are "lacking" in any other species (Crist & Kopnina, 388), the sheer abundance of seemingly anthropomorphic qualities in *Fablehaven*'s creatures might in turn reinforce human hegemony and the idea that "the Human Center has all but overtaken the whole, displacing into the peripheries of invisibility all that is 'uncivilized'" (Crist & Kopnina, 389). While hybrids such as Viola the magical cow do not appear to resemble humans in any way, several of the more prominent nonhuman characters within the novel have human-like features, are able to speak English and behave in a more or less human-esque manner. Lena is perhaps the most humanized example of this anthropomorphism, but the satyrs Newel and Doren, for instance, also appear closely associated with humanness. This can be seen in, say, how the narrator describes the satyrs' human-like physical traits first and foremost: "From the waist up, he was a shirtless man with an exceptionally hairy chest

and a pair of pointy horns above his forehead. From waist down he had the legs of a shaggy goat” (198). The narrator’s description of the satyrs’ appearance mirrors the one given of satyrs in Jennifer March’s *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*: “Male creatures of the wild, primarily human in form but with some animal features” (435). Both March’s description of satyrs as “primarily human in form” and *Fablehaven*’s characterization of a satyr as “a shirtless man” above the waist seem to claim that a satyr is not merely *similar* to a human but rather, partly or “primarily” *human*. The phrasing of these descriptions appears to perpetuate an unnecessarily human-focused perspective on the hybridity of magical creatures such as satyrs, as their human-like features are mentioned first and, in addition, humanity is imposed on these fictional beings through mere similarity to humans.

Tyler suggests that anthropomorphism could in fact be considered a form of anthropocentrism, as both the practice as well as the very term prioritize humanity over other species (23). It might indeed be seen as somewhat dubious how many of *Fablehaven*’s prominent nonhuman characters resemble humans so closely, as if the more human-like magical beings are the more significance they are assigned by the narrative. Lena the ex-naiad is perhaps the most prominent character after Kendra, Seth, and Grandpa Sorenson, which may not be mere coincidence considering her transition into mortality (though perhaps not conventional humanity as per her slow aging). This being said, the notion that all similarities to humans which nonhuman characters may possess should be considered instances of anthropomorphism and not hybridity is in and of itself problematic; according to Tyler, it is suspicious that anthropomorphism exists as a distinct term while no terminology exists for when attributes exhibited by any species other than homo sapiens are attached to some other species (21). Tyler sarcastically remarks how anthropomorphism as a term “seems to imply that there is something rather special about humans” and that humans supposedly possess “a host of unique qualities that we can’t resist attributing to other beings” (21). As noted by Jaques, however, modern research has exposed the fact that many qualities previously assumed to only manifest in humans, “reason and subjectivity” included, are actually shared by quite a few nonhuman animals (12). From this perspective, it becomes much more difficult to evaluate the degree of anthropomorphism exhibited by *Fablehaven*’s magical creatures. While it might remain somewhat dubious that the mortal, seemingly very human-like Lena is more prominent in the narrative than other magical creatures, it might also be arrogant to assume what qualities exactly, apart from her appearance, make her anthropomorphic, let alone the most anthropomorphic character. If the very term *anthropomorphism* imposes humanness on many qualities which are not exclusive to humans, it might not even be a useful term to begin with.

Perhaps a more accurate interpretation of *Fablehaven*'s hybrid beings and their role in the narrative is to highlight both similarities and differences between humans and other species; the satyrs' half-goat, half-human appearance reminds us how similar many mammals are in terms of physiology as well brain chemistry – both goats and humans can have distinctive personalities, for example. Emphasizing similarities between humans and other species certainly challenges anthropocentric assumptions about human uniqueness, but at the same time, there are unique aspects to each species. As Jaques points out, the act of foregrounding how non-human animals are similar to humans may still centralize humans and only afford respect to animals in terms of how much they remind us of humanity, which is why it is crucial to also recognize difference and distinctiveness among the animal kingdom, that is, “recognizing and valuing heterogenous beings outside of debilitating hierarchies” (Jaques, 12-3). Thus, we see that Lena, for example, possesses unique qualities rather than being exactly like human beings; her slow aging and metamorphosis from immortality to mortality being the most prominent. Paradoxically, all species are both similar and different; they are the same, or equal, in that they are all unique. From this point of view, then, it is more reasonable to consider *Fablehaven*'s magical beings as either hybrids or simply different species rather than anthropomorphic characters. Furthermore, rather than enforcing anthropocentrism, these magical creatures challenge assumptions about human uniqueness, both in highlighting that many supposedly human qualities can be found in other species, and in showing how other species exhibit their own unique, special traits.

If the role of hybrid creatures in the narrative of *Fablehaven* does not necessarily betray an anthropocentric point of view, then what of the actions and attitudes of the novel's human characters? The main characters, Seth and Kendra, are human children and the narrative mostly revolves around their perspective and experience of the novel's events. The human point of view is therefore quite literally centralized by the narrative, and it might be interpreted as an anthropocentric premise which other aspects of *Fablehaven* must subvert in order to present a less human-centric, more egalitarian worldview. Recalling Jaques' arguments about children occupying a space somewhere between the human and the animal (9, 13), it is possible that even the very presence of child protagonists and a young target audience may already imbue a piece of fiction with the potential to subvert anthropocentric beliefs, or “human dominion”, as Jaques expresses it (9). Children can perhaps offer a fresh perspective on the phenomena and notions that adult humans tend to view through a set, status quo lens; where adults see nothing more than whimsical fantasy and clear borders between the human and the nonhuman, children might see their secret, talking dragon friend and tea parties and gossip

with their dolls. Indeed, Jaques suggests that the imaginative power of child readers (or characters, for that matter) may even have the potential to impact how the reader relates to the real world and views the distinction between humans and nonhuman animals (6, 9).

Undermining anthropocentrism as an ideology is no easy feat, however. Crist and Kopnina point out that the anthropocentric perspective is founded on circular reasoning: humanity's technological advancement and its ability to control and exert power over nature has reinforced an anthropocentric worldview, and in turn, this notion of humanity as being above all other species has served as an excuse to further subjugate nature and other species (388-9). Physical human hegemony and ideological supremacy, then, are fallaciously interpreted as justification for one another, leading anthropocentrism to become so deeply ingrained within the human condition as to govern how we relate to the world. This can be seen, for instance, in the societal and global sentiment towards the contemporary environmental crises affecting our planet: only now that the human-induced climate change and mass extinction are beginning to negatively affect humanity itself and the longevity of our species have these topics become a more pressing concern, after decades of public silence (Crist & Kopnina, 391).

Crist and Kopnina's observation that the nonhuman world becomes "invisible" to the eye of the human beholder (389) is paralleled by Kendra and Seth's introduction to Fablehaven, as they are blind to the true nature of the preserve's residents prior to Grandpa's hint within a secret journal to "*drink the milk*" (67). Before the secret of Fablehaven is revealed to the children, Seth wanders into the woods without Grandpa's permission and encounters what he blindly assumes is a porcupine (34). Seth's actions are spurred by curiosity, on the one hand, and ignorance on the other; he persists in his meddlesome exploration of the woods – even convincing Kendra to come along on one of his ventures to see a hidden pond (54) – until Grandpa Sorenson is forced to cave in and explain half of the truth: that Fablehaven is a preserve for endangered species (60). Even after his encounter with the porcupine, Seth in particular appears to trivialize both the danger posed by seemingly wild nonhuman animals as well as the notion that the woods might be considered those animals' territory. When Kendra warns Seth of disease-carrying ticks in the woods before Seth's first trip beyond the yard, he simply states: "Whatever. Ticks are everywhere" (26). Seth's attitude and behavior reflect an anthropocentric sense of entitlement: he prioritizes his own curiosity over the safety and freedom of nonhuman animals while simultaneously believing that he is impervious to danger. Both aspects of how Seth seems to relate to nonhumans give the impression of centralizing humanity; the concerns

and whims of humans take precedence over the affairs and rights of nonhumans, and humans supposedly have the power or luck to overcome any adverse circumstances.

While Seth's initial conduct at Fablehaven appears to trivialize nonhuman animals, Kendra represents an opposite view on the surface: she avoids the woods at first and emphasizes the danger of ticks and even of the pet hen Goldilocks, cautioning Seth that Goldilocks could "peck your eyes out" (68). While Seth once again brushes off any potential danger by claiming that Goldilocks is "good" and "tame", Kendra finds even the premise of handling the hen unsettling: "Holding a live chicken sounds disgusting" (68). Rather than stemming from knowledge or respect for nonhuman animals, however, Kendra's avoidance of both the woods and Goldilocks seems rooted in general fear and disgust towards certain species. Her attitude towards at least some nonhuman animals exemplifies speciesism, which is defined by Oscar Horta and Frauke Albersmeier as:

the unjustified comparatively worse consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species (or group of species) whose members are favored, or who are classified as belonging to a certain species (or group of species) whose members are disregarded. (Horta & Albersmeier, 4)

Species such as chickens are commonly associated with the egg and meat industries while domestic species like dogs and cats are considered family rather than food, which illustrates Horta and Albersmeier's analysis that speciesism does not only exist on an individual level but on a structural level as well (3). Kendra's disgust at the thought of holding Goldilocks likely stems from the speciesist treatment of chickens as little more than food in many modern societies, which may be why she specifies how repugnant the thought of touching "a *live* chicken" is, as opposed to a deceased and cooked one. Kendra might not be conscious herself that her aversion towards Goldilocks could well be a result of socialization, yet as Horta and Albersmeier point out, it is possible for an individual to act or behave in a speciesist manner even if they are not necessarily aware that what they are doing is speciesist (3). Certain animal species being equated to mere food can be seen elsewhere in children's fiction as well. In Jaques' analysis of *Alice in Wonderland*, for example, Alice only considers animals as food prior to her adventure in Wonderland (Jaques, 50), a place wherein Alice's humanity (and superiority) becomes destabilized through both her encounters with anthropomorphic animals and her own hybrid transformations (Jaques, 45). Kendra's attitude towards certain animals reveals that her perspective might be precisely as anthropocentric as Seth's is, only that their human-centric thinking manifests in different ways. Where Seth trivializes nonhuman animals and does as he pleases, Kendra rejects certain animal species as a whole based on either the threat some

individuals may pose to humans – as is the case with disease-carrying ticks – or the incomprehensibility of straying from conventional hierarchies which position humans and their pets as superior to other animals; chickens like Goldilocks are food, not family.

Kendra's avoidance and fear towards some animals do not stop her from eventually joining Seth in sneaking into the woods, which suggests that she may momentarily share Seth's disregard for danger in favor of satisfying their curiosity. On their venture to the hidden pond, Kendra demonstrates that her revulsion towards certain species may even hail from nothing more than her own sense of aesthetics, screaming at the sight of a frog and commenting on how "*disgusting*" it is, while Seth deems the creature "awesome" (52). Seth curiously seems to appreciate the frog while Kendra's rather extreme reaction gives the impression that she might wish the disgusting creature had not invaded her sight in the first place, the frog's very presence being unwelcome in "the Human Center" (Crist & Kopnina, 389) of Kendra's worldview. By contrast, once Kendra and Seth sneak through the hedges fencing off the hidden pond and discover the pond surrounded by a vast garden with gazebos and boathouses, Kendra thinks that "hundreds of people could gather here with room to spare" (57). To Kendra, humans are automatically welcome in this hidden area; she views the space in terms of how it could be utilized and enjoyed by humans, and likely assumes the area was built by and for humans. Kendra goes as far as to ponder if Grandpa Sorenson has forbidden the children from going into the woods so he could selfishly keep the hidden pond all to himself (57). This parallels Seth's belief that the children should be free to roam the woods despite Grandpa's rules. Nature is thus viewed from the perspective of being "a sort of cosmic human property", as Crist and Kopnina describe humanity's conception and treatment of Earth's biosphere (Crist & Kopnina, 389). All in all, instead of *Fablehaven's* child protagonists subverting anthropocentrism or serving as a bridge between the human and the nonhuman from the very outset of the novel, it appears that Kendra and Seth must first reconsider their own biases towards nonhuman species.

Oddly enough, the process of undermining anthropocentrism seems to begin even before Kendra and Seth find out the truth about Fablehaven. The catalyst is Grandpa Sorenson's revelation that the woods are inhabited by various endangered species that could prove deadly to human trespassers, which results in even Seth revising his previous assumptions and vowing to "never go into the woods again" (60-1). Seth realizes, at least on some level, the folly of his trivialization of the danger nonhuman animals can pose to humans, and Seth and Kendra alike are proven wrong in their anthropocentric assumptions; not only is it unsafe for humans to go in the woods, but both the woods and the hidden pond within it are territory belonging to nonhuman species, wherein humans are

unwelcome. In order to make sure that the children do not trespass in the woods again, Grandpa Sorenson grounds them for a day and emphasizes that should they venture outside the yard again, the children will be grounded for the rest of their visit (62). All of this suggests that carelessly invading nonhuman beings' territory comes with repercussions, and Seth and Kendra are extremely lucky to have avoided more severe consequences for their actions, for now.

Emily Alder points out that the idea of nonhuman, hybrid species' "right to exist unmolested in their own spaces" (1096) is already exemplified in the weird tales of the early 1900s, and that these stories resist anthropocentrism with their depictions of indomitable hybrid creatures (1088). *Fablehaven's* magical creatures echo this notion, as Grandpa Sorenson eventually reveals that the preserve in fact houses beings "much more perilous than venomous snakes or wild apes" (76), such as the naiads who dwell in the hidden pond, ready to drown any human that strays too close to the water. It appears that humans are powerless when faced with *Fablehaven's* denizens, and thus, humanity's physical capacity to dominate or exploit nonhuman species is called into question. This may in turn undermine beliefs about human supremacy, since human hegemony and anthropocentrism are closely interlinked (Crist & Kopnina, 388-9). In fact, the subversion of anthropocentric beliefs can be seen in the subsequent discussion between Grandpa Sorenson and Kendra on the topic of the naiads. While Kendra initially deems the naiads cruel for killing humans, Grandpa, on the other hand, makes an effort to understand the naiads' point of view: "To them, your life is so ridiculously short that to kill you is seen as absurd and funny. No more tragic than squashing a moth. Besides, they have a right to punish trespassers" (77). Grandpa Sorenson decentralizes humanity by refusing to assign human morality to the naiads as well as by exposing the hypocrisy of judging the naiads' actions when humans themselves also thoughtlessly kill creatures that they overlook or despise – insects being just one example. He also emphasizes that the naiads are within their right to drown any trespassers, as the island in the middle of their pond holds a shrine to the Fairy Queen, which is sacred territory and off-limits to mortals (77). Kendra ends up accepting this new perspective, responding to Grandpa's anecdote about a previous caretaker who was transformed into dandelion fluff upon setting foot on the sacred island: "in other words, he had no respect for what was off-limits" (78). Grandpa and Kendra, therefore, agree on magical creatures' "right to exist unmolested in their own spaces" (Alder 1096), and that human trespassing and lack of respect for magical creatures constitute unjustifiable acts which indeed call for punishment. This represents a significant shift in Kendra's perspective on nonhuman beings, since instead of fearing and vilifying the naiads as she did previously with ticks, Goldilocks and the frog, Kendra makes an effort to sympathize with the naiads.

In the case of the trespassing caretaker, human invasion of magical creatures' spaces is seen to result in the loss of the man's humanity and life itself, emphasizing how severe a crime it is to disrespect the rights and autonomy of nonhuman beings. Moreover, the idea that death can sometimes be a suitable – or at least understandable – punishment for human disrespect towards magical creatures subverts the anthropocentric belief that the life of a human is the most sacred of all. While legislation, religion and morality in the human world tend to condemn the act of killing a human being as the most heinous crime there is, *Fablehaven*'s treaty prioritizes the lives of magical creatures over the lives of humans, as Grandma Sorenson tells Kendra that “killing a mortal is not quite as grievous a crime as killing a mystical being, but it would still dissolve most of the protection afforded me by the treaty” (277). *Fablehaven*, therefore, appears to take a radical stance against anthropocentrism by suggesting that not only should human endeavors not be prioritized over the rights of nonhuman species, but also that in a world dominated by humanity, the prioritization of nonhuman lives over human lives may even sometimes be necessary so as to avoid the extinction of nonhuman species.

Considering *Fablehaven*'s ethos of conservation in the context of the hybridity of the sanctuary's denizens – that without the aid of Viola's milk these magical creatures look like ordinary animals – may even raise real-life implications about the importance of decentering humanity. While endangered species in the real world are protected via wildlife sanctuaries and zoos, we might wonder whether these efforts are truly enough to protect nonhuman species. Are the fines and possible jail sentences for crimes against endangered species strict enough or enforced effectively enough to deter the killing of endangered species? Is it truly just that the intentional killing of a nonhuman, endangered animal can result in only a fraction of the jail sentence given for murdering a human being? According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, jailtime sentences for the poaching of endangered species can range from ten years in China, for instance, to only one year in the United States (UNODC, Criminalization of wildlife trafficking). First degree murder, on the other hand, often leads to decades or life in prison. These facts alone appear to expose our societies as deeply anthropocentric; the lives of the thriving, dominant species of humanity are quite explicitly favored over the lives of species teetering on the verge of oblivion.

Fablehaven, through its hybrid endangered species, can thus be interpreted to expose the anthropocentric premise of real-life conservation efforts, or perhaps more accurately, the anthropocentric societal structures that prevent legislation that would deem animal lives as equal to human lives and consequently afford more protection to endangered species. In this sense, *Fablehaven*

might even represent the ideal wildlife sanctuary; a utopia where the preservation of endangered species concretely takes precedence over any human concerns, and where a grave offence towards the rights of nonhuman species can sometimes even lead to human lives becoming secondary – the ultimate antithesis to anthropocentrism. The shift away from an anthropocentric perspective is reinforced by Kendra's acceptance of the trespassing caretaker's punishment, her quick adaptation to the point of view of magical creatures exemplifying Jaques' idea of the imaginative power of children subverting anthropocentric modes of thought and behavior (6, 9). Throughout the course of *Fablehaven's* narrative, it is Kendra and Seth's willingness to learn to respect and empathize with magical creatures that becomes particularly crucial for both the subversion of anthropocentrism and the establishment of an equal relationship between magical creatures and humans. Besides the capacity for child protagonists to decenter humanity, hybridity and the blending of man-made categories prove to be another vital tool for viewing things, sometimes quite literally, from the perspective of nonhuman species.

4 Human-Nonhuman Relationships: From Commodification to Camaraderie

Once Kendra and Seth's eyes are opened to the magical nature of the beings preserved in Fablehaven, the children are able to interact with the sanctuary's denizens in a more meaningful way, a prospect which carries both substantial risk as well as potential for deeper understanding between the children and magical creatures. Lena's account of her existence as a naiad bestows Kendra with more detailed and reliable insight into the perspective of immortal creatures and their perception of humans (89-91), and though it is not explicitly expressed in the text, the analogous experiences of immortality and childhood as states of being characterizable by a sense of playfulness and timelessness enables Kendra to not just imagine the naiads' perspective but to relate to them to some degree, as well. It also becomes evident that the yard surrounding Grandpa and Grandma Sorenson's house represents a shared space between humans and fairies, as the milk that allows the humans to see magical creatures is set out in dishes around the yard for the fairies to enjoy as well (30), and as Grandpa Sorenson takes care to provide the fairies with all sorts of entertainment, such as the reflective surfaces of birdbaths and soap bubbles that the fairies can use their magic on (118). Humans offer fairies opportunities to show off their magic as the fairies see fit and to admire themselves from reflective surfaces, and fairies in turn can come and go from the yard and wield their magic, allowing humans to admire the fairies' beauty and their magical creations. Instead of one species exploiting another, the human characters and fairies appear to have more of a mutual relationship.

Curiously, it does not seem like there are any human-only spaces within Fablehaven, as even Grandpa and Grandma's house can be freely visited by underground-dwelling brownies (113), and sometimes satyrs are invited to parties along with human guests, despite the satyrs' propensity for destruction of property (109). This is quite a stark contrast to Crist and Koprina's analysis that every nook and cranny of planet Earth has become "a sort of cosmic human property" (389). While humans in the real world are constantly expanding the human domain and displacing nonhuman animals from their habitats, Fablehaven restricts human spaces to the bare minimum. When Kendra asks why brownies can freely enter the house, Lena explains that "brownies are useful. They repair things. They make things. They are remarkable craftsmen . . . It is their nature. They will accept no reward" (113). Although it seems somewhat dubious that humans are taking advantage of the skills and 'nature' of brownies, Lena's position between humanity and magical creatures perhaps lends credibility to the claim that the human characters would reward the brownies for their work were the brownies open to

it. In addition to this, it does constitute a significant act of trust and vulnerability on the part of the human characters to allow the brownies free access to the humans' private spaces.

Kendra comments on "how nice of them" it is that the brownies craft and fix things for humans (113), challenging Grandpa's belief that "the best creatures [in Fablehaven] are merely not evil . . . Brownies don't fix things to help people. They fix things because they enjoy fixing things" (80-1). Though assigning human morality to nonhuman beings can be misguided, as Grandpa recognizes, Kendra's view of the brownies as 'nice' accommodates the possibility that brownies might enjoy helping others in addition to enjoying their craft. Altruism, after all, is far from a human-only quality, as evidenced by many animal species in the real world: animals raising offspring from different species, elephants and dogs helping humans and other animals in distress and outdoor cats bringing their prey to be shared with their horror-stricken human companions being just a few examples of animal altruism. Even if the brownies do not care about helping humans, Kendra's comment on their niceness expresses appreciation for the brownies beyond Lena's simple statement on how useful the brownies are; 'nice' suggests a sense of the brownies' agency while 'useful' focuses on how humans benefit from the brownies. While Kendra's words may appear childlike and naïve on the surface, it seems that her perspective on the brownies may in fact be less anthropocentric and more open-minded and respectful than that of the adult characters.

Kendra's efforts to learn respect and sympathy for nonhuman beings are contrasted by Seth's stubborn attempts to bend and break the rules of Fablehaven for his own benefit, namely in order to "See Cool Monsters" (92). Despite his vow to steer clear of the woods, Seth gives in to his curiosity and attempts to enter the woods again, only to be stopped and talked out of his mission by Kendra (93-5). The fact that Seth listens to Kendra's voice of reason and decides not to go through with his plans shows a hint of growth on Seth's part, however, his conception of magical beings as 'cool monsters' raises the concern that Seth may yet persist in trivializing nonhumans, even after learning that the dangerous animals of the woods are in fact magical beings with more power and potential for destruction than any conventional nonhuman species. "Cool monsters", in Seth's mind, are likely not so far from the "awesome" frog he encountered previously (52), seeing as he is prepared to take the risk to venture into the woods again and likely would have done so were it not for Kendra's intervention. Once again, it appears that Seth prioritizes his own curiosity over both his own as well as the magical creatures' safety; Seth not only disregards the magical creatures' right to their own, private territories, but he also does not take their power seriously, nor does he acknowledge that his own actions could inadvertently cause harm to magical creatures.

It becomes ever more evident that Seth's morbid curiosity when it comes to Fablehaven's magical creatures might not merely be an example of childish inquisitiveness – of 'boys being boys'. While Seth certainly seems to embody the archetype of the foolhardy little boy, his blatantly foolish trivialization of magical creatures and his incessant desire to "See Cool Monsters" (92) suggest a sense of commodification rather than just innocent curiosity. For Seth to have internalized, to some extent, a commodifying attitude towards nonhumans would not be surprising considering *Fablehaven's* modern fantasy setting; according to McCance, the ways in which contemporary humans and societies interact with other animals perpetuates a view of non-human species as "inert objects, useful and disposable things" (2). Modern consumerist societies instill a worldview in which nonliving things and living beings alike can be made into objects for consumption, and thus, it is not uncommon for people to treat nonhuman species as commodities, entertainment or mere food. Seth's lack of respect for the privacy and rights of magical creatures exposes his curiosity as commodification; he sees Fablehaven's denizens as entertainment for him to enjoy as opposed to thinking, feeling creatures.

The impression of commodification becomes amplified when Seth, inspired by the fairy broker Maddox, decides to capture a fairy (117). Seth does not realize the heinousness of capturing a living being, let alone one who is endangered and safeguarded in a sanctuary, because he seems to view the fairy as little more than a collectible object: "Seth had captured his prize" (118). The fairy attempts to communicate with Seth, to convince the boy to set her free: "she chirped something in a twittering language, motioning for him to open the lid" (122). Her pleas, however, fall on deaf ears – or blind eyes – as Seth figures he might free the fairy the following day, content to keep her as a prize for now: "she clasped her hands together and shook them in a pleading motion, begging with her eyes. She was so pretty, that fiery red hair against her creamy skin. The perfect pet. Way better than a hen" (122). Communication fails not because the fairy's nonverbal communication is unintelligible, but because Seth chooses to ignore the fairy's plight in favor of commodifying her, making the fairy into his "perfect pet" against her will. The image is made all the more harrowing for the human reader by Seth's focus on the fairy's humanlike features, her feminine prettiness rendering her an even better pet than Goldilocks in Seth's eyes. While a chicken like Goldilocks is an unconventional pick for a pet, the fairy with her woman-esque features is even further from what might typically be accepted as a pet. The security of distinction between the human and the nonhuman is undermined because the fairy's resemblance to a beautiful (objectified) human woman is represented as more pet-like than a nonhuman animal, and in a sense, humanity or similarity to it becomes more of a commodity than

nonhumans. Furthermore, this moment may even destabilize the very concept of a pet, as Seth's disturbing objectification and negligence of the fairy calls into question the morality of humans arbitrarily making nonhumans into pets. The fairy's hybridity – her similarity to both humans and animals – facilitates this challenge to the concept of the pet, as it is perhaps easier for the human reader to empathize with the fairy due to a feeling of solidarity, as opposed to a conventional nonhuman animal like Goldilocks. On the other hand, since the fairy can appear as herself to the seeing eye and as an insect to the unseeing eye, it may even be necessary to question if nonhuman animals should be captured or commodified either; if the seeing eye can acknowledge and feel empathy for commodified nonhumans, then is not the unseeing eye blind to the true nature of things, inattentive of the suffering of nonhuman animals?

The folly of Seth's commodifying actions is concretized when come morning, Seth sees that the fairy has transformed into “a hideous little creature” with little nubs on her back which “wiggled like the remnants of amputated wings” (125). Seth tries to offer Viola's milk to the transformed fairy in hopes she would be restored, but to no avail (126). Grandpa explains that Seth's actions constituted an act of magic: “if a captured fairy is kept indoors from sunset to sunrise, it changes into an imp” (133). Seth, in his unwitting attempt to keep the fairy as a pet, ends up transforming her into a warped and crippled shape, and the beauty that Seth sought to commodify vanishes. The fairy's new form as an imp becomes a physical reflection of Seth's cruelty and the dangers of human ignorance, as had he simply listened to the fairy's pleas, her terrible fate could have been avoided. Seth sought to capture the fairy's freedom and beauty and thus, the fairy literally lost her wings as well as the beauty fairies pride themselves on, the fairy's suffering and the wresting away of her rights manifesting in her physical form. The fairy's transformation is another illustration of how the hybridity of Fablehaven's denizens works to expose injustices and anthropocentric thinking, as Seth cannot turn a blind eye to the very concrete consequences of his actions: “he knew it was somehow his fault, some accidental consequence of catching the fairy. That was why she had been so frightened the night before. She knew he had doomed her to change into an ugly little monster” (127). Even before Grandpa's explanation, Seth realizes that what the fairy had been trying to communicate was meaningful, vital, and that the terrible transformation was a direct consequence of Seth's ignorance.

Fablehaven is a peculiar place in that while in the real world, offences against humans are judged more harshly than offences against nonhuman animals, Fablehaven's treaty instead protects the sanctuary's denizens in particular, and punishments are based on the rule of “eye for an eye”, meaning equal punishment for equal offence (79). Humans in the real world rarely suffer heavy

consequences for harming nonhuman animals, but in *Fablehaven*, it is “hurt them, they can hurt you. Use magic on them, they will use magic on you” (79). Seth is faced with this egalitarian relationship between crime and punishment when the fairies retaliate against him on behalf of their former fairy sister; for the offence of transforming the fairy into an imp, Seth himself is transformed into a monster (130). The fairies turn Seth into a strange hybrid resembling a walrus: “one arm was broad, flat and rubbery . . . A flipper coated in human skin. The other was long and boneless, a fleshy tentacle . . . Long tusks curved down from a wide, lipless mouth” (130). The narrative subverts anthropocentrism by demonstrating the dire consequences of human ignorance and commodification of nonhumans, not just for the sanctuary’s magical inhabitants but for the human characters, as well. This creates a sense of equality, of shared suffering, as Seth has to undergo the same fear and the same loss of his original form as the fairy did, the falling of the fairy’s wings paralleled by Seth’s loss of his ability to walk: “his legs had united into a single crude tail” (131). Hybridity no longer only applies to the magical creatures of *Fablehaven*, as Seth’s humanity is undermined, forcing him to experience the world from a nonhuman perspective; both via the physicality of an aquatic animal as well as through the same psychological horror he accidentally subjected the fairy to. This is in parallel with Jaques’ analysis of *Alice in Wonderland*, wherein hybridity is not merely a case of anthropomorphic animals but the human protagonist herself is hybridized via animal-like transformations, which “leads to encounters with Wonderland creatures that operate largely on animal terms so that being human is no short-hand to dominion” (Jaques, 45). Alice and Seth alike find that humanity holds no privilege within the fantastical realms they adventure in, and through their transformations into more animalistic forms, they are reminded that humans are, after all, but one species among many. It is both conceptually and physically that hybridity within *Fablehaven*’s (and *Alice in Wonderland*’s) narrative shifts focus away from “the Human Center” (Crist & Kopnina, 389) and becomes a tool for learning empathy for nonhumans.

The consequences of Seth’s ignorant actions keep piling up as Grandpa Sorenson, Dale and Kendra have no choice but to haul the transformed Seth to the witch Muriel’s hut and untie one of the last two magical knots tethering the witch to her territory, so as to lend Muriel the magical energy to undo Seth’s transformation (140). Since Muriel’s imprisonment is due to her alignment with demons and other dark entities, Grandpa is reasonably worried that the witch is now only being held in place by a singular knot, Seth even commenting after his restoration that “you shouldn’t have done it, Grandpa” (141). Seth appears to understand the severity of his actions, even indicating that he would have accepted his punishment as permanent. Nonetheless, the necessity of a witch’s aid seems to

underline the unfair nature of Seth's transformation back into himself while there is no apparent cure for the fairy; the inequality of only Seth becoming himself again is achieved via dark magic and comes with a heavy price, namely the looming threat of Muriel's freedom. Unfortunately, even though Seth seems to have learned his lesson on trying to capture magical creatures or invade their spaces, his commodifying attitude towards these supposed cool monsters still lingers to the extent that he wishes to peek outside during Midsummer's Eve, a night on which almost all residents of Fablehaven may roam freely everywhere except inside the Sorensons' house. Seth justifies his curiosity by likening the magical beings to animals in a zoo: "you wouldn't want to run across a tiger out in the wilderness. You'd be scared to death. But at a zoo, who cares? It can't get you. This room is safe. Peeking out the window will be like looking at a zoo full of monsters" (169). Despite all of the adults' warnings on how disturbing the sights may be, or how some entities may employ "artifice and illusion" (158) to try to trick any humans that lay eyes on them, Seth trivializes the possibility of danger on account of the house being protected. Despite Kendra's protests, Seth looks out the window, which causes the fairies protecting the house from outside to fly away (170), likely both due to lingering anger as well as due to Seth's persistent arrogance.

Even after the fairies fly off, Seth still underestimates how dangerous his so-called entertainment is, and all hell breaks loose after a creature disguising itself as a baby in distress compels Seth to open the window to save the supposed baby from monsters (172). Though Seth's intentions in trying to save the baby are pure, as he has no way of knowing for sure whether the baby is in fact real, he would not have seen the compelling illusion in first place had he simply quelled his curiosity and acknowledged the threat that magical creatures can pose to humans, even in seemingly safe environments. Seth's attempt to rationalize his reckless actions by equating looking out the window to viewing animals in a zoo quickly falls apart; Kendra even aptly compares their position more so to "looking out of a shark cage" (169). Caged in is precisely how Kendra and Seth end up being after magical creatures enter their room, forcing the children to cower on a bed surrounded by a salt circle (174). Although Seth's commodifying attitude is what leads to this disaster, Seth shows his gradual growth away from anthropocentrism by risking his own life to save Goldilocks from the invaders who attempt to harm the hen (175). Rather than foolhardiness, Seth displays a true act of bravery, regarding Goldilocks' life as equal to his and worth the risk of possibly losing his own life – even despite the fact that Seth has only known Goldilocks for a few days. After Dale enters with a gun and draws out the creatures, both Seth and Kendra have the sense to stay still inside the salt circle and not fall for any more tricks, even as later on a creature mimics the voice of Grandpa Sorenson

(178). As morning comes, Seth breaks down in shame and fear over what happened as a result of his actions, but Kendra reassures him that it was not all his fault since the creatures preyed on his good intentions, even praising how Seth saved Goldilocks (181). Seth shows remorse for his misguided actions and takes accountability, and Kendra acknowledges that making mistakes is human, commending Seth on his growth and selfless actions. While the events of the narrative highlight the importance of learning respect and empathy for nonhuman beings, Kendra also draws attention to the importance of having empathy for fellow humans and oneself during the learning process.

The children learn that Grandpa and Lena have been kidnapped and Dale has seemingly been turned into stone, and thus they are left to their own devices. Moments such as this are particularly significant within the narrative, as they show the reader how Kendra and Seth interact with magical creatures while none of the adults who are more accustomed to the magical sanctuary are around to mediate. Kendra and Seth enter the forest once again, but this time their aim is not to satisfy their curiosity, but rather, to rescue the adults by following the tracks of a creature that may have taken them (190). Their trespassing no longer comes from a desire to commodify magical creatures, and they only resort to entering nonhumans' spaces for the sake of helping others, as well as for their own survival. Survival is precisely why Seth and Kendra hesitantly decide to take soup from an apparent well contraption with soup inside, Seth musing that a soup-well likely would not be the strangest thing to find on a magical preserve while Kendra is suspicious that the soup might be a trap (197). Human reasoning, however, fails yet again as a tool for understanding magical creatures, as the well turns out to be an ogre's chimney and the contraption is one made by Newel and Doren in order to scoop out soup from the ogre's cooking pot (203). After the satyrs discover the children and the four of them flee from the enraged ogre, Newel comments: "you thought a chimney was a well? . . . I suppose you sometimes mistake icicles for carrots? Or wagons for outhouses?" (203). The human characters' assumptions become subject to irony, and it is also apparent that without the satyrs' help and knowledge of the woods they inhabit, the children could not have escaped the scorned ogre, as Newel and Doren's maneuvers and shortcuts prove vital to outrunning the ogre (201). This piece of the narrative bears resemblance to the encounters between trespassing humans and monstrous hybrid creatures in weird fiction; Alder explains that human knowledge or power holds no sway over these hybrids who seem to have adapted to their environments more effectively than humans ever could (Alder, 1088), and as such, "the human becomes the 'other' within the natural environment of the 'monster'" (1097). *Fablehaven*, too, represents its human protagonists as maladapted to the habitat

of magical creatures and refuses to subscribe to anthropocentrism, instead questioning whether or not human intelligence can grant any sort of advantage or wisdom in encounters with nonhumans.

Seth and Kendra relay their dire situation to Newel and Doren, however, the satyrs offer no further aid than advising the children how to navigate back to the farmhouse (206). Seth complains that “those goat guys were idiots” (207), discrediting Newel and Doren as unintelligent for not helping the children locate Grandpa Sorenson and Lena. Seth’s perspective aligns more so with humanity and human notions of intelligence while Kendra, on the other hand, positions herself between humans and magical creatures by offering another open-minded, sympathetic account: “they did save us from the ogress” (207). The children have yet to even discover who kidnapped Grandpa and Lena, so Seth’s assumption that Newel and Doren are idiotic not to offer aid is groundless at best, as there is no knowing just how dangerous the rescue mission will prove to be. Conversely, Kendra appears to acknowledge that the satyrs are not obligated to risk their life for the humans and that Newel and Doren already took a risk in helping the children. The narrative posits that humans are not automatically entitled to aid from nonhumans, especially in a situation which resulted from human folly in the first place.

Rather than human characters being entitled to aid from magical creatures (or to magical beings’ spaces), *Fablehaven*’s narrative suggests that a reciprocal relationship with the sanctuary’s various inhabitants is essential to humans’ survival in the mostly (if not entirely) nonhuman environment. Before Kendra and Seth may hope to receive any more aid from the beings around them, they must first further attune themselves to a nonhuman perspective and offer aid themselves. This being the case, the children are surprised to discover that the loud sounds they’ve been hearing at intervals from the barn on Grandpa Sorenson’s yard are in fact the pained moos of Viola, the giant magical cow, whose udders have become swollen from a lack of milking (211). Kendra’s first impression of Viola is quite a momentous departure from her earlier speciesist view of certain nonhuman animals like Goldilocks, as instead of fear and disgust, she takes a moment to gape at Viola “in amazement”, after which she declares to the cow that “we’re friends” (211). A giant cow might be more fearsome and unconventional than a pet chicken, but evidently Kendra is now much more open to nonhuman beings than she used to be, demonstrating her growth away from anthropocentrism.

In contrast to Seth’s earlier disregard for the fairy’s pleas to set her free, the children take note of Viola’s nonverbal communication: “I think she’s in pain . . . She keeps getting more upset. Her udder looks like it’s about to burst” (211-2). Seth is nearly ready to give up on Kendra’s proposal that

they attempt to milk Viola to ease her pain, fearing that they might end up only hurting the cow, but Kendra comes up with a plan to use ladders and “hug and drop” from the cow’s teats in order to milk her (213). Kendra’s clever plan seems like a positive representation of human intelligence and creativity not as tools for dominating nonhumans but as tools for helping other species, and more than this, it reflects Jaques’ idea of children’s imagination having the power to subvert anthropocentric hierarchies and make the seemingly impossible, possible (Jaques; 6, 9). Not only is Kendra adamant on helping Viola and easing her pain, but her creative plan works like magic and the children manage to milk the gigantic cow without anyone even getting hurt in the process. When Kendra and Seth later tell the tale to Grandma Sorenson, she is amazed and proclaims: “resourceful children!” (262). With the revelation that Viola is usually milked by Hugo (263), an earth golem with more strength than a grown man, Kendra and Seth’s feat becomes all the more impressive. It appears that children, with their imaginative minds and ability to adapt to perspectives unthought of by adults, can accomplish pivotal deeds of interspecies empathy and cooperation.

Seth and Kendra must offer their aid again, this time to Goldilocks, as the hen reveals that she is actually Grandma Sorenson in a transformed state: “more than a hundred feed kernels had been arranged to form six letters: I M GRAM” (221). After Goldilocks (aka Grandma) is able to communicate with the children for another moment via nodding or shaking her head to yes or no questions, Seth wonders why Grandma has not tried to communicate with them before, to which Kendra muses: “maybe she’s tried, but we never got the message” (224). Indeed, before the Midsummer Eve incident, neither Kendra nor Seth had the opportunity or, perhaps, the willingness to communicate with the nonhuman beings around them. It almost seems as if the disappearance of the adults around Kendra and Seth is a catalyst for the children to take a position between the human and the animal, as suggested by Jaques (13), and that a less anthropocentric point of view is easier for the child characters to adopt in the absence of the “fully humanized adulthood” (Jaques, 9) which the adult characters could be seen to represent. Kendra’s emphasis on how the problem may be lay in the children’s failure to comprehend Goldilocks’ potential messages also suggests that the responsibility for failed interspecies communication falls on humans and their lacking social intelligence. In other words, it is not that nonhuman animals like Goldilocks are not effective communicators, but that humans have a limited capacity to understand animal communication. Tyler describes similar mishaps in interspecies communication with the case of Clever Hans, a horse who was thought to be extraordinarily intelligent due to his ability to accurately answer questions pertaining to math, linguistics and more by motions of his head or hooves. However, as research into

the horse's abilities continued, it was eventually found that Hans was observing the ever-so slight body language of the people around him which indicated what the right response was, thus Hans would know how many taps or which motion to give. While this discredited Hans' seemingly humanesque intelligence, Tyler argues that the findings instead highlight Hans' extraordinary ability to read body language, even when researchers attempted to hide their reactions. (Tyler, 16-18.)

Although the children try to help Goldilocks, that is, their Grandma Sorenson, by taking her to Muriel as per their short window of communication, the children are ignorant as to the true extent of the consequences for untying Muriel's last knot. Upon being taken to the witch's hut, Grandma realizes the context that the children had failed to communicate; that turning Grandma back into a human would unleash Muriel: "Muriel held the rope out to Seth. The chicken looked up, ruffling her feathers and flapping her flings" (233). Grandma attempts to relay her distress nonverbally, she even "squawked noisily" (233), yet the children ignore her in a striking parallel to Seth's capture of the fairy. Humans' failure to take into account nonhuman beings' attempts to communicate their distress comes at a heavy price, as just as how undoing the fairies' retribution of hybridizing Seth draws Muriel's freedom one knot closer, undoing Grandma Sorenson's transformation severs the final knot of the witch's confinement. On a deeper level, this parallel may even invoke the sense that prioritizing human needs and performing humanizing actions has dire ecological consequences, which connects to the ongoing real-world displacement and extinction of nonhuman species. Hence, after Muriel is freed as a result of accumulative human mistakes and humanizing transformations, the denizens of Fablehaven and the human characters alike are subjected to an existential threat, namely Muriel freeing the malevolent demon Bahumat who would destroy the sanctuary, rendering Fablehaven "forever uninhabitable for all but the denizens of shadow" (273). Grandma Sorenson even cautions Kendra and Seth that "preserves have fallen ever since they were instituted. The causes are myriad, usually stemming from human folly" (273). The text heavily alludes to humanity's selfish and careless actions undermining the preservation of nonhuman species, once again connecting magical creatures to real-life endangered species. It might even be possible to read Bahumat the demon as a representation of the most evil, heinous aspects of a human-centric world view and the disregard for anyone or anything nonhuman that it generates, Bahumat's threat to other magical beings paralleling humanity's threat to nonhuman species.

Grandma Sorenson, the children and Hugo venture out in an attempt to stop Muriel from freeing Bahumat and save the other adults, however, Muriel has already unraveled a myriad of the knots that hold Bahumat and used the knots' magic to enlarge several imps as well as her puppet,

Mendigo (288). Muriel reduces the golem Hugo into a pile of debris while Grandma and Seth are swiftly subdued by the witch's lackeys, but they are unable to touch Kendra because she has "caused no mischief, worked no magic, inflicted no harm" (293). Kendra is free to flee the scene because she has respected Fablehaven's treaty and its proteges. Stopping Muriel and Bahumat seems hopeless at this point, as each and every one of the more experienced adult characters has been captured, Grandma's rescue plan having crumbled like Hugo. Alone, Kendra has no other means of fighting the desperate situation but to take a gamble and enter the island in the middle of the hidden pond and beg for the Fairy Queen's aid (300). It is only under this immense danger to not just her own and her family's lives but to the lives of all of Fablehaven's inhabitants that Kendra considers trespassing upon the sacred ground of the shrine to the Fairy Queen, Kendra being well aware of what happened to the caretaker who once set foot on the island. On top of this, Kendra is accepting and understanding of the Fairy Queen's right to punish trespassers: "What was the worst that could happen? Death, but on her terms. No bloodthirsty imps. No witches. No demons. Just a big poof of dandelion fluff" (301). In a sense, Kendra sees the possibility of the Fairy Queen's punishment as mercy, a just death as opposed to being slaughtered by the demon and its allies. Metaphorically, if Bahumat is read as a concretization of the worst of humanity, of humanity's most thoughtless and hegemonizing acts, this moment may represent Kendra's rejection of anthropocentrism; she would much rather accept death as a punishment for potentially disrespectful actions than do nothing and allow nonhuman species or her family to perish.

Kendra braves the waters of the hidden pond in a small paddleboat as the naiads try to topple her boat and drown her, yet miraculously, she reaches the island and is not turned into dandelion fluff. Kendra shows respect and gratitude to the Fairy Queen: "thank you for letting me visit you without turning me into dandelion fluff" (311). In her plea to the Queen, Kendra remains respectful and yet, she does not attempt to rationalize her thoughts, baring her emotions at the shrine: "if you can help me, I really need it . . . If that demon gets out, it will wreck this whole preserve, and there is no way I can stop it from happening without your help. Please, I really love my family . . ." (311). Kendra bursts into tears, and as they drop down into a silver bowl at the shrine, they become an offering, a plea of true humility to the Queen, and Kendra begins to sense her presence: "*I accept your offering, and join you in weeping*" (312). The Fairy Queen communicates telepathically through Kendra's emotions and her senses, in other words, through instinct, which humans commonly categorize in binary opposition with rationality. Furthermore, instinct is often associated with animals while rationality is associated with humanity, and thus, the Fairy Queen and Kendra's interaction might be

interpreted as abandoning a humanized mode of interaction in favor of a nonhuman mode. After Kendra and Seth's failure to comprehend Goldilocks' nonverbal communication, Kendra now learns to communicate with nonhuman beings on their terms rather than her own, through instinct and emotion rather than rationality. In return, the Fairy Queen empathizes with Kendra, with her fear and pain, and offers her aid just like Kendra and Seth offered their aid to Viola: "*From tears, milk, and blood, devise an elixir, and my handmaidens will attend you*" (312). With her actions, Kendra exemplifies the conceptual hybridity of children, that is, their ability to serve as a bridge between the human and nonhuman, to imagine and act on possibilities which adults would be blind to.

With regard to the contemporary mass extinction and climate change, Crist and Kopnina argue that humanity's response to these crises has been to create new technologies and solutions, reaffirming humanity as the center by positing that only human ingenuity can save the world, and so "an alternative way of life – abundant in diverse beings and rife in mutual flourishing – is virtually beyond thinkable" (392). *Fablehaven*, on the other hand, explores that unthinkable possibility of diversity and symbiosis. Not only is the magical sanctuary filled with diverse beings, from magical cows to mortal naiads, the events of the novel lead to one clear course of action as salvation for all, and that is empathy and coexistence. Melanie Dawson characterizes this ethos through a deep ecological analysis of the *Harry Potter* series, concluding that the various problems and tensions that arise in the wizarding world tend to be resolved not by the magical prowess of wizards and witches, but rather by way of "cooperation with the entire eco-system and a respect for the autonomy of other life forms" (Dawson, 72). Harry and Kendra parallel each other as main characters in that both of them are newcomers to their respective magical worlds, yet they become the unlikely heroes who manage to stop evil entities not through ingenuity, but by way of respecting and cooperating with the nonhuman beings around them. This subversive, ecological solution is facilitated by the child characters' inexperience, or rather, the fact that they are not yet tainted by the anthropocentric ideals which most adults hold, as well as their imaginative power, that is, their ability to see what the adults around them cannot.

Kendra devises the elixir the Fairy Queen told her to make, sacrificing both her own blood and Viola's blood, and beckons the fairies to drink it, even tasting the milk-blood-tears mixture herself to urge the fairies (323). The fairies are transformed into human-like proportions, and by their hand, Bahumat and Muriel are defeated. Kendra's empathy for magical beings, her respect for their rights, and her own sacrifices are concretized in the elixir, and in an empowering act of mutual understanding and sacrifice, the fairies go to war for the first time in centuries, as Grandpa Sorenson later points out

(339). It is through interspecies respect and cooperation that the evil that sought to destroy the diverse ecosystem of Fablehaven is defeated. This unlikely turn of events is made possible by Kendra's, the child protagonist's, position outside the human center; she successfully connects with the playful and timeless fairyfolk because these qualities can also characterize childhood, just as Grandpa states: "I'm sure fairies would much rather follow a little girl into battle than some pompous general" (339). Conceptually, Kendra occupies the space between the human and the nonhuman, as while she is human in form, she is able to empathize and attune herself with nonhuman beings in a way the adults around her cannot – not even Lena, who used to be immortal herself. Kendra has learned to interact and negotiate with magical creatures on their terms as opposed to her own, demonstrating true humility and kindness, and thus she becomes worthy of the momentous aid she receives. Kendra's conceptual hybridity also ends up becoming a physical reality, as she realizes that the empowered fairies have given her a permanent piece of their magic: "on the morning she awoke after the fairy kisses, when she went to the window, she saw fairies fluttering about. It had taken a moment to register that she had not yet consumed any milk that day" (340). Kendra's ability to see the point of view of magical beings and her refusal to disregard them is now concretized in her ability to see the true form of magical creatures without the aid of Viola's milk. In addition, the Fairy Queen and her fairies' act of heroism subverts Grandpa's belief that all magical creatures are 'unsafe', as it seems that many beings are only unsafe if one disregards them and their rights. Cooperation is possible through mutuality, through symbiosis, and Kendra's metamorphosis comes to represent this symbiosis; the border between human and nonhuman vanishes, and two become one.

Kendra's attunement with magical beings serves as catalyst for the thwarting of the existential threat of Bahumat, yet not only is the destruction of Fablehaven and its magical species avoided, but the empowered fairies also undo much of the damage caused by human foolishness. The fairies reimprison both Bahumat and Muriel, and they release the adults and turn them back into human form, Grandpa Sorenson having been transformed into an orangutan, Lena into a catfish and Grandma into a slug (333). Kisses from the fairies work miracles on the imps, as well, and the imp Seth accidentally created regains her true form: "The albino fairy flew up and gave the imp a kiss on the mouth, and it became a striking fairy with fiery red hair and iridescent dragonfly wings" (329). This moment suggests that the negative effects of human commodification of nonhuman beings could in some instances be reversed, and there may even be a resemblance between the restorative magic of the empowered fairies and the revitalizing effect of active real-world conservation efforts. Just as crucially, this restoration reflects the power of endurance that nature and nonhuman species possess;

a power to persevere and revitalize against the damage caused by humanity as seen, for instance, in the many species who have adapted to human environments like cities and repopulated areas abandoned by humans. The redheaded fairy's hybridization back into her original forms signifies hope both for the endurance of nonhuman beings and for the rectification of human mistakes. In a striking parallel, Seth, who has been transformed to appear a hundred years old and locked in a jar, is scolded by the fairy and he pleads with her: "'I'm sorry' Seth mouthed from inside the container. He clasped his hands and made pleading motions" (330). The fairy decides to free Seth and to reverse his transformation, and thus hybridity once again signifies the possibility for the novel's human characters to both physically and conceptually empathize with the experiences and viewpoints of nonhuman beings (and vice versa). Furthermore, the fairy's decision to reverse Seth's transformation is a concrete reflection of forgiveness and mercy; she has been saved, and so she decides to save Seth. The restoration of both the fairy and Seth's original form indicates the mutual experience of moving on from the past, and as such, the cruelty of anthropocentric actions is no longer reflected in the physical form of the nonhuman or human characters. By having shared the experience of being robbed of one's freedom and true self, Seth can understand the pain which commodification and domination causes. Thus, the fairy concludes that Seth has suffered enough consequences for his actions – all in accordance with Fablehaven's egalitarian, eye for an eye rules. Seth's absolution, then, is a manifestation of his growth as a person; once he shows true remorse for his mistakes and strives to do better, his true self, as well as self-forgiveness, can emerge.

5 Conclusion

Fablehaven works to unravel the hierarchies between humanity and nonhuman species which, it might be said, still permeate the actions and conceptions of contemporary humanity on both a societal and individual level. The binary opposition of human/animal with its insinuation of human superiority cannot be imposed upon *Fablehaven*'s magical beings, as their biodiversity and hybridity all but erases the border between the human and the nonhuman. Even notions about what is real and what is imaginary seem to lose their applicability amid the multiple levels of hybridity which *Fablehaven*'s denizens exemplify. This metaphysical hybridity extends even further due to Kendra and Seth's position as child protagonists; children have the power of imagination to envision seemingly unthinkable possibilities as well as the power to believe in such possibilities.

As children, Kendra and Seth are able to conceptually occupy the space between human and nonhuman, bridging the gap which anthropocentrism has created. Though Seth and Kendra appear to have internalized some anthropocentric attitudes of their own, their potential to see beyond conventional categorizations and hierarchies is actualized in the magical environment of *Fablehaven*. The sanctuary and its inhabitants challenge every aspect and assumption of a human-centric worldview; humans possess neither the power to dominate *Fablehaven*'s creatures nor the superiority or uniqueness to justify the prioritization of humanity. Ignorance and selfishness come at a heavy price, and Kendra and Seth find that they must learn respect and empathy for nonhuman species in order to coexist with *Fablehaven*'s magical creatures. The narrative contains a multitude of allusions to real-world endangered species (and nonhuman animals in general), and thus, the reader is encouraged to revise their own attitudes and actions towards nonhuman species – to open any unseeing eyes to the possibilities beyond the human center.

Seth, in particular, learns of the pitfalls of anthropocentrism the hard way. The egalitarian laws which govern *Fablehaven* ensure that power dynamics are never in humanity's favor as they would often be in the real world. Seth's trivializing and commodifying attitude towards magical beings and the actions he chooses to take endanger not just himself but everyone around him; equal punishments follow Seth's unwitting crimes, and every injustice he commits is reflected back onto himself. The narrative also utilizes hybridity as a tool for empathy and self-reflection; hybridity helps Seth understand the true injustice and cruelty of treating nonhuman species as secondary, as commodities rather than fellow living beings. By transforming human characters into hybrid beings themselves, *Fablehaven* facilitates the understanding of a nonhuman perspective; Seth, Kendra and the adults

alike physically experience what it is like to be nonhuman via their transformations. Shared experiences and the blending of the border between human and nonhuman create a deep sense of empathy between *Fablehaven*'s human and nonhuman characters, and anthropocentrism falls apart as the binary between human and nonhuman becomes fluid. Kendra and Seth begin to form an equal relationship with Fablehaven's magical beings; respect is rewarded with respect, altruism with altruism. Kendra ventures furthest as a mediator between humanity and other species, exemplifying not just a profound sense of respect and empathy for the autonomy and experiences of nonhuman beings, but also humility and sacrifice. Kendra's willingness to sacrifice her own life on the chance of saving her family and Fablehaven's denizens grants her the Fairy Queen's help, and this interspecies cooperation proves vital to vanquishing the existential threat of Bahumat the demon. Kendra's permanent hybridization becomes a concretized metaphor for the novel's ethos: instead of creating boundaries and hierarchies, humanity should learn live as one with our fellow species. The answer to mass extinction and climate change lies beyond human 'ingenuity', in coexistence and symbiosis with the biosphere. *Fablehaven* opens our eyes to the possibilities outside of the human center, and in the end, we may find the warning given in the novel's epigraph quite warranted for the reader: "None who enter will leave unchanged".

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