

(1) Familiars: a magician's spiritual helper.

A person has a spirit, like the spirit of a place or time. Magicians can bring their spirits to life.

**Origins:** In traditional magic, it was believed that the form taken by a spirit revealed its essential nature. In its basic form, as for Elizabethan magician John Dee (2), it was a crystal used for divination that contained its own familiar spirit. It was shut up in the confines of crystal, like a genie in a bottle, trapped in stone and kept in the form of a ring until needed. Early forms of familiars appear as imps or demons. (3) Can change shape constantly. Basic forms can be invisible. Familiars can also be human, but most of the time, they're animal.

Having animals as familiars comes from the notion of the hierarchy of beings with man at the top.

**Relation to Owner:** (4) Traditionally, the familiar can be the magician in the form of an animal; the magician can use the animal form as a vessel to inhabit for a while, BUT the familiar is a being of its own with a special relationship to the magician. Their lives are bound up together. If the magician is wounded, the familiar will suffer from an injury in a corresponding part of the body.

Death the familiar means death to the magician. But not vice versa.

You can pass your familiar to another when you die, or lend them temporarily while you're alive.

Sometimes they can be intimate with the owner.

Sometimes an invisible roaming familiar spirit can enter an animal temporarily, as when a cat sit up and stares at you for ages- a familiar spirit could have entered it and be using its eyes.

Traditionally, in folklore and witchcraft, the familiar would come to the magician, or the magician could summon one, or call one up by a spell. Could not be a pet.

**Witches:** (5) In the C17th, for a woman to be close to an animal was a sign they were a witch. Another sign was having an extra nipple, for the familiar to suck on. Also said to feed on blood.

Animal companions necessary for people cut off from human companionship, like widows.

(6) Most examples from Matthew Hopkins, witchfinder general for James I, *Demonologie*, Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches*, 1647, went around killing witches and their familiars, most of which were probably just domestic pets.

**Types of Animals:** Examples from medieval writings: dogs and cats (esp. black), hares, cats, black horses, unrecognizable creatures (7), rats, rabbits, butterflies, crows, owls, bats, toads, all night animals, snakes,

**Names:** (8) Familiar comes with a name of its own: you don't name it. Name should be a secret, part of the spell used to summon it. Examples from Matthew Hopkins: Jarmara, Vinegar Tom, Sack, Sugar, Jesus, Jockey, Mrs. Elizabeth, Collyn, James, Prickeare, Robin, Sparrow, Rutterkin, Spirit, Jack, Tiffin, Suckin, Rutterkin, Greymalkin, Pyewhacket, Lightfoot, Makeshift, Elemanzer, Grizel, Gridigut,

**Rumored Familiars:** (9) Prince Rupert, Frida Kahlo,

**Other cultures:** (10) have other animals, eg. Hyenas, badgers, bears, often trickster animals.

**(11) Black Cat:** Why is the black cat the most common familiar of the witch?

Cats helpful for catching mice, protecting the house, need you but also aloof, independent.

(12) Cat is to woman as dog is to man. The feminine.

(13) Mummified cats in houses.

**Familiars in Literature:**

(12) Brown Jenkin

(13) Poe

(14) Pyewacket

(15) Bill Sykes & Bull's Eye

**(16) Summoning your Own:**

**(17) Reading**

Reading: Frank Hamel, *Human Animals* (online for free at Project Gutenberg)

Donald Tyson, *Familiar Spirits: A Practical Guide for Witches and Magicians*

Foamy Custard website: