

How is Babby Formed

A yinrih family consists of an equal number of male sires and female dams that can range in size from two (one pair) to twelve (six pairs). The number of sires and the number of dams must be equal. The collective group of sires and dams may be referred to in English as a *childermoot* (I'm trying to stick to an English translation convention when possible).

The relationship that the sires and dams have with each other varies widely depending on culture and the outlook of the individuals. Yinrih have no sex drive and do not feel romantically attracted to their fellow parents. Instead, the desire to beget young is more like a bird flying south for the winter. It's less emotional and more instinctual. Just like humans, though, they can ignore this instinct. Hearthkeepers are forbidden to enter into a childermoot. Their congregation is seen as their litter.

The yinrih's lack of eros is the source of much confusion among humans. One popular stereotype, driven by the fact that most yinrih visiting Earth are missionaries, is that all yinrih are either perfect models of chastity or uptight prudes, depending on the human you ask. You can no more praise a monkey fox for his chastity than you can say that a bald man has red hair. Human sex is utterly beyond the yinrih's ken, and wise yinrih refuse to comment on it.

Some humans who have never met yinrih assume them to be libertines based on their well-known absence of clothing. The yinrih aren't making a statement by going naked, it's just their nature. They have nothing to cover up in the first place, and having fur makes the protective function of clothing redundant.

Yinrih lack external sex organs, and both genders possess a cloaca. Humans often mistake all yinrih for females at first sight. Yinrih also have trouble telling human males and females apart. A more polite human will advise yinrih to look for an Adam's apple to tell the two genders apart. Yinrih usually show the pads of their front paws to clarify whether they're male (single palmar pad) or female (several small palmar pads with a lactation patch). Male yinrih are larger on average but that's hard to compare if you've only seen one.

Both males and females lay eggs. The eggs are placed in a nesting site together. This act of placing one's egg in the nest is the closest thing to a marriage vow the yinrih have. Once you do that, you're expected to remain in the childermoot until the pups reach adulthood. The phrase "You put your egg in this nest" means "you made your bed, now sleep in it."

Once the eggs are together, a membrane forms over the clutch. The eggshells melt, and the genetic material from all the sires and dams mingles into a soup, and zygotes form out of this soup. A yinrih's life is reckoned from the formation of the zygote. This might count as abiogenesis since there are no gametes, just biochemical goop. (this is based on the idea that embryonic development mirrors evolutionary history. Yinrih take the idea and run all the way home with it.)

The structure that forms over the clutch is called a womb nest. It's very much like an external uterus. Each developing kit lies within its own amnion. The arrangement of these amnions is what gives interstellar womb ships their name. Gestation time is TBD, but all the kits hatch together. There's no concept of the firstborn. The whole litter is considered to be the same age (which, as stated above, is reckoned from when the zygote forms rather than when they hatch.)

The process of giving names is culturally dependent, but usually the kits are given names while still in utero. The content of Commonthroat names does not indicate gender, but Commonthroat uses gendered name suffixes. Pious yinrih names have something to do with light, but other names are also common. Some names I've given to figures in the lore: Sunshine, Rainbow, Lodestar, stormlight (lightning), ringlight (sunlight reflected off of yih's ring on summer nights).

Commonthroat does not use fixed surnames. An individual may have several different surnames depending on the group he's with at the moment. A surname is usually a physical description (Stormlight Blackpelt) the location they're from (Sunshine of Hearthside), an occupation (Rainbow Hearthkeeper).

Yinrih will take a human-pronounceable name when working or living among humans. If they're lucky, there may be an English name that's close to the original. The cleric leading the crew of the Dewfall is named Rainbow but goes by Iris in English. Some names are just calques. Stormlight originally wants to pick a "normal" English name but is encouraged to simply translate the original because it sounds cool in English (It's actually a rather bland name in Commonthroat.) Sunshine is not unknown as a name in English, so it's also simply left as is. Lodestar is in a similar boat as Stormlight. The other two yinrih crewing the Dewfall don't have easily translatable names. The one named Steadfast Friend is given the name Tod by the human who offers him lodging because he looks like a fox. Ringlight is also named by the human he lives with, in this case it's Pascal, for reasons too complex to dive into here since this section is already too long.

But let's get back to how yinrih beget young. Kits come out of the womb nest blind, and their eyes open after a few weeks. They are referred to as "kits" until they start eating solid food, at which point they are called "pups" or "puppies". Even though there's no special relationship among the parents, sires and dams are just as attached to their pups as human parents are to their children, if not more so. The nature of yinrih reproduction means that "accident" babies are unheard of. If you have children, it's because you want children. This means that a lot of human social problems surrounding child rearing are unthinkable to a yinrih. There's no shortage of yinrih who want to adopt human children upon hearing about said social problems, as the 18 or so years required to raise a human child from infancy is a comparatively trivial time span for a yinrih. Humans raised by yinrih is a whole can of worms I won't get into in this post.

I haven't decided on things like the age of sexual maturity or the age range at which yinrih strike out on their own. I don't think it will be 10 times as long as a human childhood, but it'll probably be at least as long. Once the litter is raised, the sires' and dams' commitment to the childermoot ends and they are free to disperse. Some stay together as empty nesters, others go off and do their own thing. It's another cultural thing. The relationship with their children is lifelong, however.

Some things I haven't decided, and would love others to comment on, are how this reproductive strategy effects things like lineage and extended family, the length of time to rear a litter, and

whether it would be considered acceptable for two litter mates to enter into a childermoot together given they're more genetically diverse.

A childermoot consisting of a single male-female pair, while viable, is frowned upon in many cultures. Many paws make light work, after all. There is a movement after First Contact called "humanism" that tries to mimic the human family, with a single pair rearing one or two pups (litter size is proportional to the number of contributing parents, with replacement rate taken into account.) An emphasis is placed on a strong relationship between the sire and dam. But again, no eros means no romance, and it ends up more like a smaller version of the group of friends forming a childermoot. The movement is regarded by many, including many humans, as unnatural. It may be how human families work, but it's not how yinrih families work.

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