

On the Southern Grasslands

"The Bright Way" originally referred to the migration of the yinrih out of the jungle and into the southern grasslands. There were pre-theophany shires living on the southern border of the jungle, and they had the clearest view of the Theophany. Word spread north through the interstitial teenagers that the sky opened up to the south, and so yinrih began to migrate out of the jungle, with the term "wayfarer" used to refer to these migrants.

Yinrih were built to live in the jungle. Anyone older than a kit had no predators to fear, and food and shelter were plentiful. But as Wayfarers followed the Bright Way from the safety of their jungle home to the open unknown of the southern grasslands, they found themselves in a world that they were absolutely not designed for.

Pre-theophany yinrih built few if any structures. Trees were their homes and holes in the ground and tree hollows served for storage. Tools were also rudimentary, with flint paw axes for gathering and butchering (if their claws were insufficient for the task) and perhaps the occasional pinched clay pot to store water. This all changed when they left the jungle. Food and shelter were no longer givens. Neither was safety. Grasslands require grazing animals to keep the trees from multiplying and turning the land into forest. Where there are large herbivores, there are predators to hunt them, and these predators were more than capable of devouring adult yinrih.

Among these predators were a species of zap rats who evolved a eusocial lifestyle similar to ants. Instead of using their biocapacitors for defense, they weaponized them to attack prey. They traveled in swarms and collectively shocked large animals into submission. The animal would be torn to pieces that would be devoured then and there by the swarm or carried back to the rats' underground den to feed their queen and young. Many an unwary yinrih met an unfortunate end this way.

But the yinrih were predator as well as prey. Males continued their nightly hunting routine, learning to fell much larger prey than their jungle forefathers. Conflicts between neighboring shires over the comparatively scarce grassland resources lead to early warfare, with hunters becoming soldiers.

Shelter mimicked the yinrih's steadtree homes. The first structures one could call houses consisted of wooden platforms built high off the ground, low enough for a nimble monkey fox to leap up or climb, but out of reach of groundling predators. A roof to block rain and a single wall to block the prevailing wind completed these primitive dwellings.

Shamans, now organized into the first hearthkeepers, continued their duties as healer and provider of warmth and light. They alone could tend the community's central hearth. As communities grew, acolytes would be selected from among the girls of each moot to bring home a fire bundle to light their own home hearth. Men (regardless of age) were only allowed to do this if a woman was unavailable.

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