

On The Light and Interspecies Ecumenism

The Light is the most common title given to the being worshiped by the Bright Way. It is a non-contingent incorporeal entity possessing a will and intellect that exists independent of the universe, outside of spacetime, and is said to have brought it into being.

It is neither male nor female. Possessing a gender would imply that there are others of its kind of the opposite gender with which it must beget young, and by extension age and die. Wayfarers consistently use the neuter *it* to refer to it when using English. The Light also has no name, as that would imply that there are others of its kind that must be distinguished with names. Indeed, it belongs to no broader category to which even a common noun can be applied. Very orthodox Wayfarers even hesitate to use words like *God* or *Deity* to describe it, though when pressed most will admit that those words fit well enough.

Wayfarers do recognize that monotheistic Terran faiths worship The Light as well, though they may disagree on its attributes. They regard assertions such as "Your God is not our God" as meaningless. If there's only one, then any disagreements ought to be over attributes rather than identity. Nobody would say you're looking at a different sun if you disagree on how much helium it produces per second.

Wayfarers reject Terran concepts such as Intelligent Design, at least in its most commonly presented form. By way of example, before embarking on the mission, Iris was given a relic of her namesake, Iris the Hearthsider, specifically her writing claw preserved in a small reliquary that the missionary leader keeps on her person. The claw itself is 33 millennia old, and even the reliquary that houses it predates the human invention of agriculture. Nothing is going to convince her that the universe is only six thousand years old. Wayfarers see The Light less as a watchmaker and more as a simulation programmer, setting up initial conditions so that things passively turn out a certain way rather than actively intervening.

The Light's purpose in creating the universe and granting sapience to living things is not known, though it does seem to regard its creatures with love, as it refers to them with endearing diminutives such as "dearest little ones".

Two major camps of Wayfarers emerge after First Contact: those who wish to preach to humanity, and those who want humanity to preach to them. Both sides are happy to have human religious institutions present on Hearthsider, as they both regard friendship with humans as paramount and don't want to upset their new galactic neighbors by refusing to accommodate them. The preachers also specifically seek out fervent believers, since they figure he who is lukewarm in the faith he was born into will make a lukewarm Wayfarer. They are also wary of those who would convert too readily, as that usually means the convert is either converting to gain social standing or that he

isn't taking his conversion seriously. They don't just expect pushback from prospective neophytes, they require it. Human Wayfarers, male or female, are barred from becoming hearthkeepers, mostly due to the ridiculous length of the training involved.

As for those seeking to join human faiths, Christianity and Islam see the lion's share of converts, as they won't turn down a potential catechumen no matter how many legs he has. (Synagogues have a fair few monkey foxes knocking on their doors, but the author isn't sure how Jews would respond, though he suspects there would be a range of opinions.)The subject of ordained yinrih is controversial, ironically for the opposite reason human hearthkeepers don't exist. Yinrihs' longer lifespan would allow them to accumulate power over time disproportionate to their numbers. Traditional Christian churches (Catholic and Orthodox) do not ordain aliens for christological reasons, but accommodations to vulpithecine psychology are made, such as allowing mixed-gender yinrih religious communities and blessing childermoots rather than requiring them to marry. One of the first yinrih religious orders to emerge after First Contact is a branch of the Dominicans.

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