

1-Year Anniversary

So we're coming up on one year of this project. I thought I'd celebrate by posting my original overview of the setting that I posted on the worldbuilding subreddit. A lot has changed since then, and there's a ton of outdated lore. The taboo regarding eating in public was hard to develop, so I dropped it. The nature of the Bright Way and the purpose of the missionaries has been greatly expanded, as can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

The Data Plane isn't really a thing anymore, as ansibles are far too low bandwidth to support a Matrix-like experience, although amnions can still pull it off locally as can be seen in my later stories.

Probably the biggest change is in their anatomy. Although I don't explicitly mention it, I still thought of them as bipedal at this stage. I didn't settle on their body plan until I was writing *The House of Friendship*.

You can probably date this by some of my attempts at topical humor. And yes, the exam I mention at the beginning is the same one I'm still trying to pass. (just failed my fifth attempt this morning [:(])

I wouldn't have been able to keep this going without the input and interest expressed by everyone here, so thanks for keeping this ADHDer going. Commonthroat is the first language I haven't scrapped in my 20+ years as a conlanger.

Anyway, here it is in all its unorganized glory.

I've been hyperfocusing on this all week, but I'm supposed to be studying for a very expensive certification exam, so I was hoping I could finally put this out of my mind by sharing it. It isn't part of a larger project or story, and likely never will be. I suck at drawing, writing, pretty much anything "creative". just the product of idle daydreaming when I should be studying. So I present for your consideration, the Monkey Fox! This was basically born out of me pondering the Fermi Paradox, and also feeling kind of lonely. I also wanted to play with some of the typical First Contact tropes, so instead of our rationalist heroes fighting off religious fanatics trying to blow them up (see *Contact*) it's the religious people desperately looking for aliens. I also think the idea of space Mormons is kind of funny in an endearing way. The aliens, while much further along on the tech tree, so to speak, aren't part of a galaxy spanning multi-species civilization that humans haven't found yet. They're all alone, crying out into the void just like us. I originally conceived of them as more dog like to signify their status as Man's new best friend, an intelligence that isn't our own that can walk through the hardships of life alongside us. It's not organized; it's just a bunch of ideas.

Anatomy: They're about 4 feet high on average, with bodies covered in fur save for the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet. They have two arms and two legs, as well as a tail. The hands,

feet, and tail are prehensile, and the feet look like slightly larger hands. Speaking of hands, they have six digits, with an arrangement like humans' but with an extra thumb on the other side of the hand. One of the digits on each hand contains an ink sac, with the claw being modified into a sort of pen nib. So they have a natural writing utensil. The torso and limbs are proportioned like a human's (hence "monkey"). The head looks vulpine (hence "fox") with a muzzle, rhinarium (wet nose), and erect, triangular, well-furred ears.

Yinrih are the sort of small, furry critter that triggers a human's nurturing instincts. After all, they look like a cross between a fox, a red panda, and a lemur. The only physical feature that mars this otherwise adorable image is the eyes. They're black, as in no pupil, iris, or sclera, and there's no reflection whatsoever. This appearance is due to the structure of the surface of the eye, which consists of millions of nanoantennas that couple with the ambient electromagnetic radiation the same way a radio antenna does. The result looks disquietingly like they have empty eye sockets.

Natural History: Before "asking 'why'", which is their term for achieving sapience, they were social tree-dwelling carnivorous animals living in large "family" groups, though see below for why "family" is in quotes. The natural pen finger was used to mark territory. They grouped together for protection from larger predators and to make reproduction easier, but they hunted alone and did not share their kills. Kits were expected to hunt as soon as they were weaned. This food strategy will have a huge impact on their culture later. They began asking "why" around the same time as modern humans, so around a hundred thousand years. However, they reached level II on the Kardashev scale (consuming 100% of their sun's output) around the time we discovered agriculture. The secret to their rapid development lies in the fact that they didn't invent written language, they evolved it. They've been able to preserve information between generations for as long as they've been speaking. This is in sharp contrast to humans, who only invented writing around 5000 years ago.

Reproduction: If you could come up with a procreation method that you could explain to a class of kindergarteners without blushing, this would probably come close. Monkey Foxes are monotremes (well, they evolved convergently into monotreme-like creatures). The females lay eggs and sweat milk from the palms of their hands to feed kits, hence the common oath "by the palms that nursed me!" The males also lay "eggs". Technically they're spermatophores, but they're still called "eggs". Female eggs have yolk sacs while male spermatophores do not. The males do not produce milk. Both genders have a cloaca and lack external sex organs. Upon reaching sexual maturity, members of the den will start laying eggs, and females will produce milk, all on a regular nesting schedule. When breeding season comes around, sexually mature den members put their eggs and spermatophores into a central nest. A protective membrane forms over the clutch and forms a sort of external womb. The eggshells dissolve, and the combined genetic material from all the contributing parents mixes into a soup, which is then used to form zygotes which eventually grow into a litter of kits. The kits feed off the yolk sacs from the female eggs while in utero. The number of kits in a litter depends on the number of contributing parents.

There's no intercourse, and Monkey Foxes completely lack a sex drive. This means that human concepts revolving around reproduction like courtship, marriage, or the concept of having a mother and a father that you can point to as your progenitors don't really compute for Monkey Foxes. Kits are raised by the grownup den members together. The phrase "It takes a village to raise a child" is literal in their case. Uninformed humans often mistake the Monkey Foxes' lack of "Eros", as C.S.

Lewis would term it, to mean they're cold and emotionless, or that they're somehow an entire race of uptight prudes. The fact that most Monkey Foxes interacting with humans are missionaries only reinforces this misconception. You can no more praise a Monkey Fox for his chastity than you can accuse a bald man of having red hair or measure the temperature of the vacuum of space.

Monkey Foxes do know what "love" is, in the sense of "willing the good of the beloved" and they are more than capable of forming friendships and acting selflessly for the sake of others. They do, of course, have their own cultural taboos and disordered appetites, and unfortunately some of those taboos intersect with human customs that we would find not only normal, but necessary.

Customs: Because Monkey Foxes lack the concept of modesty, and because they have fur, clothing is optional. Any clothing that is worn is utilitarian, like hats for shade or raincoats to keep dry. Monkey Foxes living and working on earth will wear clothes to better fit in with humans. We humans say a lot with what we wear, after all. When on their native world, the more communicative function of clothing is filled by perfumes. Their stronger sense of smell means they can detect individual volatile compounds that combine to make up a single odor. So, where a human police officer would wear a uniform and a badge to let others know what he's doing and who he is, a Monkey Fox police officer would have a particular scent that communicated the same. Luckily for us what a Monkey Fox thinks smells good largely overlaps with what a human thinks smells good, so nobody's strolling around smelling like a broken gas line.

The big "hangup" in Monkey Fox culture surrounds eating. Because their ancestors hunted and ate alone, they have a strong resource guarding instinct, and altercations around food can and do lead to serious injuries. Eating in public is shockingly taboo for Monkey Foxes, though that's not to say there aren't people who do it anyway. Normally, Monkey Foxes eat once every week or two, and enter a state of torpor for about 24 to 48 hours immediately after, which functions like sleep for humans. Monkey Foxes do not sleep in between meals. The food itself is bland, not unlike hard tack or, as technology progressed, a dietetically engineered flavorless nutrient paste. Drinking publicly is fine, although it's also rather plain, with the only elaboration being the addition of alcohol for relaxation or caffeine for stimulation. Most Monkey Fox faiths have strict restrictions surrounding eating, not unlike how sex is seen in human culture. Even talking about your feeding habits is the sort of delicate conversation reserved for medical professionals and religious confessors.

This eating issue is a huge cultural barrier when Monkey Foxes first meet humans. Humans, as I'm sure you know, have a ton of social and religious traditions around food. Sacred hospitality is a very common human custom and naturally the first go-to for a human to make a guest feel welcome is to offer them something to eat.

First Contact: The dominant faith in Monkey Fox culture is called the Bright Way. The Bright Way can be traced back to nearly the beginning of Monkey Fox history, which again, is around 100 thousand years. It's had its ups and downs, taking turns as persecutor and victim, with plenty of peaceful tolerance (in the sense of putting up with something you disagree with for the sake of social harmony) in between. Apologists will put forward, half-jokingly, that surest proof of the Bright Way's divine mandate is that it's managed to survive so long despite the profound stupidity of its leaders. However, around the time of First Contact, much of Monkey Fox society has secularized, and most who self-identify as believers are merely culturally attached rather than practicing members. The central tenant of this faith is that Monkey Foxes are to be apostles to the rest of the

universe. “Go and spread your light to the stars, and ye shall become brighter yourselves.” is a common scriptural quotation.

Religious doctrine requires that there be other sapient species out there, but much like humanity’s attempts at finding aliens, the Monkey Foxes have had no luck thus far, even though they discovered radio while we humans were still squatting in a ditch poking berries up our noses. Being confronted with the Fermi Paradox is a big reason why The Bright Way has lost relevance. There’s not much point in preaching to the blind infinity, after all.

Monkey Foxes who claim to have encountered aliens are the same sort of people who on earth would claim to see Mother Theresa in a cinnamon bun, and they’re dismissed off hand even by the otherwise devout. That’s not to say the faithful haven’t made serious, intellectually rigorous efforts to find ETs. This pursuit occupies a similar cultural position as missionaries do on Earth. They’d been sending probes, launching manned vessels, and otherwise screaming into the void for longer than we humans could possibly imagine, and they were only greeted with empty, pitiless indifference.

A typical Monkey Fox missionary journey went like this: build a pod about as big as The Titan, except hopefully less implodey, stick a dude inside, put them into hypersleep, and yeet the pod in the general direction of a star system with a planet in the habitable zone. If the onboard AI doesn’t pick up artificially generated radio signals after orbiting the planet for a while, begin the long journey back home. If, however, the computer detects artificial radio signals, the ship pulls the intrepid explorer out of hypersleep, whereupon he or she would put on their best ironed white dress shirt and tie (or cultural equivalent) grab their Good Book, and get ready to go door to door spreading the good news.

Of course, even at the relativistic speeds achievable by current Monkey Fox technology, these round trips take hundreds of years at a minimum. This might seem unmanageable, but Monkey Foxes regularly live at least 600 earth years, and don’t age at all in hypersleep. Certain ground crew members would also be popsicled in parallel with their missionary charges in order to preserve institutional continuity. Also keep in mind that, to a species whose cultural memory extends back to the dawn of their very existence as a sapient race, it really isn’t that long at all. They also have some tricks up their nonexistent sleeves for preventing “generation gap” from developing between the long absent traveller and the folks at home.

While it’s called “hypersleep” it’s really more of a way to halt metabolism while keeping the brain active and connected to the Monkey Fox version of the Matrix, which they call the Data Plane. While they haven’t figured out how to send matter faster than light, instant information transfer is possible thanks to The Underlay, a kind of subspace that allows superluminal communication. Interstellar vessels are equipped with an Underlay tunnel endpoint, with a corresponding endpoint located back home. Missionaries are able to interact with mission control and their loved ones back home via the Data Plane, sort of like a Clarke’s Third Law version of Zoom. Having said that, interstellar missionaries probably won’t ever see their loved-ones in the flesh again, so it is customary to hold a living funeral for friends who are preparing to venture into the infinite unknown.

Language: Monkey Foxes and humans have very different vocal tracts, and cannot directly produce

one-another's speech sounds. Any "loanwords" from one language to another, are thus more properly seen as onomatopoeia attempting to mimic the other creature's speech sounds. Monkey Fox vocal articulation happens mostly in the chest, throat, and nostrils, with the mouth, tongue, and teeth barely involved at all. To a human, Monkey Fox speech sounds, rather adorably, like a dreaming dog, so lots of quiet growling, yipping, and breathing through the nose. It's also frustratingly quiet by human standards. The best approximation of a Monkey Fox's word for their own species is yinrih, which, again, sounds more like a pair of quiet yips ending on a sharp nasal exhalation. Rather unhelpfully, the word translates roughly as "of the earth" or "from the ground" or in other words "earthling", go figure.

As far as how we sound to the Yinrih, we're basically constantly screaming. If you're an American, you're probably used to this reaction anyway. It is possible for us to understand what the other is saying, although the yinrih are most comfortable when we're talking just above a whisper, and we have to be in a pretty quiet environment to hear what they're saying. Eventually humans and Yinrih develop a lingua franca sign language to communicate directly. Their body plan and ours is similar enough for this to work.

Yinrih aren't terribly strong compared to a human. An unarmed human could easily kill an unarmed Yinrih. However, it's a good thing to remember that Yinrih civilization as a whole reached level II on the Kardashev scale around the same time humans discovered agriculture. While they're not quite "sufficiently advanced aliens", some of their tech flirts with Clarke's Third Law, like the aforementioned underlay tunnel endpoints.

While the Yinrih are much further along technologically than us, the fact that they've been able to write since they became sapient means they've missed out on a lot of very hard lessons that we humans have had to learn. Since we spread out across the globe millennia before inventing written communication, we've had to "rediscover" our fellow humans. When we think about contacting alien intelligences, we often pattern the experience after these historical instances. Yinrih culture never sundered completely after the dawn of their species, so they're far more homogenous as a result. One could compare the full spectrum of Yinrih culture to that of the Romance-speaking areas of the former Roman Empire. Sure there are different languages and cultures, but they're all pretty recognizably related. There's no Yinrih equivalent to the Basque people or Native American groups. This lack of experience with culture shock means that the Yinrih have a much harder time meeting humans than we have meeting them. In spite of all that, the Yinrih are eager to get to know us better.

Even though first contact is established for religious reasons, the missionaries have made it clear that "conversion by the sword" is strictly off the table. The long history of The Bright Way means that believers have had plenty of experience as both persecutor and persecuted, and they don't want to repeat that cycle. Nevertheless, they are not indifferentists, and will happily debate those whose views differ from theirs. They may not change their mind, but they'll at least change the subject. Unfortunately there are other Yinrih factions besides the Bright Way, and they're not as eager to engage in peaceful cultural exchange.

The biggest of these less than friendly factions are the Partisans. Historians differ on why exactly they formed. Some say they were a hardline religious sect, others say they were anticlerical iconoclasts. Most likely it's a little of column A, a little of column B. If you think that's impossible,

you've never heard of the horseshoe effect. The Partisans occupy a large swath of territory on the fringes of the Yinrih's home star system.

Revision #1

Created 2026-06-05 22:46:47 UTC by Lurker

Updated 2026-06-05 22:46:47 UTC by Lurker