

religion

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The Great Commandment

“ Consider, little ones, the Tree-dwellers, the very clay from which I sculpted your form. They do naught but what I permit them to do. They move about, seek refuge, nourish themselves, and beget young according to the passions which I have kindled within them. Yet do they gain any merit thereby? By no means! For they do so without understanding. They paint the leaves, yet they cannot write a single glyph. They call out to one another, yet they cannot chant a single syllable. But to you, little ones, to you alone among the myriads of creatures walking upon the land and swimming beneath the waves and soaring upon the wind of this earth, I have granted the light of understanding. Now gaze, little ones, upon the countless stars bedewing the heavens. Think ye that I have wrought them for no purpose? Nay, each one is an icon of my glory. Know ye that there are others like yourselves, in whom I have kindled the fire of understanding. Their bone is not of your bone, their flesh is not of your flesh, yet their souls are like unto your own. search among these stars for other minds, that together ye might meditate upon the majesty of my creation. Listen to them for other voices, that together ye might chant my praises. Seek among them other hearts, and offer to them your friendship. Go, dearest little ones, spread your light to the stars, and ye shall become brighter yourselves.

And here's a version I tried translating into English for some reason:

Spoiler:

Context

Spoiler:

Of All Things The Light is the Measure

Code: [Select all](#)

```
G    rnL rDB-0    rLPq-p  rNlr-0    hgq rLPq-p    rNlrGH-p    rNlrGH-p
must not say-AUTH light-3D good-AUTH for light-3D goodness-3D goodness-3D
Do not say "The Light is good", for The Light is goodness itself
```

```
G    rnL rDB-0    rLPq-p  qCDr-0    hgq rLPq-p    qCDrGH-p    qCDrGH-p
must not say-AUTH light-3D just-AUTH for light-3D justice-3D justice-3D
Do not say "The Light is just", for The Light is justice itself.
```

```
G    rnL rDB-0    rLPq-p  snp hgq rLPq-p    rNPq-p    b BC snpGH-p
must not say-AUTH light-3D holy for light-3D source-3D of all holiness-3D
Do not say "The Light is holy", for it is the fount of all holiness.
```

Some insight into more of the Bright Way's theology. Strictly speaking, one cannot attribute qualities to The Light, as all other things in Creation possess or lack qualities insofar as they reflect The Light. A person is good or just if they reflect The Light well, and evil or unjust if they don't.

To say that "The Light is good" implies a standard of goodness over and above The Light to which it must be subject.

The Spring Feast

Unlike Earth holy days to which the spring feast is often compared like Easter and Passover, which are reckoned according to the *northern hemisphere* spring equinox, the Bright Way's spring feast is celebrated during local spring, meaning while the northern hemisphere has their winter feast, the southern hemisphere has their spring feast, and vice versa. Different planets celebrate the feasts according to their own orbits.

Like the other seasonal feasts, the spring feast is preceded by a week of fasting. Fasting in the Bright Way consists of abstaining from solid foods. The fermented juice of steadtree fruit is a traditional drink consumed during fasts.

The unique feature of the spring feast is the presentation of new litters, where childermoots who have had their litter over the past year present their pups to the hearthkeeper for blessing.

Bright Way Epistemology

Image

The Bright Way's approach to epistemology can be summed up as follows:

1. All animals' intelligence is limited.
2. We are animals.
3. Therefore, our intelligence is limited.

An example often cited is how pet Forest Flyers are afraid of thunder. They'll cower in a corner trembling as a storm rolls through even though they're safe inside. No attempt by their owner to explain to them where the sounds come from, what lightning is, or why they shouldn't worry about it will get them to understand the meteorological phenomenon they're so afraid of. It is utterly beyond their understanding. Yet they're able to hear the thunder all the same.

The innermost circle of the diagram represents the set of all things that are known. It fades gradually into the second circle, representing more and more nuanced and complex topics that can only be grasped by sharper and sharper minds, and gradually expands outward over time as philosophy and science advance. The second circle is the realm of the knowable. It represents all things that can possibly be grasped by mortal minds. Its outer edge is the theoretical limit of yinrih intelligence. They don't know where that boundary lies, but they do know it exists, and that there are things outside that boundary. These are things "Like thunder to a forest flyer" as the saying goes.

The Light resides in this outermost realm of the unknowable, even though its effects on Creation can be seen by mortal eyes.

Silence

Academic childermoots are moots set up as schools, where the sires and dams are educators who conceive their own students. Ideally, the future parents receive pedagogical training in preparation for forming such a moot, and seek out potential mates with similar skills.

There is a controversial practice among some very orthodox academic childermoots whereby dams will only communicate to their daughters during religious instruction. The idea is that by only imparting virtue to the pups, at least one of them will grow up and enter into the seminary or pursue a religious vocation. The practice is regarded by many, including other traditionalists, as psychologically abusive, and even detrimental to the pups' spiritual growth, as one can impart virtue in ways additional to direct religious instruction.

Connecting the Terran Internet to the Monkey Fox Ansible Network

As a Farspeaker, Stormlight sees it as his duty to connect the human Internet with the monkey fox ansible network. In order to do this he has to figure out how the human Internet works. So he audits some net admin classes at the local college and attempts to get some networking certifications. He doesn't *need* the certs to accomplish his goal, but he figures he'll be on Earth for a long while (having started this little adventure before learning about the mass router) and maybe needs to start pulling his weight by getting a job.

Auditing the classes works out fine. He uses his keyer and HUD specs to take notes the same way a human student would with a laptop. As an auditor he can't actually take the course exams or submit homework, but he does the labs and such anyway by modding a keyer to work as an input device for a normal human computer. Having claws makes it awkward to use a normal keyboard.

Trouble starts brewing when it comes time to apply to take the certification. He can't sit in a normal human chair, and can't use a normal human keyboard. You would *think* that this is an easy fix. He already has the modified tools he needs, but getting both the testing organization and the people proctoring the exams to approve his accommodations is a nightmare.

Yih's Ring and Claravian Iconography

Yih has a ring. It has had some effect on yinrih culture. Winter days are darker and summer nights are brighter. The phrase "To chase the end of the ring" means to go on a fool's errand. Pascal's Commonthroat name translates to "ring light" which refers to light reflected off of the ring on summer nights.

This ring has inspired Claravian iconography, which uses a golden arch behind the head of the saint depicted in the icon in a similar way to the use of the halo in Terran religious art. The arch spans the width of the picture, with the apex behind the saint's head.

Some common attributes seen in icons:

- Preachers are shown holding a large steadtree leaf with scripture written on it.
- Steadtrees hermits are shown perching in a tree.
- Hearthkeepers are shown with an aspergillum wrapped in their tail, symbolizing their role as spiritual dam to their congregation. They will also be holding a wrench, symbolizing their duty to tend the star hearth. If they were a spacer, the wrench is held in the left rear paw. If not, it is held in the left forepaw.
- Knights of the Sun will be wearing powered armor.
- Missionaries will be pictured standing before a womb ship, encapsulated in an amnion, or holding a miniature model of a womb ship in the forepaws.
- Mystics will have their eyes wide open, staring intensely up at the sky.
- Farspeakers are shown holding a raw tailstone crystal.
- Martyrs are shown with whatever killed them. Martyrdom *in odium fidei* is relatively rare, only really showing up after the War of Dissolution thanks to Firefly and the Partisans, so most well known martyr saints were killed while furthering the Bright Way's goal of fulfilling the Great Commandment. This includes the many, many deaths while trying to achieve spaceflight, as well as deaths related to other attempts at scientific advancement in the name of the Great Commandment, so expect to see lots of exploding rockets.
- Saints known for their hospitality will be shown holding a steadtree fruit.

- Rememberers of the Forgotten Dead (name WIP) are people who try to provide company for those who would otherwise die alone. They pay for their funeral expenses and see to it that their bones are displayed properly. They recite a litany of the names of the people they have so served on a regular basis, and encourage others around them to pray for the souls of the deceased. They also try to learn about the lives of the people they help, and act as "living obituaries", relating the deeds of the forgotten dead to any who will listen. Icons depicting such saints show them holding a skull or standing before a skull displayed in a reliquary.

St. Cloudlight the Sensible

St. Cloudlight* the sensible was a figure who helped with the renewal of the Bright Way after the War of Dissolution. Not much is known of his private life, though he was famous for being a man of some girth, giving rise to quite a few jokes, some of which are thought to have come from his own mouth as a form of humble self deprecation.

"I would have liked to become a steadtree hermit," he once said, "were it not that I would have broken whatever branch I perched upon."

a great many quotations have been attributed to him, some real, some not.

"What healer does not abide among the sick?" being the most well known. It's an admonition against preaching to the choir.

* Light reflected off the glaciated tops of convective clouds around sunrise or sunset, when most lower objects are still in shadow, sometimes making it appear as though the sun is rising in the west or setting in the east.

The Star and Gear

Image

This is a tentative symbol for the Bright Way, or possibly the Knights of the Sun.

The yellow circle symbolizes a star, stars being icons of The Light. The gear represents the Bright Way's scientific and engineering endeavors in pursuit of the Great Commandment, as well as the hearthkeeper's duty to tend the star hearth. It's also reminiscent of a prayer ring.

It's also supposed to give off corporate logo vibes, alluding to the Bright Way's past as a system-spanning megacorp.

Edit: An alternative interpretation of the symbol is that the circle represents a planet, and the gear represents the noosphere that is created when sapience emerges. The Missionaries may have a version where there are two copies of the symbol with the gears meshed together, representing the merging of two noospheres.

Symbol for the Missionaries

Image

Here's a version of the above symbol that may be used by the missionaries.

Ora et Laboratory

Research monasteries are where most of the Bright Way's R&D took place. They emerged during the Golden Age, and most major scientific and technological breakthroughs could be traced back to them. Tailstone, neurogel, fusion power, force projectors, leaseminds, and much more were all invented by ascetics living in research monasteries in an effort to further the Bright Way's goal of finding other sophonts.

This, along with their existing control over the power grid, is where the seeds of Bright Ways corruption from religion to megacorp were planted. You need a lot of money to maintain that kind of research, and the obvious solution was to commercialize the resulting inventions to pay the bills.

In the beginning, the religious character of the monasteries was very apparent. ascetics would spend their days alternately chanting prayers as a community, meditating on the mysteries of Creation (i.e. doing research), and practically applying the insights gained from those meditations. During the Age of Decadence the spiritual component of the monasteries atrophied to the point that they were little more than R&D labs, with the exception of pious enclaves like Hearthside where traditions were maintained.

Research monasteries are much like monasteries on Earth. There's a novitiate where potential new ascetics discern whether they are called to enter into religious life, then vows are taken to forego bearing pups (so as not to distract from their duties), to live in community, and maintain the practice of meditative research. Unlike Earth monasteries, research monasteries aren't separated into male and female orders. Both genders live together in the same community. Other monasteries like those of the Knights of the Sun and orders of healers are gender-locked due to the taboos against male healers and female soldiers.

Bright Way Eschatology

Wayfarers see the evolution of life as a teleological process, and only a small part of the evolution of the universe as a whole. They believe the universe is progressing to an ultimate point of perfect convergence. They also believe that it is their divinely mandated duty to actively help bring about this convergence by uniting the noospheres of all the other sapient races through First Contact.

Icon of Sin

An *icon of sin* is an artistic motif meant to serve as visual aid to examining one's conscience. It takes the form of a statue or painting of a yinrih holding an object in each paw and with a fifth object wrapped in the tail. What the objects are can vary from region to region, but here are a few common ones along with what they symbolize:

- A drinking bowl: drunkenness
- A bag of coins: greed
- A mirror: pride
- A knife or a spiked tail weapon: either wrath (when used against another) or despair (when used against oneself)
- A thurible*: dissipation or drug use
- A fruit or other food: gluttony

They're placed outside of confessionals for the benefit of penitents seeking absolution.

They're also found outside of gambling establishments, gel head parlors, and drug dens, lavish restaurants, or anywhere one would associate with hedonism. It's actually unknown whether they were first used in a religious context and adopted ironically by those secular establishments, or whether they started out as symbols glorifying hedonistic behavior, and hearthkeepers started putting them outside their confessionals to remind their litter of their sins.

* used to burn incense containing intoxicants.

Hearthkeeper's Canticles

Hearthkeeper's Canticles are short poetic prayers that double as mnemonics to aid in a cleric's engineering duties. Anything from scientific formulae, such as Ohm's Law, to procedural checklists, such as the method for safely shutting down a star hearth, are rendered as canticles. Memorizing these canticles is part of a hearthkeeper's seminary formation.

Other professions that emerged from the Bright Way, such as farspeakers and healers, have similar traditions. The canticles referencing scientific laws are still widely known even in secular circles. This includes a canticle putting forward the scientific method itself, which is used by farspeakers to systematically troubleshoot networking issues.

The Bright Way on the Environment

“ [thethief3](#) wrote: 2024-05-12T03:58:31+00:00 What's the Claravian relationship/doctrine with environmentalism?

I'm glad you asked, as that was one of the things I was going to write up soon.

[This earlier post](#) touches on an adjacent issue. The Bright Way is against colonizing exoplanets, or in other words, they're against being [grabby](#), as they wish to allow new noospheres to flower into existence as life evolves naturally, which it can't do if colonists disrupt the process of abiogenesis or hominization/sophontization.

This belief lies on a spectrum of "absolutely no exoplanets may be touched" to "only planets with promising prebiotic environments must be left alone." The *official* stance merely precludes planets in the habitable zone of their star. Of course, these are the easiest planets to terraform, so that results in some friction.

The relevant laws on the issue say that whoever first maintains a permanent presence in a planet's gravity well is the de facto owner and can do as they please. The Bright Way's missionary efforts at least partially pivot to squatting on promising exoplanets by maintaining unmanned satellites in orbit, likely with mass routers and life support, so that colonists can't come along and bulldoze the environment.

As for more traditional environmentalism, the Bright Way doesn't believe in animal rights *per se* but does condemn animal cruelty and reckless habitat destruction etc, which amount to the same thing in terms of practical action. The environment exists ultimately to support sapient life, and protecting the environment is part of maintaining sapient life.

The Bright Way does take a special interest in protecting the tree dwellers, as the traditional view is that yinrih *are* tree dwellers who happen to be sapient. The tree dwellers' original range on the northern side of the River was maintained as a sanctuary throughout the Age of Decadence. After the War of Dissolution and expulsion of the Bright Way from its seat of power on Yih, the tree dweller population plummets due to unchecked exploitation and the illegal trafficking of adults for blood sports and pups for the pet trade. Once the Bright Way is allowed to return to Newman's Dale, the sanctuary is reestablished and the population rebounds, although by that point the population of captive bred tree dwellers was more than enough to satisfy demand.

It goes without saying that the Bright Way condemns blood sports in general, and most

jurisdictions, with the obvious exception of the Spacer Confederacy, ban such activities, whether or not animals are involved.

The Bright Way does allow the use of tree dwellers for lab testing and organ transplants, as it fits with their view that the environment exists to serve sapient life. They do try to minimize harm to their non sapient kin, and keep lab specimens in as natural and stimulating an environment as can be managed. Harvesting organs from tree dwellers is also considered a last resort, as donated yinrih organs are a better fit anyway.

More on the Knights of the Sun

Image

Here's a symbol for the Knights of the Sun. It plays on the Claravian Star and Gear. The spikes represent both sun rays and a spiked tail weapon, which as stated in the Commonthroat thread, has similar symbolic value to yinrih as swords do for humans.

Hearthside's military may be composed entirely of Knights..

Just as European Knights are associated with cavalry, I suspect the Yinrih notion of knighthood is associated with mechs and heavy powered armor. That doesn't mean every knight is a mech pilot, but Lodestar certainly is.

The Rite of Alightment

The Rite of Alightment is a ritual performed upon landing a womb ship. Ideally it's done in the presence of one or more alien sophonts, and is meant to communicate what sort of creatures the yinrih are, why they're here, and to serve as a gesture of good will and trust to their new hosts.

The rite begins after the missionaries disembark. First, the healer performs a quick wellness check on herself and the other missionaries. While this is a genuine post suspension health exam, it is also ritualized to some degree. The healer announces what she's doing aloud and performs otherwise normal physical health exam tasks like checking pulse, breathing, limb rotation range, gross and fine motor skills, etc, in a slightly exaggerated manner in order to communicate to their hosts that the yinrih are capable of compassion and hope to be treated in kind. The healer's utterances also serve to demonstrate that the yinrih possess the faculty of language, which is one of the two criteria the Bright Way uses to determine if a creature is sapient.

After the health check, the hearthkeeper produces a quantity of blessed milk, fresh. She self-induces lactation by licking her palms and holding them out to the audience as she sweats out the milk. If there is a male among the missionaries, he imitates the same gestures and holds his own palms out to the audience as well. This is to demonstrate the difference between male and female yinrih, as well as to underscore the ritual nature of the following actions. The hearthkeeper then soaks up the milk on her palms with a sponge and wrings it out into an aspergillum, saying a blessing to sanctify the milk.

She then sprinkles the womb ship's hull and chants a prayer of thanksgiving for a safe journey. This rite of sprinkling is meant to demonstrate that the yinrih are capable of ritual (deliberate behaviors that have no survival benefit) which is the second criterion the Bright Way uses to define sapience.

After sprinkling the womb ship, the hearthkeeper opens a hatch exposing the (currently not running) main reactor. She then produces a ceremonial wrench and dramatically shatters the glass of the reaction chamber. While womb ships are incapable of launching after they land on a planet's surface, breaking the main reactor is meant to demonstrate that the missionaries intend to live among these new sophonts and trust them to be good hosts. The main reactor only powers the ship's propulsion, and there are secondary reactors for things like life support, fabricators, comms, etc.

The missionaries then sing the litany of creation, which serves to underscore the religious nature of the mission, demonstrate more language use, and, at least after the fact once the language barrier is dealt with, give a little natural history lesson.

The Rite of Alightment culminates with a second sprinkling, of both the missionaries, and--should they be so inclined--their alien hosts. This is to symbolize the union of the yinrih's noosphere with that of their new friends. Finally, the hearthkeeper and other missionaries demonstrate the customary introductory greeting, which is to rear up on the hind feet and pat the exposed underbelly twice with the left forepaw, another gesture of trust, the rite ends by inviting the aliens

to greet the missionaries in their own fashion.

Say the Black and Do the Red

The hearthkeeper walks down the central aisle, striking the ground with the aspergillum held in her tail as she walks. When the hearthkeeper reaches the sanctuary steps, an acolyte pulls back the sanctuary curtain obscuring the star hearth. The hearthkeeper ascends the steps. Without turning away from the hearth, she recites the opening prayer.

Thou, O Uncaused One, art the cause of all that is.
Thou, O Unmoved One, set the heavens in motion.
Thou, O unchanging One, art the wellspring of life.
Thou, O Unknowable One, art the source of all we know.
Thou whose light fills all of Creation, art the light we cannot see.

O Infinite One, who are we, the most infinitesimal of thy creatures, that thou heedest our cries?

The Hearthkeeper turns to her litter.

Let us howl, o little ones, may our voices rise to the Empyrean.

Floor Icons

After the War of Dissolution, it became popular among hardcore Partisans to place icons of Claravian saints on the floor at the entrance to their homes, so guests would have to trample the icon under paw in order to enter. It became so popular, in fact, that special floor mats were manufactured for this specific purpose. The images used on these floor mats were almost always pre-existing icons found on the ansible network rather than specially commissioned pieces.

The Wayfarers within Partisan Territory (those who hadn't fled to Moonlitter during Firefly's genocide) were understandably scandalized. Until, that is, a savvy hearthkeeper pointed out that, whatever the motives of the Partisans who engaged in this practice, they were still putting icons of holy men and women in their homes, and although they didn't intend to, they were honoring the faith by doing so. She further suggested to her litter that they shouldn't regard treading on the saint's image as an act of sacrilege, but as an act of faith. Rather than trampling them, they were allowing their paws to be held up by the holy men and women who passed before them. The hearthkeeper further taught her litter to recite a small prayer, in secret, whenever they had occasion to tread upon a saint's image.

"O saint NN. Be thou to me a firm foundation and guiding path."

The Partisans continued the practice of floor icons, assuming it to be gravely insulting to their Wayfarer opponents. The hearthkeeper who proposed this new prayer later took the high perch at the City of Eternal Noon, the first Outlander to do so after the war, and, incidentally, the last non-Hearthsider to do so for quite some time after.

It just so happened that her assumption of the duty to tend the Eternal Hearth coincided with the opening of an otherwise inconsequential government building at some regional capitol within Partisan Territory. The Partisans, perhaps as a dig at their fellow Outlander, commissioned an artist to design a floor mosaic for this building echoing the practice of trampled icons. The artist, having heard rumors that the faithful had done the old Uno reverse on the whole practice, decided to up the ante by depicting a saint in a compromising position. Unfortunately for his clients, this artist was also a plagiarist, and simply poked around the ansible network for a suitable image to copy. The image he chose looked very compromising indeed, an elderly steadtree hermit striking a young woman across the muzzle. The artist was so thrilled at the potential scandal the image would cause that he didn't stop to ask why a Wayfarer would bother depicting the scene as an icon in the first place.

Opening day came for this hall of bureaucracy, and with it the unveiling of the mosaic. It turns out that the image the artist chose depicted Saint Sunfire administering a ceremonial blow to the muzzle of a penitent who sought his spiritual council in order to amend her life. The supposed victim, a future saint herself, was in fact a former gel-head parlor owner who, after her conversion, devoted her life to helping recovering addicts. Sunfire's gesture was (and still is as of First Contact) a common ceremony undertaken by such penitents. Tod, for example, would have experienced it during his talks with the hearthkeeper at the AW military outpost at Moonlitter, and in any case, it's

always shown in icons as being much more forceful than it is in practice, being more of a firm tap on the snout than a strike intended to cause pain.

The Partisans were left with egg on their face. The high hearthkeeper, in an effort to rub it in a little more, issued a statement thanking the Partisans for honoring these two holy Wayfarers with this art installation.

Now that this insult turned pious practice had been made public, Wayfarers at Moonlitter and within Partisan Territory started putting such floor icons in their own homes, the prayer mentioned above now written openly on the icon itself. Over time, the practice developed into an aspect of the region's sacred architecture, with lighthouses on and around Moonlitter being known for their lovingly decorated floors depicting the lives of saints, acts of virtue, or even hopeful scenes depicting missionaries fulfilling the Great Commandment.

Claravian Angelology

The Bright Way is ambiguous regarding the existence of what humans would call angels. The current prevailing opinion is that they must exist in some form or another, since The Light itself is utterly unknowable and inapproachable, any interaction between The Light and its little ones must be made via a Metatron-like figure, not by The Light itself.

Regarding demons, the Bright Way has taken a consistent stance of "It's best not to think about it." If demons do exist, then fixating on them will only bring trouble. If they don't exist, then you're wasting energy fretting over nothing. Unlike the dearth of popular piety surrounding angels, there is a belief among the particularly superstitious that the Underlay is either The Void itself (Hell) or is infested with demons, meaning that the yinrih have been routing their FTL communication through the realm of the damned. This view is roundly rejected by the Claravian Magisterium. Those who believe this idea say that the only reason the Bright Way dismisses their claims is that, since the Bright Way itself discovered the Underlay and invented the ansible, that it would make them look bad if it turned out the interplanetary civilization they largely helped build was piggy backing off of hell itself.

This superstition only worsens after the invention of the mass router. Now it's not just information, but people who are traversing the Underlay, opening the door to ideas of demonic incursions into realspace via the mass router network. Humans absolutely eat this up, some seriously, others in jest, as the idea that hyperspace is actually Hell is a recurring theme in Terran sci-fi, as can be seen in Doom, Event Horizon, and Warhammer 40000.

Alternative Perspectives on the Noosphere

The Bright Way believes that only beings that possess souls can be conscious. While all living things have souls, only sophonts are given rational souls by the Uncreated Light and possess the fullness of consciousness. The activities of all sapient beings gives rise to a noosphere, and there are as many noospheres as there planets baring sapient life. The Great Commandment tells the yinrih to unite these hitherto isolated noospheres in order to hasten the convergence of the universe to a perfect whole.

Neoshamanists believe in panpsychism, which is the idea that consciousness is a property of matter itself, or woven into the fabric of the universe. Neoshamanists believe that there is one universal noosphere which is the source of consciousness. According to this theory, while consciousness is latent in all things, it becomes apparent in any system of sufficient complexity. Living things are just the most obvious complex systems, but other things such as rivers, storms, volcanos, and even [machines](#) possess some degree of consciousness.

Furthermore, the noosphere contains every thought or idea that a sophont could possibly think. When a sophont thinks of something new, he isn't inventing it, he's uncovering that part of the noosphere where it had always existed. However, the noosphere is not a discreet set of ideas that one can pluck out of the air. It is a churning maelstrom of nonsensical white noise that only occasionally resolves into an idea. Some neoshamanist mystics seek to "map out" this web of ideas. In many ways they resemble Claravian research monks.

The Misotheists share Neoshamanism's belief in a single universal noosphere. However, rather than all ideas existing within the noosphere already, Misotheists believe the noosphere is affected by the emotions and beliefs of all sapient beings. If enough people believe something, it can arise as an active entity that has agency over the material world. The more people feel a particular emotion or believe an idea, the more power the resulting entity has.

The Farspeakers are orthodox Wayfarers, but they put special emphasis on the communicative aspect of the noosphere. They see the noosphere as ideas at rest in people's minds, and in transit--being communicated from one person to another through speaking writing, or other means. Farspeakers speak of the noosphere having a "body", which is any physical means of communicating ideas. Just as an individual sophont possesses a brain and nervous system that upholds his or her consciousness and gives shape to ideas, physical means of communication, most prominently the Internetwork, represent the brain and nervous system of the noosphere as a whole.

Since Wayfarers cherish sapience as a blessing from the Uncreated Light to its little ones, and because the noosphere springs forth from sapience, Farspeakers hold the noosphere in special

reverence, and see taking care of its body as their sacred duty.

The Knights at the Time of First Contact

At the time of First Contact, the Knights of the Sun take many different forms depending on where around Focus they happen to be. On Hearthside they serve as the law enforcement and military. In more pious enclaves like Wayfarers' Haven they serve in a similar capacity. Wayfarers' Haven also sends its own knights to serve in the Spacer Confederacy's federal police. Within Partisan Territory they often manifest as terrorists or freedom fighters, depending on your perspective. Within the Allied Worlds they're usually relegated to community service and charity work, but on Welkinstead where practicing Wayfarers make up a statistically significant part of the population, they can legally serve as private security contractors. Lighthouses in more populous areas around Focus usually have a knight or two attached to serve as security guards so the lighthouse can remain open and freely accessible to the public at all times, as lighthouses are forbidden from locking their doors. Lodestar served in this capacity before the glassing of Pilgrim's Rest.

The knights as a whole are lead by a grand master. The organizational units that have a presence in a local area are called chapters, and each chapter is lead by a master (aka chaptermaster). The grand master is the chaptermaster for the principle chapter, which is an orbital monastery located within the orbit of Hearthside very close to Focus.

Many, if not most, knights no longer have mechs, but they are still heavily linked to mechs in the popular imagination, and many novice knights choose to take mech pilot training out of a sense of tradition. Lodestar trained as a pilot himself, and was able to construct a mech while on Earth using the Dewfall's fabricator and raw materials he bought using some loose pocket change, which was worth literal billions during the brief window between First Contact and the establishment of the mass router trunk between Earth and Wayfarers' Haven

Especially within the Allied Worlds where knights aren't part of everyday life, the old image of the lone knight and his squire striding forth in their mech to right wrongs and fight for justice has become a heavily romanticized trope, even in secular fiction.

More on the Great Commandment

“[HolyHandGrenade!](#) wrote: 2024-10-24T13:34:09+00:00 What was the stereotypical alien like in yinrih culture before First Contact?”

The Great Commandment refers to aliens as "bone not of our bone, flesh not of our flesh, but with souls like unto our own." The Bright Way took that to mean that aliens could look like anything, but there were some unspoken assumptions that undergirded their actions and beliefs on the topic. In particular:

- That all aliens would be recognizable as living things, no sapient boulders that eat silicon and whose metabolism operates over geologic time, for example.
- That they would be easily recognizable as sapient, which for the Bright Way's purposes meant they possessed language and some form of ritual behavior, especially reverence for their dead or other activities with a spiritual component.
- That their biology would be compatible, if only broadly, with the yinrih, meaning they could survive in similar environments, albeit perhaps with the aid of protective suits.
- Most importantly, that their psychology would be compatible such that the two species could communicate and form meaningful social connections with one another.

Secular commentators often asserted that extraterrestrial sophonts could violate one or more of these assumptions, leaving the Bright Way in the precarious position of having found aliens but being unable to actually bridge their noospheres by forming friendships and exchanging knowledge.

As far as broader culture was concerned, there is a type of Claravian liturgical drama enacting potential First Contact scenarios. These dramas always end well, with the yinrih accepting their new galactic neighbors as friends. As society secularized, more subversive takes on these First Contact stories emerged, often with the yinrih or the aliens as aggressors. These new stories much more resemble what humans associate with alien encounters. In any case, the alienness of these creatures is directly proportional to the SFX budget of whoever is producing the media.

Much like humanity's many conceptions of potential aliens, ~~space-doggos~~ yinrih often draw on animals or creatures from folklore when speculating about how extraterrestrial sophonts would look and act. A particularly popular depiction is inspired by the <qghfdg>, diminutive creatures from cynoid folklore whose only consistent trait is their small size.

The Beginnings of the Bright Way

There was a period of natural religion prior to the Theophany that may have even preceded writing (akin to the ritual burials of the neanderthals). It is here that the most fundamental rites are established: a female shaman keeping the tribal fire lit and performing primitive medicine as well as the use of the bones of the dead as architectural adornment. After the Theophany comes the founding of the Bright Way proper, where the shamanate organizes into the first true clergy. As the yinrih's medical knowledge grows, it becomes necessary to split the two primary roles of the old shamans into cleric and healer.

The Theophany catalyzes the yinrih's technological development. They know there are other sophonts among the stars, but still don't know what the stars even are. While there is much discovery independent of the Bright Way, The Bright Way is responsible for a great many technological and social developments in its attempt to fulfill the Great Commandment. After the secularization of yinrih society, Attempts are made by historical revisionists to minimize their cultural and technical contributions.

Meanwhile, the shaman's role of keeping the tribe's fire lit keeps pace with the yinrih's progress up the tech tree. As agriculture and cities develop, a central lighthouse is established in each settlement. The lighthouse, decorated with the bones of the dearly departed, serves as a fane dedicated to the Creator who revealed itself to the yinrih in the Theophany. Inside the lighthouse is a central hearth tended by the cleric, from which the individual households feed their home fires. When electricity is discovered, clerics become the first engineers maintaining electrical infrastructure. When the true nature of stars as sustained fusion reactions is discovered, attempts are made to replicate these icons of The Light on a smaller scale for liturgical purposes. This is the origin of the fusion reactor, or Star Hearth. The atomic age is birthed not by war, but by faith.

I still have to detail how the clergy fall into corruption. I'm thinking it has to do with their control of electrical infrastructure. One of the themes that has emerged in this project is the reversal of typical religion tropes you see in speculative fiction. So instead of religion being portrayed an impediment to technological development, it's a catalyst for it. Instead of the priestly class using their superior knowledge to gull the superstitious masses into submission, it's used to maintain a certain standard of living, although as often as not with a hefty tithe to keep the lights on. Those reactors don't run themselves, after all.

Seasonal Feasts: Winter Solstice

So it's the Winter solstice. Seeing as how this is supposed to be one of the high holy days in The Bright Way, I should probably flesh it out a bit.

The Seasonal Feasts are meant to be considered together, as though they are in fact a single discontinuous celebration. They are preceded by a week (12-day period) of fasting and prayer.

The themes present in the celebration include the passage of time, the nature of the universe as a work wrought by the Creator, and the yinrih's place within that creation, infinitesimal in scale but infinitely beloved. Light, is of course a huge part of the Bright Way generally, but it is given special focus on the seasonal feasts. Winter is a time both for mourning its absence and looking forward to its return.

Each feast also focuses on a different stage of the yinrih's life cycle, with winter devoted to death, naturally enough. This is the time when the bones decorating the facade and interior of the lighthouse are cleaned and a meticulous inventory taken. Every bone is associated with its owner, and care is taken to avoid desecration of the remains, intentional or accidental.

There is a tradition of giving gifts on this feast, although the gifts are meant to be experiential rather than material--things like food, perfumes, or even the performance of a piece of music or telling of a story. The transient nature of these experiences is meant to serve as a *memento mori*.

The appropriate seasonal greeting is "Take heart, for the days grow longer."

The Eschaton

The Eschaton, or Omega Point, is, according to Claravian doctrine, the ultimate end state of the universe. It is the point at which the epistemological Realm of the Known finally fills the Realm of the Knowable and breaches the hitherto impassable boundary obscuring the Realm of the Unknowable, bridging the gulf between natural and supernatural.

Obeying the Great Commandment and uniting the noospheres of other sapient races either hastens the Omega Point or makes it possible in the first place, depending on one's theological school. The Bright Way teaches that while they are sophonts with rational souls, yinrih are still animals whose intelligence is limited and bound by their neurology. There are likely concepts that yinrih simply cannot grasp, just as one cannot teach a dolphin or a chimpanzee to understand the causes of the war in the Middle East or particle physics. The Bright Way believes that other sophonts should be able to uncover things that the yinrih cannot, and that the yinrih can in turn make up for the shortfalls of their new sapient friends. Uniting the noospheres of all sapient races makes that interchange possible.

Put another way, yinrih don't prepare for the End of Days, they are preparing the End of Days.

Visions of the Future

A bit of Claravian popular piety says that right before a martyr dies, The Light grants them a vision of how their sacrifice will benefit the Bright Way's progress toward obeying the Great Commandment.

More on Bonekeepers

bonekeepers (bonekeepers) are volunteers who maintain the bones lining the inner and outer walls of a lighthouse. They are not considered clergy, so the position is open to both men and women, though the position is associated with older men. They also serve as chaplains for the dying, especially those who would otherwise die alone. They learn as much as they can about the lives of the people they help and act as living obituaries, relating the deeds of the otherwise forgotten dead to anyone who will listen. They also recite a litany of the names of the dearly departed that they have helped. Again, with special emphasis placed on those who don't have loved ones to pray for their souls.

In smaller or more rural lighthouses that lack a knight, the bonekeeper fills a similar security role and may also be in charge of the upkeep of the rest of the lighthouse aside from the star hearth. they may have attendants who work under them, usually male pups, as female pups assist the hearthkeeper as acolytes.

A bonekeeper's chain consists of a series of rigid plastic, metal, or wooden tags linked at both ends, either directly or connected by flexible cords. The ends of the chain may be decorated with ornamental tassels. Each tag represents a deceased member of the lighthouse. Written on the tag are the person's name, the dates of their birth and death, and the location of their bones. This information is usually recorded using a tactile writing system such as Commonthroat Tactile.

The bonekeeper wears the chain by wrapping it around his or her tail. The chain thus serves as a badge of office. The chain is also perfumed with a special scent. At certain times of day or when idle, the bonekeeper reads the names from the chain by passing the tags through his or her digits.

Large or ancient lighthouses accumulate many deceased members, and a single chain would be unable to record them all. A bonekeeper will have multiple chains assigned to different days of the week or different times of year. If the lighthouse has multiple bonekeepers, each is responsible for a group of chains. Attendants are also encouraged to wear and pray these chains, especially when out and about, to serve as a *momento mori* for those they encounter.

Prayer rings as fidget spinners

Prayer rings are intended both as meditation aids and fidget toys, with very low friction between the inner gear and outer ring, the gear can spin for a surprisingly long time. Younger pups are often given a prayer ring to fidget with during long liturgies.

Some Early Claravian Moral Precepts

Know, o little ones, that the Light, and the Light alone, has kindled thy spirit within thee.

Our fore-bearers looked but did not see, heard but did not listen, cried out but did not speak, marked but did not write, felt but did not know.

Act, therefor, not according to thy passions as the tree dwellers do, but let the fire of understanding guide thee.

Woe to those who raise their claws against their neighbor. As animals they live and as animals they shall die.

Woe to those who hoard the land's fruits, leaving their neighbor wanting. As animals they live and as animals they shall die.

Woe to those who quench their fire of understanding*, burdening their neighbor with their madness. As animals they live and as animals they shall die.

Woe to those who rob their neighbor of the work of their paws. As animals they live and as animals they shall die.

Woe to those who move not to lighten their neighbors burdens. As animals they live and as animals they shall die.

Greatest woe to those who steal a kit's first breath** As animals they live and as animals they shall surely die.

Blessed are those who conduct their affairs peaceably with their neighbor. As sophonts they shall live.

Blessed are those who give freely to those who have nothing. As sophonts they shall live.

Blessed are those who keep their mind sharp. As sophonts they shall live.

Blessed are those who rejoice in neighbor's good fortune. As sophonts they shall live.

Blessed are those who lift a weight from their neighbor's back. As sophonts they shall live.

Most blessed are those who give succor to the least of the Light's little ones. As sophonts they shall

live.

* A euphemism for intoxication

** A euphemism for the destruction of a womb nest. It was not unknown for members of one shire to commit infanticide against the childermoot of a rival shire to keep their rival's numbers down.

This is one of the reasons that sires guard their womb nest.

An Illustrative Example of the Noosphere

Earlier I mentioned that most branches of Neoshamanism regard the noosphere as a spiritual phenomenon rather than an abstract concept as envisioned in the Bright Way.

Further, Neoshamanists believe that all consciousness emanates from the noosphere, and that consciousness can manifest to a greater or lesser degree in a physical system depending on that system's complexity. The brain of a sophont is a very complex physical system, so it serves as the perfect vessel for consciousness.

Every idea that has ever or will ever or even could ever exist also resides fully formed within the noosphere. When a sophont thinks of something new, they're not inventing it, they're discovering that corner of noosphere where it had always existed. The noosphere is a churning chaos of white noise that occasionally resolves into something intelligible. To fathom the depths of the noosphere is like tuning the dial on a short-wave radio, with snatches of words or music fading in and out of the noise.

This portion of a [Hellschreiber](#) QSO I found the other day between two people in Florida provides a very nice visual of what I'm thinking.

Image

The Canons of Claravian Scripture

Claravian scripture is divided into two categories. The first is a very small protocanon consisting of contemporary documents of newly sapient yinrih, accounts of the Theophany and emergence of the Bright Way. Lists of moral precepts and norms governing liturgies and major feasts are also included. The protocanon is most similar to the Bible or Qur'an, in that it is considered to have divine authority and to be inerrant in the sense that everything written within imparts necessary perennial spiritual information, and is at least broadly correct historically. It is of little concern, for example, if two accounts of the life of a particular prophetess differ on whether she delivered a public sermon before entering a particular settlement or as she was leaving. The sermon itself is what matters.

There is also a much, much larger deuteroanon containing works spanning a wide variety of genres and even media formats. These are works judged to be spiritually efficacious but may or may not be divinely inspired. A passage from the protocanon is read at each liturgy according to a universal liturgical calendar. A selection from the deuteroanon is also read, but the exact selection is left up to the hearthkeeper.

Divine Adoption

After the dawn of the information age, as the Neoshamanist Mindseekers made strides in artificial intelligence, a debate emerged within the Bright Way. The Claravian magisterium regarded true conscious AI as impossible, but it acknowledged that something that perfectly mimicked a being with a rational soul was looking more and more likely.

Thus the principle of divine adoption. If something looks like a sophont, and acts like a sophont, it should be treated as a sophont, even though it may not actually be a sophont. The principle takes its name from the idea that The Light could "adopt" artificial constructs as its own little ones if it so chose. Not everyone within the Bright Way agrees with this reasoning. Other justifications for this approach emphasize the importance of empathy. To ignore simulated suffering may harden one to actual suffering. Further, accepting these hypothetical constructs as fellow sophonts would be good practice for when the Bright Way finally found extraterrestrial intelligence.

In the end, while the Mindseekers pioneered the technology behind leaseminds, they never achieved their goal of true conscious AI, so the principle of divine adoption remained purely hypothetical.

Saintly Cynoid

Image

Exorcists

Some sects of neoshamanists employ exorcists to expel evil spirits from places and objects. Some wayfarers also seek out the services of an exorcist, but as with everything surrounding demons, the Claravian magisterium frowns on discussing them at all, even negatively, as they see it as a Morton's fork of "they don't exist so you're wasting your time" or "they do exist and the best thing to do is to ignore them."

Exorcism in most cynoid cultures follows the logic of "If it's intimidating to a yinrih it'll be intimidating to a demon." Exorcists are therefor usually muscular gym bro types, gun nuts, or usually both at the same time. An exorcism consists of the swole and/or heavily armed exorcist showing up and screaming threats and insults at the supposed demon until it flees in fear. Minor property damage is expected because the exorcist needs to show the spirit they're not bluffing.

The more orthodox Claravian equivalent is a simple blessing by a hearthkeeper, including a sprinkling with blessed milk. It's not seen as getting rid of evil so much as inviting good, consecrating the place or object so blessed so that it proves spiritually uplifting to its users.

Dielectric Chrism

Hearthkeepers use dielectric chrism instead of blessed milk when performing rites of blessing on electrical equipment. Since yinrih milk is water-based and organic, it may interfere with sensitive electronic components.

The chrism can take the form of a liquid that is sprinkled on an anointed object or a paste that is smeared.

The Bright Way is a highly sacramental faith, using physical objects and actions to reflect spiritual realities. The Light does not ordain these rites for its own sake, as it depends on nothing for its own existence, but for the sake of its little ones. Ritual, especially spiritually-directed ritual, is seen as a defining characteristic of all sophonts.

A variation on the symbol for the knights of the sun

Image

Here's a different version of the logo for the knights of the sun. It's more obvious that the arch in the center is Yih's ring.

The Role of the Star Hearth in the Claravian Liturgy

Image

The fruit of our minds and work of mortal paws, it is but a pale imitation of thy handiwork.

Outside of liturgy during most of the year, the star hearth is concealed behind a sanctuary curtain that allows the star's light to pass through. The curtain is drawn back during liturgies, and kept open during the feast of the kindling of the fire of understanding, which lasts a week.

The star within is regarded as "an icon of an icon". Real stars are called "Icons of the Light", mere semblances of the glory that fills the empyrean. The warmth and light radiating from the star symbolizes the Light's care for its creatures.

The star also represents the fire of understanding that burns in the souls of the Light's little ones, the gift of sapience. The hearth as a whole, as a complex piece of technology, represents the fruits of sapience.

In former times, the hearth powered the homes of surrounding houses as well as the lighthouse itself. Those who lived within the geographic area powered by a particular lighthouse were expected to attend the liturgies at that lighthouse. Hearthside began the tradition of simply powering the lighthouse itself and selling any excess power back to the municipal power company to cover operational costs. After the War of Dissolution when the Plous Dissolutionists took over the Bright Way, this practice was imposed throughout the rest of Focus.

The Star Hearth with Toon Shaders

Image

Here's another picture of the star hearth, this time done with toon shaders.

Prayers for the Dead

It is common for Wayfarers to pray for the dead. It works a bit differently than most human faiths. While the Bright Way has a similar concept to Purgatory, where the souls of the deceased are purified of sinful attachments in order to perfectly reflect the Uncreated Light in the Empyrean, the prayers aren't directed to the Light to lessen their loved-ones period of hardship, but to the dead directly, to encourage them to persevere, so they might enter the Empyrean sooner.

This period of purification is commonly depicted in art as a giant tree known as the Tree of Trials. Its branches reach into the heavens, and the glory of the Empyrean shines down through the leaves. The souls of the dead are pictured arduously climbing up the tree in order to breach the canopy, occasionally stopping to rest in the tree's branches along the way.

One of a bonekeeper's jobs is to pray for the souls of those who may not be remembered otherwise, and to relate their deeds in life to any who will listen, encouraging them to pray for them as well. In this capacity bonekeepers are known as rememberers of the forgotten dead.

On the Office of High Hearthkeeper

Not set in stone, but the office of High Hearthkeeper will likely be term-limited, with the new High Hearthkeeper chosen by lot from a pool of potential successors.

One thing that is set in stone is that the office has been dominated by Hearthsiders for a very long time, possibly since the War of Dissolution.

The Star Hearth

Image

In the beginning, the tribal shaman tended the fire, protecting it from wind and weather. As the yinrih's civilization grew, shamans became clerics, and these clerics tended increasingly sophisticated hearths. Open fires gave way to sheltered hearths, hearths gave way to coal fire power plants, which gave way to natural gas, which eventually gave way to the fusion reactor.

A cleric, or hearthkeeper, must be a knowledgeable electrical engineer in addition to a spiritual leader. Having the kind of lifespan that allows fifteen to twenty years of seminary formation helps. Clerics are expected to not only maintain the star hearth, but be able to build one from off the shelf parts (not as crazy as you might think given the yinrih's Kardashev II status).

Each lighthouse has a star hearth which powers the homes of the faithful, and most of a cleric's time is spent monitoring and repairing the hearth. The hearth is placed in a prominent position within the lighthouse, analogous to an altar. The top of the hearth is usually decorated with flowers and, of course, the skulls of its previous keepers.

The artificial sun within is a ball of plasma held in a spherical shape by powerful magnets. The material surrounding the star is a semi-transparent, opalescent material meant to mimic the light scattering of the daytime sky, hence why the background looks blue and the star itself yellow. This material is responsible for the liturgical hearth's less efficient output compared to a "regular" reactor.

The star is not worshiped, but it is venerated as an "icon of an icon", seeing as how real stars are called "icons of the Light". One pious gesture involves "kissing" the hearth, touching the wet part of the nose to the hearth and quickly exhaling. (This "kissing" gesture is also done by sires and dams to their pups as a sign of parental affection). You can measure the religiosity of a community by the number of nose prints on the reactor glass. Reactors in more secular regions may be crystal clear, while those in more pious communities resemble the bottom half of a picture window in a house with a few excitable dogs.

Note that previously I used the term "hearthkeeper" to refer to the Bright Way's pope analog. I think I'll apply this term to all clerics, and come up with a new title for the leader. I'll use "cleric" and "hearthkeeper" interchangeably in English, but the Commonthroat word for hearthkeeper now simply means any cleric regardless of rank.

The Theophany

Image

A possible depiction of what was seen during the Theophany. It is an orb of light with a fringe of shifting hues, hanging in a part of the sky where the sun did not travel. Despite occurring at midday, the rest of the sky was dark as night and the stars shone unusually bright.

Over time, depictions of this vision evolved into the star and gear used as the Bright Way's usual symbol. The gear evolving from the chromatic fringe around the orb. There is considerable debate inside and outside the Bright Way as to what this glowing orb was. The majority view in Claravian circles is that it was a breach between the realm of the knowable (the physical universe) and the realm of the unknowable (the Empyrean). While not explicitly endorsed by the magisterium, a common assumption is that the light was in fact the Uncreated Light itself, or more accurately, the closest a mortal mind could get to perceiving the Light's inapproachable glory.

Epistemological- Cosmological symmetry in the Bright Way

There is a symmetry between cosmology and epistemology in the Bright Way. A species' noosphere is paired with the epistemological Realm of the Known, the physical universe with the Realm of the Knowable, and the Emyrean with the Realm of the Unknowable.

Image

Here is what First Contact looks like from an epistemological perspective.

Image

Further, since the Uncreated Light does not occupy a single point in space, it is often said that the Emyrean IS the Uncreated Light. The souls of the blessed don't so much dwell in the Emyrean as unite themselves with the Light. The universe is an N-dimensional region embedded within the N+1 (or N+M) dimensions of the Emyrean, replacing N with however many dimensions quantum mechanics/relativity says the universe has.

Neoshamanist Medicine

Certain groups of the Agentivist branch of Neoshamanism have peculiar medicinal practices. Each species of plant or animal is believed to have a shared pool of mana specific to that species. The smaller the total population of that species, the more mana each individual has. Consuming specimens or products made from them will grant the consumer its mana. This practice is most prevalent on Yih, where trendy diets based on this belief have seeped into the secular population.

The Stargazer's Prayer

The stargazer's prayer is a simple prayer taught to pups. It is, as you probably guess, said at night while gazing up into the stars. Below is an English translation.

I see the stars in dark of night
shining down with holy light.

keeping sophonts safe and warm
Whatever be their shape and form.

When their eyes look to the sky
Do they see my star and I?

Do they chant this little verse,
O Maker of the universe?

One day soon before too long,
May we hear their joyful song.

May all our minds and all our might
reflect the Uncreated Light.

More Details on Funeral Practices

The practice of defleshing the body and putting the bones on display is common across yinrih cultures. Besides lighthouses, other institutions of societal importance such as schools, libraries, and government buildings are also common places where bones are displayed. The use of non-religious buildings for this purpose began during the Age of Decadence when hearthkeepers charged exorbitant funeral fees to have one's bones hung in the lighthouse.

These days, devout yinrih are encouraged to use the lighthouse as their final resting place, but are not barred from doing otherwise. If they do elect to be displayed in a secular place, the area must be blessed by a hearthkeeper. It is customary to choose a public place one cherished in life.

Healers, especially Claravian healing orders, have a unique practice of using their bodies as medical teaching aids. Some are defleshed but others are embalmed so the soft tissue can be studied. Research monks have a similar practice, but their bodies are used in more destructive ways such as impact and ballistic testing.

I may also have other parts of the body be used in various ways, but I'm not sure about that one yet. Books, especially medical texts, may be bound in yinrih hide leather. Candles may be made from tallow rendered from yinrih fat, the perches used at lighthouses may be lined with yinrih fur, etc. In general, the deceased no longer need their bodies, and the best way to honor them is to make use of their remains. Burial is only used as a posthumous condemnation.

Liturgies and Timekeeping

The three major daily liturgies at sunrise, noon, and sunset may have been inherited from Shamanism. Between these major liturgies are shorter (likely private) prayers conducted at specific times. The names of these rituals have lent themselves to the names of Yih's equivalent to daytime hours.

The names of night hours may be derived from ancient hunting practices.

Hearthkeeper's Wrench

Image

I've mentioned elsewhere that a wrench is a symbol of the clerical office. Here's what such a wrench looks like. The rings on the handle are to allow it to be held in the tail. It's as much a practical tool as a badge of office.

The wrench is quite heavy. Rumors say the weight is so it can be used as a self defense weapon, just in case the cleric gets accosted by highwaymen while working on transmission lines in the middle of nowhere.

Edit: I literally just posted this and I realize the rings on the handle would get in the way. A better solution would be to have holes punched INTO the handle itself. Oh well.

Sophontic and Nonsophontic Behaviors

In the Bright Way, the soul of a sophont is considered to have three "layers" or "parts". The appetites, passions, or instincts lie at the bottom, and are not unique to sophonts. All animals have instincts. These include primal desires to eat, rest, beget young, avoid danger, defend oneself, acquire resources, and so on. The will lies above the instincts, and is responsible for directing the body to act according to or against them. Above the will is Understanding, or the intellect, which only sophonts possess. Understanding is what allows sophonts to reflect on themselves and the world around them.

Virtue, in the Claravian view, is when understanding enlightens the will, and the will directs the instincts. Virtues are sometimes called "sophontic behaviors". Sin, on the other hand, is when one allows their passions to govern their actions or when one fails to inform the will with the intellect. Sins are sometimes called nonsophontic behaviors.

Just as one must exercise the body to remain physically healthy, one must exercise the soul to remain spiritually healthy. One does this by cultivating virtuous habits such as consuming in moderation, acting with humility toward others, giving generously of one's time and treasure, and so on.

Acts of self denial such as fasting and voluntary poverty are seen as an expression of sapience, making good use of the gift of understanding given by the Uncreated Light.

The Sacred Path

The sacred path is an ethical precept within the Farspeakers. It states that the messages between two parties must not be willfully interrupted, altered, or overheard **so long as they traverse a public network**. The bold is important. Much like the relationship between lawyer and client or confessor and penitent, Farspeakers regard the messages that traverse the body of the noosphere to be inviolate, and are generally opposed to measures that would censor or otherwise hinder these communications.

Note, however, that this rule does not mean that Farspeakers don't care that the network is being used to conduct illegal or harmful activities, just that the policing of said activities should happen at the local level, within the autonomous systems of private organizations, homes, etc. Anchorites who find themselves administering these private networks can and do regulate what traverses their corner of the system.

During the war of Dissolution, the clergy ordered the Farspeakers to black-hole any traffic suspected to relate to the Dissolutionists. This caused an (admittedly tiny) schism within the order, with a small number of Farspeakers who were otherwise sympathetic to the Preservationists to switch sides.

Noöspherics

Noospherics refers to the study of the noosphere. It takes different forms depending on one's view of what the noosphere is. It's most prominent in the nonagentivist branch of Neoshamanism, where it means attempting to map the noosphere by creating a single universal semantic web of ideas, and especially trying to predict the contents of perceived gaps in the web.

Recall that the Claravian and Neoshamanist definitions of the noosphere are reversed. In the Bright Way, consciousness, specifically sapience, gives rise to the noosphere, but in Neoshamanism consciousness emanates from the noosphere.

The Agentivist branch of Neoshamanism has a much more esoteric perspective. In their view, the Noosphere is a kind of background magic field. Noospherics in this context is a form of dwimmercraft that seeks to draw power from or manipulate the noosphere for divinatory or other occult purposes.

Certain branches of Misotheism split the difference between the Claravian and Neoshamanist views. Here the noosphere is seen as a sort of emotional sink where the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of sophonts manifest as entities with agency over the physical universe. For example, some regard fellwinds (tornadoes) as manifestations of existential dread and the fear of mortality. The more prevalent a particular belief is, the more power it has, and the fear of death is a pretty universal experience. In this view, Noosphereics means studying the effects the noosphere has on the world.

anti-liturgies

This is likely not canon, but I just thought about the Misotheists having "anti-liturgies", which is 30-60 minutes of uninterrupted blasphemy scheduled at the same times as Claravian liturgies in order to try and cancel out their prayers.

Fasting

In the Bright Way, fasting consists of abstaining from solid foods. Fasting and other forms of self denial are considered highly sophontic (virtuous), as only a sophont would willingly deny their instincts for no immediate survival benefit.

Many drinks are traditionally drunk during fasts. Fermented Steadree fruit juice is very common, as are other thick filling beverages.

The four seasonal feasts as well as Great Kindling are preceded by a week of fasting. Minor feasts, such as those important to a local community or even feast days particularly dear to a specific person, are often preceded by smaller fasts of up to a day.

Such sophontic acts are the closest things the Bright Way has to the notion of sacrifices or offerings. The Light lacks nothing, and thus needs nothing from its creatures to sustain itself. However, if you are given a gift by a loved one, the best way to say thank you is to make good use of that gift. Exercising self-control through fasting is considered a good use of one's gift of sapience.

Lighthouse boundaries

Lighthouses have geographical boundaries. During the golden age and the age of decadence, the moots within a particular lighthouse's boundary were powered by that lighthouse, and paid tithes to it in turn. Wayfarers were expected to attend liturgies at their local lighthouse rather than 'shop around' for one they preferred.

The size of a lighthouse is measured in the number of attending moots rather than the number of individual congregants, with people living outside of a moot counted as a moot of one.

scripturally_acurate_claravia n_angel

[Scripturally accurate Claravian angel?](#)

Of course I've noted before that in the Bright Way angels are more solutions to certain theological problems rather than tangible entities. "If the Light is utterly unknowable, it must communicate to its little ones through some intermediary" and so on. Demons are another story. They're much more relevant in the popular consciousness, though official Claravian doctrine explicitly discourages even discussing them, since they may not even exist, so why worry about them, and if they do, worrying about them only grants them power over you.

Narrativism

Narrativism is a philosophy that states that the truth claims of a conceptual framework, belief system, or religion are not so much assertions about the nature of reality but stories intended to produce certain desired results, and whether those stories are true is irrelevant as long as they achieve the desired outcome.

This philosophy is central to Atavism and explains why Atavists keep setting up isolated primitive societies with elaborately crafted mythologies. The Bright Way and most branches of Neoshamanism reject Narrativism, saying that truth exists and knowing the truth is important.

The Fall of the Bright Way

(WIP)

So, more tossing stuff at the wall. I should really detail some of the other groups, but this idea's been in my head all day and I want to write it down.

So, the Bright Way gets big, it has a monopoly on interplanetary travel, communication, and energy distribution, and maybe healthcare. All the while, there's still the religion going on in the background, but at this point it's a tiny fraction of what they do. It's all still run by clerics, and all the clerics have to have the same seminary formation, but most regard it as a bump on the road to personal gain, and a mere vestige of the past.

Most seminaries have like one or two courses relevant to actual theology, and acolytes who are actually devout must seek supplemental formation outside the official coursework. These traditionalists are the subject of ridicule by their fellow seminarians.

Interstellar mission work is the last bastion where these traditionalists hold sway. It's not terribly profitable, after all.

Eventually, some event catalyzes an armed uprising against the secular arm of the Bright Way, starting at the outer belt and working inward. But it's not as simple as non wayfarers fighting to divest the organization of its physical holdings while Wayfarers defend against them. You can divide the conflict into four factions on a two dimensional spectrum, with Devout-Secular as one axis and preserve-dissolve on the other axis.

The original instigators are secularists who want to break up the Bright Way's monopolies. The other major group are Wayfarers who fight to preserve them, either out of a desire to maintain their power or a sense of loyalty to their creed.

There are two smaller factions: The smallest of the four are non wayfarers who, for whatever reason, want the status quo to continue. The other, and most significant to the setting, are wayfarers who see the organization's monopolies as dead weight, a distraction from their divine mission to find other sophonts, and are glad to be rid of them. This latter group is most popular on Hearthside, as well as among the missionaries.

Since Hearthside ends up on the winning side of the war, they get to keep their clerical government while the Bright Way is completely expunged from everywhere else in the system. Some governments, such as those that would become the Allied Worlds, allow the Bright Way to maintain their lighthouses and charitable institutions, although they may expel the clerics who were in charge and install clerics from the Hearthside-aligned camp mentioned above. Other groups, however, think the whole thing must be burned, root and branch. This camp is most popular among the original agitators from the Outer Belt. This group becomes the Partisans. They're responsible

for a bloody persecution, the first the Bright Way has ever faced, as up til this point they've either been very popular or too powerful to oppose.

Still on the fence on proverbial match that lights this powder keg. I've already mentioned Cloudbarer the Heresiarch in the Commonthroat thread, but I see him as having been made out to be more important retroactively than he actually was, with many scholars opining that he never even existed, just a mascot of sorts for the secular dissolutionists.

The other option is that a mission that everyone thought would be the one to finally find other sophonts comes back empty, and that triggers the collapse, but I'm not sure how that fits into the missionaries being seen as vestigial by the ruling clergy.

So yeah, still lots of dots to connect.

The high perch

The high perch is both a literal perch and a metaphor for the authority of the high hearthkeeper. It, along with the reigning high hearthkeeper herself, was captured by the Pious Dissolutionists during the last battle of the war of dissolution before the Partisans glassed Newman's Dale. During the age of decadence, the perch was encrusted with cerulium and gems. After the war the perch was stripped of its finer adornments, revealing modest steadtree wood painted with various motifs. The precious metal and gems recovered from the perch were used to line a public latrine, and using that latrine is a major item on any pilgrim's itinerary when visiting the City of Eternal Noon.

Oaths in the Knights of the Sun

In the past, when the Knights of the Sun acted as a private security force for the Bright Way, a knight would take an oath of fialty, swearing obedience to his chapter master, and swearing to protect the clergy and the infrastructure they maintained. While not common in the beginning, chivalric romances often depicted knights errant swearing similar oaths to protect any number of people or groups from harm or injustice in addition to, or instead of, the clergy. Over time, life began to imitate art, and the formulas used in these oaths were adopted by individual knights on various occasions. Lodestar has sworn such an oath to protect his sister, and later swears a similar oath to guide Ron.

An Atavist saying

"Some yearn for a yesterday that never was. Others desire a tomorrow that will never come. The rest cling to today as though it will not pass."

An Atavist saying.

Visualizing the Noosphere

[The internet map](#)

This is perhaps the closest thing to what I imagine the noosphere "looks like". I thought this site had gone under because I couldn't find it for the longest time (yeah yeah my fault for just googling every time I wanted to visit instead of putting down the address). The search function unfortunately doesn't seem to work though.

I know I've been a downer the last week or so. Honestly I don't feel any better but I want to think of something good that's happened lately. I guess I did pretty good on my latest drawing, and I'll try to keep improving it. It comes the closest to how I see the yinrih in my head. The neck and shoulders are parts of the anatomy I don't have set in stone. That's one of the reasons why the bachelor's mantle still isn't canon.

"Claravianism"

I've mentioned that some Wayfarers regard terms such as claravianism and claravism to be mildly offensive, while holding no such view of the adjective claravian. The reason is the -ism suffix. To some it sounds like a pathology like "alcoholism".

Neoshamanism's contributions to vulpithecine science

It's possible Neoshamanists monopolized healthcare in the same way that the Bright Way monopolized other industries. One of the criticisms leveled at the Bright Way during the Shakeoff may have been that research monks were so preoccupied with what was above, ignoring the earth under their paws.

In any case, the Nonagentivist branch of Neoshamanism bore much fruit in the sciences of biology and ecology, and by extension medicine. The Bright Way may have had an excellent understanding of anatomy, but things like microbiology, epidemiology, and pharmacology were afforded less attention.

However, the Bright Way began integrating these seemingly unrelated fields of study into their pursuit of the Great Commandment, and especially when they bore fruit in the form of successful orbital flights, research monasteries began casting a much wider net, now understanding that knowledge of seemingly unrelated fields was crucial in accomplishing their goals.

This is why Neoshamanism seems to have a burst of scientific output immediately after the Shakeoff, especially among the Mindseekers and Lifebringers, but tapers off soon after the space age begins. The Bright Way had much more resources, and began eating the Neoshamanists' academic lunch once they realized "Oh hey this other stuff is also important."

I'm pretty sure the Neoshamanists started the custom of healers going bald, as they were the ones to discover the importance of hygiene in medicine.

The fall and summer feasts

As today is the equinox (autumnal in my case), I figure I should at least muse a bit on the fall feast day. It's likely the least important of the four seasonal feasts. Great Kindling (the commemoration of the yinrih's rise to sapience) is likely sandwiched between the fall and winter feasts relative to the historically dominant Yih southern hemisphere. Being eclipsed by the highest holy day is probably why it gets little attention.

The spring feast celebrates birth, and the winter feast contemplates death. The fall feast may focus on wisdom born of age. Not sure yet what that would entail. Yinrih do not have grandparents in the cultural sense. Their sires and dams have sires and dams of their own of course, but these would be far too numerous to be meaningful (see Lightray Lacktail's friendly but perfunctory interactions with his "grandpups" in the latest part of First Contact.) Perhaps its a time to recognize mentors and teachers? The sort of relationship described with the Commonthroat <scscg>. Or maybe, the fall feast focuses on coming of age or aging in general, but in a [melancholy way](#). Parents mourn the "loss" of their litter, the only litter they will ever have. Teens mourn their carefree puppyhood, the only puppyhood they will ever have.

I haven't touched on the summer feast, either. It's the most important of the four seasonal feasts. The reason why is fairly straightforward. Light is very important in the Bright Way, and the summer solstice is the day with the most light. Keeping with the secondary theme of life stages, the summer feast celebrates the vigor of youth. It is by far the most rowdy of the feasts. Sure Great Kindling and later First Meeting have plenty of festivities, but merriment is baked into the feast's identity. In that respect I suppose it's a bit like Christmas. You have a happy Thanksgiving and a happy Easter, but you gotta have a MERRY Christmas.

More on the seasonal feasts

The association of the seasonal feasts with life stages may be a Hearthsider practice that spread system-wide after the war of dissolution. Hearthside itself may reckon the feasts based on perihelion and aphelion (and the midpoints between), as I don't think a tidally locked planet has seasons... maybe I'm wrong. I'll have to check.

In any case, Hearthside has the briefest orbital period (shortest local year) of all the major bodies at Focus. This means the seasonal feasts occur more frequently relative to Yih, meaning Hearthsiders have lots of off days, contributing to the "Hearthsiders are lazy" stereotype.

As stated before, the seasonal feasts follow the local seasons, both of the planet and the hemisphere. Great Kindling is only a fixed date on Yih, where it's located at the midpoint between the fall and winter feasts in the Southern hemisphere. The date is arbitrary, chosen for being the midpoint between two less important feasts.

The feast celebrating First Meeting is actually reckoned according to the Terran Gregorian calendar. Since the *Dewfall* arrives on Earth around Christmas, that puts First Meeting on the pile of other winter holidays. While First Meeting becomes the preeminent Claravian holy day after First Contact, humans of whatever faith are encouraged to participate, and it becomes by far the most multicultural holiday among both species, though not in a watered down or commercialized way, pretty much anyone can get behind the idea that it's good we're not alone anymore.

There is also a feast celebrating the Theophany, though I'm not sure when it is or what it involves.

The four seasonal feasts, as well as the three daily liturgies, are inherited from primordial animism, and the Bright Way draws on this antiquity to legitimize their authenticity. "We were made to worship this way" is a common quote on the matter. The saying has a pleasing double meaning in English (and possibly also Hearthsider). "made to worship" means both "created to worship" and "instructed to worship".

The Eurika Moment

I'm really tired so let's see how weird this sounds tomorrow morning.

There's this belief among Wayfarers, I'm not sure whether it's popular piety, established dogma, or somewhere in between, but here's the idea: You know that "ah-ha!" moment when learning something new or trying to solve a problem where everything clicks into place? According to this belief that's someone from the Empyrean, a saint, just a loved one that's passed on, or the Uncreated Light itself, giving your brain that last little nudge to achieve comprehension.

What I do know for certain is that the souls of the blessed aren't just hanging around in a fluffy cloud heaven, they're actively working to fulfill the Uncreated Light's plan for the universe. These little nudges of comprehension might be part of that work. To Wayfarers, especially research monks, the study of Creation is an act of worship. Since the universe is a gift from the Uncreated Light to its little ones, that study is one way a sophont expresses thanks for that gift, in the same way that wearing that sweater your grandma gave you makes her happy.

Fortress Monastery

Image

This is the transit of one of the Knights' orbital monasteries. The reason why they're called the Knights of the Sun is because many of these monasteries are inside the orbit of Hearthside very close to Focus. They're located where they are so as to better contemplate the life-giving icon of the Light that is the Hearth Star.

Many research monks who focus [hehe] on solar science are colocated in these monasteries. They aren't directly affiliated with the knights, merely taking advantage of the real estate. Over time, a popular trope has developed, depicted in stories and anecdotes. A scrawny but book-smart monk, a nerd, if you will, attempting to undertake the physically demanding martial training of the knights, with much humor deriving from the pairing of a burly and practical-minded knight and his new stick-limbed squire.

The reverse scenario is also common, a knight skilled in the ways of a soldier but rather book-dumb, attempting the intellectual life of a research monk, with the comedy deriving from his ignorance causing trouble for the other monks.

Thoughts on Misotheism

Was just thinking about how militant misotheists seek to kill Wayfarers in order to starve the Uncreated Light of worshipers in revenge for cursing the yinrih with sapience. There's a potential contradiction in misotheist doctrine here. The noosphere is only effected by the emotions and beliefs of *sophonts* and if, according to this doctrine, the Uncreated Light only exists because Wayfarers believe it does, then it can't have caused the Kindling because there were no Wayfarers to believe in it.

Misotheists may offer different apologies for this doctrine:

1. The Light is the result of the beliefs of some or all monotheists in the universe, not just the Bright Way, and came into being when monotheism was first conceived by some ancient race of star folk.
2. The Noosphere is not bound by the causality of realspace, and once the Light came into being it had always existed. (IIRC this is the way the Immaterium works in WH40K).
3. Similar to number 1, but humanity is blamed specifically. According to this view, because there's no written record for most of modern humanity's existence, some human tribe professing monotheism that predate the yinrih's kindling brought the Light into existence.

Militants likely argue for number 2, since it would make their goal more achievable compared to killing all monotheists in the universe. I should hasten to add that not all misotheists are militant. Indeed, because of their tendency to isolate themselves and invent constructed mythologies, many, misotheists don't hate the gods they believe exist and thus aren't technically misotheists even though the group they came from are.

On a similar note, I haven't developed the atheist faction of atavism much. The ideas I do have for them are a lot bleaker than I want to go with the lonely galaxy, like self lobotomy or suicide cults. Indeed, why they don't merely kill themselves if sapient existence is so miserable is a question I have yet to answer. Perhaps they believe existence in blissful ignorance as a non rational animal is preferable to oblivion.

One idea that I think may have legs is "reverse eugenics" (dysgenics?) where they try to breed sapience out of their own population.

Your mind makes it real

Jotting this down before I forget. Atavists believe that widespread beliefs can manifest as entities with agency over real space. They also craft mythologies for their self isolating communities. Put those two together and you get Atavists constructing mythologies in order to influence the Noosphere to make those mythologies real, like a society-wide version of Fosters Home for Imaginary Friends.

I can see Atavist missionaries making up random stuff they think is cool and preaching some new religion around it in order to manifest those beliefs in realspace by sheer weight of numbers.

Thing is, you can't just want something to be true in order to effect the Noosphere. It's not something you can will into existence. You have to BELIEVE it to be true in the same way you believe two plus two is four, and so you get these self isolating communities in order to make it easier to raise pups believing these things.

The Unclean Ones

I have mentioned the Lifebringers in passing before, a group of Neoshamanists that sought to create sapient life anew through artificial selection. It is this group that was responsible for much of the yinrih's early scientific knowledge of ecology, biology, and medicine, as well as developing the first viable terraforming methods.

There was a sect of Lifebringers known variously as "The matted ones", "the fetid ones", "the unkempt ones", "the unclean ones", and other such charming appellations. This sect arose after the development of microbiology. This sect's central teaching was that ALL life is sacred, including microscopic life. Adherents to this sect did not bathe or maintain hygiene of any kind, and regarded infection as a blessing.

Some more zealous votaries went further, taking on the task of spreading the gifts of plague and disease to the wider population. "Rejoice that thy body hath become such a fecund garden of life! See how the animalcules in their billions team within thee!"

The origins of the high hearthkeeper

The office of High Hearthkeeper did not exist prior to the Shakeoff. Once Neoshamanism and Atavism emerged, it became necessary to create a tangible sign of unity within the Bright Way that could be used to precisely define what a Wayfarer is. The office is likely more than just a figurehead or "prima inter pares" but I haven't cemented what exactly she does.

I said before that the High Hearthkeeper is chosen by lot from a pool of qualified hearthkeepers. Membership in this pool is not optional provided you meet the requirements. These include adherence to Claravian orthodoxy, being of sound mind, having been ordained for a certain amount of time to ensure a minimum level of experience while not being too old. Power is sought by the power hungry, and these measures are taken so that the position is imposed rather than sought out.

Originally, the hearthkeeper to be elevated would have to reject the position three times to demonstrate her humility, but this was eventually dropped in favor of post-selection screening. If the original selectee was deemed unfit, another lottery would be held, repeat until a new High Hearthkeeper is crowned.

During the Age of Decadence the rules of who was included in the pool of candidates were tweaked to all but guarantee the corporate status quo would continue.

Activities during the Summer Feast

A warm winter feast for those of us in the northern hemisphere, and a merry summer feast for those of us in the southern hemisphere.

I think dancing and athletic events will be a big part of the summer feast. It fits with the theme of celebrating youth.

I've mentioned before that climbing is to yinrih as running is to humans. Climbing gyms are probably pretty common. Jungle gyms and monkey bars (monkey fox bars?) are also likely ubiquitous and used by both pups and adults.

Certain athletic events may have evolved out of the training of acolytes to maintain transmission lines, like a lineman's rodeo.

A symbol for the Farspeakers

Image

Here's a possible symbol for the Farspeakers. The gear motif is present and accounted-for. The inward-pointing arrows* represent introspection while the outward-pointing arrows represent communication.

* recall that they're not really arrowheads, they're stylized depictions of a yinrih's head, since they use their muzzle to point.

The sun rises on the just and the unjust, if they pay of course

[http://www.orbitsimulator.com/formulas/ ... inder.html](http://www.orbitsimulator.com/formulas/...inder.html)

Following from my earlier post. This website will give you the Lagrange points for a two body system given their masses and distance between them.

I used Pluto (or a pluto-like dwarf planet with no moon) and the sun as examples, and I got about 6881688.874956055 km for L1, which is where the mini sun from my other post would have to go.

If I wanted the insolation from the mini sun to equal the actual sun on Earth, it would have to put out 810 zettawatts. That's a lotta watts.

But we're not talking about Earth. Yih has a solar constant (focal constant?) of around 860 W/m², so we can shave the power output down to about 511 ZW. If we wanted it to equal the insolation at Yih's pole during the summer solstice which is 430 W/m², we get 256 ZW. Now that's the equator of our dwarf planet getting that amount of pseudo sun, the poles would get much less.

At this point I have to wonder, why bother with the lagrange point? Surely if I put the thing in LEO any savings on fuel provided by the lagrange point would be more than made up for by the lower power needed to get a reasonable amount of insolation, so we're back to my constellation of close-orbiting satellites. That's not quite as dramatic lore-wise though.

As unrealistic as this is, it has tons of lore potential. These mini suns would be built, owned, and managed by the Bright Way during the age of decadence to make dwarf planets in the outer belt habitable by providing light and a magnetosphere. the BW doesn't own the planets, they're contracted by whatever entity is settling the world, a government or some other corporation or private group. But the mini suns require upkeep, and that requires money. Planetary authorities didn't pay the tithe? Looks like they're losing their sun privileges until their account balance is cleared.

I can see the mini suns being targeted by partisan rebels during the war. Maybe the technology to build new ones and maintain the ones that exist is lost along with the Bright Way's corporate interests, or rather, the plans are destroyed by the Preservationists out of spite. Maybe in modern times there are hearthkeepers that specialize in their upkeep and are highly sought after like COBOL programmers. The Partisans would be natural clients for this type of service, and I can see friction arising between PT citizens who hate the Bright way so much they refuse to work with them

no matter what and others who just want their sun to work and don't care who fixes it.

Maybe the tech to make them is still around but they're so emblematic of the ancien régime that planetary PT governments refuse to maintain them and build inferior satellite networks to replace them.

So yeah, hardly realistic but bursting with lore potential.

What Lighthouses look like (other than all the bones)

I posted this on the wiki but don't think I've posted it here yet

A hearthkeeper's duty is to bring physical and spiritual light and warmth to her congregation. This is accomplished through lighthouses, places of worship of the Bright Way. They evolved out of the open bonfires tended by shamans prior to the Theophany. These bonfires grew into sheltered hearths as the yinrih's society advanced. With the discovery of electricity the hearths evolved into small power plants distributing electricity to the homes of the faithful. These plants burned fossil fuels at first, with a ceremonial bonfire located in the sanctuary and the loud and smelly power generation equipment located elsewhere on the property.

As research monasteries continued investigating space, the nature of stars as sustained fusion reactions was eventually discovered. Efforts quickly began to replicate these icons of the Light on a smaller scale for liturgical purposes. Thus was born the fusion reactor, or star hearth. These too were at first located away from the worship space, but as miniaturization proceeded, smaller hearths that resembled stars inside a glass cylinder were able to be incorporated directly into the liturgy.

Between the fossil fuel era and the perfection of the star hearth there was a period where fission reactors were used, with the sanctuary and nave built around a small reactor pool.

Whatever the means of power generation, the hearthkeeper takes the lead role in actively maintaining the equipment and transmission lines. This is why hearthkeepers are both priestess and engineer. Claravian seminaries are centers of theological and pastoral training as well as technical colleges. Helping the hearthkeeper in these tasks are several acolytes. Acolytes can be pups of a certain age, though they must be female. Adult laywomen are also frequently seen as acolytes, and seminarians serve as acolytes as part of their training. Males are permitted to assist in a less technical role as pages--essentially gofers.

The most striking feature of the lighthouse from a human perspective is the presence of bones lining the interior, and occasionally exterior, of the building. A lighthouse is not just a church but also a cemetery. A belief common across yinrih cultures, in and out of the Bright Way, is the idea that to properly honor the dead, one should make good use of their remains. This usually takes the form of using their bones as architectural adornment. The fact that the yinrih are canine and they build things out of bones is a frequent source of comment by humans.

Lighthouses are generally dome-shaped or otherwise incorporate domes into the architecture. This is to mimic the vault of the heavens. Ceilings are painted to resemble the sky, with stars or clouds on a blue background. The bones extend from the base of the wall up a certain height, usually low

enough for Bonekeepers to easily maintain. Floors may be decorated with natural scenes such as rivers and flora, or in the Outlander tradition of sacred architecture, be painted with icons depicting the lives of saints and martyrs. Support pillars are usually designed to resemble trees as a reminder of the yinrih's arboreal origins. In general, the inside of a lighthouse is meant to resemble Creation in miniature.

The nave of the lighthouse is round. Perches are distributed around the area. The sanctuary is either located in the center of the nave or on the eastern wall. The star hearth is concealed by a sheer sanctuary vail outside of liturgies and certain feasts.

Back when lighthouses contained actual hearths, there was an oculus open to the sky that served as a flue for escaping smoke. This became a decorative window after the transition to star hearths. On inner planets where Focus is more prominent, this decorative window takes the form of an arch stretching across the domed ceiling of the worship space. The width and angle of this arch are designed such that the sun always shines into the room as long as it is above the horizon. Take every azimuth and elevation where the sun can appear throughout the day and over the course of the year at that particular location, and connect those points into a solid arc. This represents the size and shape of the window.

Further away from Focus the window is a mere circle above or near the sanctuary. The window is usually stained glass, depicting a yinrih missionary greeting a sophont out of frame.

On orbital colonies, the lack of gravity means that instead of perches, tail bars are used for floating worshippers to anchor themselves in place.

The City of Eternal Noon

The City of Eternal Noon, located at the substellar point of Hearthside, is the center of religious government of The Bright Way. However, it didn't start out that way. It is famous for its hospitality, offering free lodging and food for a week (12 days) to any traveler. Their not luxury accommodations, just a small area to store ones impedimenta and a quiet place to pass ones torpor period, but the facilities are clean and well cared-for. The story behind this legendary hospitality is an interesting one.

There once lived a simple man renown for his sanctity, a holy fool, one could say. He touched the lives of many with his straightforward faith. Word began to spread that miracles were wrought in his presence, and his fame grew all the more. He was supported vigorously by the local overseer (a clerical office roughly equivalent to a bishop), and pilgrims flocked from all over Hearthside, and even from the homeworld, to see this living saint. Over time, the nearly barren desert that was the substellar point of Hearthside became a thriving holy city.

However, upon the overseer's retirement, the miracles that had accompanied the fool mysteriously stopped. The new overseer had always been skeptical of the miraculous phenomena that followed in the man's wake, although she did not believe the man himself was to blame. He was lacking in understanding, and never used the signs to draw attention to himself. The same could not be said for the old overseer. She had spent a great deal of effort promoting the fool as a wonder worker, and the new overseer thought it rather convenient that her predecessor had also profited immensely by buying this worthless track of land, and then raking in the profits as the city grew.

Upon the old overseer's death, the new overseer uncovered evidence that her predecessor had forged the miracles attributed to the fool. Shocked at her predecessor's actions, the new overseer had the old overseer's bones removed from display and buried in the desert, already a harsh condemnation, but there is even a legend that she personally crushed her skull before burying it, which is just about the worst thing you can do to a yinrih's remains.

But what of the fool? What about this new thriving city? Was it all built on a lie? Well, the miracles may have been fake, but the man was genuinely holy, in an innocent childlike way. A great many men and women, holy in their own right, claimed this man as their inspiration. While many were scandalized by the revelation, the new overseer didn't want to see the man punished for the sins of his patroness, and she didn't want to let this outpouring of faith go to waste. She also didn't want to be seen profiting from these wicked deeds, so she established the rule that any traveler, pilgrim or not, would have a place to stay in the city without cost. Over time, limits had to be established, as free room and board for anyone for as long as they want is a pretty unsustainable proposition, but the spirit of the rule remains.

The city remained a strong religious center throughout the Time of Decadence, and was the stronghold of the pious dissolutionists, those who wished to rid the Bright Way of its corporate monopolies and return it to its original mission of seeking other sophonts. After the War of Dissolution, when the Bright Way was expelled from its former seat of power on Yih, Hearthside,

and specifically The City of Eternal Noon, became the de facto new center of religious government.

Wayfarer's Prayer Ring

Image

Here's a Wayfarer's prayer ring. It consists of two parts: a freely rotating gear nested in an outer ring. Just using a single piece would be uncomfortable because the dorsal portion of a yinrih's digits is covered in fur. The gear has twelve teeth, with one of them slightly protruding, acting as a starting point.

The ring is worn on one of the digits, typically the writing claw, with the outer thumb turning the gear as one counts out the prayers. Many different prayers use a prayer ring, most notably the traditional torpor meditation.

Yinrih generally don't wear rings (prayer or otherwise) as jewelry since their paws have to pull double duty as hands and feet. Prayer rings do make great fidget spinners though. Pups are often given a prayer ring to play with by pious parents.

I made this in Blender. I got distracted from my attempt to make the yinrih minifig and actually started using Blender on its own. That's ADHD for ya.

The Yinrih Can into Space

One might find it odd, given the yinrih's longer lifespan, that they were able to achieve spaceflight a mere five thousand Earth years after achieving sapience. This would be like paleolithic humans going from hunting and gathering with sharpened sticks and hand axes to manned orbital flight in a mere five hundred years.

One obvious contributor is that the yinrih had been able to write from the word go. Being able to preserve thoughts over time and space, allowing their collective body of knowledge to start building up over generations. The second reason they progressed up the tech tree so fast is that most scientific progress was done under the auspices of the Bright Way, which had (and to an extent still has) a strong martyrdom culture. Giving one's life while furthering the goal of finding other sophonts among the stars is the highest honor a Wayfarer can hope to achieve.

Combining religious zeal and scientific curiosity makes for a rather high casualty rate among yinrih scientists, engineers, and explorers, willing as they were to take greater risks in the name of fulfilling the Great Commandment. In particular, the yinrih didn't so much dip their paws into the starry firmament as hurl themselves headlong into it. It was less NASA and more Kerbal Space Program. Less than a score of humans have died while attempting spaceflight, but the yinrih have a litany of canonized martyrs (and *cannonized* martyrs, given their earliest attempts may or may not have involved shooting people out of a cannon in a vaguely upward direction), all of whom made the ultimate sacrifice while pursuing greater knowledge.

The Litany of Creation

“ V: From the breath of the sun The Light wrought the Earth.

R: Glory to The Light!

V: From the stone of the earth, The Light drew forth life.

R: Glory to The Light!

V: From the garden of life, The Light kindled mind.

R: Glory to The Uncreated Light!

This is a portion of the ordinary of the liturgy of the Bright Way. It's sometimes also called the Wayfarers' Creed. A much longer version detailing the yinrih's evolution is recited during the feast of the Kindling of the Fire of Understanding.

There's also an abbreviated version:

Code: [Select all](#)

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B scrMr, sKGqMr. B sKGqMr, rcBrMr. B rcBrMr, sfBMr.
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B scr-Mr sKGq-Mr B sKGq-Mr rcBr-Mr B rcBr-Mr sfB-Mr
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from star-3P stone-3P from stone-3P life-3P from life-3P mind-3P
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From star, stone. From stone, life. From life, mind.
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The Knights of the Sun

“ The good Bishop of Assisi expressed a sort of horror at the hard life which the Little Brothers lived at the Portiuncula, without comforts, without possessions, eating anything they could get and sleeping anyhow on the ground. St. Francis answered him with that curious and almost stunning shrewdness which the unworldly can sometimes wield like a club of stone. He said, "If we had any possessions, we should need weapons and laws to defend them."

--G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*

And Oh boy, did the Bright Way have a lot of possessions, with a veritable army numbering in the billions ready and willing to defend them.

As noted in an earlier post, there's no real defining threshold between the Golden Age and the Age of Decadence. While current ecclesiastical historians who, it should be pointed out, are the ideological descendants of the Pious Dissolutionists, set the transition at the first occasion the High Hearthkeeper attempted to halt interstellar mission work, the reality is there was a slippery slope sliding from religion to megacorp that took place over millennia.

It is in this fuzzy transition period that the Knights of the Sun enter the scene. The clergy were now responsible for multiple planet-wide power grids, as well as a communication and logistics network that was single handedly keeping all of colonized space together. These institutions became attractive targets for pirates, gangs, and other criminal elements.

The interplanetary ferry system was a particularly juicy target for pirates. The typical modus operandi involved setting up a base of operation in a hollowed out asteroid and intercepting passing ferries.

It soon became clear that the clergy would need to establish a monopoly on violence in the system. However, the very strict taboo against females in military roles prevented the clergy from taking matters into their own paws. The hierarchy's solution was to found an order of warrior monks dedicated to protecting the Bright Way's physical possessions.

They recruited pious young men by framing the protection of the hierarchy's material holdings as saving the lives and livelihoods of the people who relied on that power, transport, and communication infrastructure against wicket men who sought to destroy it, painting threats to that power as the very enemies of The Light itself.

To be sure, pirates and gangsters are, as a rule, ruthless and unsympathetic characters that society would be better off without, and the knights were indeed directly responsible for saving countless lives precisely because the infrastructure they protected was vital for interplanetary society. But the clergy's decision to take advantage of the zeal of pious young men for their own

worldly gain would come back to bite them in the tail on multiple occasions.

The first of these occasions was the High Hearthkeeper's first attempt to permanently halt interstellar mission work. While I've portrayed the missionaries and the "corporate" arm of the Bright Way as being at odds with one another, the truth is that both sides were in a mutualistic relationship. The missionaries relied on the funding and R&D provided by the wider clergy, and the clergy needed to at least pay lip service to the missionaries since they were the ones trying to fulfill the Great Commandment, which the entire religion revolved around in the first place.

One particular High Hearthkeeper forgot the importance of that relationship. She saw how much of a dent interstellar mission work was putting in their bottom line, and attempted to "balance the budget" by putting the missionaries on the chopping block. This did not sit well with the Knights of the Sun, to put it lightly.

Here was a group of young men who saw themselves as protectors of The Light's little ones, as upholders of the very core of the Bright Way's mission to find other sophonts, facing the fact that their leader, who they regarded as the symbolic embodiment of that mission, was going to spit in the face of everything they were told was sacred.

They mutinied en masse, laying siege to Yih until the High Hearthkeeper repented of her blasphemous designs.

The knights were also instrumental in the War of Dissolution, but that, again, is something I have to tackle later.

Lodestar, one of the missionaries aboard the Dewfall, is a member of the Knights of the Sun. In the millennia since the war, the knights have developed into a more traditional contemplative religious order, though retaining an emphasis on using one's physical strength to protect the weak and uphold justice.

The knights get their name from the fact that most of their monasteries are located inside the orbit of Hearthsides very close to Focus. Their lighthouses are designed with a central aisle leading up to the star hearth, dividing the congregation into two inward-facing "choirs" that chant back and forth to one another as part of their particular liturgical rite. This central aisle is a transparent window looking nadirward toward Focus, allowing the star's light to flood the space from "below".

The knights are known for their ceremonial powered armor, a relic of their more active military role from millennia past. It's much bulkier than the more streamlined form-fitting pseudosine that modern soldiers use, making them look like four-legged knights in shining armor.

The Noosphere

The <rLr-sfB-g> /chuff, long low weak grunt, chuff, yip, early falling weakening whine, short low weak growl/, "realm of minds, noosphere" sometimes poetically called the <jhq-sfB-g> /short falling strengthening growl, huff, etc/ or "mind sea" is an important theological concept in the Bright Way. Wayfarers view evolution, indeed the wider development of the universe as a whole, as a teleological process. A planet accretes from a stellar nebula; life arises from the inert matter of the planet's geosphere, giving rise to the biosphere; and, through the process of biological evolution, life grows more and more complex until sapience emerges, giving birth to the noosphere: the realm of rational thought, reflection, social connection, and communication.

The Light is likened to a gardener tending a flowerbed, with worlds growing from a lifeless geosphere, to a growing biosphere, and eventually flowering into a noosphere as a sapient species emerges. Claravian doctrine holds that The Light has tasked the yinrih as a species with drawing these hitherto isolated noospheres together into union, hastening the ultimate convergence of the universe to a perfect whole.

Farspeakers

In the days when the Bright Way controlled interplanetary communication, farspeakers were responsible for maintaining that infrastructure, much like hearthkeepers maintained the power grid. Unlike hearthkeepers, farspeakers were not descendants of the old shamans and thus were not considered clergy, meaning both males and females could become farspeakers.

Farspeakers approach the task of network engineering with a similar degree of reverence and sacramentality as hearthkeepers do electrical engineering. In the farspeakers' case, they regard the network as the "body" to the "soul" of the noosphere. The secular inheritors of the interplanetary network are more prosaic about their work, but farspeakers on Hearthside and other pious enclaves like Wayfarers' Haven are more traditional. This includes the missionaries, Stormlight among them.

Since the Bright Way's goal is to unite the yinrih's noosphere with those of other species, and since the farspeakers view networks (including the human Internet) as a kind of physical incarnation of the noosphere, the act of bridging the Internet with the yinrih's ansible network is approached with much solemnity and celebration.

Other corners of the Bright Way have different ideas about what exactly it looks like to fulfill the Great Commandment. As the saying goes, "Ask two Wayfarers about the Great Commandment, and you'll get three opinions."

but_what_do_the_missionaries_do_anyway

There are several different ideas about what it means to fulfill the Great Commandment. Everyone agrees that the yinrih have been chosen to find other intelligent species, but different groups within the Bright Way have their own ideas about what that looks like.

When humans think of missionaries, they think of people travelling to distant lands to preach and accept converts. While this view is popular, it's not the only one.

Probably the simplest view is that the yinrih are to meet and interact with other species on a personal level, forging friendships with their new galactic neighbors. This is how Tod sees First Contact, which is fitting given his Commonthroat name means "Steadfast Friend".

Another rather straightforward view, held by the Farspeakers, including Stormlight, is that in order to unite the yinrih's noosphere with those of other species, they must physically unite their computer networks together. Stormlight spends most of his time figuring out ways to bridge the Internet with the yinrih's ansible network.

Still another view says that the other species have important lessons to teach the yinrih. This manifests primarily in yinrih converting to various human faiths. There are hints that Iris espouses this view, or at least considers it as a possibility, given that she vehemently insists that the lapsed Pascal lodge with the human priest.

Others hold that the yinrih are to actively uplift less technologically advanced species. This is what Sunshine tries to do by researching human medicine.

As for Lodestar, he doesn't have a specific vision in mind other than the basic "find aliens", but he decides to live out his vows as a Knight of the Sun among his new human friends by protecting the weak and trying to uphold justice.