

Appearance

Forest Elves generally resemble Humans, with pointed ears. Their clothing is often described as primitive—dressing themselves in furs, leathers, and roughly spun cloths, such as hemp or linen. Painted beads and carved bones are also typical accents in jewelry and garb.

It is not uncommon for a Forest Elf to bear tattoos or painted markings on their face and body. Each tribe and family uses different markings for different meanings, though one marking—the Mourning Band—is universal. It appears as a black stripe across the face, and represents the loss of a loved one or close friend, and is worn for a week after the passing of the individual.



Behavior

One might describe Forest Elves as being reclusive or cautious around members of other races, yet they often prove to be generous and kind to those who have gained their trust.

Those who have been raised on traditional teachings, hold that all life is sacred. As such, they will often avoid unnecessary killing, and find such acts to be distasteful.

History

The Forest Elves of Gisido have lived simple lifestyles in small settlements, scattered throughout the forests and plains. As the Gaesin Empire grew, these Elves found themselves encountering the Humans regularly, and began trading with them. As the Humans began to settle nearby and expand their territories, some Forest Elves joined them.

During the reign of Emperor Mercius, many of the Elves that had moved into the Human cities and integrated themselves into Gaesin society, returned to their old lifestyles alongside their kin—often in remote settlements.

As the Great War unfolded, most Forest Elves avoided joining outright conflict, but individuals and small war bands aided the rebellion by disabling Imperial supply caravans that traveled through their territories, and by teaching rebels guerrilla warfare tactics.

Society

Forest Elves live in tribes that are typically led by their eldest member. Each tribe consists of several families, each headed by its eldest member, or couple in the case of a large family consisting of several generations. Mystics are also important figures in their communities, and serve as healers, ritualists, and counselors.

Each family of Forest Elves is named for an animal's totem. For example: Wawaazisii (Bullhead), Baswenaazhi (Crane), Aan'aawenh (Pintail Duck), Nooke (Bear) and Moozwaanowe (Moose-tail). An individual is considered a member of their father's family.

While it is commonly thought that Forest Elf communities take the form of clusters of tents and huts, they also call some cities home—the largest of which, is Attis.

As most Forest Elf tribes and clans are self-sufficient and secluded, they often barter with goods, rather than coin.

Coming of Age

Rites of passage may vary by tribe, and are different for boys and girls.

A girl's rite begins with the start of her first menstruation. During this and all subsequent menses, she is secluded in a specified structure, known as a Moon Lodge. She is also expected to undergo a berry fast, during which, she will refrain from eating berries for a year. During this time, she spends time with older female relatives, who provide her with advice on the duties and expectations of her future role as a mother.

As boys lack in indications of physical maturity, their rites typically begin between the ages of 20 and 28. Following his first successful hunt of large game, the boy is sent from his village without food or water for four days. During this time, he is expected to meditate and seek his spiritual guide, which often takes the form of an animal.

Religion

Traditionally, Forest Elves see all things as being born from the earth, and so hold Gaia—more commonly called the Earth Mother—as the creator. Meha and other gods associated with nature are also offered great respect.

Life in all forms, is the greatest gift in the eyes of the Forest Elves. As such, hunting is never done for sport, and offering prayers to Gaia on behalf of slain animals is a common practice for hunters. Even plants are shown respect, and offerings of water and manure are given to plants that have been damaged or taken from in harvest.

Superstitions

Many Forest Elves believe that the gods are apt to test the hearts of mortals by presenting themselves as sick, wounded, or starving animals, and that they will offer blessings and boons to those who offer aid to such creatures they may encounter.

Alternatively, certain creatures are seen as omens of the gods keeping watch over an individual, and each creature has a particular meaning for different individuals and scenarios. As an example, it is believed that if a bride encounters a lamb, dove, spider, or a black cat on her wedding day, her marriage will be blessed with good luck, fortune, and fertility.

Courtship

While in some cases, a girl's father selects her husband, or a man is allowed to select his bride, it is far more common that both a man and a woman are able to choose for themselves.

Courtship is done in public—the man offers a blanket, made by his female relatives, to share with the girl he wishes to court, and the pair wraps themselves together with it. In such close proximity, the only true privacy they are afforded is the ability to whisper to each other.

Marriage

Following the evening meal of a given day, if a man wishes to propose marriage, he is expected to visit his intended bride's parents, and state his intentions. Should they approve, he is instructed to return home and inform his family. The woman is then expected to grind grain and make bread, which she then takes and offers to the man's mother. Acceptance of the bread suggests approval of the marriage.

The following day, the woman grinds more grain, while her future groom chops wood and fetches water for his mother. In the evening, the bride arrives at the man's home, and prepares to stay with his family for three days.

On the evening of the third day, the female relatives of the bride arrive at the man's home, and wash the hair of the bride and groom in a single basin. Following this cleansing ceremony, the couple makes their way to the bride's home, where the man will spend the next two weeks, preparing a white robe for his wife to wear.

Once the garment is complete, the two families will join for a feast, and their members make an exchange of gifts. That evening, the bride will join her family in her home, while the groom returns to the home of his family. The following morning, the man will make his way to his bride's home, and fetch wood for her mother, at which point, he will be recognized as a permanent resident of the home.

Funerals

Believing the souls of the dead depart the body after burial, rather than immediately after death, Forest Elves usually make an effort to bury the body on the same day. However, should the body be kept overnight, friends and family will visit the home of the deceased, to keep company with grieving loved ones, as well as with the dead.

White sage is left to smolder near the body, and its smoke is swept around the room with a feather, cleaning the area of evil spirits. Tobacco is smoked in the presence of the dead, and offered to the flame of a candle on their behalf. The body is washed and dressed in white garments, and taken to the burial site, where a grave will have already been dug.

After placing the body in the grave, the family of the deceased places a single change of clothes, a pipe, a knife, and other small trinkets with it, before covering the body with flat stones and soil. The highest-ranking person often recites a prayer in attendance, praising the life of the deceased, and wishing them a happy afterlife.

For four nights following the burial, a fire is kept at the head of the grave, and food and water is kept at its side—the light and sustenance believed to be used by the dead on their journey to the afterlife.

The personal effects of the dead are divided among their relatives or given to members of the community, and a bundle containing items similar to those left in the grave, is offered to their closest relative. After one month, this person gives the items to relatives and members of the community, who they deem fit to wear or use them. In addition, a dish is included in the bundle, which is expected to be carried by the person it is given to, on behalf of the dead, for one year. For every meal—both at home, and as a guest—the bearer places a portion of all food of the meal in the dish, and places it in an empty spot, as an offering for the dead.

Festivals

No particular festival seasons or days are traditionally recognized in Forest Elf society. Instead, great gatherings are held to celebrate certain events. These gatherings feature songs, dance, feasting, and games of all kinds.

Games

While wrestling, foot racing, and bow shooting are popular means of sport among the Forest Elves and many other peoples, Lacrosse is also a popular sport of Elvish make.

Dice games are also popular, with the most common variation making use of four sticks, which have been carved in such a way to have two opposite-facing, flat sides. One side is painted or carved with a design, while the other is left blank, two of the designs are unique, and two match. The sticks are held in the hand, and dropped to the ground, and score is kept based upon the number of designs that face upward.

Gender and Family Roles

In typical Forest Elf society, men provide for their communities as hunters, warriors, and by performing physical tasks, such as cutting and gathering wood. Women process the meat and hides, bake bread, gather vegetables and herbs, make clothes, and rear children.



However, if a community is lacking in individuals to fill the role of a certain gender, boys or girls may be raised to fill the role of the other. These individuals are said to be “two-spirited.”

Traditional Occupations

Forest Elves do not usually concern themselves with businesses, but certain necessary roles must be filled. These include healers, hunters, horse tamers, farmers, butchers, leatherworkers, anglers, and warriors.

Economics

For the most part, the Forest Elves as a whole are self-sufficient, gathering or producing what they need from the land. Those who live in outlying settlements typically do not deal in coin, but rather barter for and with goods such as tools, weapons, pelts, textiles, and beads.

It is not uncommon for Forest Elf communities to barter and trade with outsiders however, and many Forest Elf traders find that cultural crafts such as woven blankets, painted beads, and treated animal skins make for popular trade goods.

Aging and Life Expectancy

As with all Elves, Forest Elves age at a rate that is twice as slow as Humans, and can live for upwards of 160 years.