

Appearance

Like other variations of Elves, the Sekahn closely resemble Humans with pointed ears. However, due to their ancestors' tendency to dwell underground, the Sekahn exhibit unique traits. Their hair, for example, is often white, while their skin carries a purple hue. Over time, variations of these traits have developed however—Those whose ancestors primarily dwelled above ground and lived as farmers or tradesmen usually display a darker, more robust color and may even sport more silvery locks, while those who only more recently have come to the surface usually have a pale complexion.



Sekahn garb resembles that of the Sobin—traditionally including various forms of T-shaped robes. Loose trousers that gather at the ankles are common for men, while women often wear waist-length robes, and floor-length skirts, with a broad sash, tied in the back.

Behavior

The Sekahn are rather conservative when compared to other peoples, though less so than the Sobin. Humility and respect are important elements in an individual's personality, for the Sekahn.

These people are generally friendly and generous, and often refer to their peers with familial terms such as brother or sister for those who are of the same age group, aunt or uncle for those who are somewhat older, or grandmother or grandfather for the elderly.

Bowing is commonplace for the Sekahn, and is used to greet, bid farewell, offer respect, to give thanks, and to offer apologies. Individuals bow at the waist, with the degree of the bend suggesting a greater degree of respect, or a greater apology.

History

Residing primarily in subterranean communities, the early Sekahn had little impact or influence from the outside world. With an increasing population and limited resources, the Sekahn began to establish farms and settlements on the surface.

In the late third century, Sobin travelers made contact with the Sekahn surface settlements, and quickly began to establish mutually beneficial trade agreements. These arrangements lasted for roughly 60 years, until personal greed began to turn a number

of the deals sour. Weary of regularly receiving poor deals, a wealthy Sekahn hired an assassin to eliminate his Sobin contact. However, the assassin mistook a Sobin noble for his mark and managed to slay him. Subjects of the slain noble rallied together to seek vengeance in the name of their lord, and began to sack Sekahn settlements. In response, the Sekahn dispatched their own forces to counter the attacks. The situation continued to escalate on both sides until it took the form of total war.

The Sobin, having greater access to supplies and equipment, held the upper hand in the conflict, advancing deeper into Sekahn territory with each victory. However, an early, harsh winter and treacherous terrain bore heavy losses for the Sobin, and ultimately saved the Sekahn from total annihilation. Overall, the conflict lasted for roughly one year, and ended in May 338.

Having never made contact with Gaesin traders, the Sekahn were not a part of the Empire during Mercius' reign, and managed to go unnoticed by the invading army during the Great War. As whispers of unoccupied lands spread among other nations and peoples, the Sekahn found themselves hosting refugees seeking to hide from the Empire.



Society

Sekahn society is divided into four groups—the scholar-gentry, the middle class, commoners, and slaves—and is led primarily by women.

The nobility—the scholar-gentry—is hereditary status granted to the legitimate offspring of existing nobles. These individuals avoid conscription and manual labor roles, but are expected to be well versed in poetry, art, music, and literature. Noblewomen may have as many lovers as they please, and men of this class are typically never allowed to leave the

home without the express consent of their wives.

The middle class is mainly comprised of illegitimate children of the scholar-gentry, and individuals who were demoted from scholar-gentry status. These people often function as astronomers, musicians, scribes, and translators. Those who pursue military careers are given leadership roles.

Commoners in Sekahn society, typically include farmers, merchants, and artisans, and make up the majority of the military. Certain tradesmen are also considered commoners—these include butchers, tanners, anglers, and ferrymen.

Slaves can be owned privately, or by the state. Those who are owned by the state are often individuals who have fallen into debt. As such, they may still own land and live much the same way as other commoners, but must offer a portion of their crops or income to the state, as a way of paying their debt.

Coming of Age

While few communities practice them in modern times, coming of age ceremonies are traditionally held on January 15th. These ceremonies are performed by local magistrates and similar officials, and are attended by youths who—over the previous year—have turned 30 years old.

During this event, the supervising official typically offers a speech and pieces of advice to the newly-recognized adults, and takes down their names, to recognize them legally as adults—allowing them to join the military, marry, and own property.

Religion

Today, the Sekahn generally recognize the Holy Trinity—a sign of Sobin and Gaesin influences on their culture.

Traditionally, their religious views were directed toward spirituality and achieving inner peace, and focused on the natural world around them. To those who hold their spirituality to a high degree, pacifism, generosity, and long periods of meditation are a way of life.

Superstitions

Traditional belief suggests that malevolent spirits may possess the bodies of the dead, causing them to rise from the grave and attack the living. In an effort to combat this possibility, tradition dictates that bodies be wrapped in seven layers of canvas and bound with seven ropes or chains. As an additional precaution, the mouth, nose, and ears are often filled with cotton or other materials to close off points of entry to any evil spirits seeking to enter the body.

Courtship

Traditionally, parents employ matchmakers to analyze their child's attributes and appearance, and compare them to those of other children of a similar age and class. Should the matchmaker offer a match, the children are able to meet and develop relationships of their own accord.

The matchmaking process usually begins at the age of 25.

Marriage

Traditionally, brides wear a white robe and decorate their hair with pins and ornaments, while grooms dress in black, thigh-length robes adorned with their family crest, and white trousers.

Few guests attend the ceremony, and those that do, are usually the immediate relatives of the bride and groom.

Weddings typically take place at a temple of Gaia, and are officiated by a priest of the temple. To begin, the priest places several food items on an altar, and cleanses the area by fanning the smoke of a bundle of smoldering white sage through the area. Once the space is cleansed, the couple kneels before the altar, and offers a prayer for blessings from the gods or other supernatural powers they wish, while the priest rings a small bell, welcoming benevolent spirits to witness and bless the marriage.

Once the couple has finished their prayers, the priest pours a cup of liquor, and offers it to the bride, who takes three small sips before passing it to the groom who takes three sips in kind. The process repeats a second and third time. The first cup represents an oath of honesty, the second represents an oath of humility, and the third represents an oath of loyalty.

To complete the ceremony, the priest places a small bag of Sacred Grass and an evergreen branch as an offering, on the altar, before welcoming the couple to make their own offerings, and then welcoming the guests to follow suit. Once the offerings have been made, the priest rings the bell again, and the families depart.

Funerals

Immediately after death, or as an individual is dying, individuals tending to them moisten their lips with water—a ritual known as *Water of the Last Moment*. The body is washed with perfumed oils and makeup is applied to give the corpse a lively appearance, before the corpse is dressed in a white gown. Once dressed, the ears and nose are plugged with cotton, and the mouth is filled with dried rice. Lastly, the body is wrapped in seven layers of hemp or linen cloth, and bound by seven ropes.

A small altar is usually erected next to the deathbed, consisting of flowers, incense, and a candle.

Relatives of the deceased are gathered for a wake, dressed entirely in black, and the body is placed in a coffin, which is then placed on the local temple's altar, with the head of the coffin directed north. The temple's priests typically chant sutras as friends and relatives of the deceased place objects and food items with the body, ending the wake as they end their chants.

The immediate family of the deceased is expected to keep vigil with the deceased until the following morning.

The next day, the casket is nailed shut, and carried to the family grave or tomb. Here, a priest blesses the deceased and oversees the interment of the body.

For one week after the burial, daily memorial services are held, during which, family and friends of the deceased make offerings to the dead, and the temple's priests bless the soul of the departed and the burial site. Bowls of rice and water are often left

at the grave each day, to provide food for the departed soul on their trek to the afterlife. In addition, large incense sticks are left to burn at the grave, to ward off malevolent spirits.

Sekahn regularly make pilgrimages to family burial sites to maintain graves, leave offerings to the dead, and pray for advice or blessings from their ancestors.

Festivals

While the Sekahn celebrate nearly all common festivals, they have adopted several from the Sobin. Major festivals include Coming of Age Day (see: “Coming of Age”), Star Festival, Lantern Festival, and various tree-viewing festivals.

The Star Festival takes place on the seventh night of July, and is said to be the only night of the year when two stars—who according to legend, are lovers—may meet. Many Sekahn write wishes on strips of colorful ribbon or paper, and hang them from tree branches, and fireworks displays are common.

On the evening of July 19th, those celebrating the Lantern Festival write messages to deceased loved ones on paper lanterns, before lighting a candle within them, and setting them adrift on a stream or river. It is believed the lanterns guide lost souls to the afterlife, and carry messages to those who have already passed on.

Tree-viewing festivals are popular in the spring and fall, and vary in the time they are celebrated, depending on when the blooms and coloration of the leaves is at its peak. Similarly, some regions also hold flower-viewing festivals for the same purpose.

Games

Gambling is popular among the Sekahn, with one of the most popular games being Cho-Han, or Odds and Evens. In this game, a single die or multiple dice are rolled in a cup or bowl and covered while the players place bets on if the roll’s sum is odd or even. Once the bets have been placed, the dice are revealed. To combat cheating, a third party designated roller is used, and often performs their role without a shirt or robe, to not conceal anything within their sleeves.

Another popular game resembles the Asaltante game of coin-flicking. With this activity, participants take turns holding arrows by their knocks and flipping them into the air, aiming to have their missiles land in a designated area: Either a tall, narrow pot or small hoops placed on the ground.

Gender and Family Roles

Men are often expected to perform domestic tasks and tend to the children and food preparation, but also take on labor and military roles, as they are more aptly suited for such tasks. Women however, are often involved in political and financial affairs, and will aid with rearing the children.

Traditional Occupations

Common occupations relate to farming, fishing, construction, and mining. However, the Sekahn are known for their martial prowess, due to their sizable military and skillful swordsmen.

Economics

The Sekahn are most well-known for their textiles—particularly, silk. However, rice and fine artworks are also staples of the Sekahn economy.

Aging and Life Expectancy

As with all Elves, Sekahn age at half the rate of the average Human, and can live for up to 160 years.