

## Appearance

Sobin generally resemble Humans with pointed ears.

Their clothing is usually colorful and adorned with images inspired by nature—paisley prints, floral designs, and emblems resembling animals are rather popular. While the Sobin have adopted the clothing habits of the Gaesin, their traditional garb consists of various styles of T-shaped robes (kimono), which are often secured by a sash, tied at the back, and sometimes combined with wide, pleated trousers (hakama). Footwear traditionally consists of woven or wooden sandals, which are worn barefooted, or with split-toe socks.

## Behavior

The Sobin are rather conservative when compared to other peoples—certain practices like serving meals or tea, and even the means by which others are addressed, are often ritualized and seemingly strict. Respect and humility are among the most important traits for any Sobin.

Rather than referring to one's peers by their first name, Sobin usually use surnames and appropriate prefixes or suffixes to refer to others.

Bowing is commonplace for Sobin, and is used to greet, bid farewell, offer respect, to give thanks, and to offer apologies. A bow is always performed with the hands at one's sides, and by bending at the waist—the degree of the bend often correlates to the origin of the gesture: The deeper the bow, the greater the respect being offered.

## History

The 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 Elves joined them.

Those communities that had early contact with the Humans eventually developed similarly sophisticated societies.





The Sobin and nearby Sekahn established trade relations, which eventually began to turn 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.

During the reign of Emperor Mercius, the Sobin were afforded nearly the same respect as Humans, by the empire, prompting many Sobin to regard themselves as superior beings in comparison to other non-Human peoples.

## **Society**

Sobin society is collectivist in nature, meaning that the actions of an individual reflect upon their family and community, rather than solely upon the individual.

Nations are led by military leaders, who control armies of warriors, which serve both as soldiers, and as peacekeepers. These warlords often appoint their own governors, magistrates, and other underlings, who each establish their own ranks of cohorts to aid in maintaining their territories. The rest of Sobin society effectively consists of the peasantry, and consists of merchants, craftsmen, farmers, and fishermen. The latter two tend to receive greater respect than the former, as they provide the rest of their communities with the food necessary to sustain life.

### *Coming of Age*

While few communities practice them in modern times, coming of age ceremonies are traditionally held on January 15<sup>th</sup>. 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 Sobin generally recognize the Holy Trinity—a sign of Gaesin influence on their culture.

Traditionally, their religious views were directed toward spirituality, and focused on the natural world around them. These ideas promoted belief in a vast pantheon of deities who each govern particular domains, in addition to otherworldly attributes granted to common animals, such as crows, foxes, and cats.

### *Superstitions*

As part of traditional religious folklore, the animals of the world may potentially possess supernatural attributes, such as sentience, shapeshifting capabilities, and control over illusionary magic.

One popular example believes that a demonic creature resembling a flaming tiger called a Kasha is inclined to steal the bodies of the dead and spirit them away in a hellish underworld, trapping their spirit therein. To combat this, funerals are often conducted twice, with the first being done with decoy casket filled with stones intended to thwart the Kasha's efforts.

### *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. 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 kimono and decorate their hair with pins and ornaments, while grooms dress in thigh-length robes (haori) adorned with their family crest, and black, gray, or striped hakama.

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 groom, who takes three small sips before passing it to the bride who takes three sips in kind. The process repeats a second time, with the cup first being offered to the bride, and then a second cup is poured and offered to the groom to repeat a 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.

Following the wedding, a tea ceremony is usually attended by the wedding party, and takes place at either the groom's home, or the home of his parents. During this time, the bride is expected to display her domestic skills by serving those in attendance and following the appropriate rituals for cleaning and storing the equipment she uses.

### *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 and makeup is applied to give the corpse a lively appearance, before the corpse is dressed in a white kimono, with the right side crossing over the left; a practice solely reserved for dressing the dead.

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.

Traditionally, the burial takes place twice—a false casket, filled with stones, is placed in the grave in the morning, and then removed in the afternoon and replaced with the one containing the body. The fake burial is intended to prevent malevolent spirits from stealing the corpse and dragging the soul to the abyss.

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.

Sobin 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 Sobin celebrate nearly all common festivals, they have several of their own. 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 Sobin 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 19<sup>th</sup>, 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 Sobin, 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*

While men and women are more or less considered equals in Sobin society, women are often seen as being delicate and needing protection. As such, some families only allow a girl to leave the home with a male escort—usually her father, or a brother or cousin—or will set a strict curfew for her, while boys of the same age may not be given such restrictions. Men and women both perform the same functions, including those

related to the military, and women typically tend to the majority of housework and childcare.

### *Traditional Occupations*

Scholars, mages, fishermen, and farmers are the most popular professions, followed closely by wood and leatherworkers, swordsmen, and merchants.

### *Economics*

The Sobin economy is diverse, and is largely rooted in wooden goods and silk, along with fine art, literature, and various livestock and crops.

### **Aging and Life Expectancy**

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