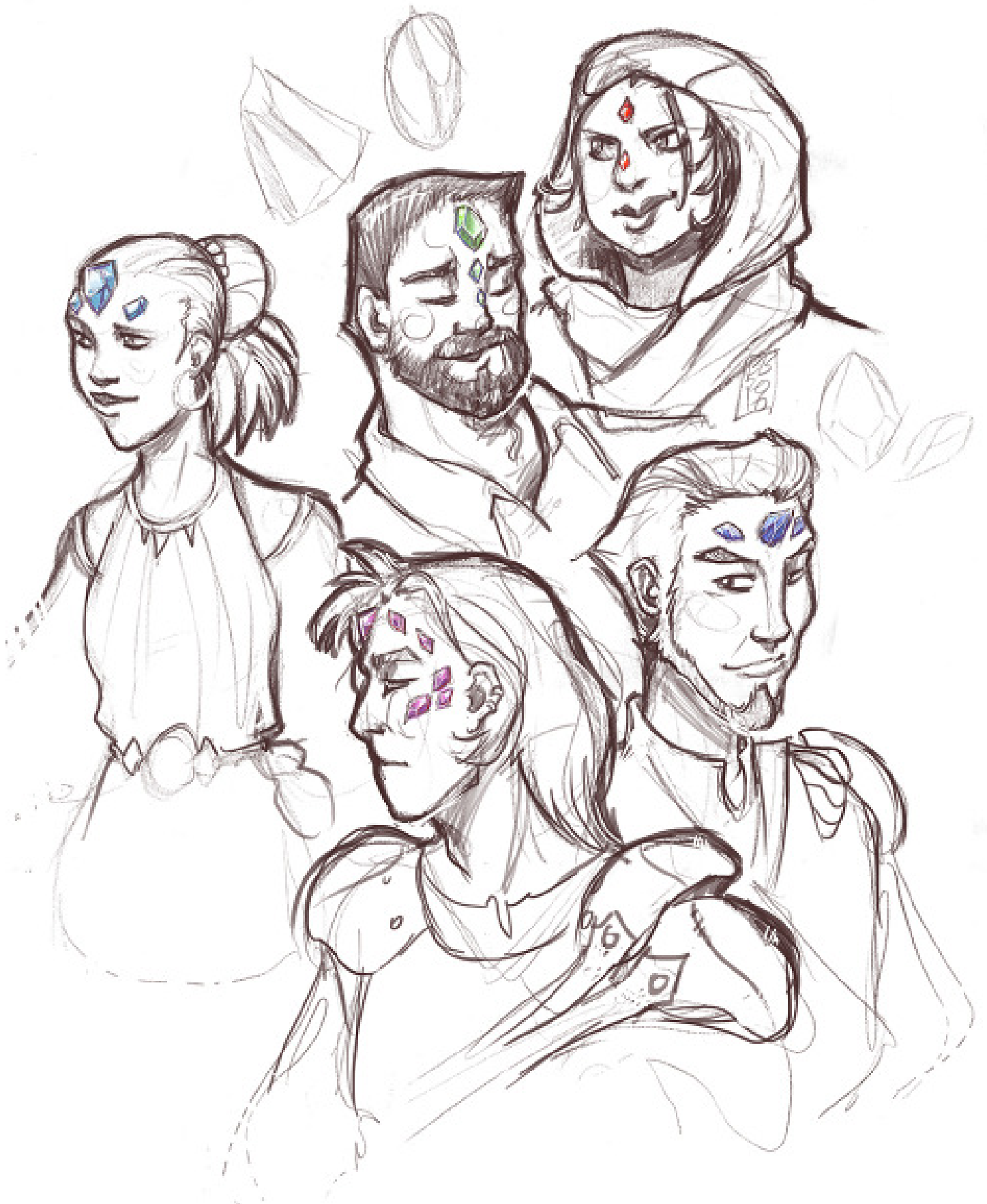


Selunari



Alexei stared at his reflection in the stream. The boy looking back certainly resembled him – same unruly hair, same dark eyes, same five fingers on each hand (he waggled them at his reflection to make sure). The only thing physically different about him was the large blue gem glittering on his forehead. A small change, really. But it wasn't the outside change that concerned him.

In his eight long years, Alexei had never experienced anything half as strange as what had happened the week before. The caravan had made camp for the night the way they always did, snaking the wagons into a wide circle at the edge of a field. The moon was full and the stars were bright, and Uncle Yishai was cooking a stew over the fire that smelled like magic. Someone was tuning a fiddle nearby, and Alexei's baby sister Lajni was chasing the dog, her peals of laughter echoing around the camp. Alexei remembered thinking how big the sky looked that night; from his place at the edge of the circle, it seemed like the stars went on forever.

As if hearing Alexei's very thought, a strange light had appeared in the sky. It seemed to come from everywhere, as if dawn was suddenly breaking all around him. Every star seemed brighter, and the moon shone as fiercely as the sun. Alexei shut his eyes against the glare, but curiosity made him open them again. The light seemed to envelop him until he could see nothing else. It was beautiful, the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, shimmering through every color of the rainbow and more. He felt warm, wrapped in this blanket of light. He was unafraid. Comforted. Connected. For a moment that might have been a breath and might have been forever, he felt a joy so complete it defied description. He felt whole.

The light faded. Alexei blinked. He was still standing next to his wagon at the edge of the circle. The dog was still barking and the stew was still simmering. But something was different. It was as if he could sense every member of his caravan, could feel their energy around him. He turned to his cousin Talya to ask if she felt the same and was astonished to see that a pair of red gems had appeared on her forehead, one above the other. He looked at Uncle Yishai and discovered that he was sporting a deep purple gem near one temple. Even Mama was marked, with a large green gem surrounded by four tiny blue ones. Slowly, Alexei reached up to touch his own forehead.

Selunari. The word was so new, but somehow it felt as if it was the first word he had ever learned. How could that be? He had never heard it before that night and suddenly it was an indelible part of him. How could something so recent feel so old, so... comfortable?

"Alexei!"

Alexei looked up, startled out of his reverie, to see the kindly, wrinkled face of his grandmother, Basimah.

"Lost in thought, are we?" she said with a smile. Alexei nodded solemnly.

"What troubles you, little one?" asked Basimah, the warmth in her eyes matching the three iridescent gems on her brow. "Come, tell your Grandmama," With a grunt, she sat down beside him on the bank of the stream, smoothing her colorful skirts as she did so.

"I don't..." Alexei started. He searched for the words. "I feel different, but not different. Have I changed? Did we all change? I mean... Am I still me?"

"Aahhh," said Basimah. "The Selunari, yes? You are looking to understand. I explain to you, little one." Alexei had always loved his grandmother's accent, so different from Mama's or even his own. If there was one sound that could always comfort him, it was Grandmama's voice.

Basimah gestured upwards at the darkening sky, where the first stars were beginning to appear. "You see this, yes? Those stars? Beyond those stars are more stars, and more beyond them. And then? Even more stars!"

"Do they go on forever?" asked Alexei, looking wide-eyed at the sky.

Basimah laughed. "That I do not know, little one. But I like to think they do. You see those stars over there? The ones that make a picture? Do you know what that picture is called?"

"A constellation!" Alexei had just learned that word from his cousin Marcos and was always pleased to show off newfound knowledge.

"Yes, my smart boy! A constellation. There are many, many constellations in the sky, and some of them we will never see. But others, on very special days, they show themselves to us."

"So, Selunari is a constellation? One of the special ones?"

"Indeed! And do you know why we saw it?" Alexei shook his head.

"There are more than just stars in the sky, little one. There is the moon," Basimah pointed to it peeking over the horizon, "and there are planets, just like this one, but very far away. As they move, sometimes they come close together. Do you understand this?"

Alexei did not want to say no, but his frown betrayed him.

Basimah gathered a few small stones and laid them down in front of them. "Here is the sun, in the center. Yes? And all the planets, they move around the sun, in their own time."

She shifted the pebbles in their orbits as she spoke. "And sometimes, as they move, some of them line up, like this," she said, stopping each stone in its orbit when it lined up with the previous one. "And sometimes, very, very rarely, all the planets align like this. And right here," she pointed to the space just beyond the last pebble, "is where Selunari is."

"So... All the planets lined up with Selunari, and it sent light to us?" asked Alexei. The concepts were beginning to fall into place in his head, but they still did not entirely make sense.

"More than light, little one. It sent us magic! When the planets gave it a path, Selunari reached out to us. It spoke to us. Did you hear it?"

Alexei nodded; he had heard it. It had not used words, but he had understood it all the same. The color, the warmth; that was Selunari. It had reached out to his people and become one with them, if only for a moment. It had marked them with starlight on their brows and left them bonded even more deeply than before, as if each one was a star in a great constellation. In truth, it had made him feel alive.

Alexei thought about the old words for his people. Gypsy, the most common, but so many others. They all seemed so far away, as if they had never been his.

"I feel like I am Selunari now. Or, no, not now... I feel like I always was Selunari. I feel like we were always Selunari, you and Mama and the rest of the caravan. But not just the caravan: everyone. All of us, everywhere. I feel it! Is that strange?"

"Not at all, little one! I feel it too. If you ask your Mama, or your cousins, they will say the same. We are the Selunari. Nothing has felt more true."

"But are we still who we were before? Or are we different?"

Basimah thought for a moment before responding. "We are the same, I think, only... more complete. I believe we have found a part of ourselves. It is the way of our people to use what we can find until we know what is better. We did not know our true selves, so we used other words to say who we are. But now, we know."



Alexei grinned. “Yes. Now, we know. We always were Selunari! We just didn’t have the word before now.” His smile turned into a thoughtful frown. “But if we always were Selunari, why did we not know before now? Did the planets and stars never line up before?”

“Ahh, that is a very good question indeed,” Basimah responded, a twinkle in her eye. “We may never know. Perhaps they never did align before. Or perhaps they could not. Perhaps Selunari was not complete, just as we were not complete. I like to believe that one of the stars of Selunari got lost and needed to find its way home before it could speak to us.”

“Lost?” Alexei asked, folding his arms and raising an eyebrow. Grandmama was definitely telling one of her silly stories now. “How does a star get lost?”

“Now that, little one, is a story for another time.” Basimah winked, then began to rise. “Let us go. Your Mama will be missing us!” Together, the pair got to their feet and walked, hand in hand, toward the camp.

RACIAL BASICS

To be a Selunari is to be a member of the largest extended family in the world. This is not merely a colorful boast: every Selunari, regardless of whether or not they are related by blood, is connected to one another by a deep empathic bond called *sela* (once called *sumadja*). It is not a learned trait, nor is it purely biological; it is deeper, the very nature of their existence. Even a Selunari who has never encountered one of their kin feels the pull of the *sela*, sometimes causing strife when a Selunari is raised by other races (known as *eshdir*). Likewise, an Elf or High Ogre raised by Selunari might love the race and their adopted family, but they will never feel the true bond of *sela*.

The *sela* also manifests as an intense wanderlust that some describe more as a genuine physical need than simply a personality trait. Because of this, it is nearly impossible for Selunari to stay in one place for very long. Some theorize that, since the Selunari are connected to the stars, they wander the same patterns as various celestial bodies. Others think their *sela* is searching the worlds for others like itself, or that the Selunari seek “completeness” with the constellation from whom they got their name.

Because the *sela* compels Selunari to place family concerns over all others, any bonds the Selunari form with *eshdir* societies are highly conditional. Trade agreements between towns or cities and Selunari caravans are common and the caravan may stay for several weeks or even months, but their irresistible need to travel prevents them from ever fully integrating into the cities themselves. On a personal level, Selunari are capable of deep friendships with *eshdir*, but they have great difficulty accepting positions of responsibility in *eshdir* institutions such as governments and guilds. While it is not impossible, it is incredibly rare to see a Selunari in a position of civic duty. Even if the Selunari could satisfy their need to travel while serving, it is highly frowned upon by Selunari society, and those who stray face the potential for great scorn.

While the distinction between Selunari and *eshdir* societies may be startling to some, the Selunari harbor no animosity toward the *eshdir* as a whole. On the contrary, “*eshdir*” translates roughly as “protector(s) of the path”; the Selunari believe that had it not been for the clear connecting path formed by the planetary alignment, they would never have come to be, and that this symbiotic relationship between stars and planets echoes itself in the mortal races. Dear friends, spouses and chosen siblings can even be “adopted” into a familia, though to do so is no quick or simple decision for the Selunari. *Eshdir* adopted this way will never truly feel the *sela* and must understand this fundamental disconnect if they are to find their place within Selunari society.

Every family has its fair share of conflict and the Selunari are no exception. Sibling and generational rivalries are common, and with no ruling body making decisions for the Selunari as a whole, caravans often find themselves at odds over preferred traditions. Nevertheless, Selunari try to keep these disputes “within the familia”. When these clashes become too intense, Selunari usually prefer to leave their caravan and travel with

eshdir for a time, hoping the change in environment will give them a new perspective and allow them to return with solutions.

On a philosophical level, the sela manifests as an aversion of stagnation in all its myriad forms (most clearly demonstrated by the race's endless wanderlust), though interpretations of this philosophy vary greatly from familia to familia and even person to person. Slavery is considered the height of abhorred practices, as to restrict another's freedom to travel and experience life on their own terms is to doom them spiritually. Selunari who engage in slavery are exceedingly rare and are shunned by the vast majority of their kin. Some Selunari even consider civic duty a form of slavery, as it too restricts access to the open road, though most simply consider it at odds with the Selunari lifestyle.

At the same time, Selunari hold tradition in very high regard. Other races may see this as inherently contradictory, but Selunari believe that there is movement even in stillness and that the lessons of the past must be heeded to inform the future. To that end, every caravan has its own Code of Honor by which all the familias within it abide. These Codes are not as mandatory as a Code of Chivalry might be for eshdir; rather they are descriptions of the customs and expectations that each caravan places on all its members. Thus, the Codes may vary widely from caravan to caravan across Fortannis (though similarities are often found in caravan from the same land). A Selunari travelling without their familia always seeks to learn the specifics of the Code of Honor in any new land or area so as to avoid inadvertently embarrassing their familia name.

In addition to the bond of sela, the Selunari constellation gave its people one other gift. Selunari knew that imbuing its

people with such a deep wanderlust would place them in frequent danger, so it took the magic inside them and transformed it into a form of protection. It took the magic inherent to Selunari (known in common parlance as Gypsy Curse) and turned it into a potent charm, allowing the Selunari to resist Curse magics.

COSTUMING

The Selunari are consummate travellers and their dress reflects their endless wandering. Selunari clothing is a vast and varying mixture of styles, colors, fabrics and patterns from all corners of Fortannis. Many also tend to wear their wealth on their person in the form of fine jewelry, as their traveling nature prevents them from investing money in more conventional ways. Most familias have a signifying color or palette present in their clothing, though the meanings of colors vary from one familia to another. Some familias also use simple facial markings to distinguish themselves, such as dots, dashes, X's and lines on the cheek or chin.

The one physical marker that ties all Selunari together is the large gems that grow from their foreheads (must be at least the size of a US penny). Some Selunari possess only one gem, while others may have two, three or even more. These gems are considered the manifestation of the sela and represent the stars of the Selunari constellation.

ROLEPLAYING TIPS

Selunari personalities are as varied as the stars in the sky, and as with all races, there is no singular "right way" to play them. However, the sela does bring certain traits to the forefront; Selunari have a tendency to be rakish, outgoing, friendly and irrepressibly free-spirited. Some might even be considered wild or unruly by eshdir. They revel in new and different experiences, allowing their natural joie de vivre to draw wisdom from negative moments and put them in perspective. The one absolute truth is that Selunari are loyal to each other to a fault. Familia business comes before all else, and those who choose to contradict this may face extreme social consequences. This is not to say such conflict never occurs, but all Selunari know that to do so is to put their relationships and their place in Selunari society in dire jeopardy.

The wandering nature of the Selunari brings them into contact with myriad peoples and cultures, and everything from their dress to their superstitions are influenced by the world around them. Selunari possess a wide variety of accents in their speech, which may differ even within one familia, depending on where each member spent their formative years. Selunari speech is also peppered with words from many different languages and they are known to have occasional difficulty with the grammar and syntax of the Common tongue. Likewise, they absorb cultural values that make sense to them personally, so they may have startling things in common with unlikely peoples.

In creating a Selunari character, players have the opportunity to construct an elaborate amalgamation of both In-Game and real world influences. Costuming can be a mixture of reality and fantasy, pairing kilts and bodices with Elven armor and Dwarven weapons. Do research and be creative! Please remember to ensure, when taking inspiration from the real world, that it remains just that: inspiration only. Be conscious of the way you present any actual cultural dress, beliefs, accents, etc. in order to maintain both immersion and respect for their real world counterparts!

