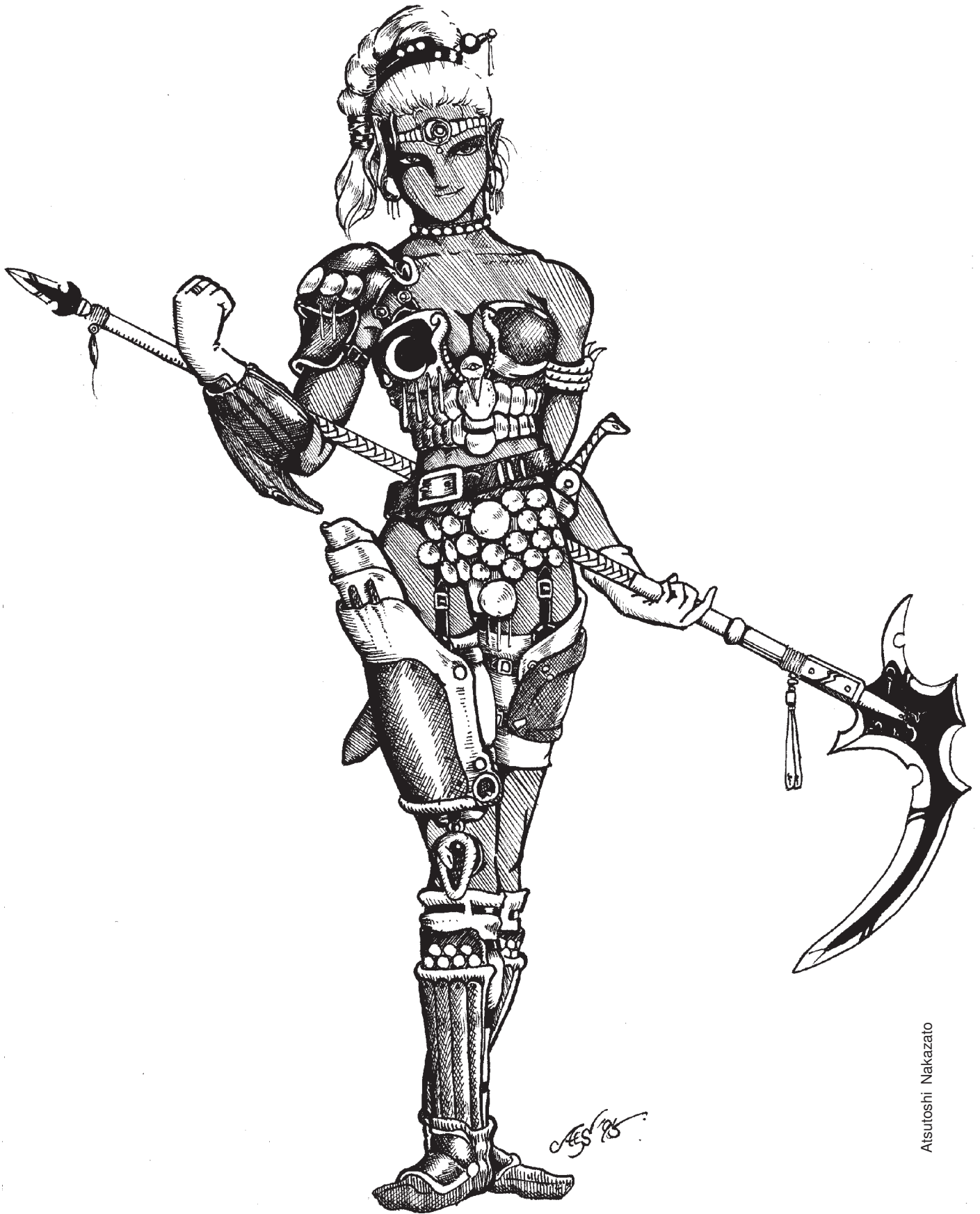


Dark Elf



Atsutoshi Nakazato

This moment had been coming since the affair had begun. Sentis knew already what the outcome was likely to be: it was even a necessary one. As she was led through the Halls of Justice by her silent guardians, she silently swore to herself that she would have the courage and the strength to behave well and uphold her family's honor.

The final chamber loomed about her, the jagged ceiling ascending into darkness overhead. The Guardian of Justice himself was seated at the center of the chamber, enveloped in robes of the darkest crimson, his long white hair spilling over his shoulders in stark contrast. Even from here, she could see, no, *feel* the icy blue of his stare upon her.

Her captors released her arms, allowing her the freedom to bow in reverence. She knelt swiftly, bowing her forehead to the elegant stone tiles, her bound arms unable to leave their position behind her back. There, she waited...

"Rise, Vaiask Sentis."

Although it was customary for the family name to be spoken first, this time it caused her stomach to tighten nervously. This would have nothing to do with her family, she told herself, if all went as she hoped.

Smoothly rocking back to her heels, then rising slowly to her feet, Sentis raised her head proudly although she did not stare directly at the Guardian. This would have been no time for rudeness, although she would not quail in the face of accusation.

"We understand that you were responsible for the deaths of the emissary from the Bright Above and his guards." He had risen now, and was walking with measured, slow paces toward her. Not expecting her to really answer, he merely paused for effect before he stopped just in front of her, arms crossed. He knew he was making it difficult for her to avoid direct staring now, and she was obliged to drop her eyes to his dark hands, but her chin remained still.

"I do not think it was just you, was it, Valask Sentis? You had others with you."

She would not betray her companions. They had made an oath between them of silence, and so there would be no offering of information. Likely, he knew this already: that meant he was leading up to something.

"Can you swear upon the honor of your family that there were no others?"

Sentis exhaled slowly, closing her eyes. No matter what the oaths made between herself and her companions, she could never lie upon the honor of her family. Prodded in the back by one of her guards, she knew she was required to respond.

"Guardian of justice, I cannot make that oath."

The Guardian merely nodded. It was the only answer she could have given, but it was as clear as the simple truth would have been.

"We have heard that this emissary killed your brother last year. We understand the right of revenge. However, you know that the Empress pardoned all involved in that affair when a treaty was made. Would you make the Empress herself an oathbreaker?"

A fine white brow arched as he asked that final question. Her voice was steady, bolstered by the strength of her conviction.

"No, Guardian of Justice. It was an act done without knowledge of her Imperial Majesty, and without knowledge of my House or family."

"We have already determined that by questioning. You know what this means for you, you who have acted against the Empress' oath? We must keep the peace between us and the Bright Above."

Sentis bowed her head, not in defeat, but in respect for the solemnity of the moment. "Guardian of Justice, I understand."

Sentis' death was swift, brought about by her own hand in proper ritual. She had been outcast before the rite, separating her from her House, her family, her home. Should she survive the resurrection, she would be banished. Thus was her death far more reaching than a simple loss of life; but it had been planned this way.

In her year long stalking of the Emissary, she had learned a great deal of his secrets. His death was not just about her brother: no, this was about protecting her people, her race, in the best way that she could from that elf's plans. She always knew she would have to pay the price, using her death to guard her race from retribution even then. In those last moments before her vision faded into red darkness, she thought she saw the Guardian of Justice smiling down at her. That he knew, and had probably known all along, brought her heart a calm such as she had never known.

And then there was blackness.

RACIAL BASICS

The primary requirement for the Dark Elf race is a dedication to honor. Their laws and culture are based around this concept in very rigid and labyrinthine ways, and are largely incomprehensible to the other races,

Once their word is given, or a promise made, a Dark Elf will stick to it to the letter. Because of this, they do not give their word lightly. They might also find loopholes in fulfilling their promise, but they will not break it. Swearing upon their honor, or particularly by the honor of their family, is the most solemn of Dark Elf oaths.

This does not mean that Dark Elves cannot lie. What is important in the consideration of honor is the intent; the result that the Elf is trying to achieve. In their opinion, there are times when lying is the honorable thing to do, considering the result that will come from it.

Dark Elves must also be absolutely certain that their race is superior to all others, and they must display absolute dedication to the protection and furthering of their race. This does not mean that Dark Elves have to spit on every surface race individual they meet, or that they go about treating them as slaves or trying to kill them. Dark Elves often ally with other races and so treat them with honor appropriate to that relation. While some Dark Elves might be obvious and vocal in their racism, some may be quiet and prudent about it. Regardless, Dark Elves will never betray their race or prefer another race to their own if there is ever a choice.

When Dark Elves are above ground, they do their best to follow the local laws rather than to bring dishonor upon themselves and their family.

The Dark Elf system of nobility, government, and society always ends up organized into Houses. Those who have no fealty to a House are either of great stature that requires impartiality or somewhat looked down upon as the fringe of society. There will always be an emperor or empress of some sort, and a ranking of the Houses in order of social importance.

Dark Elves do not fear death. To them, an honorable and sometimes "beautiful" death is as important as a well-lived life. Many people misinterpret this attitude as meaning that Dark Elves throw their lives away, or love death more than they love life. This is not the case; they simply put as much care into the manner of their death as they do in every other aspect of their lives, and they do not understand why other races seem to fear such a natural and inevitable event.

There are occasions where death is preferable to life. One of them is when a Dark Elf has disgraced himself or herself in some way. True remorse followed by a brave and formal suicide

can do much to revoke some of the grievances caused by the individual's life, or at least make the best of a bad situation. Also, if a very heroic act will result in death, particularly if it benefits the Dark Elf race as a whole, a true Dark Elf will embrace the opportunity as they will find no better or more glorious end to their lives. Again, this is not the same as wandering through life hoping to die and dwelling upon the idea of death.

Although Dark Elves appear to be serious and dour much of the time, they are not without a sense of humor. They are not flighty and jovial, but they are passionate and when something does amuse them greatly (usually things other races might consider sick or weird), they will laugh. Some races say the laughter is even worse than their usual dour demeanor. In the same token, they are quite capable of sorrow, although it is considered excessive to weep too much. It is a sign of weakness if a Dark Elf allows him or herself to be completely overcome by emotion.

Dark Elves as a whole admire beauty, but the things they consider beautiful do not always appeal to the tastes of other races. Silence, the dark, jagged or sinuous lines and unsettling colors appeal to their aesthetic senses. Things that seem particularly 'appropriate' to their culture, whether actions or music or clothing, are considered beautiful even if they might otherwise seem strange or violent to others.

The sun is uncomfortably bright to this race, although it does not damage them. Given a choice if they are above ground, they would rather sleep during the day and come out at night when "It's nice out." If someone casts a *Lightspell* nearby, a Dark Elf will often find it momentarily painful to the eyes and be rather annoyed.

Dark Elves are capable of living for great lengths of time. They are not sure themselves how long they might live if left to it; however, due to the often deadly nature of their existence, and their lack of fear toward death, actual numbers aren't likely to be acquired anytime soon. Player characters should generally be no more than a hundred to two hundred years old at the most. Anything more would assume a greater level of ability and knowledge than a starting character should possess.

COSTUMING

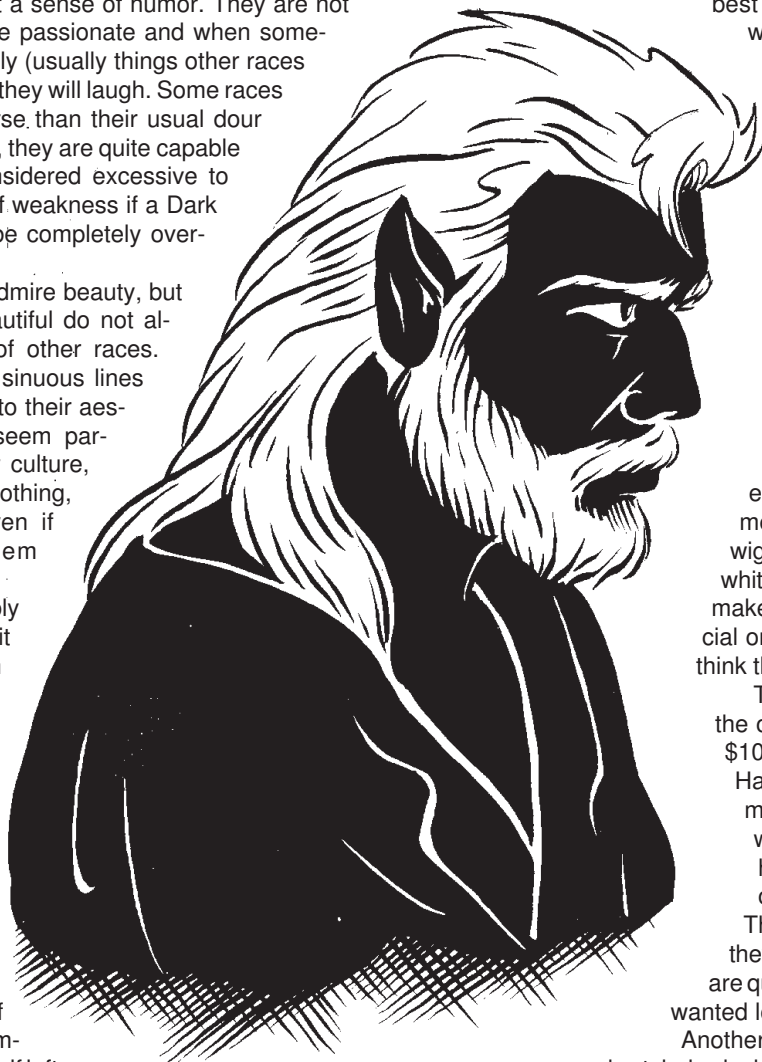
Dark Elves must have pointed ears, black skin, and white or silver hair. The makeup requirements of this race are considerable and often uncomfortable, but they are not negotiable. If a person can't tolerate the makeup, they should not play a Dark Elf.

The best black makeup is generally water-based pancake type. Cream-based tends to look oily and rub off on everything, and it requires special makeup remover.

Pancake is more resistant to rubbing, particularly if you get a good theatrical brand like Ben Nye, it is resistant to running in cold water (like rain) and comes off with soap and warm water.

Pancake makeup also lets your skin breathe more than the cream-based makeup.

Pointed ears can be found from many companies like Woochie and may be available for sale at your local campaign, although it is rare to find them in black. Generally, you will need to paint the ears yourself. A good acrylic art paint will stick to the latex and look nice.



Lips are often tricky, since even the best pancake or cream makeup will tend to come off on your mug or food or wear off as you speak or lick your lips.

One thing that tends to help is to buy a very, very dark lipstick that is designed for "all day wear" or "no smudging." First cover your lips with pancake black, then use the dark lipstick over top of it. The colors should blend to something very close to black and it will stay on while not drying your lips out.

Hair can be done in several ways. The quickest and least messy is to purchase a wig. Most wigs can be ordered in silver or white, but wig shops will usually make you pay in advance for special orders like that since they don't think they will be able to resell them.

The drawbacks to wigs are that the ones worth having will be over \$100 (don't settle for cheap \$30 Halloween wigs; they are a nightmare and look terrible after one wearing) and they have to be held on tightly so they don't fly off at an inopportune moment.

The positive aspects of wigs is they can look very impressive, they are quick to put on, and if you always wanted long hair you can have it.

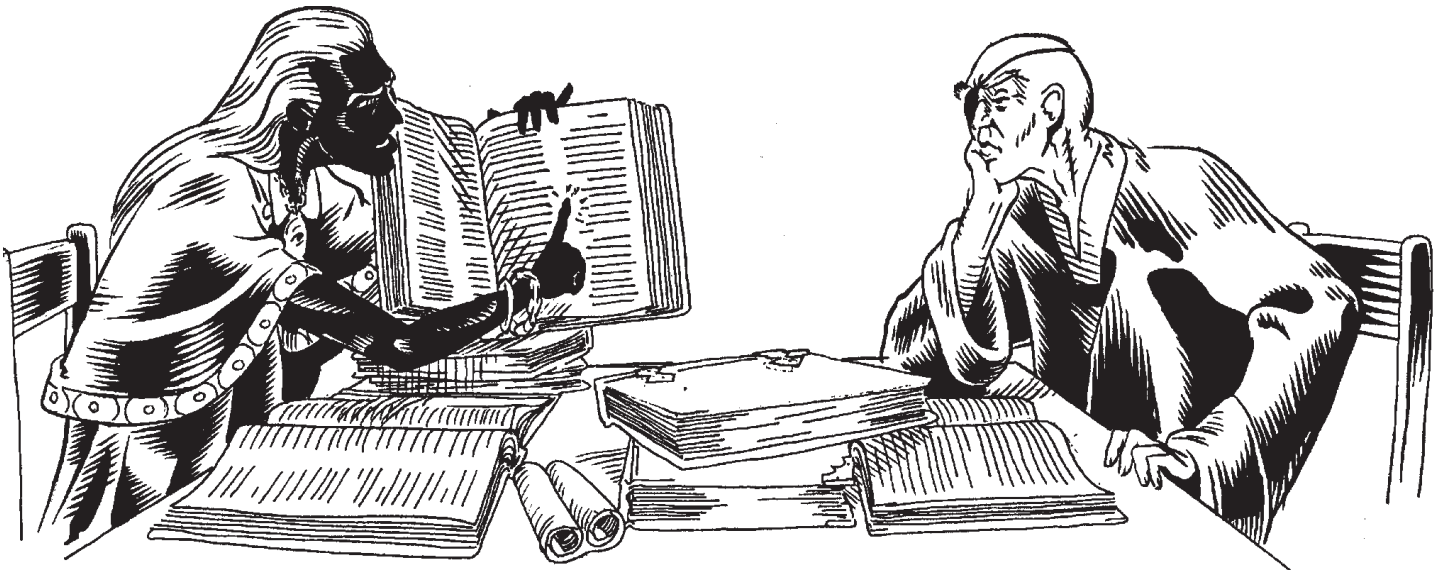
Another method, more useful for the short haired players, is to temporarily color your hair/beard white. Most theatrical stores will have Hair-White that works decently. The advantages are that it is cheaper, and it won't have to be fastened to your head like a wig. The disadvantages are that it doesn't look as good generally, and you have to make sure your hair color isn't peeking through and needing a touchup all the time.

The simplest method is to cover up your hair somehow. A bandanna tied down tightly can work. Don't rely on something like the hood of your cloak, because those don't stay up all weekend long.

Using this method to cover your lack of pointed ears is not allowed. People need to see those to know you are an elf.

For hands, most people wear gloves. You can use black surgical gloves or formal black satin gloves. Some people just wear decorative gloves and never show their hands.

Some advanced tips for those who like details: Use pancake white and a fine art brush to color your eyebrows and eyelashes. It's a neat effect against the black skin. When possible, wear dark colors where fabrics tend to touch made-up skin, like collars. You won't notice the makeup slowly rubbing off onto it that way.



ROLE-PLAYING TIPS

While Dark Elves are not flamboyant (which is typically seen as tasteless) they are intense. They believe passionately in things, such as honor and their race. They react to insults strongly, requiring that honor be satisfied in some way or another, although they will rarely resort to shouting matches or useless posturing. They take matters of honor too seriously for that. This satisfaction can range from public duels to “revenge served cold” after months of planning, depending on the local customs and the individual.

Dark Elves tend not to make close binding friendships with other races, since it is hard for the races to understand each other deeply enough and because Dark Elves have a hard time getting past the strongly held belief of superiority.

It is possible for a close friendship of this sort to occur, but it should be very intense, such as blood brothers who have owed each other their lives. Otherwise, the other races have a hard time feeling like they ever really know a Dark Elf, even if they’ve spent a lot of time together.

Sometimes Dark Elves simply assume it is impossible for others to understand them (and don’t try to make them), even though that might not actually be the case. Dark Elves seek the company of other Dark Elves for this reason among others. It is always nicer to be around people who understand you and know what to expect from you, and vice-versa.

Their marriages and intimate relationships rarely go outside of rigid social code, whatever the specifics for the area might be. Culture, race, and family are more important than personal romantic fantasies to most Dark Elves. That means that typically they do not mate outside their race.

Dark Elves see many of the overworld races as silly and weak. They respect shrewd, powerful, and honorable people, so any overworlders that fit this description will be seen as worthwhile exceptions.

Perhaps the most important thing a Dark Elf player needs to do is to sit down and seriously consider their character’s priorities, allegiances, oaths, and so on. Imagine difficult situations requiring a consideration of these elements, and how your character would choose among them. The point of this exercise is to create a solid, logical, and lawful code that will help you understand how your character would react in any given situation. Dark Elf mentality is so different from that of modern Americans, that planning such as this is essential.

One of the easiest ways to do this is to make a list of concepts ranging from the least important to the most important. If a situation requires that you choose one or the other, you will automatically pick the one with the most importance; i.e. an oath to your family over an oath to a friend. Hierarchy permeates the Dark Elf paradigm, which can make things easier for you if you work with this tool.