

Chapter 2

The Backgrounds of Orin's Gate

Personality & Background

Characters are defined by much more than their race and class. They're individuals with their own stories, interests, connections, and capabilities beyond those that class and race define. This chapter expounds on the details that distinguish characters from one another, including the basics of name and physical description, the rules of backgrounds and languages, and the finer points of personality and alignment.

Character Details

Your character's name and physical description might be the first things that the other players at the table learn about you. It's worth thinking about how these characteristics reflect the character you have in mind.

Name

Your character's race description includes sample names for members of that race. Put some thought into your name even if you're just picking one from a list.

Gender

You can play a male or female character without gaining any special benefits or hindrances. Think about how your character does or does not conform to the broader culture's expectations of sex, gender, and sexual behavior. Some races do not have a specific gender, so think about how that would play out if that is the case.

Height and Weight

You can decide your character's height and weight, using the information provided in your race description. Think about what your character's ability scores might say about his or her height and weight. A weak but agile character might be thin. A strong and tough character might be tall or just heavy.

Other Physical Characteristics

You choose your character's age and the color of his or her hair, eyes, and skin. To add a touch of distinctiveness, you might want to give your character an unusual or memorable physical characteristic, such as a scar, a limp, or a tattoo.

Alignment

A typical creature in the worlds of Orin's Gate has an alignment, which broadly describes its moral and personal attitudes. Alignment is a combination of two factors: one identifies morality (good, evil, or neutral), and the other describes attitudes toward society and order (lawful, chaotic, or neutral). Thus, nine distinct alignments define the possible combinations. Keep in mind that this is more of a system to help inform character choices, not define them. Your alignment can be fluid as well. Han Solo is mostly CN on the list, but while he formed deep bonds with the Twins, his alignment shifted for a time to CG.

These brief summaries of the nine alignments describe the typical behavior of a creature with that alignment. Individuals might vary significantly from that typical behavior, and few people are perfectly and consistently faithful to the precepts of their alignment.

- Lawful good (LG) creatures can be counted on to do the right thing as expected by society.
- Neutral good (NG) folk do the best they can to help others according to their needs.
- Chaotic good (CG) creatures act as their conscience directs, with little regard for what others expect.
- Lawful neutral (LN) individuals act in accordance with law, tradition, or personal codes.
- Neutral (N) is the alignment of those who prefer to steer clear of moral questions and don't take sides, doing what seems best at the time.
- Chaotic neutral (CN) creatures follow their whims, holding their personal freedom above all else.
- Lawful evil (LE) creatures methodically take what they want, within the limits of a code of tradition, loyalty, or order.
- Neutral evil (NE) is the alignment of those who do whatever they can get away with, without compassion or qualms.
- Chaotic evil (CE) creatures act with arbitrary violence, spurred by their greed, hatred, or bloodlust.

Languages

Your race indicates the languages your character can speak by default, and your background might give you access to one or more additional languages of your choice. Note these languages on your character sheet. Choose your languages or choose one that is common in your campaign.

With your DM's permission, you can instead choose a language from a more Exotic Language. Some of these languages are families of languages with many dialects.

Personal Characteristics

Fleshing out your character's personality—the array of traits, mannerisms, habits, beliefs, and flaws that give a person a unique identity—will help you bring him or her to life as you play the game. Four categories of characteristics are presented here: personality traits, ideals, bonds, and flaws. Beyond those categories, think about your character's favorite words or phrases, tics and habitual gestures, vices and pet peeves, and whatever else you can imagine.

Each background presented later in this section includes suggested characteristics that you can use to spark your imagination. You're not bound to those options, but they're a good starting point.

Personality Traits

Give your character two personality traits. Personality traits are small, simple ways to help you set your character apart from every other character. Your personality traits should tell you something interesting and fun about your character. They should be self-descriptions that are specific about what makes your character stand out. "I'm smart" is not a good trait, because it describes a lot of characters. "I've read every book in Candlekeep" tells you something specific about your character's interests and disposition.

Personality traits might describe the things your character likes, his or her past accomplishments, things your character dislikes or fears, your character's self-attitude or mannerisms, or the influence of his or her ability scores.

A useful place to start thinking about personality traits is to look at your highest and lowest ability scores and define one trait related to each. Either one could be positive or negative: you might work hard to overcome a low score, for example, or be cocky about your high score.

Ideals

Describe one ideal that drives your character. Your ideals are the things that you believe in most strongly, the fundamental moral and ethical principles that compel you to act as you do. Ideals encompass everything from your life goals to your core belief system.

Ideals might answer any of these questions: What are the principles that you will never betray? What would prompt you to make sacrifices? What drives you to act and guides your goals and ambitions? What is the single most important thing you strive for? You can choose any ideals you like, but your character's alignment is a good place to start defining them. Each background in this chapter includes six suggested ideals. Five of them are linked to aspects of alignment: law, chaos, good, evil, and neutrality. The last one has more to do with the background than with moral or ethical perspectives.

Bonds

Create one bond for your character. Bonds represent a character's connections to people, places, and events in the world. They tie you to things from your background. They might inspire you to heights of heroism or lead you to act against your own best interests if they are threatened. They can work very much like ideals, driving a character's motivations and goals.

Bonds might answer any of these questions: Whom do you care most about? To what place do you feel a special connection? What is your most treasured possession? Your bonds might be tied to your class, your background, your race, or some other aspect of your character's history or personality. You might also gain new bonds over the course of your adventures.

Flaws

Finally, choose a flaw for your character. Your character's flaw represents some vice, compulsion, fear, or weakness—in particular, anything that someone else could exploit to bring you to ruin or cause you to act against your best interests. More significant than negative personality traits, a flaw might answer any of these questions: What enrages you? What's the one person, concept, or event that you are terrified of? What are your vices?

Inspiration

Inspiration is a rule the Dungeon Master can use to reward you for playing your character in a way that's true to his or her personality traits, ideal, bond, and flaw. By using inspiration, you can draw on your personality trait of compassion for the downtrodden to give you an edge in negotiating with the Beggar Prince. Or inspiration can let you call on your bond to the defense of your home village to push past the effect of a power that has been laid on you.

Your DM can choose to give you inspiration for a variety of reasons. Typically, DMs award it when you play out your personality traits, give in to the drawbacks presented by a flaw or bond, and otherwise portray your character in a compelling way. Your DM will tell you how you can earn inspiration in the game. You either have inspiration or you don't—you can't stockpile multiple "inspirations" for later use.

If you have inspiration, you can expend it when you make an attack roll, saving throw, or ability check. Spending your inspiration gives you advantage on that roll. Additionally, if you have inspiration, you can reward another player for good roleplaying, clever thinking, or simply doing something exciting in the game. When another player character does something that really contributes to the story in a fun and interesting way, you can give up your inspiration to give that character inspiration.

Backgrounds

Every story has a beginning. Your character's background reveals where you came from, how you became an adventurer, and your place in the world. Your fighter might have been a courageous knight or a grizzled soldier. Your Vagabond might have gotten by as a guild thief or commanded audiences as a jester. Choosing a background provides you with important story cues about your character's identity. The most important question to ask about your background is what changed? Why did you stop doing whatever your background describes and start adventuring? Where did you get the money to purchase your starting gear, or, if you come from a wealthy background, why don't you have more money? How did you learn the skills of your class? What sets you apart from ordinary people who share your background?

Keep in mind that all the below are examples. You can tweak and modify your background. Talk with your DM so you can make something that will make sense for their campaign.

Acolyte of the Sentinels

You have spent your life in the service of the Sentinels. You are not necessarily a Sentinel Class, but you firmly believe in their mission. Were you a lesser functionary in the order, raised from childhood to assist the Sentinels in their day to day operations? Or were you a young person in training to take up the mantle of a Sentinel? Perhaps you were the leader of a small village outside of any established Sentinel structure, knowing the mission statements of the Sentinels, but serve in no official capacity.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Cultures, Insight
- **Languages:** Two of your choice
- **Equipment:** A symbol of the Sentinels, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 15 Bekkr

Feature: Shelter of the Sentinel

As an acolyte, you command the respect of those who share your belief of the Sentinels. You and your adventuring companions can expect to receive free healing and care at a Guild hall of the Sentinels, or other established presence of the Sentinels though you must provide any material components needed for the powers used. Those who share your beliefs will support you (but only you) at a modest lifestyle. You might also have ties to a specific Guild Hall and you have a residence there. This could be the Guild Hall where you used to serve, if you remain on good terms with it, or a Guild Hall where you have found a new home. While near your Guild hall, you can call upon the Sentinels for assistance, provided the assistance you ask for is not hazardous and you remain in good standing with the Sentinels.

Charlatan

You have always had a way with people. You know what makes them tick, you can tease out their hearts' desires after a few minutes of conversation, and with a few leading questions you can read them like they were children's books. It's a useful talent, and one that you're perfectly willing to use for your advantage. You know what people want and you deliver, or rather, you promise to deliver. Common sense should steer people away from things that sound too good to be true, but common sense seems to be in short supply when you're around. The bottle of pink-colored liquid will surely cure that unseemly rash, this ointment—nothing more than a bit of fat with a sprinkle of silver dust—can restore youth and vigor, and there's a bridge in the city that just happens to be for sale. These marvels sound implausible, but you make them sound like the real deal.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Deception, Sleight of Hand
- **Tool Proficiency:** Disguise kit, forgery kit
- **Equipment:** A set of fine clothes, a disguise kit, tools of the con of your choice (ten stoppered bottles filled with colored liquid, a set of weighted dice, a deck of marked cards, or a signet ring of an imaginary duke), and a belt pouch containing 15 Bekkr.

Feature: False Identity

You have created a second identity that includes documentation, established acquaintances, and disguises that allow you to assume that persona. Additionally, you can forge documents including official papers and personal letters, as long as you have seen an example of the kind of document or the handwriting you are trying to copy.

Criminal

You are an experienced criminal with a history of breaking the law. You have spent a lot of time among other criminals and still have contacts within the criminal underworld. You're far closer than most people to the world of murder, theft, and violence that pervades the underbelly of civilization, and you have survived up to this point by flouting the rules and regulations of society.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Deception, Stealth
- **Tool Proficiency:** One type of gaming set, thieves' tools
- **Equipment:** A crowbar, a set of dark common clothes including a hood, and a belt pouch containing 15 Bekkr.

Feature: Criminal Contact

You have a reliable and trustworthy contact who acts as your liaison to a network of other criminals. You know how to get messages to and from your contact, even over great distances; specifically, you know the local messengers, corrupt caravan masters, and seedy sailors who can deliver messages for you. **Variant Criminal Option: Spy:** Although your capabilities are not much different from those of a burglar or smuggler, you learned

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and practiced them in a very different context: as an espionage agent. You might have been an officially sanctioned agent of the crown, or perhaps you sold the secrets you uncovered to the highest bidder.

Entertainer

You thrive in front of an audience. You know how to enthrall them, entertain them, and even inspire them. Your poetics can stir the hearts of those who hear you, awakening grief or joy, laughter or anger. Your music raises their spirits or captures their sorrow. Your dance steps captivate, your humor cuts to the quick. Whatever techniques you use, your art is your life.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Acrobatics, Performance
- **Tool Proficiency:** Disguise kit, one type of musical instrument
- **Equipment:** A musical instrument (one of your choice), the favor of an admirer (love letter, lock of hair, or trinket), a costume, and a belt pouch containing 15 Bekkr

Feature: By Popular Demand

You can always find a place to perform, usually in an inn or tavern but possibly with a circus, at a theater, or even in a noble's court. At such a place, you receive free lodging and food of a modest or comfortable standard (depending on the quality of the establishment), if you perform each night. In addition, your performance makes you something of a local figure. When strangers recognize you in a town where you have performed, they typically take a liking to you.

Folk Hero

You come from a humble social rank, but you are destined for so much more. Already the people of your home village regard you as their champion, and your destiny calls you to stand against the tyrants and monsters that threaten the common folk everywhere.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Animal Handling, Survival
- **Tool Proficiency:** One type of artisan's tools or Musical Instrument.
- **Equipment:** A musical instrument or a set of artisan's tools (one of your choice), a shovel, an iron pot, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr

Feature: Rustic Hospitality

Since you come from the ranks of the common folk, you fit in among them with ease. You can find a place to hide, rest, or recuperate among other commoners, unless you have shown yourself to be a danger to them. They will shield you from the law or anyone else searching for you, though they will not risk their lives for you.

Guild Artisan

You are a member of an artisan's guild, skilled in a field and closely associated with other artisans. You are a well-established part of the mercantile world, freed by talent and wealth from the constraints of a feudal social order. You learned your skills as an apprentice to a master artisan, under the sponsorship of your guild, until you became a master in your own right.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Insight or Persuasion
- **Languages:** 1 additional language
- **Tool Proficiency:** One type of tools
- **Equipment:** A set of tools (one of your choice), a letter of introduction from your guild, a set of traveler's clothes, and a belt pouch containing 15 Bekkr

Feature: Guild Membership

As an established and respected member of a guild, you can rely on certain benefits that membership provides. Your fellow guild members will provide you with lodging and food if necessary and pay for your funeral if needed. In some cities and towns, a guildhall offers a central place to meet other members of your profession, which can be a good place to meet potential patrons, allies, or hirelings. Guilds often wield tremendous political power. If you are accused of a crime, your guild will support you if a good case can be made for your innocence or the crime is justifiable. You can also gain access to powerful political figures through the guild, if you are a member in good standing. Such connections might require the donation of money or DME items to the guild's coffers. You must pay dues of 5 Bekkr per month to the guild. If you miss payments, you must make up back dues to remain in the guild's good graces. **Variant Feature: Guild Merchant:** Instead of an artisans' guild, you might belong to a guild of traders, caravan masters, or shopkeepers. You don't craft items yourself but earn a living by buying and selling the works of others (or the raw materials artisans need to practice their craft). Your guild might be a large merchant consortium (or family) with interests across the region. Perhaps you transported goods from one place to another, by ship, wagon, or caravan, or bought them from traveling traders and sold them in your own little shop. In some ways, the traveling merchant's life lends itself to adventure far more than the life of an artisan. Rather than proficiency with artisan's tools, you might be proficient with navigator's tools or an additional language. And instead of artisan's tools, you can start with a mule and a cart.

Hermit

You lived in seclusion—either in a sheltered community such as a monastery, or entirely a lone—for a formative part of your life. In your time apart from the clamor of society, you found quiet, solitude, and perhaps some of the answers you were looking for.

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- **Skill Proficiencies:** Medicine, Cultures
- **Tool Proficiency:** Herbalism Kits
- **Languages:** One of your Choice
- **Equipment:** A scroll case stuffed full of notes from your studies or prayers, a winter blanket, a set of common clothes, an herbalism kit, and 5 Bekkr

Feature: Discovery

The quiet seclusion of your extended hermitage gave you access to a unique and powerful discovery. The exact nature of this revelation depends on the nature of your seclusion. It might be a great truth about the cosmos or the forces of nature. It could be a site that no one else has ever seen. You might have uncovered a fact that has long been forgotten or unearthed some relic of the past that could rewrite history. It might be information that would be damaging to the people who or consigned you to exile, and hence the reason for your return to society. Work with your DM to determine the details of your discovery and its impact on the campaign.

Noble

You understand wealth, power, and privilege. You carry a noble title, and your family owns land, collects taxes, and wields significant political influence. You might be a pampered aristocrat unfamiliar with work or discomfort, a former merchant just elevated to the nobility, or a disinherited scoundrel with a disproportionate sense of entitlement. Or you could be an honest, hard-working landowner who cares deeply about the people who live and work on your land, keenly aware of your responsibility to them. Work with your DM to come up with an appropriate title and determine how much authority that title carries. A noble title doesn't stand on its own—it's connected to an entire family, and whatever title you hold, you will pass it down to your own children. Not only do you need to determine your noble title, but you should also work with the DM to describe your family and their influence on you. Is your family old and established, or was your title only recently bestowed? How much influence do they wield, and over what area? What kind of reputation does your family have among the other aristocrats of the region? How do the common people regard them? What's your position in the family? Are you the heir to the head of the family? Have you already inherited the title? How do you feel about that responsibility? Or are you so far down the line of inheritance that no one cares what you do, if you don't embarrass the family? How does the head of your family feel about your adventuring career? Are you in your family's good graces, or shunned by the rest of your family? Does your family have a coat of arms? An insignia you might wear on a signet ring? Colors you wear all the time? An animal you regard as a symbol of your line or even a spiritual member of the family? These details help establish your family and your title as features of the world of the campaign.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** History, Persuasion
- **Tool Proficiency:** One type of gaming set
- **Languages:** One of your choice
- **Equipment:** A set of fine clothes, a signet ring, a scroll of pedigree, and a purse containing 25 Bekkr

Feature: Position of Privilege

Thanks to your noble birth, people are inclined to think the best of you. You are welcome in high society, and people assume you have the right to be wherever you are. The common folk make every effort to accommodate you and avoid your displeasure, and other people of high birth treat you as a member of the same social sphere. You can secure an audience with a local noble if you need to.

Outlander

You grew up in the wilds, far from civilization and the comforts of town and technology. You've witnessed the migration of herds larger than forests, survived weather more extreme than any city-dweller could comprehend, and enjoyed the solitude of being the only thinking creature for miles in any direction. The wilds are in your blood, whether you were a nomad, an explorer, a recluse, a hunter-gatherer, or even a marauder. Even in places where you don't know the specific features of the terrain, you know the ways of the wild.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Athletics, Survival
- **Tool Proficiency:** One type of musical instrument
- **Languages:** One of your Choice
- **Equipment:** A staff, a hunting trap, a trophy from an animal you killed, a set of traveler's clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr

Feature: Wanderer

You have an excellent memory for maps and geography, and you can always recall the general layout of terrain, settlements, and other features around you. In addition, you can find food and fresh water for yourself and up to five other people each day, provided that the land offers berries, small game, water, and so forth.

Educated

You spent years learning the lore of the multiverse. You scoured manuscripts, studied scrolls, and listened to the greatest experts on the subjects that interest you. Your efforts have made you a master in your fields of study.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** DME, History
- **Languages:** Two of your choice

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- **Equipment:** A bottle of black ink, a quill, a small knife, a letter from a dead colleague posing a question you have not yet been able to answer, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr.

Feature: Researcher

When you attempt to learn or recall a piece of lore, if you do not know that information, you often know where and from whom you can obtain it. Usually, this information comes from a library, scriptorium, university, or a sage or other learned person or creature. Your DM might rule that the knowledge you seek is secreted away in an almost inaccessible place, or that it simply cannot be found. Unearthing the deepest secrets of the multiverse can require an adventure or even a whole campaign.

Sailor

You sailed on a seagoing vessel for years. In that time, you faced down mighty storms, monsters of the deep, and those who wanted to sink your craft to the bottomless depths. Your first love is the distant line of the horizon, but the time has come to try your hand at something new. Discuss the nature of the ship you previously sailed with your Dungeon Master. Was it a merchant ship, a naval vessel, a ship of discovery, or a pirate ship? How famous (or infamous) is it? Is it widely traveled? Is it still sailing, or is it missing and presumed lost with all hands? What were your duties on board—boatswain, captain, navigator, cook, or some other position? Who were the captain and first mate? Did you leave your ship on good terms with your fellows, or on the run?

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Athletics or Perception and Piloting
- **Tools:** Navigator's tools
- **Equipment:** A belaying pin (club), 50 feet of silk rope, a lucky charm such as a rabbit foot or a small stone with a hole in the center (or you may roll for a random trinket on the Trinkets table in chapter 5), a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr.

Feature: Ships Passage

When you need to, you can secure free passage on a sailing ship for yourself and your adventuring companions. You might sail on the ship you served on, or another ship you have good relations with (perhaps one captained by a former crewmate). Because you're calling in a favor, you can't be certain of a schedule or route that will meet your every need. Your Dungeon Master will determine how long it takes to get where you need to go. In return for your free passage, you and your companions are expected to assist the crew during the voyage. **Variant Feature: Pirate:** You spent your youth under the sway of a dread pirate, a ruthless cutthroat who taught you how to survive in a world of sharks and savages. You've indulged in larceny on the high seas and sent more than one deserving soul to a briny grave. Fear and bloodshed are no strangers to you, and you've garnered a somewhat unsavory reputation in many a port town. If you decide that your sailing career involved piracy, you can choose the Bad Reputation feature (see sidebar) instead of the Ship's Passage feature.

Soldier

War has been your life for as long as you care to remember. You trained as a youth, studied the use of weapons and armor, learned basic survival techniques, including how to stay alive on the battlefield. You might have been part of a standing national army or a mercenary company, or perhaps a member of a local militia who rose to prominence during a recent war. When you choose this background, work with your DM to determine which military organization you were a part of, how far through its ranks you progressed, and what kind of experiences you had during your military career. Was it a standing army, a town guard, or a village militia? Or it might have been a noble's or merchant's private army, or a mercenary company.

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Athletics, Intimidation
- **Tools:** One type of gaming set, and 1 Artisan tools
- **Equipment:** An insignia of rank, a trophy taken from a fallen enemy (a dagger, broken blade, or piece of a banner), a set of bone dice or deck of cards, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr.

Feature: Military Rank

You have a military rank from your career as a soldier. Soldiers loyal to your former military organization still recognize your authority and influence, and they defer to you if they are of a lower rank. You can invoke your rank to exert influence over other soldiers and requisition simple equipment or horses for temporary use. You can also usually gain access to friendly military encampments and fortresses where your rank is recognized.

Urchin

You grew up on the streets alone, orphaned, and poor. You had no one to watch over you or to provide for you, so you learned to provide for yourself. You fought fiercely over food and kept a constant watch out for other desperate souls who might steal from you. You slept on rooftops and in alleyways, exposed to the elements, and endured sickness without the advantage of medicine or a place to recuperate. You've survived despite all odds, and did so through cunning, strength, speed, or some combination of each. You begin your adventuring career with enough money to live modestly but securely for at least ten days. How did you come by that money? What allowed you to break free of your desperate circumstances and embark on a better life?

- **Skill Proficiencies:** Sleight of Hand, Stealth
- **Tools:** Disguise kit, thieves' tools

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- **Equipment:** A small knife, a map of the city you grew up in, a pet mouse, a token to remember your parents by, a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 Bekkr.

Feature: City Secrets

You know the secret patterns and flow to cities and can find passages through the urban sprawl that others would miss. When you are not in combat, you (and companions you lead) can travel between any two locations in the city twice as fast as your speed would normally allow.