

Backgrounds and Specialties

INTRODUCTION

These rules provide options for fleshing out PCs (& NPCs) beyond their ability scores, race and class abilities. The options here provide some minor benefits in terms of game mechanics, but the main intention is to provide some structure to help players customize their characters.

Each PC (and at the DM's option, each major NPC) can select one background and one specialty from the following lists. Of course the lists can (and should) be expanded or modified to accommodate the needs of the DM's campaign or inventive player ideas.

BACKGROUNDS

Backgrounds provide a means for establishing the past experiences of a character, prior to their joining one of the character classes in the game. Each background is deliberately broad in definition and players are encouraged to fill in the details to add more depth to the character.

In situations where a character makes an ability roll (see page 141 of the BFRPG rules), the GM should assign a bonus of +5 to the roll where it is deemed that the character's background (past experiences) would give them an advantage at the task. In situations where the character's background is only partly relevant, a lesser bonus (e.g. +2) can be used, at the GM's discretion.

Sample backgrounds:

Aristocrat

These characters are from the upper class of their societies. Generally wealthy and well-educated (almost all are literate), aristocrats are well versed in etiquette, dancing, diplomacy and other skills useful in courtly circles

Barbarian

Barbarians are from a culture that is more primitive than the assumed medieval technology level of a typical BFRPG game. Barbarians are self-sufficient, imposing and impressive to those from other cultures. They are proficient at hunting, tracking and outdoor survival.

Farmer

Experience at herding and/or cropping, handling domesticated animals, manual labor, etc. Farmers tend to be very practical and good at solving problems with improvised tools and materials.

Outdoorsman

Experience in tracking, hunting, trapping and survival in the outdoors. Outdoorsmen are good at predicting the weather, assessing natural hazards and blazing the most efficient path through uncharted territory.

Scholar

Whether as an historian, herald, linguist or theologian, this character has highly specialized knowledge in a particular field and a broad knowledge of related fields. All scholars are literate and are generally inept at most physical and practical tasks, although they excel at research, writing and recalling obscure facts.

Seafarer

Whether as a simple sailor, a merchant navigator or a pirate, the character is an experienced seafarer. Depending upon their past role aboard their ship, the character is skilled at manning the sails/rigging, navigating, naval combat or the logistics of sea voyages.

Soldier

Soldiers are those who have received formal military training in some kind of martial organization. This could be an organized militia, a mercenary company or the army of an important ruler. Soldiers are skilled in military tactics, the repair and maintenance of weaponry and the logistics of organizing and moving large numbers of troops.

Tradesman

The character has some kind of experience as a craftsman, tradesman or other similarly specialized role, including various kinds of artists, performers and merchants. Blacksmiths, bowyers, cobblers, leatherworkers and tailors all have specialized skills that they can use to eke out a living between adventures. A tradesman may or may not be literate depending upon the nature of their trade or craft.

SPECIALTIES

Each character class may choose to specialize in certain aspects of their chosen profession. Specialties provide benefits that accrue as the character gains levels. It may be possible for a character to change their specialty, if both the player and GM agree such a change is warranted based on events that have occurred in the game.

Characters may only take one specialty, and it must be from the list associated with their character class (or in the case of a character with multiple character classes, one of their classes). Each specialty lists 3 'levels' of benefit. Characters gain the first level of a specialty at 3rd level, the 2nd listed benefit is gained at 6th level and the third at 9th level.

Sample character specialties are listed below for each character class:

Cleric Specialties

Crusader

These clerics have received more militant training than the typical cleric in order to focus on combating their enemies.

Game effects:

1. The cleric may use a single type of normally prohibited weapon (e.g. sword, axe, bow etc.)
2. Cast a free Striking spell once each day.
3. Cast a free Dispel Evil once each day.

Dwarven Cleric

These clerics serve numerous roles in Dwarven society and are tasked with furthering the interests of dwarves wherever they may be found. In battle, Dwarven clerics focus on spells that aid their comrades.

Game Effects:

1. Use any kind of axe in addition to the weapons normally allowed to clerics
2. Cast a free Bless or Resist Fire spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.
3. Cast a free Neutralize Poison or Protection from Evil 10' Radius spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.

Elven Cleric

Elven Clerics are tasked with the wise guidance and long-term prosperity of elven communities.

Game Effects:

1. May use a long or short bow in addition to the weapons normally allowed to Clerics.
2. Cast a free Speak with Animals or Charm Animal spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.
3. Cast a free Speak with Plants or Commune spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.

Halfling Clerics

These Clerics are highly respected in halfling communities, being responsible for the health and education of their flock.

Game Effects:

1. Cast a free Purify Food and Water or Remove Fear spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.
2. Cast Cure Blindness or Cure Deafness spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.
3. Cast Create Water or Create Food spell once each day in addition to their normally prepared spells.

Healer

These clerics specialize in curing the sick and assisting the wounded.

Game effects:

1. The cleric may re-roll all 1s and 2s for all cure spells.
2. Cast a free Cure Light Wounds once each day.
3. Cast a free Cure Serious Wounds once each day.

Heavily Armored

As the Fighter specialty of the same name, below.

Prophet

Oracles are specialists in divining truths and seeking out the unknown through the power of their faith.

Game effects:

1. Cast a free Detect Evil or Detect Magic once each day.
2. Cast a free Locate Object or Speak with Dead spell once each day.
3. Cast a free Commune or True Seeing spell once each day.

Redeemer

Redeemers are clerics who seek out and destroy the undead and other inherently evil creatures.

Game effects:

1. Cast a free Detect Evil or Protection from Evil spell once each day.
2. The cleric rolls an additional 1d6 when determining the number of hit dice worth of undead affected by a successful turn undead attempt.
3. Cast a free Dispel Evil spell once each day.

Shaman

Many cultures have clerics who work closely with spirits and/or totem animals rather than directly with a deity.

Game effects:

1. Normal animals will not attack the character, provided they remain quiet, calm and do not make any sudden movements.
2. Cast a free Charm Animal or Speak With Animals spell once per day
3. Cast a free Speak With Dead or Commune spell once per day.

Fighter Specialties

Archer

Archers are specialists with some kind of missile weapon (usually a bow, but crossbows and even sling specialties are possible).

Game effects:

1. +1 to hit bonus; automatically surprise opponents if weapon is loaded/ready in anticipation of an encounter.
2. Extra attack per round for a bow or sling; crossbows have their reload time reduced by one round.
3. +2 to hit bonus.

Brawler

These characters are pugilists, martial artists or simply enjoy a good tavern brawl.

Game effects:

1. The character can make two attacks when brawling or wrestling.
2. Brawling damage is improved to 1d4 (punch) or 1d6 (kick).
3. Characters can harm opponents clad in metal armor (and monsters with relatively thin hides) with brawling and wrestling attacks.

Dual Wielding

This character specializes in using a weapon in each hand. Usually, the weapon in the character's off-hand is lighter and smaller than that in the primary hand.

Game effects:

1. Two weapon fighting penalties reduced to 0 (primary)/ -5 (secondary).
2. Two weapon fighting penalties reduced to 0 (primary)/ -3 (secondary).
3. Two weapon fighting penalties reduced to 0 (primary)/ 0 (secondary).

Dwarven Warrior

Dwarven warriors specialize in weapons and tactics that maximise their effectiveness against their traditional foes.

Game Effects:

1. +1 attack and damage bonus when in melee with goblins, hobgoblins, bugbears or orcs.
2. +4 AC bonus when attacked by any giant-type creature (includes ogres and trolls).
3. Extra attack per round when in melee combat.

Elven Warrior

These elves spend decades perfecting the art of battle with bow and blade

Game Effects:

1. +1 attack and damage bonus with either long and short sword OR long and short bow
2. +1 attack and damage bonus with either long and short sword OR long and short bow (whichever was not taken previously)
3. Extra attack per round when using either long/short sword OR long/short bow

Halfling Warrior

While they may not be the most robust combatants, Halfling warriors know how to hold their own in a fight.

Game Effects:

1. +1 to hit with all ranged attacks in addition to their racial +1 bonus with missiles (+2 total).
2. +2 AC bonus when attacked by any giant-type creature (includes ogres and trolls), in addition to their racial +2 bonus (+4 total).
3. Extra attack per round with any ranged weapon. (For crossbows, this reduces the reloading time by one round).

Heavily Armored

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the lightly armored warrior is the tank, who specializes in using armor to deflect blows and reduce damage. To such characters, there is no such thing as too much armor.

Game effects:

1. Shields provide an additional +1 AC bonus.
2. Armor provides an additional +1 AC bonus.
3. Damage from weapons that hit the character is reduced by 1.

Holy Warrior

These warriors are the elite champions of a deity or are closely associated with some kind of clerical order. They must take oaths to abide by strict codes of conduct in order to maintain the benefits of this specialty.

Game effects:

1. Cast Detect Evil at will
2. Cast Striking once per day.
3. Automatically inflict double damage on a successful attack on undead and strongly evil (GM's discretion) creatures.

Horseman

A mounted warrior, who specializes in battle in the saddle. Knights, cavalry and nomadic tribesmen are all examples of expert horsemen.

Game effects:

1. +1 to hit and damage bonus while mounted
2. No AC penalty while charging from the back of a mount
3. +2 to hit and damage bonus while mounted

Lightly Armored

Certain styles of fighting emphasis speed and mobility over being weighed down with cumbersome armor and shield.

Game effects:

1. +2 AC bonus provided non-metal armor (or no armor) is worn.
2. +3 AC bonus provided non-metal armor (or no armor) is worn.
3. +4 AC bonus provided non-metal armor (or no armor) is worn.

Weapon Master

This category of specialist represents characters who are specialists with a particular type of melee or thrown weapon, such as a sword, spear or dagger.

Game effects (when using chosen weapon):

1. +1 to hit and damage bonus.
2. Extra attack per round.
3. +2 to hit and damage bonus.

Magic-user Specialties

Artificer

These magic-users focus on imbuing magic into all manner of liquids, scrolls and items.

Game effects:

1. Base chance of creating magic items is 30% (instead of the usual 15%)
2. Cost of creating magical items reduced by 50%
3. Time required to create magical items reduced by 50%

Elven Mage

Most Elven Magic-Users are mages (see the mage specialty, below)

Mage

These magic-users are generalists, interested in all types of spells.

Game effects:

1. Once per day, the magic-user may cast any 1st-level spell in their spellbook in addition to their normally prepared spells, without having to prepare it in advance.
2. Once per day, the magic-user may cast any 2nd(or lower)-level spell in their spellbook in addition to their normally prepared spells, without having to prepare it in advance.
3. Once per day, the magic-user may cast any 3rd (or lower)-level spell in their spellbook in addition to their normally prepared spells, without having to prepare it in advance.

War Wizard

These magic-users supplement their magic use with basic martial training.

Game effects:

1. The magic-user may avoid the -5 attack penalty with one type of weapon that is usually not allowed to them.
2. The magic-user may cast spells in leather armor (but may not use a shield).
3. The magic-user may cast spells in chain mail armor (but may not use a shield).

Witch/Warlock

Magic-users of this specialty use the power of unspeakably evil entities to brew potions and enhance the power of their charms and curses.

Game effects:

1. Can brew potions (rather than having to wait until 7th level to do so); Opponents save with a -4 penalty against Charm Person spells; cast Charm Person once each day, without having to prepare it in advance.

2. Cost of potions reduced by 50%; Opponents save at -4 against Charm Monster; cast Charm Monster once each day without having to prepare it in advance.
3. Time required to brew potions reduced by 50%; Opponents save at -4 against Bestow Curse (reverse of Remove Curse); cast Bestow Curse once each day without having to prepare it in advance.

Thief Specialties

'Box Man'

These thieves are specialists at opening locks and disabling all manner of traps set to deter theft.

Game effects:

1. +5% to Open Locks / Remove Traps; Once per day, the thief may re-roll one Open Locks or Remove Traps attempt at half their normal chance.
2. +10% to Open Locks / Remove Traps; Once per day, the thief may re-roll one Open Locks or Remove Traps attempt at their normal chance.
3. +15 % to Open Locks / Remove Traps; After failing to use the Open Locks skill on a particular lock, the thief may make another attempt every 24 hours.

'Deadeye'

These thieves specialize in using ranged weapons to eliminate their targets.

Game effects:

1. May use missile weapons (at short range) to make sneak attacks.
2. Sneak Attack multiplier increased to x3.
3. May use missile weapons (at short or medium range) to make sneak attacks.

Dual Wielding

As the Fighter specialty of the same name, above.

Dwarven Thief

Most Dwarven Thieves are "Box Men" (see the "Box Man" specialty, above)

Elven Thief

Most Elven Thieves are "Scouts" (see the "Scout" specialty, below)

Halfling Thief

Most Dwarven Thieves are "Scouts" (see the "Scout" specialty, below)

Lightly Armored

As the Fighter specialty of the same name, above.

Scout

Scouts are thieves who specialize in sneaking around unnoticed.

Game effects:

1. +5% to Move Silently / Hide; chance to surprise opponents increased by 1-in-6.
2. +10% to Move Silently / Hide; chance to surprise opponents increased by 2-in-6.
3. +15% to Move Silently / Hide; chance to surprise opponents increased by 3-in-6.

Spy

Spies are thieves who specialize in eavesdropping and gathering information surreptitiously.

Game effects:

1. +5% to Pick Pockets / Listen; A 'Listen' roll can be used to understand the general nature of documents written in unfamiliar languages.
2. +10% to Pick Pockets / Listen; A 'Listen' roll can be used to understand the general nature of conversations in unfamiliar languages.
3. +15% to Pick Pockets / Listen; chance to surprise opponents increased by 3-in-6. A 'Listen' roll can be used to speak simple phrases in any language with which the thief has passing familiarity.

Thug

These thieves specialize in the use of violence against their victims.

Game effects:

1. Ignore the usual (-4) penalty for using weapons to subdue; The thief can wear Chain Mail armor, although this halves their chance of using all Thief Abilities (except Open Locks and Remove Traps).
2. Sneak Attack damage: x3; When struck by subduing attack, the thief may ignore 1 point of damage (a successful attack always deals at least 1 point of damage).
3. Sneak Attack damage: x4; When struck by subduing attack, the thief may ignore 2 points of damage (a successful attack always deals at least 1 point of damage).

Creating New Specialties

The GM is encouraged to modify the specialties above to suit the world or setting in which their game takes place. When creating new specialties, the GM should try and keep the 'power' of the benefits similar to those granted to each of the classes for the existing benefits above. "Bonus"

spells should only be of a level that the character would otherwise be able to cast, while bonus 'to hit' should be restricted to specific circumstances.

Option - Multiple Specialties

The GM may decide to allow characters to pursue multiple specialties. This allows for greater variety, but requires more record-keeping on the character sheet. When using this option, characters still wait until reaching 3rd level to select their specialty, but upon reaching 6th level they may select the first "rank" in a new specialty rather than adopting the second "rank" in their first specialty. Hence, it is possible for a 9th level character to have one "rank" in each of three specialties. Of course, the GM is free to make rulings on the appropriateness of different specialty combinations on a case-by-case basis.

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