

Aarbat Player Backgrounds

Backgrounds: I will accept any of the Background choices listed in the *Player's Handbook*. But, these choices are in some cases constrained by the particulars of the Aarbat setting. In addition, I make available some additional custom background choices.

Player Handbook Backgrounds: Considerations and constraints:

Acolyte: This choice requires a choice in the religion of the character. Most clerics and acolytes in Aarbat are of the Way of the Cross (Christianity variant). There is a number of worshipers of the Sun, or less likely, other gods of the Sun pantheon (Egyptian derived). Most of those are in Sundown, or scattered with no supporting religious structures and organization. Which makes it hard to be an acolyte unless you happen to be from Sundown where there's still a temple. A neighboring kingdom reveres Marduck, a LN deity. That's not an impossible choice. There may be scattered followers with a Norse background and origin. So, Acolyte for Way of the Cross is a "normal" choice, using the *Player's Handbook* characteristics. But a lot of work will be needed to determine how to fit other religions into this background choice.

Charlatan: This background would be most natural for someone from the City of Selleze, the largest city in Aarbat. A Charlatan character could also be from the capitol, Aahfundit, though that is somewhat less likely. Do consider how choices of personal characteristics may cause this character to become non-playable due to conflicts within the party. If you cheat or steal from fellow adventurers, there will likely be consequences.

Criminal: This background best fits Selleze, with Aahfundit being a possibility. There are perhaps petty criminals in the larger towns like Tonstol, but not in an organized way. This is a possible choice for a character who was involved in criminal activity as a matter of survival going back to childhood, but who wants to break with that past. There are quite few NPC's in the towns up and down the Circe Road for whom this is true. Generally, someone with this background, who is trying to leave it behind, won't want to go to Selleze, because of possibly being recognized and sanctioned. Beware of this character perhaps becoming unplayable.

Entertainer: This is a viable alternative. Again, someone with this background is likely either from Selleze or Aahfundit, or wants or wanted to go to one of those cities to become famous and maybe rich from reaching their entertainment aspirations. A more likely story is someone from one of those cities who failed to make a viable living and is looking for alternatives elsewhere. There are NPC's here and there with this kind of story.

Folk Hero: I suppose this one is possible, most likely for a character from one of the villages or towns. There have been occasional major raids into Aahfundit in the past, but most of those are two decades or more ago. The Norse still raid Freshkill regularly. Villages and Towns occasionally have athletic competitions, mostly informal, at harvest time, at which one could become a hero. This background choice needs to be supported by chosen character attributes that make the background plausible. As a default, strength. Perhaps being a hero for some great feat of strength to save a widow or orphan, for example, implies strength ≥ 16 and "Athletics" proficiency. Anyone choosing Folk Hero also needs high Charisma, maybe 13 or higher.

A Guild Artisan: Someone with this background is most likely to be from Selleze or Aahfundit, unless the skill is in one of the most common ones such as blacksmithing or carpentry. In most cases an artisan practicing in a town or village rather than Selleze would not be a guild artisan, but perhaps a former guild artisan, because the guilds focus on the cities. There are some particular towns that have particular guild connections, such as mining in

Gildegulch and furniture making in Topaltown. I will accept a second set of related artisan's tools proficiency as a substitute for a language, and will consider Perception or Investigation as a substitute for Persuasion proficiencies. For the "Guild Merchant" variant, proficiency with land vehicles or sea vessels can be substituted for a language or tool proficiency, and Animal Handling can be substituted for either Insight or Persuasion.

Hermit: This background rather than "Acolyte" might be a better choice for someone wanting to be a Cleric but without being "Way of the Cross." I'd allow "Survival" as an alternative proficiency substituting for either Medicine or Religion. Some discussion will be needed to see what makes sense as a context for the hermit's origin. Somewhere in the arid planes to the north? The dense eastern forests? The mountainous heights to the south? Ultimately, wherever the character spent time as a hermit, where did he come from originally? This will need some working out beyond the choices for characteristics.

Noble: This fits a character from a family at the level of Lord or higher, or a family whose leader is a principal advisor to the king, or a leading Guildmaster or office holder in Selleze. The particulars need to be worked out. The character is most likely a third son or a daughter who sees that his future in the nobility is likely to be eclipsed in the future by a sibling or rival that is better positioned. Continuing to retain the benefits of this noble standing, "Position of Privilege," requires spending money at a rate consistent with that status, but staying in the very best accommodations, having superior clothing and more than one outfit suitable for different occasions, etc. If you fail to maintain the appropriate lifestyle, those benefits are lost. The "Retainers" variant requires that you pay and provide housing and meals of a suitable quality for those characters as well. You are assumed adequately proficient in horse riding, etiquette, dancing and heraldry.

Outlander: This background needs specifics appropriate to the Aarbat setting. The following choices for the outlander background are viable:

1. A **"nomad"** background. The nomads live on the northern plains, now mostly toward the west. They are human. They ride horses and are in general experts with horsemanship. So "Animal Handling" is needed as a Proficiency, taken as a choice from the race rather than background. "Nomad" language substitutes for Common, so the character will also need Common. A language, "Orcish," or a second tool choice can substitute for "Musical Instrument." Tool choices would not include blacksmithing, masonry, cartography, or tinker's. The Nomads have their own religion. A character may have abandoned that religion for another, but there would need to be a plausible reason. The Nomads look forward to the apocalyptic day when they sweep all of this artificial "civilization" away.

2. A **"freeholder"**: There are a number of freeholds amid the savage lands to the north, east of the nomads, where small colonies eke out a subsistence existence in the ruins of a fortress or old manor house abandoned after the fall of an older civilization. These are mostly humans, but some such freeholds may tolerate half orcs. This choice is someone born in one of these freeholds, who perhaps escaped that existence by simply running away and being fortunate enough to survive a harrowing trip to Orctown. Or, possibly, was part of a party sent to trade in Orctown for needed goods. Most such freeholds have some sort of product for needed trade goods, such as carpets, woven fabric, local gemstones (raw or finished), special liquor or potions, or perhaps even a unique weapon or other devices. The character's language skills need to include Orcish or Gnoll. The particular freehold needs to be identified. (Purvis's is the nearest, Tovis's is somewhat further away. There may be others.

3. A “**Coast Rat**”: South of Aarbat along the Rock Coast there is a tribe of outlanders known to others as the Coast Rats. They subsist on what they can grow on the wind-lashed coast despite the poor soil, and gather from the sea seaweed, fish, mollusks and such. Occasionally a shipwreck provides a windfall of treasure which is either hoarded against future needs or traded in Southby or Leeshr for needed goods the Coast Rats can’t provide for themselves. Sometimes someone of value may be found among the wrecks, who can be sold as a slave or, if young, adopted into the tribe. The Coast Rats are human. They see themselves at war with all other races, especially the savage humanoids found further inland. They move from place to place, often finding shelter in known caves within their territory. Coast Rats follow the normal “outlander” suggested characteristics, making allowances for a bleak and rocky lee shore setting, and being less animal oriented.

Sage: Someone of this background is almost certainly from Selleze, but with a slight chance of being from Aahfundit or even from the Kingdom of the Sun, the Norse Kingdom, Xrune, or one of the petty kingdoms of the Rock Coast further south. The most important issue is, what is the Sage’s field of study? That may require some work with the DM to figure out the specifics of what you know as part of your background that goes beyond common knowledge. Whatever it is, the field of study should be something relevant to the Circe Road or trade thereon.

Sailor: The Circe Road is an inland route, so there would need to be some rationale for a character with a sailor background getting involved in this campaign. The only significant port involved with deepwater international trade is the capitol, Aahfundit. There are also sailors who man the boats that travel between Aahfundit and Selleze, and a few on the routes between Aahfundit and Nextonover and Aahfundit to Bargecheck. A sailor from overseas may well have a religion from his point of origin, such as Ra from the Kingdom of the Sun, Norse from Northzemlya, or even Beelzebub from Allanta, far off to the west around the Rock Coast.

Soldier: Someone with this background is a former 0 level member of one of the various military companies maintained by the King or one of his nobles. Those in closest proximity to the Circe Road are listed. (There are other companies elsewhere, but at a considerable distance.) It is a possibility that the character was a candidate to be a soldier but was rejected. That is especially common for the Queen’s Own Rangers. There are women fighters around who are rejects from The Rangers. A woman fighter with a soldier background might also be from Freshkill, as a Militia member there. Norse raiders typically kill any men, and carry away any boy children to be brought up as Norse warriors.

Based in Tonstol (King’s army) – (no females)

The Steel Boots: 40 footmen- chainmail armor, halberds, maces, javelins and shortswords.

King’s Silver Skewers: 30 crossbowmen- studded leather armor, heavy crossbows, shortswords.

Based in Guardraw: (Lord Grant’s army): (very few if any females)

The Grey Cloak Scouts: 16 light infantry -studded leather, longswords and longbows.

Based in Orctown: (Lord Grantt’s army): (Redblack Foot and Greencap Scouts include ½ orcs.)

Redblack Foot: 100 footmen- studded leather armor, pole arms, shortswords, javelins.

Greencap Scouts: 40 scouts- leather armor, shortswords, longbows

Blueribbon Light Horse: 13 horsemen- studded or leather, shortswords, shortbows, chariots

Ranger Detachments in Tonstol, Standpipe, Nextonover (nominally of the Queen) all female

Queen's Own Rangers: about 30 rangers- commonly leather, shortswords, shortbows, horses.

Some sort of military related tool proficiency may be substituted for the gaming set or land vehicles. For example, an outfit, especially the larger ones, will include cooks, perhaps an armorer or weaponsmith to make repairs, or other support specialists. In similar manner, a drum or bugle can be substituted for either land vehicles or the gaming set, which assumes the character was a band member (for one of the larger companies) or signaler. Pick a specialty appropriate to the company. Exclude “officer”- a 1st level inexperienced officer is most likely an extra son of noble birth who bought the office, and should have the “noble” background instead.

Urchin: This background is going to fit someone from Selleze better than anywhere else. Perhaps Aahfundit, but the King doesn’t like urchins around and arranges to have them taken elsewhere. Or enslaved. There are many NPC’s having this background. While most have moved on elsewhere, others remained in Selleze having moved into a more respectable profession or craft. Another set of tools or musical instrument can substitute for “disguise kit”. Also, a subcategory of Urchin will be considered a separate background: There are also many children who were raised on “baby farms” that were either indentured or enslaved, used in various ways in perhaps Selleze but also possibly in the mines of Gildegulch or in galleys at Aahfundit, or elsewhere that cheap inexperienced labor can be put to use. These might not have thief tool or disguise proficiencies, or slight of hand, but other proficiencies that are a better fit for the particular background.

Additional Backgrounds: The following backgrounds are particular to the Aarbat setting.

Convoy Guard: This is a character who has made a living guarding convoys for merchants within the kingdom of Aarbat, and possibly even on the Circe Road earlier. This can be considered a derived background similar to “soldier,” but without the military discipline. He has traveled here and there on the roads of Aarbat either in the employ of a particular merchant on a regular run or picking up jobs in taverns along the hiways and byways as opportunity might come. A convoy guard typically stays in bunkroom accommodations in taverns where the merchant stops for the night, usually at the merchant’s expense, or at camps along the road where there is no place for lodging. A convoy guard is typically not a “driver,” but some are (with Animal handling). Those have a bit better chance of employment.

Skill Proficiencies: Athletics, Perception, Animal handling (2 of these 3)

Tool Proficiency: land vehicles, gaming set or musical instrument

Traveler: familiar with most of the cities, towns and highways of Aarbat.

Equipment: gaming set or musical instrument, traveler’s clothes, a souvenir from the most unusual place visited, pouch containing 10 gp.

Characteristics:

Personality Trait:

1. Polite and respectful
2. Survivor of a destroyed convoy by nomads or savage humanoids: hid or ran
3. Colleagues come and go; hard to make friends. Many turn out to be just thugs.
4. I’ve seen all sorts of travel disasters; the merchants don’t believe likely, but are.
5. I’m brave enough to stand my ground when attacked, even worgs and goblins.
6. I fall in love with some barmaid or other in every tavern I visit.
7. I have a crude sense of humor and say things I shouldn’t.
8. I face problems head-on in a straightforward manner. Keep it simple.

Ideal:

1. Greater Good: I'm hired to guard convoys, for merchant and lives of us all.(G)
2. Responsibility: I'm true to my contract, and to lawful authorities (L)
3. Independence: They are paying me to use my head and do what's smart. (C)
4. Might: I'm a bad #*\$@. Nobody's going to mess with me and what I want. (E)
5. Live and let Live: Ideals are not worth getting killed for. Neither is the load.(N)
6. Employer: I am loyal to the merchant. I'm hired to protect and his interests. (A)

Bond:

1. I'll die before betraying the trust of those who have hired me.
2. A colleague was killed by orcs. I hate orcs, and above all else, want to kill 'em.
3. When we escaped, my friend was left behind with an arrow in him. I'm ashamed to have left him to die there.
4. I like the life of the road. I don't think I could ever settle down.
5. I look forward to meeting friends, former colleagues, when I run into them.
6. There are some merchants I'd die to defend – others, not so much.

Flaw:

1. If the odds are bad enough, I'm sorry, I'll run. No point dying pointlessly.
2. Merchants are not worth defending, but they pay me. They should pay more.
3. I just plain didn't see those bandits, even though I was supposed to be the point man looking out. A merchant and colleagues died because of my fault.
4. When I get mad, in a fight, I stop thinking. I feel like I have to kill 'em all.
5. At night when we stop in a tavern, I tend to get too drunk, loud and wild.
6. I have a hard time saying no to anybody that is nice and uses gentle persuasion.

Street Thug: A character who has started with nothing and managed to make something of himself among the dregs of society by force of will and /or brute strength. This can be considered a variation of "Urchin" available to character with fairly good strength (S=13 minimum). Most street thugs who stay put tend to become "bullies" eventually. Be careful that this character doesn't become unplayable because nobody will tolerate him in the party.

Skill Proficiencies: Intimidate, Persuasive

Tool Proficiency: gaming set (dice or cards)

Language proficiency: Thieves Cant

Secrets of the City: As for Urchin

Equipment: Common clothes, some relic from a guy you beat up or robbed, dice or cards, brass knuckles (or similar) +1 damage hand, pouch with 10 gp.

Characteristics:

Personality Trait:

1. I grab stuff I can take first, think about whether I need it or can sell it later.
2. I enjoy intimidating victims who are weaker than I am. Play with 'em like a cat.
3. I can anticipate when somebody's about to run, and will try to trip them up.
4. Manners are for kings and princes. I'll say anything to anybody I want.
5. Can't help myself; I try to help out some of these urchins that get into trouble.
6. Anyone being nice to me is probably trying to cheat me or put one over on me.
7. I'm a thug, not a dandy. I'll bathe when or if I want to, and that's not too often.
8. I'm easily persuaded to back off by a pretty face, unless she's done me wrong.

Ideal:

1. Respect: Gotta do my job, but I don't gotta be needlessly cruel. I can be nice, too, if someone really deserves it, and is nice to me.(G)
2. Community: We people of the street have to help each other against the powers that would have us all starve in poverty. Nobody else is going to help us.(L)
3. Change: Who knows what tomorrow brings? Some of these guildmasters and nobles were once as poor as I am. Some's gonna be in the future, too. (C)
4. Retribution: You do something bad to me, and I'm going to pay you back threefold, or more. Then beat your brains out. (E)
5. People: You help me, and I'll help you. As long as you respect me. We can get along, as long as that's clear. Cross me, and it's over, with interest. (N)
6. Aspiration: Hell, I'm not going to just be a street thug forever. Give me a chance, and I'll get somewhere for myself.

Bond:

1. This place is my home. If the people paid to defend it don't, I will, if I can.
2. I try to help out orphans, kids being sold to the baby farms. Give 'em a break.
3. I owe my survival to someone who showed me how to live on the streets.
4. I'm still alive because of someone that gave me some cash when I'd have died.
5. I made a mistake of clobbering the wrong dandy. He's hired a goon to get me.
6. I respect others who worked to get out of the gutter like I did. I have no sympathies for those who are too lazy or stupid to pull themselves out of it.

Flaw:

1. If the odds are against me, I'm outa there. Nobody's paying me to die.
2. I need money. More of it. A lot more. Then I'll be respected, a somebody.
3. I can't trust anybody else. I've been betrayed, had to start over too many times.
4. Life isn't fair. I never give a victim a break, or any chance at all, if I can help it.
5. I often seem to beat up the wrong victim. I should pay more attention, check.
6. My motto: Do unto others before they do unto you. Likewise: Grab yours first.

Village Commoner: You grew up in a small town or village, one of the many who earned their living tilling the soil, watching the herds, or doing labor of the sorts needed to sustain production of food and the other essentials of life. Hard work and just enough to get by have been the way of life for generations. For some reason, you left this world to become something else. That may or may not have worked out, but eventually you found yourself an "adventurer" of some sort. Still, your roots are in the village, and the family and your family's values sustain you. In the region around the Circe Road, the towns you might have come from include Guardraw, Strabis, Tonstol, Rivendown, Torquis, Exroads, Bargecheck, and Partweigh. Possibly, from further away, Stonecircle, Splitwater, Nextonover, Ripeview, or (if female) Freshkill.

Skill Proficiencies: Nature, Animal handling, Survival (two of these)

Tool Proficiencies: Land vehicles, agricultural tools (plow, etc.)

Equipment: Common clothes, a club, some sort of trinket from home, pouch with 10 gp.

Characteristics:

Personality trait:

1. I can't just stay in one place. I want to see the world. More to life than the farm.
2. I have an affinity to the land, and geography. I seek to understand the way it works.
3. Town life is too dull. I want to experience the excitement of life elsewhere!

4. Papa and Mother told me a lot. Even though I'm not on the farm, those lessons hold for much of life. I always think, "What would they say to do?"
5. There were too many of us, and when I grew up I had to go find a life for myself.
6. If I ever again have to shovel manure or keep chickens from pecking each other to death, it will be too soon. Farm life is not for me. Too messy, dirty. I'm gone.

Ideal:

1. Continuity: People come and go but the land goes on, and life sustains itself. (N)
2. Greater Good: We each need to do our part; the whole is greater than any of us. (G)
3. Change: Storms and drought, feast and famine, all these happen. Live with it. (C)
4. Cleverness: Know what to plant, when to sell. Take advantage when you can. (E)
5. Tradition: Do things the way God, Nature intended, passed down from of old. (L)
6. Nature: Learn to work with nature, and nature will work with you. (A)

Bond:

1. My family and village is what's important, even when I'm far away.
2. My family lost the farm and it's my lot to try and make a living to help sustain them in this time of need. Maybe I can even get it back and take revenge.
3. Something unnatural is going on. Others don't see it. I do. I must do something.
4. It's my duty to the next generation of the family to have children of my own.
5. My sibling ran up a big dept in riotous living that fell onto my family. It is my duty to help make up for that, or find a solution that helps us recover.
6. When we fell into poverty, my siblings were sold into slavery. I must redeem them.

Flaw:

1. I enjoy partying, and often drink too much and fall in love at festivals, celebrations.
2. I hate birds. They gobble grain meant for others, and then can just fly away.
3. I have a hard time trusting anybody from outside our village.
4. I'm scared of wolves. They hunt in packs. Other dangers to the herd I can face.
5. A neighbor young man killed my sibling in anger. Said sorry later. I can't forgive.
6. I'm embarrassed to be a villager from a farm. I think others look down on me for it.

Slave / Indentured: You were likely the child of a prostitute in Selleze, or perhaps a baby or child sold by pirates illegally in Southby or elsewhere. You are more or less of urchin status. But instead of growing up in Selleze or some other city, you were raised on a "baby farm." A baby farm pays for babies and children and uses them as labor to sustain farming, at least enough to sustain the operation. Then, when the children are approaching maturity, they are sold as slaves or as indentured servants, depending on which establishment is doing the dealing, and who the buyer is. Girls often end up as next generation prostitutes in Selleze or possibly elsewhere. Some who have demonstrated crafting skills may end up as seamstresses, gemcutters, or in other crafts where dexterity and good eyes are at a premium. Boys end up in the mines of Gildegulch, as farm labor to farms where there are not enough younger members for the work needed, or as rowers in the galleys or messenger boats. Some end up going into crafts like blacksmithing and carpentry, initially as slaves or indentured, but eventually (if worthy) apprenticed. Some are exported to Circe to serve there, and others are even occasionally sold to evil priests of outlawed religions for their foul purposes. Most slaves and indentured servants eventually obtain their freedom one way or another. They then seek to escape the shame of having been from a baby farm, and the disadvantages that come with having had no family and no support growing up or while enslaved.

Skill Proficiencies: two of stealth, deception, perception, athletics

Tool Proficiencies: tools, as appropriate to work done.

Equipment: Common clothes, something from your past, possibly from your mother, pouch containing 10 gp.

Characteristics:

Personality Trait:

1. I hoard food and anything else I think I may need in the future.
2. I want to find out who my mother was. What happened to her? Father?
3. I don't trust authorities of any kind. They just take advantage of others.
4. I feel a surge of anger whenever anybody orders me to do something.
5. I'm skilled at seeming pleasant while planning how to escape or evade.
6. I tend not to talk unless pressed to give a response to a direct question.

Ideal:

1. Respect: The poor and slaves deserve respect as much as anyone else. (G)
2. Community: I'm not the only one in this situation. Let's help each other. (L)
3. Change: Who knows what comes next? Relax, accept, then use it to advantage.(C)
4. Retribution: I live to get revenge on those who have wronged me. (E)
5. Transactional: Everything is a transaction. If someone does good, return good. And if bad, return bad. Don't let someone get out of balance with you. (N)
6. Aspiration: I'll get mine someday. And then I'll know what to do. (A)

Bond:

1. The people that ran the baby farm were actually kindly people. I think of them as family. As much family as I ever had, despite the nature of their business.
2. I had a particularly kind master at some point, who eventually freed me.
3. My family were the other children at the farm where I grew up. We'd try to help each other, cover or lie, especially when punishments were being inflicted.
4. My mother found me. She visited me when she could as I was growing up. She was poor and couldn't keep me. She loved me. I was one of very few with a mother.
5. The house my mother was at checked on the farm where I was, and made sure, for the mothers, we were taken care of. Cruel business, but they did what they could.
6. I have no family. I'm alone in the world. I have to take care of myself. Nobody else will.

Flaw:

1. When things seem hopeless I tend to give up, and just take whatever comes.
2. I'll kill myself and as many others as I can before ever becoming a slave again.
3. I detest slavery so much that I'm willing to take risks to destroy anything of it.
4. I want to become rich so I can buy and free slaves, or hire an army to free them.
5. I want to find an opportunity to kill a particularly cruel master.
6. I blame the clerics of the Church for allowing slavery to be tolerated.