



# CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER BACKGROUNDS

The common adventurer as depicted in traditional fantasy settings, those individuals driven to fight for the good, seek out lost caverns or cities, slay dragons, or save the princesses, are uncommon in *The Black Company Campaign Setting*. In fact, they're not likely to exist at all. Characters rarely emerge from the morass of society to take arms for some esoteric principle like honor, justice, love, or beauty. Moreover, most people are content to make a life through modest means, such as labor, or

if noble, through the labor of others. Of those people, fate, circumstance, accident, and rarely dissatisfaction force them to leave their old lives behind, to become a mercenary, a soldier, a wizard, or a scholar, to become more than one of the faceless masses populating the world. These people are the "adventurers" of *The Black Company Campaign Setting*, and they are just as likely to be thieves or murderers as they are to be honorable soldiers or ambitious sorcerers.

## BACKGROUNDS

Instead of selecting a race (as there are only humans in this world), a starting character selects a background to reflect his life prior to becoming an adventurer. Backgrounds are the vestiges of former lives, reflecting the set of experiences and inclinations shaping the character's future. Like racial selection in other games, backgrounds help to distinguish characters of identical classes, more so than feat or skill selections. A fighter who was once a healer is fundamentally different from a fighter who was a noble or even a magician's apprentice for that matter.

Mechanically speaking, backgrounds narrow the focus of the bonus feat and skill point selections, assisting you in defining your character's history and natural inclinations, while encouraging a good foundation for roleplaying. When creating a new character, select or roll randomly for one background from any of those included in this chapter. A background always offers four skills in which you may place your bonus skill points. For each level gained above 1st, the background grants one additional skill point to put towards one of your background skills. A background also provides a choice of two bonus feats. Select one at first level. Finally, each background provides a special advantage to offset your reduced options. The background format follows.

**Background Name:** This is a description of the background.

**Skills:** This section lists the skills in which the character may divide his four bonus skill points. Skills listed here are always class skills for this character.

**Bonus Feat:** This section presents two starting bonus feat options from either **Chapter Six: Feats** or those listed in the *PHB*. Select one.

**Background Trait:** This section describes any special rules governing the background and any other mechanical changes to the character.

**Favored Class:** This section describes the character's favored class. A character's favored class does not count against her when determining experience point penalties for multiclassing.

**Special:** This section defines any special restrictions required for play.

**Iconic Characters:** This last section lists example characters from the novels of the Black Company, some are obscure and some well known. For more information on these characters consult **Chapter Thirteen: Characters** and the **Appendix: The Black Company Roster** on page 233 and 302 respectively.

We all have our pasts.

—*The Black Company*

## RACES AND NATIONALITIES

*The Black Company Campaign Setting* assumes there are no physical or mental differences between the various races of humans. A Nyueng Bao and a northern Imperial have identical physical characteristics. On the other hand, nationalities and ethnicities may affect religious attitudes and social outlook. For more details on the subtle differences between ethnicity, race, and region see **Chapter Seven: Description**.

All characters in *The Black Company Campaign Setting* have the following racial traits.

- Medium Size
- Base land speed is 30 feet.
- Automatic Language: Native tongue (Speak only). Bonus Languages: Any (see **Speak Language** in **Chapter Five: Skills** for details).

## ARISTOCRAT

You were a member of the elite social ranks of your society.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Diplomacy, Intimidate, Knowledge (nobility & royalty), and Sense Motive. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Negotiator or Skill Focus (any one of your Background Skills) as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are wealthy. Gain 100 sp. You must spend at least 50 sp during character generation. In addition, you may speak one additional language fluently, and gain a +1 competence bonus on Knowledge (nobility and royalty) skill checks.

**Favored Class:** Noble.

**Iconic Character:** Lady, the Radisha Drah, Raven.

## BEGGAR

You lived on the streets amongst the worst of humanity, relying on charity or your thieving skills to survive.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Bluff, Knowledge (local), Profession (beggar), and Survival. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Deceitful or Toughness as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are street smart and hardy. You gain a +1 bonus to Fortitude saves and a +1 competence bonus to Knowledge (local) and Profession (beggar) skill checks.

**Favored Class:** Thief.

**Iconic Character:** Asa, Wheezer.

## BUREAUCRAT

You were an official in your city or nation's government.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Gather Information, Knowledge (local), and Knowledge (nobility & royalty), and Speak Language. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Investigator or Skill Focus (any of your Background skills) as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You gain a well-placed contact in your home city's government. This NPC is always Friendly. This contact can help you with tasks, information, or even a loan if you improve his attitude to Helpful. Your GM may assign a higher DC, based on the nature of the requested favor. Once your contact assists you, her attitude returns to Friendly. Each additional time beyond the first that you call on your contact for a favor within a month, the contact's starting attitude drops a step to Indifferent, Unfriendly, and finally Hostile. If your contact's attitude becomes Unfriendly or worse, you must succeed a DC 25 Diplomacy or Intimidate check to improve their attitude to Friendly, or you lose this background trait. You may not retry this last check. The contact gained from this background can be an Aristocrat, Commoner, Expert, or Warrior, and her character level equals yours -2.

**Favored Class:** Noble.

**Iconic Character:** Hagraon, Smoke.

## COMMONER

You were a farmer, artisan, or laborer.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Craft, Handle Animal, Profession, and Ride. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

TABLE 3-1:  
RANDOM BACKGROUNDS

| Roll  | Background            |
|-------|-----------------------|
| 01-02 | Aristocrat            |
| 03-07 | Beggar                |
| 08-10 | Bureaucrat            |
| 11-22 | Commoner              |
| 23-28 | Criminal              |
| 29-30 | Engineer              |
| 31-35 | Entertainer           |
| 36-40 | Fugitive              |
| 41-45 | Hermit                |
| 46-50 | Hunter                |
| 51-53 | Magician's Apprentice |
| 54-58 | Merchant              |
| 59-60 | Officer               |
| 61-64 | Physician             |
| 65-68 | Priest                |
| 69-72 | Prostitute            |
| 73-76 | Sailor                |
| 77-79 | Scholar               |
| 80-85 | Soldier               |
| 86-90 | Smuggler              |
| 91-95 | Thug                  |
| 96-97 | Tomb Robber           |
| 98-00 | Tribesman             |

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Endurance or Skill Focus (any Craft or Profession) as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are more productive in your Craft or Profession. When making skill checks in Craft in which you have ranks, you produce +25% in cp in a week. For example, a character makes a Craft check once per week. If he succeeds, he multiplies the Craft check result by the DC. So, manufacturing a longbow has a Craft DC of 12 and a longbow costs 20 sp. Your total craft check is 15. Multiplying the result by the DC generates 180 cp. With this ability, you generate 45 additional cp, for 225 cp total, or 22.5 sp. In addition, when making a Profession check to practice your trade, you earn your Profession check in cp instead of half of the check.

**Favored Class:** Any class.

**Iconic Characters:** Murgun, Case, Pawnbroker.

## CON ARTIST

You are a charlatan, profiting by defrauding and taking advantage of others.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Bluff, Disguise, Sense Motive, and Sleight of Hand. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Deceitful or Persuasive as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are slick negotiator. When trying to sell something, and if you beat your opponent's Sense Motive check with a Bluff check, you sell the item for 75% of normal price instead of 50%. Also, you gain a +1 competence bonus to all Bluff and Sense Motive skill checks.

**Favored Class:** Thief.

**Iconic Characters:** One-Eye, Tom-Tom.

## CRIMINAL

You were a smalltime criminal, perhaps a cutpurse, swindler, or burglar.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Hide, Intimidate, Move Silently, and Sleight of Hand. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Deceitful or Stealthy as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are quick with your hands. Sleight of Hand checks are move actions for you. In addition, if you try to use this skill as a free action, you take a -10 penalty on the check instead of -20. Finally, you gain a +2 bonus to Initiative checks.

**Favored Class:** Thief.

**Iconic Characters:** Smeds Stahl, Big Bucket.

## ENGINEER

You know all there is to know about construction and invention.

**Skills:** You gain 4 bonus skill points to divide as you wish among Craft (any one), Disable Device, Knowledge (architecture & engineering), and Profession (siege engineer). Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Nimble or Skill Focus (any background skill) as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are adept at dismantling and rebuilding just about anything you come across. You may make a Disable Device check to disable a simple device as a standard action, and an intricate or complex device in 1d3 rounds. In addition, you gain a +1 competence bonus to all Craft and Disable Device skill checks.

**Favored Class:** Scout.

**Iconic Character:** Cletus, Loftus.

## ENTERTAINER

You made a living entertaining others.

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Diplomacy, Knowledge (local), and Perform (any two). Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Acrobatic or Skill Focus (any background skill) as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are skilled at working the crowds. When making a Perform skill check to impress an audience, you earn +50% of the indicated amount of coin. The DC increases for previous failures are reduced to 1 per previous failure. You also gain a +1 competence bonus to all background skills.

**Favored Class:** Jack-of-all-Trades.

## FUGITIVE

The authorities want you for crimes you did or did not commit

**Skills:** You gain 4 skill points to divide as you wish among Disguise, Gather Information, Hide, and Move Silently. Each level beyond 1st-level, you gain 1 additional skill point to place in any one of these skills. These are always class skills for you.

**Bonus Feat:** You gain either Endurance or Run as a bonus feat.

**Background Trait:** You are skilled at getting away from your pursuers. You gain a +1 bonus to all Fortitude and Reflex saves.

**Favored Class:** Scout.

**Iconic Characters:** Sleepy.

