

FANTASTIC HUMANS

AVERAGE. BASELINE. NORMAL. THESE are the sorts of words used to describe humans in a typical fantasy world, and why not? They're the dominant—and often, the only—race in many fantasy worlds. They're the yardstick on which everything in most fantasy games are measured. Elves are graceful, dwarves are hardy, and dragonborn are fierce. At least, more graceful, hardy or fierce than humans, who are average at everything, as far as the rules are concerned.

The problem is “average at everything” isn't exciting, especially in a world where magic and monsters are real. Average isn't even exciting when you consider what humans are actually capable of in the real world. Once you consider humans average, you quickly forget what actually makes humans exceptional. It isn't that we have thumbs, or that we can adapt to any environment or adapt it to us. Those things are important, sure, but in a fantastic world those are the things that serve as a baseline for humanity, not as what make humans exceptional.



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There are three things in particular that humans are exceptionally good at: we tire slowly, heal quickly from injury, and innately understand tools of all kinds. While we can't outrun gazelles, we can hunt them by pursuing them until they can't run anymore. We can't ignore a severed arm or leg, but unlike most animals we can survive without one. We aren't the only animals to use tools, but we almost instinctively create and understand them. All of these things, even more than our ability to live anywhere and do anything we put our minds to, have contributed to our becoming the dominant species on Earth. But none of these features are allowed to mean much in a fantasy role-playing game.

Now, humans can't be the best at everything—and indeed, they ought not to be. If humans were the only race in the game to make and use tools and weapons (for example), the game world would be a very different place. But even so there could be other, more tangible differences between player character races other than the shape of their ears and the color of their skin.

VARIANT HUMAN TRAITS

Humans come in all shapes and sizes, but even in a fantastic world, some things make them distinct. A human using these variant racial traits loses the human's Ability Score Increase trait (the one that grants +1 to all ability scores), and instead gains three racial traits of their choice from the following list, no more than once each.

Ability Score Increase. Two different ability scores of your choice increase by 1.

Cross-Country Endurance. You tire slowly—so slowly that you seem to others to be unstoppable. You treat your level of the Exhausted condition as if it were two levels lower when determining the

penalties you take, requiring you to reach 3 levels of exhaustion before suffering disadvantage, and 8 levels of exhaustion before dying. Additionally, your travel pace functions as though it were one stage faster when determining the distance travelled in a day.

Nomad's Perseverance. No matter how fierce the weather or rough the terrain, you press ever-onward. Your travel pace is not reduced by difficult terrain or poor weather unless that weather would normally prevent travel entirely. Additionally, moving 1 foot in difficult terrain costs only 1½ feet of movement for you. Additionally, your travel pace functions as though it were one stage faster when determining the distance travelled in a day.

Stubborn Reserves. No matter how tired you get, you can keep on working, not feeling the effects until much later. When you gain a point of exhaustion, you do not suffer the increased penalty until you complete a short or long rest—unless it would kill you.

Rapid Scarring. Your wounds scab over quickly, often leaving you with scars. The effect isn't always pretty, but they get you on your feet quickly and reliably. When you roll Hit Dice to regain hit points, if the number rolled on the die is lower than your proficiency bonus, you instead treat the number rolled as though it were equal to your proficiency bonus.

Life-Saving Scars. You survive blows that would kill a creature twice your size, with nothing more than an awesome scar and a story of how you lived to tell the tale. When you make a death saving throw, you succeed if you roll an 8 or higher. Additionally, you recover 1 hit point if you roll a 19 or a 20 on a death saving throw.

Death-Defying Scars. Even when your enemies think you dead, you pull yourself through to fight

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another day. If you would die from failing three death saving throws, you instead awaken 1d4 hours later, stable and with 1 hit point, surviving with a telling and often visible scar. The scar that you bear should be determined by your GM based on the blow that would have killed you, and imposes a penalty on your character at least equivalent to reducing one of your ability scores by 4. These scars can be restored only by powerful magic, such as *regenerate*. You cannot use this ability again until you gain a level.

Omnivore. You can eat anything, often things unpalatable to other people or races, even things not intended to be food. You gain advantage on all saves against ingested poisons and diseases, and can survive on nearly any organic matter you find—such as the flesh of aberrations or the bodies of oozes—even if it wouldn't be nourishing to others.

Human Palate. Having eaten or tasted anything and everything, you have learned to discern between countless flavors—even those intended to be harmful. You can immediately identify ingredients in everything you eat, and detect ingested poisons, although generally any amount that you can taste is enough to suffer the full effects. Additionally, you can make an Intelligence (Investigation) check against the save DC of the poison in order to detect poison in or on a substance by smell alone.

Clever Tools. Your tools feel like an extension of your own body. Whenever you make an ability check using tools you are proficient with, you add double your proficiency bonus to the check.

Intuitive Tools. Using tools of any kind is second nature to you. Whenever you make an ability check using tools you are not proficient with, you add half your proficiency bonus (rounding down) to the check.

Makeshift Tools. Even when you don't have the right tools, you can make do. Whenever you make an ability check that would normally require tools, you can make the check without tools, although it takes 10 minutes longer than normal to do so. Additionally, choose up to two

tools you are proficient with. You do not suffer disadvantage while using improvised versions of these tools.

Magical Tool. They might not follow the same laws as most nature, but magical items are just another tool to you. Whenever a magical item requires you to roll for a random effect (not including d20 rolls like attack rolls), you can roll twice and choose which effect you prefer. Additionally, any magical item that is your possession for 24 hours or more that would regain charges at dawn recovers 1 more charge than normal, up to its normal maximum.

HUMAN FEATS

While humans are born fairly exceptional, and many are raised in such a way that they can do incredible things, humans can learn to do truly amazing things when they put their minds to it. Their endurance, survivability, and versatility is second to none.

DAUNTLESS SCARS

Prerequisites: Human race, rapid scarring racial trait, Durable feat

You prove to be exceptionally difficult to put down.

- ▶ Increase your Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- ▶ When you would roll Hit Dice to regain hit points, you instead regain hit points as though you had rolled maximum on your Hit Dice.
- ▶ You only need to succeed two death saving throws in order to stabilize when dying.

HUMAN ADAPTABILITY

Prerequisite: human race

Thanks to a broad study and a good short-term memory, you can learn to be good at just about anything. You gain proficiency in any one skill or tool. When you take a long rest, you can change which skill or tool proficiency this feat grants.

READY TO GO

Prerequisite: human race

You recover quickly, and nothing can keep you down for long.

- ▶ When you spend Hit Dice during a short rest, you restore one more hit point than normal.
- ▶ You recover one additional Hit Die whenever you take a long rest.
- ▶ You recover two levels of exhaustion when you finish a long rest, so long as you have had enough to eat and drink.

Variant Rule: Humans are Old

The rules in this article help humans stand out in a vibrant fantasy world, but none of them address another strange problem in fantasy gaming, where even the oldest humans are barely adults by the standards of nearly every other race. Most playable races actually live for *many times* longer than humans. And even the shortest lived playable races only live very slightly shorter than humans.

Although there is plenty of room in fantasy for creatures old enough to be childhood friends with your grandfather's grandfather, living for a long time is another thing humans are actually really good at. Only a few creatures best us when it comes to withstanding old age.

With this variant rule, age reaches out to touch other races a little more equally, which allows humans to feel a little less like a passing fad in an ageless world. It brings humans back to the midpoint of life, where they can at least enjoy being the midpoint they live to be.

Dwarves: Dwarves mature at the same rate humans do, and occasionally live as long as 200 years.

Elves: Elves reach physical maturity slightly later than humans, often in their early thirties. As elves typically see adulthood as much of a mental state as

WAND MASTER

Prerequisite: human, magical tool racial trait

Wands are just one of many magical tools at your disposal, and you understand the energy that flows through them just like any other tool that must be carefully maintained. Wands that have been in your possession at least 24 hours always recharge up to their maximum number of charges at dawn. 🪄

a physical one, they are generally not considered an adult until they are 100 years old, and often live to be 500 years old, although the fortunate few exceed that by centuries further.

Halflings: A halfling reaches adulthood around the age of 12, and generally lives to 60. Exceptional cases have been known to live for well over a century.

Dragonborn: Young dragonborn grow quickly, typically reaching adulthood by 15. Most live to be between 60 and 80, but rare dragonborn seem to have more dragon blood than others and seem untouched by the ravages of time.

Gnome: Gnomes mature at the same rate as humans, but typically do not settle into adult life until 40 or later. They can live as long as 500 years, but more generally they live to be 350.

Half-Elves: Half-elves mature slightly slower than humans, reaching maturity in their early twenties. They often live much longer, regularly living to just shy of 200 years.

Half-Orcs: Half-orcs mature faster than humans, typically reaching maturity at 16. They also age faster, and rarely live even to 60 years.

Tieflings: Tieflings mature at the same rate as humans, and almost always live for precisely 100 years.