

Heroic Backgrounds

Cults of Faerun

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*Necromancers
of the Northwest*



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INTRODUCTION

There are many different reasons why someone might want to play a character with a background in a cult. It can provide story hooks that lead to interesting side quests, it can present moral quandaries when they are forced to choose between their past faith and their current mission, and it can simply serve to add an air of dark mystery to a character, to name just a few. Faerun is rich with secret societies, orders, and other cult-like organizations, each of which could easily provide a background on their own. This book contains backgrounds for three: the cult of the dragon, the cult of shared suffering, and the cult of the howling peak.

CULT OF THE DRAGON

You belong to the Cult of the Dragon, an ancient and powerful organization founded by the great wizard Sammaster. Though the days of glory are behind your cult, you still seek to fulfill your fallen founder's vision and have devoted your early life to the service of dragons, particularly the mighty undead dragons called dracoliches. While in the past, your cult chiefly sought to raise such great and eternal tyrants to rule over the entire world, today your cult spends its time revering and serving dragons as spies, warriors, or field operatives.

The Cult of the Dragon is organized into small cells which are distinct from each other, each revering and working with individual dragons in order to further the goals of their draconic masters. You were or are a member of one of these cells, beholden to a cult leader known as a Wearer of Purple and ultimately to a mighty dragon or dracolich. Work with your DM concerning the exact details of the cell and its other members; typically, cells are only a few members, but some may contain more, perhaps even recruiting a small army. Though you serve draconic beings, you can expect some return for your faithful service and benefit from the support of a powerful, but secret organization.

Skill Proficiencies: Arcana, History, Intimidation

Tool Proficiency: Disguise kit

Languages: Draconic

Equipment: Any 2 trinkets and a belt pouch containing 25 gp

FEATURE: DRAGON CULTIST

You have devoted your life to the service of dragons and their chief cult. While the Cult of the Dragon is not particularly well received by good-aligned dragons, it has a long and storied history with evil dragons, and particularly with undead dragons. This background can help you to better interact with dragons than other characters; while it is no guarantee that dragons will not devour you, revealing your membership in the Cult of the Dragon to an evil-aligned dragon can help you in persuading it to spare your life and the lives of your companions, and perhaps to render simple aid. You add double your proficiency bonus on Persuasion checks made with evil aligned dragons. Additionally, non-hostile evil-aligned dragons can be counted on to provide you (though not your companions) with basic aid in the form of shelter, protection (provided that the threat is not a challenge to the dragon), and very limited wealth, including lending magic items to you. In addition, you can count on the aid of

other cells of the Cult of the Dragon, including providing you and your companions with shelter, protection, and limited resources to aid you in your goals.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Dragon cultists are usually defined by their single-minded devotion to dragons, but are drawn to the lifestyle because they share similar values and views of dragons, particularly evil ones, or because they seek to gain some shared glory of the more powerful creatures. While dragon cultists are subservient to the very strong, they tend to be bullish and strong individuals, hoping to embody draconic characteristics.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I like to collect things that shine and sparkle, regardless of their intrinsic value.
2	I follow strong leaders with discipline and devotion, proving my loyalty in everything I do.
3	I dominate the weak and make them work for me.
4	I like to boast of my achievements, real or imaginary, to seem more impressive.
5	I prefer dark and enclosed spaces, and am more comfortable underground than above ground.
6	I have great power and am not afraid to show it.
7	I use my anger as a means of coping with the stress of life.
8	I protect what's mine fiercely and with all my heart.
d6	Ideal
1	Wealth. Through great wealth, we amass great power and influence and can dominate others. (Evil)
2	Power. By having power over others, my ambitious can be fulfilled and I will be fulfilled. (Evil)
3	Realization of Cult Ambitions. The world shall be ruled over by dragons entirely and eternally. (Any)
4	Simplicity. By embracing the simple life of the cult, we can rid ourselves of evil and malice. (Good)
5	Obedience. Through worship and service, we shall be rewarded and treated justly. (Lawful)
6	Fear. Our power will be great and all will tremble before me. (Evil, Chaotic)

CULT OF SHARED SUFFERING

You belong to an ancient and mostly disbanded heretical cult, devoted to what you believe to be a truer interpretation of the teachings of Ilmater, god of suffering and loss. You live your life to embrace his teachings and to share in his glorious sacrifices. For the most part, you embrace the traditional dogma of the Church of Ilmater, which long ago spurned your sect, relegating you to the ranks of a hated cult. Your strict interpretations of Ilmater's faith date back to the end of the time of troubles, when gods walked the earth, and emphasizes that mortals must live Ilmater's sacrifice to do honor to him. You believe in shared suffering, and while your cult has been criticized for inflicting suffering on others, your cult never does unto another what it would not do unto itself. Your cult practices mortification of the flesh, and routine self-flagellation is part of your daily life. Members of your cult have been known to kidnap and torment the wealthy and comfortable so that they may know the suffering of the meek, start fires and destroy crops that man might never grow complacent, and you may even have committed acts of barbarity yourself, so that the world may better know Ilmater.

Your cult has chiefly been defined by conflicts with the more established Church of Ilmater, but has also had its fair share of clashes with noblemen and worldly authorities across the realms, causing your numbers to dwindle at the hands of the unrighteous. Still, true believers view these events as yet another test of their faith, and embrace the suffering wrought against them. Though many have accused the Cult of Shared Suffering of evil and wrongdoing, claiming that they are supported by vile and evil gods like Loviatar and Beshaba, your members are not actually evil, merely misunderstood. Suffering is a way of life and transcendence for you and yours, and you merely seek to spread the message of Ilmater in the larger world.

Consult with your DM about the cult's relationship with the region's local Church of Ilmater, noble families, and similar details to better establish your identity in the cult.

Skill Proficiency: Intimidation, Persuasion, Religion
Tool Proficiency: Any 2 artisans tool kits
Language: One of your choice
Starting Gear: A holy symbol, a prayer book or prayer wheel, vestments, and a belt pouch containing 20 gp

FEATURE: FAITH OF THE PEOPLE

While local government and the so-called "true" Church of Ilmater spurn your faith and persecute you whenever they have the chance, your cult's teachings and methods, though extreme, have brought them great favor with common people, especially those discontent with the excess of the wealthy. Through a healthy mix of fear and shared faith, most common folks will lend you whatever aid and shelter you request; though you are expected as a cult member to do without, you can usually collect tithes for the cause. Because of your fearsome reputation, you have advantage on Intimidation checks made against peasants and other commoners, subject to the DM's discretion. You can also count on others faithful to your cause to render you whatever aid you wish, so long as it is not used to make your life or the life of anyone else easier. This usually includes help in risky prospects to spread suffering, in which both cultists and their targets have a chance to share equally in the suffering.

d6 Bond

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| 1 | I am seeking an object or relic to advance the cause of my draconic masters. |
| 2 | I am guarding a treasure sacred to the cult. |
| 3 | I have been given a task by a mighty dragon, dracolich, or Wearer of Purple which must be accomplished at all costs. |
| 4 | I am biding my time and blending in until my master's plans are revealed. |
| 5 | I have infiltrated society to learn of the any plots and plans which might threaten my master's goals. |
| 6 | I am seeking the knowledge and power to raise a mighty dracolich to rule over all of Abeir-Toril. |

d6 Flaw

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|---|--|
| 1 | I am easily dominated and controlled by the strong. |
| 2 | I am crippled with greed, unable to part with my treasures even if doing so would improve my circumstances. |
| 3 | I have earned the ire of a leader of the Cult of the Dragon, either a dragon or a Wearer of Purple, who threatens my life. |
| 4 | I am relentlessly pursued by the forces of good for crimes I have committed in service to my draconic masters. |
| 5 | I am obsessed with anything draconic and will always go out of my way to indulge my obsession. |
| 6 | I am prone to fits of rage that prevent me from operating in regular society. |

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Members of the Cult of Shared Suffering are defined by deep faith and unshakable conviction, reveling in the glory of mighty Ilmater. Deeply religious individuals, they also follow a strict dogma and philosophy with a tight focus. Though often ill-received, these cultists thrive on adversity and indeed revel in it, drawing strength from suffering and joy from inflicting it on others.

d8	Personality Trait
1	I never ask anyone to do something I wouldn't gladly do myself and am likely to ask others to join in endeavors, rather than ask for favors.
2	I never accept help from others, even when things are going poorly for me.
3	I refuse gifts and insist on repaying any kindness in turn.
4	I enjoy watching people get hurt, especially when I am the one doing the hurting.
5	I don't believe in hoarding wealth, giving the majority of my wealth to those in greater need.
6	I think very little of other people, believing them to be unworthy of the love of mighty Ilmater.
7	I spend most of my time in religious or philosophical contemplation and quote frequently from scripture during regular conversation.
8	I view every minor inconvenience as a great sacrifice, taking undue pride in overcoming small obstacles and often worrying over small problems.

d6	Ideal
1	Purity. Through suffering, people can obtain a deep purity and true sense of purpose. (Good)
2	Retribution. All people will be made to feel my pain and suffering, that they might understand my sacrifice. (Evil, Lawful)
3	Equality. We must all share equally in Ilmater's suffering. (Lawful)
4	Cult Dogma. All mankind must suffer to honor Ilmater's sacrifice and bring about our collective salvation. (Any)
5	Pain. Embrace suffering to feel the rush, and inflict the joy of torment on others that they might come to know the pleasures of pain. (Chaotic)
6	Demonstration. Through adherence to the dogma, I shall become known to Ilmater and prove my faith. (Lawful)

d6	Bond
1	I am spreading suffering that we might all share in Ilmater's sacrifice.
2	I have failed in the teachings of my faith and now seek to redeem myself through a life of adversity and sacrifice.
3	I am looking to convert others to the worship of Ilmater and help them understand the true path of their faith.
4	I am looking to retrieve a holy relic of Ilmater and return it to the hands of the true faithful.
5	I have received a holy vision claiming to be from Ilmater, instructing me to perform some task or service in his name.
6	I have discovered an ancient text or verse that has the potential to change everything.

d6	Flaw
1	I have been permanently injured or disfigured by my faith and it makes it difficult to live everyday life.
2	I have been accused of crimes by the local government, who seek to arrest me and throw me in prison, or worse.
3	I have become an enemy of the established Church of Ilmater and they seek to put a stop to my endeavors.
4	I have attracted the attention of those who are enemies of my faith.
5	I fear growing comfortable, and so seek out danger for myself and others that I might not grow complacent in my faith.
6	I have made a vow to give up my material wealth to the Cult of Shared Suffering.

CULT OF THE HOWLING PEAK

You are a truly unique individual, having descended from an ancient and powerful empire. The blood of Netheril flows in your veins, and you have been inducted into a secret society of your kin, who have taken upon themselves the task of guarding the secrets of the ancient empire of wizards that once dominated Faerûn. Though your numbers are few and you face lingering stigma, brought on by other cults devoted to Netheril, you endlessly seek to protect and preserve Netheril's secrets in order to keep your ancient history alive, while keeping the god-like power of ancient mages from the hands of those who would do evil with it. Your burden is heavy and you receive little support from your fellows, often being forced to operate on your own to keep the world safe from your blood legacy.

The Cult of the Howling Peak is made up of humans descended from the citizens of Netheril, and has taken up the task of keeping secret the magics of that ancient empire in order to prevent cataclysms. You will likely benefit from having some knowledge of the civilization of Netheril, and should consult with your DM about exactly what your character knows. Because of the nature of the cult, you might be a relatively new member, having been only recently discovered by other Netheril descendants and indoctrinated into their ways. Chiefly driven to keep dangerous things from the public, the Cult of the Howling Peak largely operates in the desert hills that once marked the great empire, but occasionally sends its members into the world to recover artifacts and information pertaining to their cause.

Skill Proficiency: Athletics, History, Investigation

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A scroll case stuffed with research notes, a cold weather outfit, a set of common clothes, a tent, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp

FEATURE: LEGACY OF NETHERIL

Your bloodline can be traced to the great wizard empire of Netheril, and you are but one of a handful of pure-blooded descendants inducted into the Cult of the Howling Peak, which seeks to preserve and protect Netheril's legacy. You are well versed in the history of that empire and claim a deep bond with it. You have advantage on all History checks pertaining to subjects related to Netheril. Additionally, because of close ethnic ties, you can count on most other direct descendents of Netheril to offer you basic aid, such as shelter and mundane supplies, and to provide you with information regarding pieces of Netheril lore. Because of the close bond within your cult, you can draw upon the skills and resources of your fellow cultists to aid you in virtually any task, so long as it does not distract from their goals.

SUGGESTED CHARACTERISTICS

Cultists of the Howling Peak have a strong connection to the past and a strong sense of responsibility. Thus, they seek to preserve history and culture while limiting the world's access to dangerous magic. You seek out relics and information which could be particularly dangerous in order

d8	Personality Trait
1	I am constantly referencing events that happened at least 500 years ago, and take great joy in explaining what I'm talking about.
2	I assume that everyone is well versed in ancient history and obscure lore, rarely explaining complicated concepts.
3	I have written a groundbreaking work on the history of Netheril and frequently bring it up in conversation.
4	I have a strong connection to my ethnic roots and treat people who can prove Netheril blood better than other people.
5	I have visited at least two Netheril ruins in my youth, and the experience changed me for the better.
6	My involvement in the Cult of the Howling Peak is a great source of pride for me and I frequently reference my contacts within the cult.
7	I have an unhealthy interest in arcane objects and lore.
8	I have a great aversion to magic of all forms, stemming from things I have seen in my work with the cult.

d6	Ideal
1	Beauty. The works of the ancients are things of great wonder and potential and I believe the beauty of their creations must be preserved. (Good)
2	Safety. The world is not yet ready for the things that still lie in ruins and vaults and must be protected. (Lawful)
3	Dogma. The works of Netheril must be found and secured so that they don't do any more damage. (Any)
4	Recovery. The works of my people deserve to be found and retrieved from the ruins where they languish. (Any)
5	Power. Only a true son of Netheril deserves the power that comes from our ancestors, and it must be wielded by us alone. (Evil, Lawful)
6	Understanding. Through seeking out the treasures of the ancients and understanding the past, I can understand myself. (Good)

d6	Bond
1	I am searching for an object from Netheril that must be found before it is too late.
2	I have lost an object of historical significance that must be recovered at all costs.
3	I have been given a key to an ancient ruin and been told to keep it safe.
4	I am searching for others to join the cause of the Cult of the Howling Peak and keep the world safe from harm.
5	I have seen the damage done by Netheril artifacts firsthand and am determined never to see it again.
6	I have a specific piece of knowledge that I must never share, though there are some trying to learn it.

d6	Flaw
1	I know a secret that many would kill me to prevent me from revealing it.
2	I have an artifact which is desperately wanted by nefarious Netheril cultists.
3	I have been mistaken for another Netheril cultist who is wanted by local authorities.
4	I have an obsession with all things past and refuse to embrace new ideas.
5	I have a crippling phobia of magic that prevents me from willingly receiving beneficial spell effects, except in the direst circumstances.
6	I am so absentminded in my focus that I rarely pick up things I have dropped.

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Backgrounds for Cultist Characters

There are many different reasons why someone might want to play a character with a background in a cult. It can provide story hooks that lead to interesting side quests, it can present moral quandaries when they are forced to choose between their past faith and their current mission, and it can simply serve to add an air of dark mystery to a character, to name just a few. Faerun is rich with secret societies, orders, and other cult-like organizations, each of which could easily provide a background on their own.

This book provides three new backgrounds for player characters, each based on a cult or secret society from the Faerun campaign setting. Included are backgrounds for the cult of the dragon, the cult of shared suffering, and the cult of the howling peak.



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