

# Character Backgrounds: an optional Skills system

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## Introduction

*Castles and Crusades* is a marvelous implementation of the d20-based open game rules set. It is streamlined, fast-playing, and simple to learn. The rules fade into the background, allowing story and character to take precedence over strategy and tactics. And yet, with the Primes system in place, characters are still as varied in concept and ability as they are in more detailed skill- and feat-based iterations of the system.

Unfortunately, the drawback to a lack of a concrete skills system is twofold. First, characters can attempt to do things that they by rights shouldn't be able to do (how does a fighter spawned from a peasant farming community know how to perform surgery, for example). Second, characters gain no bonuses to actions based on a creatively constructed or well-detailed background.

Both of these issues can easily be solved through the introduction of a basic backgrounds system. In this article, we will explore a simple means to create a background for characters that allows for greater character customization and is completely modular with the Primes system already in place.

## Determining Backgrounds

To determine background randomly, all players should roll 1D4 at character creation. The result determines the number of medieval professions to which the character was exposed before beginning his life as an adventurer. Then, the player rolls on the table below for each profession. If a given profession comes up twice, the player can re-roll or choose to have that profession at an improved level (see "Using Backgrounds," below).

Alternately, for those who dislike random determination of character backgrounds, each player can script out his character's back story as he likes, and then work with the CK to choose appropriate backgrounds from the list below. CK's should be careful to adjudicate this more freeform method closely, to maintain balance in the game, and in no case should a player ever have more than 4 backgrounds.

**Table: Character Backgrounds**

D20 roll	Background
1	Blacksmith
2	Carpenter
3	Mason
4	Cobbler
5	Tailor
6	Tanner
7	Weaver
8	Merchant
9	Fisherman
10	Farmer
11	Miller
12	Brewer
13	Healer
14	Noble
15	Huntsman/Trapper
16	Soldier
17	Stable Hand
18	Rat Catcher
19	Innkeeper/Cook
20	Thatcher

Note that these professions do not necessarily represent a station the character was born to; but one he was exposed to enough to understand on some level. A character with the Noble background, for example, understands the workings of castle and noble life, but this could be from being a servant in a castle and not necessarily a born noble. Under no circumstances should these backgrounds replace any class

ability; the rules for mimicking cross-class abilities still apply. Thus, a fighter with the Hunter/Trapper background may attempt to track using his attribute as though it was Prime, but still does not add his level as a bonus to the roll, since Tracking is a Ranger class ability.

### *Using Backgrounds*

These 1 to 4 professions represent a character's previous occupations or apprenticeships, those careers the character tried or held before taking up a life of adventuring. In these areas, the character has had special training or experience that provides bonuses in certain situations. Any time a character is able to call upon his life's training or experience, he gains the same benefit as though he was using a Prime Attribute, even if the attribute related is not normally Prime. If the attribute related to the check is normally a Prime, the character gains a +2 to the associated check. Situations in which these life paths are appropriate to use are at the discretion of the CK, though players are encouraged to be creative in suggesting the use of such abilities.

**For example:** a group comes to a market place needing to acquire new weapons and/or repair their armor. As they approach the blacksmith's shop, several backgrounds could be appropriate for use in haggling with the artisan. Blacksmith, obviously, is appropriate here. Also possible would be merchant, since these men and women are experts at haggling for prices, or Noble, for whom negotiation is of major importance. Any time a player can justify to the CK's satisfaction

that his background could play an important role in an Attribute Check, he works off of the base CC of 12 and, if the Attribute in question is already Prime, gains +2 to his check.

Likewise, the character's background serves as an (albeit minor) restriction on his abilities. Some characters, for example, cannot perform surgery no matter how high their Intelligence score is. If an attempt is antithetical to a character's background, the attempt probably shouldn't be allowed, though as always this is at the discretion of the CK.

### *Improving Backgrounds*

Every 4 levels, a character can improve a single background, which then sees its bonus increase by +1. Likewise, characters who roll redundant results on their initial background selection can opt rather than re-rolling to increase the bonus to the redundant result in this manner. For example, Joe gets 2 rolls on the background table; both come up "Noble." He can choose to re-roll the second result in hopes of getting a different background, or may improve his Noble background, granting +1 to Noble-related Checks in addition to using all attributes as though they were Prime when accessing his knowledge of the ways of the nobility. This +1 bonus would also stack when using attributes with his Noble background that are already Prime, granting a +3 bonus, rather than the standard +2.