
The Coming Storm

In western Aerth, beyond the Serpent's Teeth mountains and the wild Sunderlands, like the Kingdoms of the Westerlands. These small, isolated kingdoms have kept to themselves since the rise and fall of the Zethinian Empire four centuries ago.

After a cruel winter, the people of the Westerlands are hopeful that the coming year will be kind to them. And so, they prepare to celebrate the turning of the year at the Festival of Springtide. And to pray to the gods for a gentle summer and a bountiful fall. There will be feasting and song and dance and contests of skill and strength. And the Festival in Red Bridge in the Kingdom of Caelon promises to be the best in the Westerlands. People from all over the Westerlands, from Caelon and Bandery and Durst, from beyond the Ghostwood, from the Windwrack Coast and the Vale of Aelan and the Skysunder Mountains gather in Red Bridge for the Festival.

But, the hope is muted. The seers and priests are already muttering that the signs are against them. A wandering, red star crosses the sky, warning of strife. The dark of the moon fell on Soulsnight, warning of death to come. Farmers on the frontier speak of raids from the wilderness. Merchants speak of soldiers on the road. Or brigands. Travelers talk of strange shadows in the night. And the rivers are running high and fast, which the sages say means a hot, dry summer is coming. And, in Red Bridge, as they prepare for Springtide, there is an undeniable tension in the air. Everyone is on edge. And tempers seem quick to flare.

The World of Aerth

Here are some things you need to know about the world of Aerth and its people.

The World is Ancient

Aerth is an old world, and many kingdoms and peoples have come and gone over the long years. Ancient ruins of long-forgotten empires dot the landscape and few people today know more of the history of the world than what they know of the last few generations. For in the dark ages between the rise and fall of great empires, much is forgotten.

Even the Roads are Dangerous

The fall of the great Zethinian Empire, four centuries ago, marked the start of a long, dark age. Warlords and governors waged war for long years to tear off their own small corners of the once great Empire. Refugees retreated behind the walls of the surviving castles and towns. The elves and dwarves retreated to their own corners of the land. And savage creatures tore at civilization from every direction. Today, civilization has just started to recover. Even within the borders of what small kingdoms have managed to unify themselves, travel is precarious, and few people travel more than a few miles from where they were born. And those who do travel don't do so lightly. For many dark dangers lurk between the flicking candleflames of civilization that dot the wild landscape.

It is a Human World

While the great Zethinian Empire managed to forge an alliance between the five civilized races: humans, elves, dwarves, halflings, and gnomes, it was always dominated by the ambitious and powerful humans who ruled it. And when it fell, the elves, dwarves, and gnomes retreated to their own private kingdoms, enclaves, and clanholds. And there they have remained. For it is only humans who feel the need to build kingdoms and empires. Still, as civilization has recovered, dwarves, elves, and gnomes on the borders of human land have started to creep back into human lands. The halflings, of course, have always lived alongside humans in small villages or in neighborhoods of human towns. The elves, dwarves, and gnomes who travel into human lands are unusual among their own races, and those who were raised in or alongside human communities might be considered outsiders by their own people.

Old Faiths and New

There are beings of great power in the Cosmos, beings who may have existed since the dawn of time. Their existence is beyond doubt, for their influence is

everywhere. First, there are the Gods of Celestia, the gods of the Divine Realms. In ancient times, they drove the chaotic Primordials from the world and back into the Elemental Chaos from which they came. And many believe they created the mortal beings of the world, both civilized and uncivilized. It is known that they maintain the world, ensuring the sun rises and sets and the tides come and go, that sort of thing. But, while they have great power over the world, they rarely exercise it unasked. People may pray to the gods to watch over them and – with the proper reverence and the right offerings, they will – but the gods have their own matters to keep to. While some have a special place in their hearts for mortal beings and offer help and guidance to the worthy, others have darker agendas. Then there are the Old Gods, the Small Gods. These beings aren't gods in the true sense. They are the spirits of the world itself, of its plants, animals, and locations. It is said they were born when the world was born and are older even than the Divines and the Primordials. Their ways are the ancient ways of the world. And they are very powerful wherever the light of civilization has yet to shine. Those who respect them do not worship them as gods. Instead, they are treated as companions or threats. The dwarves revere only two gods, the Father and Mother gods of the dwarves. But they believe their ancestors serve in the great clan of Father and Mother, and so most clans revere their ancestors as gods and raise shrines to their patrons.

Faith is Important, But Not Everything

No one doubts the gods exist. It would be foolish to claim they don't. Their power is everywhere. It's evident. And most people don't bother arguing about whether the Old Gods or the New are more important or whether the dwarves are wrong to treat their ancestors as divine figures. What's the point? That said, most people in the civilized world revere the New Gods. They celebrate holidays, maintain shrines, make offerings, ask for guidance, and pray for aid when needed. But they also know they are specks in the eye of the gods and the gods have their own, mysterious ways. And sometimes the gods are troublesome and meddling. Those who revere the Old Gods respect them as a dangerous part of the world that must be reckoned with. They may bribe or beg them to help, but that's the best one can hope for. And it is mostly the wilder people of the world. Elves acknowledge the gods but rarely bother with them. Only dwarves constantly worry over their gods and believe they are always being watched and judged.

Magic is Known, But Rare and Special

Magic is woven into the heart of the world. There is the great magic of the gods that, if it did not actually create the world, does keep it going. There is the magic of life and death, light and dark, good and evil, and order of chaos that buffet the mind and soul of all mortals. There is magic in the very elements of the world, and there are even various creatures – great and small – born of magic. Magic is an undeniable part of life in Aerth. But it is strange, rare, and fantastic. The average person cannot tell one type of magic from another, and the most magic a person may have ever seen might be the magic of a traveling conjurer. Which may just be sleight of hand. Those who can work magic – either by calling on the gods for miracles or by shaping the mana that infuses the world into magical spells – only barely understand their own magic. Wizards may speak of formulae and forces and divide their magic up into schools, but they cannot say how magic works. Only that it is. And truly powerful magical beings are rare. Magic is not exactly feared, but it is another of those things that people prefer to keep at a distance, for no one knows what it is really capable of and there are lots of stories of what happens when magic goes wrong. Thus, most practitioners of magic are careful not to be too obvious about it.

You are an Adventurer

You are an unusual individual. You were born and raised somewhere in the Westerlands, but yours is not meant to be a normal life. You eschewed the common life of a farmer, smith, merchant, or carpenter in favor of traveling the world, confronting challenges, plumbing the depths of ancient ruins, and doing battle with villains and monsters. Why? That is for you to decide. But you and your accidental allies – which you will come to call friends – will face a variety of challenges starting at the Festival of Springtide in Red Bridge when disaster strikes. And you cannot choose not to face those challenges.

An Adventurer is not a Hero

You were not born a hero. No one is. For heroes are made, not born. And heroes are made by their choices, not their skills. You are not exceptional. There are many out there who can fight better than you. Many who are your equal in whatever arts you pursue. Even the rare magical arts. At least not at the start of your career. If you wish to be a hero, you must make yourself a hero. Survive. Grow. Earn respect and glory and friendship. Do so, and people will come to love you. But turn against them, and they will challenge you. And they can do so. Because there is always someone more powerful than you. And you must pick your battles with care.

Building Your Character

At the start of the game, you will create a character who comes from some corner of the Westerlands. You will decide some basic details about where you were born, how you were raised, and what you want out of life. You will also decide why you're visiting the Festival of Springtide at Red Bridge. If you weren't simply born in Red Bridge. But your background isn't as important as what you do in the game. You will also generate a character according to the game rules. And that means choosing a race, class, skills, feats, and purchasing starting equipment.

Choosing a race, class, and background details are about more than choosing game mechanics and abilities. It's about deciding the person you want your character to be. Elves are very different from humans. Clerics face challenges that are very different from wizards. And the world will treat you differently depending on who you are. Here are some basic details you can think about to get you started.

Ability Scores

Your character has six ability scores that determine their basic physical and mental capabilities. Each is typically measured on a scale between 3 and 18 with 9 to 12 representing the average score for a normal, adult human. The scores are Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Ability scores will be determined using the standard method of character generation. You will roll 4d6 six times, discarding the lowest die and totaling the remaining three.

Race

You must choose a race. Most people in the Westerlands are human. Halflings are also common. Elves, dwarves, and gnomes are rare and unusual. If you choose not to play a human, you will have to figure out why your character is traveling in the human lands and dealing with human problems with human allies. And you will be treated as unusual by both the humans of the world and the other members of your own race. Perhaps you were an exile, suffered from a disaster, a member of a family of traders who lived near humans or was orphaned and adopted by humans. Or perhaps you left home for another reason. One that makes it very difficult to go back.

Human

Humans are the most numerous, populous, and diverse people of the world. If you're a human, you'll have to decide whether you come from either of the two central kingdoms of Bandery or Caelon, from the more rugged frontier wetlands of Durst, from the shores of the

Windwrack Coast, from one of the Free Cities south of the Serpent's Teeth, or from the wilds to the east or north.

During character generation, I'll help you pick an appropriate home for the type of character you want to play.

Dwarf

Dwarves are stout, hardy mountain people who dwell in clanholds deep in the heart of the world's most formidable mountains. They are a proud, honorable people who live in large, monarchical clans steeped in ancient tradition. Dwarves are generally serious, stern, honorable, and proud, but they are hardy drinkers, and they have a reputation for greed. While most dwarves do have a weakness for material goods, it is usually more the craftsmanship they appreciate than the wealth itself. And the status it represents. There are several ancient dwarven clanholds in the Skysunder Mountains.

Halfling

Halflings are a small, nimble, optimistic, and cheerful people who are quite at home living alongside humans. Halflings are known to enjoy the comforts of home, family, and kin. But they are also curious to a fault and strangely fearless. Hence, they are natural wanderers and rarely stay in one place for very long. They tend to travel in small family groups, living for a few years near one human community and moving to the next. They have a reputation for thievery that isn't entirely unearned, and they are also known to be incredibly lucky. Halflings dwell among the humans of Caelon, Bandery, and Durst.

Elf

Elves are long-lived, graceful people of the deep forests of the natural world. It is said they are the most ancient of the civilized races and were born of the world itself. They are clever and agile, but frail. They are a magical people who feel a close kinship with the ancient magic of the natural world. They are longer lived than humans, and so they tend to take a very long view of everything. They are patient, and they tend to be detached, aloof, emotionless, and private. But they appreciate fine art, music, and anything that takes a great deal of skill to master. Elves are known to dwell in small, private enclaves in the Vale of Aelan.

Gnome

Gnomes are the descendants of an ancient race of faerie folk who emigrated to the mortal world in the long distant past. It is said they were driven from their home by dark fey. Gnomes retain their fey origins, being mercurial, moody, flighty, impulsive, and sometimes even amoral. As

such, the other races tend to have a hard time getting along with gnomes. All gnomes have a natural talent for magic. Gnomes are known to dwell in the hills of the Ghostwood in the shadow of the Skysunder Mountains.

Other Races

In this age, intermarriage between the races is rare – and is often seen as taboo – and therefore, there are no half-elves and half-orcs. Beyond that, many other mortal races do exist, but they are either dangerously uncivilized – such as orcs and goblinoids – or else rare, insular, and private – such as centaurs.

Class

Your class defines your adventuring profession. It is the sum total of what you can do as a result of your various skills and talents. Some classes are professions in their own right. Others are merely a handy designation for game purposes. For example, a wizard is a wizard, but a fighter might be a soldier, mercenary, gladiator, scout, or even a blacksmith with a talent for combat.

The classes available are Barbarian, Bard, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Paladin, Rogue, Sorcerer, and Wizard. Other classes may be made available later, but don't fit the general theme of the game at this time.

Barbarian

A Barbarian is a warrior and survivalist known for savagery in battle. They come from less civilized, more primitive societies. A barbarian might be a warrior from one of the raiding sea reaver communities along the Windwrack Coast or from nomadic hunter tribes in the grasslands on the border of the Sunderlands. There are also small groups of clanless, wild dwarves in the Skysunder Mountains who were almost always the result of a tragic disaster that destroyed most of a clanhold. Many Barbarians revere the Old Gods and even believe their power comes from their own tribal or clan gods or spirits. *Barbarians will use the variant rules presented in Pathfinder Unchained, not the Core Rules.*

Bard

Bards are lorekeepers and storytellers, but what really defines them is the art of bardic magic. Bards have mastered a form of ancient magic that is woven into song and story, almost always through an apprenticeship with another bard. Bards might be storytellers or sages, wandering performers, sages and advisors to nobles and leaders, oracles, or would-be heroes obsessed with being the stars of their own stories. By their nature, bards are dabblers and learn a little bit of everything.

Cleric

A Cleric is an individual whose devotion to one of the gods of the world is so great that have chosen to work that god's will in the world. And who has been rewarded with the magic of the gods themselves? Not all clerics are priests, and very few priests are clerics, but often, the two go hand-in-hand. A cleric is defined by their devotion to a single god and a willingness to give their life over to serving that god. And that devotion has earned the blessing of the gods. But it is not freely given. A cleric who goes against their god may be stripped of their powers or suffer fierce retribution. Clerics combine combat training and divine magic to serve as the soldiers of the gods in the world.

Druid

Druids are similar to Clerics, but concerning the Old Gods, rather than the New. Druids may be found wherever the old ways are strongest, such as along the border with the Sunderlands, the Ghostwood, or in western Durst. Druids are individuals who have learned to commune with the Old Gods – the spirits of the world – to such a degree that they can call upon their magic. And even eventually, take on their forms. Unlike clerics, druids aren't devoted to a particular figure, and they don't see themselves as the swords of their gods. Instead, they live alongside the spirits of the world and seek their own way with the Small Gods as their companions. While some see themselves as protectors of the wild world and will fight against poachers and the slashing-and-burning of Hobgoblin armies, they do not count themselves as the enemies of civilization nor do they see the New Gods as enemies. Druids are skilled survivalists, able to ally themselves with natural animals and to call upon nature magic.

Fighter

Fighters are combat experts, pure and simple. They come from every walk of life, from soldiers and generals to street thugs, raiders, mercenaries, and gladiators. And no two fighters are precisely alike. Each has their own combat style. The only thing that unites fighters as a group is their skill at arms. All fighters are masters of weapon and armor. And, except for enchanted relics and magical items, fighters do not use magic.

Paladin

Paladins are champions of the good, the right, the just, and the innocent. They have devoted themselves to fighting for right against evil. They are the knights in shining armor of the world. And their devotion to the ideals of righteousness is so strong that it imbues them with magics to heal the injured and to smite the wicked. While many Paladins are spiritual and revere the Celestial Gods – at least the good ones – they view even those gods

as beholden to higher ideals. A Paladin's oaths to uphold what is right and just trumps the worship of any god. Paladins must hold themselves to a high moral standard, for if their devotion falters, so does their power. In ancient times, Paladins were members of knightly orders, but, these days, such orders are quite small and scattered and few of their members actually achieve the status of a true paladin. In short, many warriors and knights are anointed in the name of justice and righteousness, but a Paladin is a rare and exceptional knight who rises above their fellows to embody virtue.

Ranger

Rangers are survivalists and wanderers who dwell on the fringes of civilization. They are a broad group, encompassing guides, trackers, hunters, and thief-takers. Some simply live alone, off the land, protecting travelers who wander into their land. Others see themselves as protectors of the civilized people of the world. Regardless, they are experts in traveling the wilds of the world. And eventually, every ranger who lives long enough in the wilds learns the ways of the Old Gods and gains a small talent for natural magic. Rangers are also skilled skirmishers or archers. Rangers might dwell in the Ghostwood, along with the borders of the Sunderlands, in the wetlands of Durst, or in the hills of the Serpent Teeth.

Rogue

Like fighters and rangers, rogues are a broad group. Anyone who lives by guile, cunning, and expertise might be a rogue. Some are criminals – thieves and assassins – while others are spies, scouts, skirmishers, or diplomats. Every corner of the civilized world has its rogues, and no two rogues are precisely alike. Every rogue has a carefully honed skill set. *Rogues will use the variant rules presented in Pathfinder Unchained, not the Core Rules.*

Sorcerer

Sorcerers are individuals born of innately magical bloodlines. Their family line might be blessed with the blood of an angelic being or tainted with the corruption of a fiend. Dragon blood might course through their veins. Or the blood of the fey. Such commingling of blood happened in the long distant past, and the details are lost to the mists of time. And the effect has lain dormant in the family line for generations. Until the sorcerer is born. A sorcerer is inherently magical. They are able to cast arcane magic as a wizard might but without any special training. Or even understanding. Few sorcerers ever truly understand their "gift." A sorcerer can be born to anyone of any race. Many die young, unable to control their abilities and keep from being consumed by the magic in their blood. But some survive. *The Undead bloodline is not available in this game.*

Wizard

A wizard is an individual who has learned the ancient art of arcane magic. Magic infuses the world and everything in it. And an individual who knows how to channel and shape the magical energy of mana can bend the world to their will. Wizards must learn their art from other wizards. And, though wizards are rare, there are a few in every corner of the world. Some offer their services to kings and lords, such as those in Bandery and Caelon. Others live in quiet, out-of-the-way corners on the Windwrack Coast or in Durst. And many wizards eventually take on apprentices rather than let their art disappear from the world. In ancient times, there were great academies and guilds of magic and some say they still exist in distant countries, but in this age, in this corner of the world, there are too few wizards left to support them. And most people are happy about that. For magic makes people nervous. Even the wizards who do exist today pale in comparison to the ancient archmages and most spend their whole lives trying to rediscover the magical arts that were lost in bygone eras, gaining magical power in fits and starts. *The Necromancy School is not available as a specialization. As Necromantic disrupts the natural cycles of life and death, necromancy is inherently evil.*