

GROUP CHARACTER CREATION

Inspired by the Traveler table top role-playing game.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Briefly, this method was designed for a table to create their characters together and interweave their backstories. The intent is to disperse any in-character awkwardness regarding how you met, why you should trust each other, etc. It also turns a normally solo activity into a group activity.

This method can take a long time on first run. Be prepared to spend up to two full sessions at it—keeping in mind, there will be narrative and dice rolling, not just pencil scraping.

As will be expanded upon in later sections; players will initially roll "commoner" stats (which may represent themselves at a young age or their guardians). They can choose a race and background before or after seeing these results, which traits they'll have access to for ensuing life trials. A childhood life trial will then be run by the DM.

As an adolescent, players will roll some additional stats, and an adolescence life trial will be run by the DM.

Lastly, as young adults, players will gain one last stat boost, along with their class and first level features—available for use during the final young adult life trial.

RACE AND BACKGROUND

Fairly straight forward. Any race or background allowed by the DM is fair game. The ability check modifiers (including Racial ability score bonuses) provided by these will be the primary factors utilized during life trials, but a DM may grant bonuses for clever usage of other features.

ABILITY SCORES AND CLASS

Before the childhood life trial, each player rolls 4d4 "down-the-line" twice—meaning the first roll determines Strength, the second Dexterity, and so on. The player then chooses one of the two stat lines for their initial "commoner" stats.

☆A player must record their lowest d4 roll when determining each ability score. If a player does not, they must reroll two new statlines from the beginning, making sure to record the lowest d4 roll of each ability score.

After conclusion of the childhood trial, but before the adolescence trial, each player rolls 1d4 "down the line" twice. The player takes the highest one of these d4s to replace the lowest d4 roll from each of their initial ability scores.

After conclusion of the adolescence trial, but before the young adult trial, each player selects their starting class. The player increases the ability score associated with their class by +2, or if their class has multiple ability score dependencies, they can increase two of them by +1. If in doubt, reference the multiclassing requirements to determine the primary ability score(s) of a class.

RUNNING LIFE TRIALS

Life trials are sets of ability checks (sometimes called tests) arranged into turn-based rounds, not unlike initiative order. Once each player has rolled, a round is complete. This is repeated three times per life stage; childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. This means a table of three players will make 27 ability checks—9 per player.

To determine which ability score will be tested, the DM rolls a d6—with a result of 1 being Strength, 2 being Dexterity, and so-on. The DC depends on what stage of life is being tested; childhood equals $8 + 1d4$, adolescence equals $8 + 2d4$, and young adulthood equals $8 + 3d4$ (also rolled by the DM). Ability score to-be-tested and check DC is determined for each player individually, each round.

Although a player cannot choose to use a different ability score modifier than what a trial demands, they can add a relevant skill or tool proficiency modifier, regardless of what ability score it is normally governed by.

☆The DM is under no obligation to allow a non-proficiency feature to affect the check results, but should they choose to, small bonuses of +1 are recommended—even if a feature directly calls for advantage or other bonuses. Trials are abstractions, not normal gameplay.

Once an ability score and DC for a player's check is determined, they roll a d20, applying any relevant modifiers to determine whether they pass or fail. These results should be recorded for later resolution (upon conclusion of the young adulthood trial).

Player Intervention. Aka "phone-a-friend". Once per round, when a player fails a life trial, another player can choose to intervene. If they do, the intervening player makes a their own roll to attempt to pass the trial on the original player's behalf, using their own skills and modifiers. If the player-characters had not met prior to this intervention, this becomes their meeting point, and the intervening player makes the check with a +1 bonus.

Imagining Life Trials. The nature of these trials requires a lot of quick improvisation on the part of the DM. To ease this DM burden, consider asking a player what events they imagine might test their character. It's also reasonable to re-roll trials that would test the same ability score back-to-back. Here are a few common trials:

Strength: fights, laborious jobs, saving a trapped npc

Dexterity: evading, meticulous jobs, time-sensitive travel

Constitution: recovery, boring jobs, maintaining calm

Intelligence: empirical judgement, scholarly jobs, research

Wisdom: situation avoidance, rustic jobs, advisement

Charisma: diversion, entertainment jobs, civil disputes

LIFE TRIAL RESOLUTION

After conclusion of the young adulthood trial, players tally up their success and losses for each stage, using the Life Trials table below to determine the result of each life stage.

For each life stage, the player rolls a d6 on the appropriate table to determine what bonus or malus they gain as a result.

LIFE TRIALS

Trial Results	Table
3 failures, 0 successes	Disaster
2 failures, 1 success	Mishap
2 successes, 1 failure	Providence
3 successes, 0 failures	Miracle

MISHAP

Die Result	Malus
	Gain an enemy and one of the following:
1	Lose 1 hit point maximum.
2	Gain a debt.
3	Lose one starting item worth at least 10gp.
4	Lose one-quarter starting currency.
5	Gain a negative reputation.
6	Gain a cosmetic scar.

PROVIDENCE

Die Result	Bonus
	Gain a friend and one of the following:
1	Gain a minor cosmetic magical effect.
2	Gain a positive reputation.
3	Gain one set of tools.
4	Gain one common magic item.
5	Gain a guarantee of compensation.
6	Gain 1 hit point maximum.

DISASTER

Die Result	Malus
	Gain a nemesis and one of the following:
1	Lose 1 Ability Score point.
2	Lose one background proficiency.
3	Gain a dark bargain.
4	Gain the enmity of a powerful group.
5	Gain a phobia.
6	Gain a cursed trinket.

MIRACLE

Die Result	Bonus
	Gain an ally and one of the following:
1	Gain a lucky trinket.
2	Gain a tolerance.
3	Gain the favor of a powerful group.
4	Gain a promise of aid.
5	Gain expertise in one background proficiency.
6	Gain 1 Ability Score point.

LIFE TRIAL TERMINOLOGY

Ally - An NPC that will aid the character even at great personal risk. A sworn brother, a loyal beast, or even a secret admirer may all serve as examples.

Cosmetic magical effect - A minor magical change of appearance granted to the player; dancing tattoos, color-changing hair, or an eternally pleasant cologne are all viable examples.

Cursed trinket - Trinkets are small, usually non-descript items, such as a polished stone, a tiny bone, or braided bracelet. A cursed trinket cannot be discarded or lost (unless an effect capable of removing curses is used on the trinket), reappearing in the player's possession when out of sight. The recommended curse is as follows: Each time you roll a 20 on a d20 in combat, the trinket gains a charge. At 3 charges, the next 20 you roll on a d20 in combat is treated as a 1 instead, and the trinket's charges are reset to 0.

Dark bargain - Similar to a debt, but owed to a non-mundane entity. Such entities rarely seek mortal wealth, instead demanding more esoteric prices. It is recommended that a dark bargain be for 3 or fewer favors, depending on the difficulty of accomplishing them. Failure to make progress on the debt may be enforced by magical means, such as the Geas spell.

Debt - A literal monetary debt owed to a mundane party, which should in some way be related to the failed Trial. A monetary debt is determined by rolling the player's starting gold, and payment is due after a number of days equal to the gold amount. A player may attempt to negotiate partial or full payment of this debt in favors, but should only succeed if the owner of the debt perceives they would profit more than the debt itself would be worth.

Enemy - An NPC that seeks the character's downfall. This does not extend to attempts at murder, more often taking the form of a foil to the player's plans.

Friend - An NPC that will aid the character so long as they aren't required to incur personal risk. Can be relied upon not to betray the player.

Group enmity and favor - Similar to an enemy or friend, but with greater resources. A group may refer to an organization such as a guild, a large family, or another team of adventurers. In general, the larger the group, the more indirect the means it will use to affect the player.

Guarantee of compensation - A debt owed to the player by a mundane source, generally collected monetarily. A player may attempt to collect this debt in favors, but only if the debtor perceives the favor as being of lesser value than the monetary buyout. Monetary value of the debt is determined by rolling the player's starting gold, and is repayed after a number of days equal to the gold amount.

Lucky trinket - Trinkets are small, usually non-descript items, such as a polished stone, a tiny bone, or braided bracelet. A lucky trinket can't be lost or stolen (though it can be given away), reappearing in its owner's possession when out of sight. The recommended boon is as follows: This trinket has 3 charges. When you roll a 1 on a d20 roll in combat, you can expend a charge to treat it as a 20 instead. When the trinket reaches 0 charges, it disappears.

Nemesis - An NPC that seeks the player's death. Will take actions detrimental to their own well-being and even their survival if they believe it would lead to the player's harm.

Phobia - A neurotic fear of a circumstance, creature, or object—usually related to the source of the Trial's failure. While the source of a character's phobia is in sight, the character gains the frightened condition. Phobias can be overcome, usually by repeated and significant exposure to the cause. Being caged, spiders, or deep water are all examples of phobias.

Promise of aid - Similar to a guarantee of compensation, but granted by a non-mundane source. Such an entity can typically be called upon by a ritual or token, and acts as a single-use intervention. The form of aid provided should be related to the entity, and may take the form of temporary followers, loaned items, or high-level spell casts.

Reputation - A reputation affects a character the closer they remain to its source. This is represented in play as bonuses or penalties in social interactions with NPCs which have knowledge of the player's past. A positive reputation might grant a bonus to persuasion and deception, while a negative reputation might grant the opposite. Some bad reputations can enhance the player's intimidation even as they penalize other interactions.

Scar - A cosmetic physical wound that doesn't cause disability. A slave-tattoo, criminal-branding, pox-marks, or even a nervous tic can all serve as examples.

Tolerance - Fortitude when facing an obstacle previously overcome. Opposite a phobia, a tolerance grants the player advantage on ability checks and saving throws made to interact with the circumstance, creature, or object they have earned a tolerance against. The subject of a tolerance should in some way be related to the Trial that granted it. House-fires, mounted enemies, or pit-traps may all serve as examples of obstacles that the player has overcome and gained a tolerance toward.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Imagine we have three players:

- Jack, our first player wants to play a Goliath Barbarian no matter what. He doesn't care about his Background, and is cool with whatever the DM assigns there.
- Amy, our second player, is either going to play a Ranger or a Druid once she sees her stats, but wants to be a Human with the 'Noble' Background.
- Eric, our ~~min-maxer~~ third player, wants to see what everyone else is playing so he can fill in, and will choose his Race and Background accordingly.

Today these players alongside Bill-the-DM will be running a group character creation session. Bill first has each player roll their stats. Each player rolls two complete statlines, noting their lowest rolls for each stat as they do. Eventually they choose the following (superscript is their lowest d4s):

Jack chooses: $8^1, 12^3, 8^1, 10^2, 16^4, 10^2$
Amy chooses: $15^3, 10^2, 13^2, 11^2, 13^1, 11^1$
Eric chooses: $11^1, 7^1, 8^1, 10^2, 14^2, 10^1$

The players then add their racial modifiers:

Jack (Goliath Sage): $10^1, 12^3, 9^1, 10^2, 16^4, 10^2$
Amy (Human Noble): $16^3, 11^2, 14^2, 12^2, 14^1, 12^1$
Eric (Shifter Urchin): $11^1, 8^1, 8^1, 10^2, 16^2, 10^1$

With stats set, Bill proceeds with Childhood trials, in alphabetical order. Bill rolls a 5 on a d6, meaning Amy's first childhood trial will be a test of Wisdom. He then rolls a 4 on a d4, determining that the DC for this trial will be 12 (8+4).

Bill: "A test of wisdom! Amy, there is a great deal of intrigue at court, and as a young child you are in a prime position to listen in without suspicion. This trial is a test to see how well you perform at this task when it matters most."

Amy: "Can I use my History proficiency to see if I understand what the adults are gossiping about?"

With Bill's assent, Amy rolls her check at a +4, using her Wisdom modifier and History proficiency bonus. Despite her high chances, her check is a 7. However, Eric has an idea:

Eric: "Can I intervene?"

Bill: "Sure, tell me what you're doing and how you interject yourself into a noble area as an urchin."

Eric: I'm there to steal stuff, and when I hear a plot against Amy's family, I warn her when she's out shopping or something.

Bill: "Alright that's pretty clever, I'll let you use your Thieve's Tools or Stealth proficiency, your choice."

Naturally, Eric rolls a 20, and with his "first-meeting" bonus and modifiers passes with a 26, netting Amy her first success.

The table carries on; Eric fails a test of Intelligence, while Jack passes his test of Constitution. With the first round complete, the Childhood life trial continues with Amy's second test. Bill rolls a 1 on a d6 to determine the trial type, and a 2 on a d4, making Amy's second test a DC10 Strength check. Bill chooses a simple children's-scuffle as the setting, which Amy passes flawlessly. Eric and Jack both pass their second tests, with Eric once again intervening to assist Jack for the win. With the second round complete, the table runs the third—and final—round of the Childhood trial; Amy passes, then intervenes to help Eric pass, but with no interventions remaining to aid him, Jack fails his third test.

With Childhood over, each player rolls up two d4s for each of their ability scores, resulting in some stat changes (the superscript reflects the d4s chosen by each player to replace their lowest recorded d4s):

Jack: $11^2, 12^{na}, 12^4, 12^4, 16^{na}, 12^4$
Amy: $17^4, 12^3, 14^{na}, 12^{na}, 15^2, 14^3$
Eric: $12^2, 11^4, 11^4, 10^{na}, 16^{na}, 13^4$

With everyone's stats determined, the players begin their Adolescence life trials. Bill runs three rounds of tests once more, resulting in two successes and one failure for each player. Despite their higher stats, the increase in check DC from an average of 10.5 to an average of 13 seemed to result in slightly harder scenarios.

Adolescence over, the players select their classes, gaining access to the proficiencies granted by their class features, and adding a +2 bonus to the primary ability score of their chosen class. Amy has three choices as a Ranger; she can take a +2 to either Dex or Wis, or a +1 to both:

Jack (Barbarian): 13, 12, 12, 12, 16, 12
Amy (Ranger): 17, 13, 14, 12, 16, 14
Eric (Cleric): 12, 11, 11, 10, 18, 13

EXAMPLE SCENARIO CONTINUED

With stats updated, Bill runs the final trial—young adulthood—for our player characters. After another nine checks, our players finish the trial, and Bill calls for them tally up their passes and fails for each life stage:

Jack:

Childhood: pass, pass, fail
Adolescence: fail, pass, pass
Young Adulthood: pass, pass, pass

Amy:

Childhood: pass, pass, pass
Adolescence: fail, pass, pass
Young Adulthood: fail, fail, pass

Eric:

Childhood: fail, pass, pass
Adolescence: pass, fail, pass
Young Adulthood: pass, fail, fail

Bill asks each of the players for their results, informing them which tables they will be rolling on to finish character creation:

Jack: Providence, Mishap, Miracle

Amy: Miracle, Providence, Mishap

Eric: Providence, Providence, Mishap

Each player rolls a d6 on the indicated tables to learn their fate, earning the following:

Jack:

- (2) friend + gain a positive reputation
- (3) enemy + lose one starting item
- (5) ally + gain expertise in a background proficiency

Amy:

- (3) ally + gain the favor of a group
- (3) friend + gain one tool set
- (1) enemy + lose 1 max hp

Eric:

- (1) friend + gain a cosmetic magic effect
- (6) friend + gain 1 max hp
- (2) enemy + gain a debt

Finally character creation is complete, and the players are set to explore the world. Hopefully the fact they made more friends than enemies will help them out, and Bill has several backstory hooks to draw the players into his wider narrative.