

## Races of Zaldara

Zaldara is home to a multitude of races—some more common than others.

### Core Races

The Core Races are the primary races on Zaldara. They have created the great civilizations that control the continent.

The Core Races are: Human, The Saelfsidhedai (Elves), The Baerâsidhedé (Half-Elves), The Haduarkan (Dwarves), The Vale Folk (Halflings), The Urkhani (Orcs), and the Urk-Khag (Half-Orcs).

### Human



Humans are by all accounts the most ubiquitous race on Zaldara. Humans come in three varieties: Northron, Midron, and Southron.

- **Northron:** Northrons tend to populate the lands of the far northern regions of Zaldara: Jossia and the northern provinces of Leilior and Boraël. Northrons tend toward the pale-skinned, anywhere from a deep salmon to almost white. Their hair and eyes tend toward blonde and white, though some (known as “dark Northrons”) have red or nearly black reddish-brown hair. Their eyes tend to be lighter as well—pale blue or green. Northron facial features tend toward the strong, prominent jawline and high cheekbones. They cannot be termed delicate in any manner. Northron men and women can grow to be anywhere from 5’10” to 6’5”, with some men even approaching 6’9” or 6’10”.

- **Midron:** Midron peoples tend to populate the central and western portions of Zaldara. This includes the nations of Leilior, Ornîs, Yulania, Boraël, Eacenia, and northeast Sianaë. Midrons are fairer skinned than their Southron neighbors.

Those from southern nations (such as Yulania) tend toward being olive-skinned, while those in the north of Leilior and Boraël tend toward lighter, not-quite-pale skin. Hair color ranges anywhere from brown to dirty blonde to reddish brown/blonde and eyes tend toward brown, green, or hazel. Some, those generally from the far north north of the region, tend toward blue eyes and reddish blonde hair. Midron facial structure tends toward the more delicate, with high angular cheekbones and thin noses and lips. Midron men and women generally grow to 5’8 to 6’, with anyone standing over 6’ tall being an unusual occurrence.

- Leiliorans are known for their tendency to be blonde or even have red-gold hair and fair eyes.
- Yulanians, especially those from the south of their country, tend to be darker-featured, with olive skin and black or brown hair and dark eyes.
- Boraëls tend to be fairer skinned (though not as fair as Northrons) and have blue or green eyes.
- **Southron:** “Southron” is the designation given to the human racial type living primarily in the far south of Zaldara. This includes the nations of Achera, Kuskar, The Jirran Freeholds, Tarsas, and parts of Sianaë. People of these regions tend to have dark brown skin to reddish-brown skin, thick

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brown or black hair, and brown eyes. Southron facial structure tends to feature strong, prominent bones and squared jaws. They also tend to be full-lipped and have large, almond-shaped eyes. Southron men usually grow to be anywhere from 5'6" to 5'10". Southron women tend to be shorter, growing to anywhere from 5'0" to 5'6". Tall Southrons are not common.

- Acherans, in particular, are known for their hawk-like profiles.
- Tarsians are known for their olive skin and amber-brown eyes.
- Kuskars tend toward darker skin and darker eyes and are known for their thick mustaches.
- Freeholders are a varied mix of peoples, but with much Southron stock.
- The Sianaeans of the Tarsian border region tend toward similar features to their neighbors. Northwestern Sianaeans tend to be of lighter skin and eye, tending more toward Midron features.

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### The Saelfsidhedai

The long-lived Saelfsidhedai [say-ELF-she-die], also known as Elves, are children of the natural world, similar in many superficial ways to fey creatures, yet definitively rooted in the workings of this world. Elves value their privacy and traditions, especially after the horrors of The Rivening when their numbers were decimated and their cities were swallowed whole by the very earth.

They are often slow to make friends, at both the personal and national levels, though once an outsider is accepted as a comrade, such alliances can last for generations. Elves have a curious attachment to their surroundings, perhaps as a result of their incredibly long lifespans or some deeper, more mystical reason. Elves who dwell in a region for long find themselves physically adapting to match their surroundings, taking on the coloration reflecting the local environment.

Those Elves that spend their lives among the short-lived races often develop a skewed perception of mortality and become morose, the result of watching wave after wave of companions age and die before their eyes.

#### Physical Description

Generally taller than humans, Elves possess a graceful, fragile physique that is accentuated by their long, pointed ears. Their eyes are wide and almond-shaped, and filled large vibrantly colored pupils, while Elven clothing often plays off the beauty of the natural world, those elves that live in cities tend to bedeck themselves in the latest fashion.

#### Society

Many Elves feel a bond with nature and strive to live in harmony with the natural world. Most, however, find manipulating earth and stone to be distasteful, and prefer instead to indulge in the finer arts with their inborn patience making them particularly suited to wizardry.

Before The Rivening, the Saelfsidhedai lived in great forest cities with, ruled by an aristocratic class with several great Houses. After the great disaster destroyed their civilization, they, too joined The Scattering, becoming nomadic tribes for a time, fighting each other and the other races for vital resources. Now that civilization is reemerging from the ruins of disaster, the Elven clans have banded together into settlements that, while dwarfed by the cities of their past, can now be called sizable and thriving.

#### Relations

Elves are prone to dismissing other races, writing them off as rash and impulsive, yet they are excellent judges of character. An Elf might not want a Dwarf neighbor, but would be the first to acknowledge that



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dwarf's skill at smithing. They regard Halflings with a measure of pity, for these small folk seem to the Elves to be adrift, without a traditional home.

Elves are fascinated by humans, as evidenced by the number of Half-Elves in the world, even if they usually disown such offspring.

They regard Half-Orcs with distrust and suspicion.

### **Alignment and Religion**

Elves are emotional and capricious, yet value kindness and beauty. Most Elves are Chaotic Good. Most worship the primary Elven goddess, Celandian the Stargazer, though others worship Eltheriel, the Spellweaver, and Findenrior, the Huntsman.

### **Adventurers**

Many Elves embark on adventures out of a desire to explore the world, leaving their secluded forest realms to reclaim forgotten Elven magic or search out lost kingdoms established millennia ago by their forefathers.

For those raised among humans, the ephemeral and unfettered life of an adventurer holds natural appeal. Elves generally eschew melee because of their frailty, preferring instead to pursue classes such as Wizards and Rangers.

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### The Baerâsidhedé



Since the two races first came into contact with each other, humans have held up Elves as models of physical perfection, seeing in the fair folk idealized versions of themselves. Sometimes this mutual infatuation leads to romantic relationships, though usually short-lived trysts are the end result. These sometimes lead to the birth of Half-Elves (or, in polite company, the Baerâsidhedé (bare-AH-she-heh-DAY) or “man-elf”).

Half-Elves are descended of two races and cultures, and yet inheritor of neither. They are often shunned by both lines of their ancestry, referred to as “half-breeds” or “half-humans”. The less polite in Elven society refer to them as the Sinârandrathé (see-NAR-an-dra-THAY) or “blood tainted”.

#### Physical Description

Half-Elves stand taller than humans, but shorter than Elves. They inherit the lean build and comely features of their Elven lineage, but their skin color is dictated by their human side. While Half-Elves retain the pointed ears of Elves, theirs are more rounded and less pronounced. A Half-Elf’s human-like eyes tend to range a spectrum of exotic colors running from amber to violet to emerald green and deep blue.

#### Society

Half-Elves lack a unified homeland and culture, forcing them to become versatile and able to conform to any environment. Half-Elves rarely fit in with either humans or Elves, as both see too much evidence of the other in them. For some, this weighs heavily; for others, they are bolstered by their unique status and freedom.

#### Relations

A Half-Elf understands loneliness, and appreciates life experience more than heritage. As such, they are often open to friendships and alliances with other races and less likely to rely on first impressions.

#### Alignment and Religion

Half-Elven isolation strongly influences their characters and philosophies. Cruelty does not come naturally to them, nor does blending in and bending to societal convention—as a result, most are Chaotic Good. If a Half-Elf turns to religion, it will likely be that of their homeland.

#### Adventurers

Half-Elves tend to be itinerants, wandering the lands in search of a place they might finally call home. The desire to prove oneself to the community and establish a personal identity—or even a legacy—drives many Half-Elf adventurers to lives of bravery.

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### The Haduarkan

Dwarves (aka “Haduarkan” [ha-DWAR-can] in their language) are a stoic but stern race, ensconced in cities carved from the hearts of mountains deep in their domain of Hadurk-Sur. More than any other race, the Dwarves have acquired a reputation as dour and humorless craftsmen of the earth.

#### Physical Description

Dwarves are short and stocky, standing about a foot shorter than most humans with wide compact bodies that account for their burly appearance. Both Male and female Dwarves pride themselves on the length of their hair and men often decorate their beards with a variety of clasps, beads, gems, and intricate braids. No one trusts a beardless dwarf...

#### Society

The great distances between their mountain citadels account for many of the cultural differences that exist within Dwarven society. Most Dwarves trust their clan first and count other dwarves as only a notch above other races.

Despite the schisms, Dwarves throughout the world are known by their love of stonework, their passion for stone-and metal-based craftsmanship and architecture, and a fierce hatred of giants, Orcs, and Goblinoids.

#### Relations

Dwarves and Orcs have had a longstanding enmity throughout their histories. Dwarves also generally shun and distrust Half-Orcs.

They find Halflings and Elves to be too “pretty” and too flighty to be worthy of respect.

Humankind’s industrious nature and hearty appetites come closest to matching those of the Dwarven ideal.

#### Alignment and Religion

Dwarves tend to be driven by honor and tradition and have a strong sense of friendship and justice. As a result, most Dwarves are Lawful Good.



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The primary god of the Dwarves is Skondir aka “The Maker”. They also venerate their ancestors and various heroes of the dwarven race (such as Fundin Glitterstone).

### **Adventurers**

Dwarven adventurers can be found in most regions of the world, leaving the confines of their home to seek glory for their clans, to find wealth, or to reclaim fallen Dwarven citadels from ancient enemies. Most Dwarves tend toward classes such as Fighter or Barbarian.



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## The Vale Folk



Optimistic and cheerful by nature, blessed with uncanny luck and driven by a powerful wanderlust, Halflings (or The Vale Folk) make up for their short stature with an abundance of bravado and curiosity. At once excitable and easy-going, Halflings like to keep an even temper and a study eye on opportunity, and are not as prone as some of the more volatile races to violent or emotional outbursts. Even in the jaws of catastrophe, a Halfling almost never loses his sense of humor.

The Vale Folk are inveterate opportunists. Unable to physically defend themselves from the rigors of the world, they know when to bend with the wind and when to hide away. Yet a Halfling's curiosity often overwhelms his good sense, leading to poor decisions and narrow escapes.

Though their curiosity drives them to travel and seek new places and

experiences, Halflings possess a strong sense of house and home, often spending above their means to enhance the comforts of home life.

### Physical Description

Halflings rise to a humble height of 3'. They prefer to walk barefoot, leading to the bottoms of their feet being roughly calloused. Tufts of thick, curly hair warm the tops of their broad, tanned, feet. Their skin tends towards rich almond color and their hair toward light shades of brown. A Halfling's ears are pointed, but proportionately, not much larger than those of a human.

### Society

Halflings are often referred to as "The Vale Folk" due to their holdings in Melnys Vale, near The Rift and south of the Saelfsidhedal (or "Elf Lands"). Here they have a few independent townships with no central government. Many of the folk leave the Vale to eke out a living in human lands.

### Relations

Most Vale Folk pride themselves on going unnoticed by other races—which has lead to many Halflings excelling at thievery and trickery. If noticed, most go out of their way to be forthright and friendly with "larger" races. Halflings live well with humans and respect the Elves and Dwarves. Only Half-Orcs are generally shunned, due to that race's violent and intimidating nature.



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### **Alignment and Religion**

Halflings tend to be loyal to friends and families but are often forced to scrap and scrounge in a world where most folks are far bigger than they. As a result, most Halflings tend to be Neutral.

Halflings tend to favor gods that value small, tight-knit communities—be they good or evil. They are also large believers in the power of comfort. The only true god of the halflings is Rosaela. Otherwise, halflings will worship the gods of the communities in which they live (human or elven).

### **Adventurers**

Their inherent luck coupled with their insatiable wanderlust makes the Vale Folk ideal for lives of adventure.

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### The Urkhani

Along with their brute strength and comparatively low intellect, the primary difference between the Urkhani (orcs) and the civilized humanoids is their attitude.

#### Physical Appearance

This savage creature looks like a bestial version of a savage human, with green-gray skin and greasy black hair. Most sport pointed ears and often have over-sized pointed teeth and/or tusks as well as clawed hands. An adult male orc is roughly 6 feet tall and 210 pounds. Females are slightly smaller in build and in height.

#### Society

As a culture, orcs are violent and aggressive, with the strongest ruling the the rest through fear and brutality. They take what they want by force and think nothing of slaughtering or enslaving entire villages when they can get away with it. They have little time for niceties or details and their camps and villages tend to be filthy, ramshackle affairs filled with drunken brawls, pit fights, and other sadistic entertainment. Lacking the patience for farming and only able to shepherd the most robust and self-sufficient animals, orcs almost always find it easier to take what someone else has built than to create things themselves. They are arrogant and quick to anger when challenged, but only worry about honor so far as it directly benefits them to do so.

#### Urk-Khag (Half-Orcs)

Orcs and humans interbreed frequently, though this is almost always the result of raids and slave-taking rather than consensual unions. Many orc tribes purposefully breed for Half-Orcs and raise them as their own, as the smarter progeny make excellent strategists and leaders for their tribes. Among the Urkhani, they are known as The Urk-Khag or "Ork-Man".

#### Relations

The Urkhani see all other races as prey. Other races see orcs as a monstrous scourge, a blight upon the land.

#### Alignment and Religion

Most orcs veer toward Chaotic Evil in alignment. This is by nature and is reinforced by the nature of their society. They are by nature brutal and savage.

Most orcs worship the god Saarask, the warrior-progenitor god of the Urkhani race.



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## The Urk-Khag



Half-Orcs (or, as they are known amongst the Urkhani, “Urk-Khag” or “Orc-Man”) are monstrosities, their tragic births the result of perversion and violence—or at least, that’s how other races see them...

It’s true that Half-Orcs are rarely the result of loving unions, and as such are usually forced to grow up hard and fast, constantly fighting for protection or to make names for themselves. Still, Half-Orcs consistently manage to surprise their detractors with great deeds and unexpected wisdom—though sometimes it’s easier just to crack a few skulls...

### Physical Description

Both genders of Half-Orc stand between 6 and 7 feet tall, with powerful builds and greenish or grayish skin. Their canines often grow long enough to protrude from their mouths, and these "tusks" combined with heavy brows and slightly pointed ears give them their notoriously bestial appearance.

### Society

Unlike Half-Elves, where at least part of society’s discrimination is born out of jealousy or attraction, Half-Orcs get the worst of both worlds: physically weaker than their Orc kin, they also tend to be feared or attacked outright by the legions of humans who don’t bother making the distinction between full Orcs and half-bloods.

Still, Half-Orcs tend to be valued for their martial prowess and Orc leaders have been known to spawn them intentionally, as the half-breeds regularly make up for their lack of strength with increased cunning and aggression.

### Relations

A lifetime of persecution leaves the average Half-Orc wary and quick to anger, yet those who break through his savage exterior might find a well-hidden core of empathy. Elves and Dwarves tend to be the least accepting of Half-Orcs—seeing in them too great a resemblance to their racial enemies, but other races aren’t much more understanding. Human societies with few Orc problems tend to be the most accommodating and there Half-Orcs make natural mercenaries and enforcers.

### Alignment and Religion

Due to their usual brutish or lonely existence, most Half-Orcs tend to be bitter, violent, and reclusive. Evil comes naturally to them—but they are not evil by nature. Rather, most Half-Orcs are Chaotic Neutral, having been taught by long experience that there is no point doing anything but that which

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directly benefits themselves. When they bother to worship gods, they tend to favor those that favor warfare from either heritage (Orc or Human).

### **Adventurers**

Staunchly independent, many Half-Orcs take to lives of adventure out of necessity, seeking to escape painful pasts or improve their lot in life. Some take on the mantle of crusader to prove their worth to the world.

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## Auxiliary Races

*The “auxiliary races” are far more rarely seen on Zaldara. While a few have built civilizations beneath the earth or waves of the continent, most are the rare offspring of humans and other entities. While many of these races are considered civilized, some are typically viewed as monsters, and may prove interesting challenges for roleplaying and character interaction. When playing drow, kobolds, orcs, or other such races, it is often best for party dynamics to take on the roles of characters who rebel against the norms of their races and societies—creatures who do not agree with their often brutal cultures, and instead wish to carve out a better existence for themselves among other races. When playing these races, even more so than for many other races, it is important to work with your GM to determine character motivations and backgrounds that work in the campaign.*

**Aasimar:** Creatures blessed with a celestial bloodline, aasimars seem human except for some exotic quality that betrays their otherworldly origin. While aasimars are nearly always beautiful, something simultaneously a part of and apart from humanity, not all of them are good, though very few are evil.

**Aquatic Elves:** Considered beautiful by many elves, humans, and similar surface races, aquatic elves are a graceful and quick-witted people. Their skin can be the pale white or gold of beach sand, the russet of living coral, or the green-black of deepwater kelp. Often, aquatic elves’ coloration adjusts to their usual environment over time, sometimes changing over the course of a few generations. Their hair is long and silky, rippling with shades of blue and green. Aquatic elves have delicate, translucent webbing between their fingers and toes, allowing them to swim adroitly through the water.

**Changelings:** The offspring of hags and their mortal lovers, changelings are abandoned and raised by foster parents. Always female, changelings all hear a spiritual call during puberty to find their true origins. Tall and slender, with dark hair and eyes mismatched in color, changelings are eerily attractive.

**Dhampir:** The accursed spawn of vampires, dhampirs are living creatures tainted with the curse of undeath, which causes them to take damage from positive energy and gain healing from negative energy. While many members of this race embrace their dark sides, others are powerfully driven to rebel against their taint and hunt down and destroy vampires and their ilk.

**Drow:** Dark reflections of surface elves, drow are shadowy hunters who strive to snuff out the world’s light. Drow are powerful magical creatures who typically serve demons, and only their chaotic nature stops them from becoming an even greater menace. A select few forsake their race’s depraved and nihilistic society to walk a heroic path.

**Duergar:** Gray skinned, deep-dwelling dwarves who hate their lighter skinned cousins, duergar view life as constant toil ending only in death. Though these dwarves are typically evil, honor and keeping one’s word means everything to them, and a rare few make loyal adventuring companions.

**Gillmen:** Gillmen descended from humans. Aboleths captured several of these humans and muted them to survive underwater. The gillmen’s ancestors were thus saved from extinction, but at a terrible cost: for centuries, they served the aboleths, physically and mentally twisted into the perfect tools of that ancient race.

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**Goblins:** Crazy pyromaniacs with a tendency to commit unspeakable violence, goblins are the smallest of the goblinoid races. While they are a fun-loving race, their humor is often cruel and hurtful. Adventuring goblins constantly wrestle with their darkly mischievous side in order to get along with others. Few are truly successful.

**Hobgoblins:** These creatures are the most disciplined and militaristic of the goblinoid races. Tall, tough as nails, and strongly built, hobgoblins would be a boon to any adventuring group, were it not for the fact that they tend to be cruel and malicious, and often keep slaves.

**Ifrits:** Ifrits are a race descended from mortals and the strange inhabitants of the Plane of Fire. They primarily hail from the Eastern Wastes and are seldom seen in Zaldara proper. Their physical traits and personalities often betray their fiery origins, and they tend to be restless, independent, and imperious. Frequently driven from cities for their ability to manipulate flame, ifrits make powerful fire sorcerers and warriors who can wield flame like no other race.

**Kobolds:** Considering themselves the scions of dragons, kobolds have diminutive statures but massive egos. A select few can take on more draconic traits than their kin, and many are powerful sorcerers, canny alchemists, and cunning rogues.

**Merfolk:** These creatures have the upper torso of a well-built and attractive humanoid and a lower half consisting of a finned tail. Though they are amphibious and extremely strong swimmers, their lower bodies make it difficult for them to move on land. Merfolk can be shy and reclusive. Typically keeping to themselves, they are distrustful of land-dwelling strangers.

**Oreads:** Spawned from the tribes living in and around the Rift, these creatures of human ancestry mixed with the blood of creatures from the Plane of Earth, oreads are as strong and solid as stone. Often stubborn and steadfast, their unyielding nature makes it hard for them to get along with most races other than dwarves. Oreads make excellent warriors and sorcerers who can manipulate the raw power of stone and earth.

**Ratfolk:** These small, ratlike humanoids are clannish and nomadic masters of trade. Often tinkers and traders, they are more concerned with accumulating interesting trinkets than amassing wealth. Ratfolk often adventure to find new and interesting curiosities rather than coin.

**Sahuagin:** Sahuagin are well known and feared among aquatic races. These piscine predators are cruel and vicious, and they see all other creatures as either competitors or prey. The sole exception is the shark—sahuagin are rarely found without semidomesticated sharks nearby, as they feel a close bond with these other predators of the sea and both creatures are used to hunting ruthlessly alongside each other. Although sahuagin usually gather together in tight-knit tribes, an individual sahuagin might decide to pursue glory on her own, perhaps seeking a powerful artifact or a richer hunting ground.

**Sylphs:** Spawned on the tribes of the Eastern Wastes, these ethereal folk of elemental air, sylphs are the result of human blood mixed with that of airy elemental folk. Like ifrits, oreads, and undines, they can become powerful elemental sorcerers with command over their particular elemental dominion. They tend to be beautiful and lithe, and have a knack for eavesdropping.



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**Tengu:** These crow-like humanoid scavengers excel in mimicry and swordplay. Flocking into densely populated cities, tengus occasionally join adventuring groups out of curiosity or necessity. Their impulsive nature and strange habits can often be unnerving to those who are not used to them.

**Tieflings:** Diverse and often despised by humanoid society, tieflings are mortals stained with the blood of fiends. Other races rarely trust them, and this lack of empathy usually causes tieflings to embrace the evil, depravity, and rage that seethe within their corrupt blood. A select few see the struggle to smother such dark desires as motivation for grand heroism.

**Undines:** Like their cousins, the ifrits, oreads, and sylphs, undines are humans touched by planar elements. They are the scions of elemental water, equally graceful both on land and in water. Undines are adaptable and resistant to cold, and have an affinity for water magic.

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## Aasimar



Aasimars are humans with a significant amount of celestial or other good outsider blood in their ancestry. While not always benevolent, aasimars are more inclined toward acts of kindness rather than evil, and they gravitate toward faiths or organizations associated with celestials. Aasimar heritage can lie dormant for generations, only to appear suddenly in the child of two apparently human parents. Most societies interpret aasimar births as good omens, though it must be acknowledged that some aasimars take advantage of the reputation of their kind, brutally subverting the expectations of others with acts of terrifying cruelty or abject venality. “It’s always the one you least suspect” is the axiom these evil aasimars live by, and they often lead double lives as upstanding citizens or false heroes, keeping their corruption well hidden. Thankfully, these few are the exception and not the rule.

**Physical Description:** Aasimars look mostly human except for some minor physical trait that reveals their unusual heritage. Typical aasimar features include hair that shines like metal, jewel-toned eyes,

lustrous skin color, or even glowing, golden halos.

**Society:** Aasimars cannot truly be said to have an independent society of their own. As an offshoot of humanity, they adopt the societal norms around them, though most find themselves drawn to those elements of society that work for the redress of injustice and the assuagement of suffering. This sometimes puts them on the wrong side of the law in more tyrannical societies, but aasimars can be careful and cunning when necessary, able to put on a dissembling guise to divert the attention of oppressors elsewhere. While corrupt aasimars may be loners or may establish secret societies to conceal their involvement in crime, righteous aasimars are often found congregating in numbers as part of good-aligned organizations, especially (though not always) churches and religious orders.

**Relations:** Aasimars are most common and most comfortable in human communities. This is especially true of those whose lineage is more distant and who bear only faint marks of their heavenly ancestry. It is unclear why the touch of the celestial is felt so much more strongly in humanity than other races, though it may be that humanity’s inherent adaptability and affinity for change is responsible for the evolution of aasimars as a distinct race. Perhaps the endemic racial traits of other races are too deeply bred, too strongly present, and too resistant to change. Whatever dalliances other races may have had with the denizens of the upper planes, the progeny of such couplings are vanishingly rare and have never bred true. However, even if they generally tend toward human societies, aasimars can become comfortable in virtually any environment. They have an easy social grace and are disarmingly personable. They get on well with half-elves, who share a similar not-quite-human marginal status, though their relations are often less cordial with half-orcs, who have no patience for aasimars’ overly pretty words and faces. Elven courtiers sometimes dismiss aasimars as unsophisticated, and criticize them for relying on natural charm to overcome faux pas.

**Alignment and Religion:** Aasimars are most often of good alignment, though this isn’t necessarily universal, and aasimars that have turned their back on righteousness may fall into an unfathomable

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abyss of depravity. For the most part, however, aasimars favor deities of honor, valor, protection, healing, and refuge, or simple and prosaic faiths of home, community, and family. Some also follow the paths of art, music, and lore, finding truth and wisdom in beauty and learning.

**Adventurers:** Aasimars frequently become adventurers, as they often do not quite feel at home in human society and feel the pull of some greater destiny. Clerics, oracles, and paladins are most plentiful in their ranks, though bards, sorcerers, and summoners are not uncommon among those with a fondness for arcane magic. Aasimar barbarians are rare, but when born into such tribes they often rise to leadership and encourage their clans to embrace celestial totems.

## NON-HUMAN AASIMAR

Not all aasimar are descended from humans. Aasimars can be born of any intelligent race, though human aasimars are the most common. Aasimars of other races usually exemplify the ideals of beauty and skill as seen by their base race. For example, halfling aasimars are small, beautifully proportioned, and display exceptional grace. Half-orc aasimars are slightly larger and stronger than ordinary orcs, with tough skin and metallic claws and tusks—they are likely to be neutral rather than evil, but still display aggression and incredible combat prowess. Less common humanoids, such as lizardfolk, tengus, and others, can also produce aasimars, though given these races' exotic appearance, members of the more common races may have trouble telling such aasimars apart from their kin.

It should be noted that while any creature that breeds with a celestial may give birth to half-celestial offspring, only humanoids can give birth to aasimars. Thus, while it's possible to encounter a half-celestial dragon, unicorn, or griffon, any children of such creatures would be either half-celestials or normal members of their race. (And just as often, these less conventional half-celestials are sterile.) When discussing half-celestials and aasimars, it's important to distinguish them from both true celestials (angels, azatas, agathions, etc.) and simple celestial creatures (creatures with the celestial template, which are themselves denizens of the good-aligned Outer Planes but similar in many ways to their Material Plane counterparts). Most aasimars also have a difficult time getting people to grasp distinctions between celestial types, with common folk erroneously grouping all such beings together as "angels."

Non-human aasimars have the same statistics as human aasimars with the exception of size. Thus a halfling aasimar is Small but otherwise possesses the same statistics and abilities as a human aasimar—the difference is purely cosmetic. Non-human aasimars do not possess any of the racial abilities of their base race. However, they are usually raised in the same cultural context as other members of their base race, and thus generally adopt the same fighting style as their peers, use the same types of weapons and armor, and study the same skills.

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## Aquatic Elves



Aquatic elves, considered “cousins” to the land-dwelling Saelfsidhedai, can live either in or out of the water, but most prefer homes in the watery depths of oceans and seas. They establish small communities, uniting with other aquatic elves as needed for protection but remaining largely independent. Some of these communities are built partly above and partly below the water, with half-elves of aquatic descent living in the open air, while their aquatic kin make their homes below.

Aquatic elves consider themselves an enlightened people capable of appreciating life in more dimensions than other creatures. When they do interact with other races, they often appear aloof and dismissive, as though bored or distracted, though this is not necessarily the case.

Aquatic elves are simply thinking of what wonders they might find during their explorations of their watery environs.

Considered beautiful by many elves, humans, and similar surface races, aquatic elves are a graceful and quick-witted people. Their skin can be the pale white or gold of beach sand, the russet of living coral, or the green-black of deepwater kelp. Often, aquatic elves’ coloration adjusts to their usual environment over time, sometimes changing over the course of a few generations. Their hair is long and silky, rippling with shades of blue and green. Aquatic elves have delicate, translucent webbing between their fingers and toes, allowing them to swim adroitly through the water.

### Adventurers

Groups of aquatic elves are known to specialize in searching ruins for pieces of art, historical records, and magical artifacts from sunken and forgotten empires.

Those exploring the submerged debris of long-lost cities sometimes partner with adventurers of other races to overcome dangerous traps or guardians. Prideful as they are, aquatic elves know that other creatures can contribute specialized abilities to an expedition, though they are happiest working with halflings, and surface elves, as these creatures are likely to return to the surface when their business beneath the waves is done. Some aquatic elves distrust humans, who they believe conceal expansionist motives and have a reckless disregard for danger—especially as concerns ancient and dangerous magic. Aquatic elves ally with gillmen only when necessary, as they worry that any such collaboration could be a part of some deeper aboleth scheme.

Aquatic elves believe that life is more vivid underwater than on land and that exceptional possibilities—both material and spiritual—exist for aquatic explorers. Aquatic elf adventurers, particularly those with no obligations to family or community, seek out hidden caverns, new species of plants or animals, and undiscovered ruins in the deepest reaches of the ocean, believing that their journeys lead to personal spiritual evolution.

## Races of Zaldara

As with surface elves, aquatic elves often have an aptitude for arcane magic, and the lure of lost power can draw aquatic elf adventurers far from familiar environments.

Arcane practitioners venture into submerged abandoned sites associated with other races, such as merfolk, hunting for lost magic items or forgotten spells; these expeditions often bring the aquatic elves into conflict with the races that consider the ruins their own. Aquatic elf adventurers may even leave the ocean and travel on dry land to pursue rumors of particularly powerful treasures, no matter how thinly substantiated.

When they do so, they prefer to ally with surfacers who know the area well (or hire one or more guides or specialists), as they harbor an unnatural fear of getting lost while on land and being unable to return to their vibrant ocean homes, even though they suffer no physical detriments from being on land for extended periods of time.

## Races of Zaldara

### Changelings

Changelings are the offspring of hags and their lovers taken through magic or madness. Dropped off on doorsteps of prospective foster parents, changelings are raised by strangers. Typically tall, slender, dark haired, and attractive, changelings otherwise resemble their fathers' race. They are always female, and their mismatched colored eyes and abnormally pale skin hint at their true heritage. At puberty, changelings receive "the call," a hypnotic spiritual voice that beckons them to travel and discover their true origins. Changelings who ignore this call choose their own destiny; those who heed it discover their "mother" and may come into great power by transforming into hags themselves.





## Races of Zaldara

### Dhampir

The half-living children of vampires birthed by human females, dhampirs are progenies of both horror and tragedy. The circumstances of a dhampir's conception are often called into question but scarcely understood, as few mortal mothers survive the childbirth. Those who do often abandon their monstrous children and refuse to speak of the matter.

mortal women couple with vampires, woman suffers a vampire bite. Some dhampirs' status as a unique race, from an unholy affliction. dhampirs' seeming inevitably humans bloodline).

Regardless, they live mortal creatures, supernatural

Hardship and suffering

Most grow up as

exquisite features and

of prejudice, mistrust,

witness the seemingly

supernatural powers or sensitivity

ranging from awe to terror to

must learn to cope with these

in the world. While most

evil of their undead heritage and

depicted by society, a few reject their unholy conceptions, instead vowing to avenge their mothers by

hunting the very creatures that sired them. Dhampirs keep few, if any, close companions. Ultimately,

the majority of evil dhampirs regard their allies as little more than tools or fodder. Those whom they

deem useful are judged by their merits as individuals, not by their race. However, even with those they

feel attached to, most dhampirs are sullen and reserved. Some fear the persecution heaped upon them

may be transferred to their companions, whereas others worry their own bloodlust will one day

overwhelm them and they'll inadvertently turn upon their friends. In any case, an alliance with a

dhampir almost always leads to an ill-fated conclusion.

While some speculate that dhampirs result when

others claim that they form when a pregnant

particularly zealous scholars even contest

instead viewing them as humans suffering

Indeed, this hypothesis is strengthened by

inability to reproduce, their offspring

(usually sorcerers with the undead

and die just like any other

despite possessing a

longevity akin to that of elves.

fill a dhampir's formative years.

orphans, and despite their

innate charm, they face a lifetime

fear, and persecution. Humans who

sinister nature of a dhampir child's

to daylight display an array of reactions

outright hatred. Eventually, a dhampir

difficulties in order to find his place

dhampirs succumb to the innate

devolve into the monstrous fiends



**Physical Description:** Tall and slender and with well-defined musculature, dhampirs look like statuesque humans of unearthly beauty. Their hair, eye, and skin colors resemble unnerving versions of their mothers'; many possess a ghastly pallor, particularly in the sunlight, while those with dark complexions often possess skin the color of a bruise.

While many dhampirs can pass as humans in ideal conditions, their features are inevitably more pronounced and they move with an unnaturally fluid grace. All dhampirs have elongated incisors. While not true fangs, these teeth are sharp enough to draw blood, and many suffer a reprehensible desire to indulge in sanguinary delights, despite the fact that the act provides most no physical benefit.

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**Society:** Dhampirs have no culture of their own, nor do they have any known lands or even communities. Often born in secret and abandoned at orphanages or left to die on the outskirts of town, they tend to live solitary lives as exiles and outcasts. Individuals acquire the cultural beliefs and teachings of the regions in which they grew up, and adopt additional philosophies over the course of their complex lives. This ability to adapt to a verity of circumstances provides dhampirs with a social camouflage that hides them from both predators and prey. In rare instances, dhampirs might gather to form small groups or cabals dedicated to resolving their joint issues. Even so, the philosophies of such groups reflect the interests of the individuals involved, not any common dhampir culture.

**Relations:** As dhampirs are scions of evil, few races view them favorably. They share an affinity for those half-breeds whose sinister ancestry also sets them apart from human society, particularly tieflings and half-orcs. Humans view them with a combination of fear and pity, though such feelings often devolve into hatred and violence. Other humanoid races, such as dwarves, elves, and halflings, simply shun them. Similarly, dhampirs bear a deep-seeded loathing for living creatures, their hatred planted by jealousy and fed by frustration.

**Alignment and Religion:** Most dhampirs succumb to the evil within their blood. They are unnatural creatures, and the foul influence of their undead heritage makes an evil outlook difficult to overcome. Those who struggle against their wicked natures rarely progress beyond a neutral outlook.

**Adventurers:** The life of an adventurer comes naturally to most dhampirs, since constant persecution condemns many to spend their days wandering. Evil dhampirs keep moving to maintain their secrecy and evade lynch mobs, while those who follow the path of vengeance venture forth in search of their despised fathers. Regardless of their reasons, most dhampirs simply feel more at home on the road than in a settlement. Having little formal training, a great many of these journeyers become fighters and rogues.

Almost universally, those inclined toward magic pursue the field of necromancy, though dhampir alchemists have been known to obsess over transforming their own bodies. Those who feel the call of the hunt often become inquisitors.

# Races of Zaldara

## Drow



Cruel and cunning, drow are a dark reflection of the elven race. Also called dark elves, they dwell deep underground in elaborate cities shaped from the rock of cyclopean caverns. Drow seldom make themselves known to surface folk, preferring to remain legends while advancing their sinister agendas through proxies and agents. Drow have no love for anyone but themselves, and are adept at manipulating other creatures. While they are not born evil, malignancy is deep-rooted in their culture and society, and nonconformists rarely survive for long. Some stories tell that given the right circumstances, a particularly hateful elf might turn into a drow, though such a transformation would require a truly heinous individual.

**Physical Description:** Drow are similar in stature to humans, but share the slender build and features of elves, including the distinctive long, pointed ears. Their eyes lack pupils and are usually solid white or red. Drow skin ranges from coal black to a dusky purple. Their hair is typically white or silver, though some variation is not unknown.

**Society:** Drow society is traditionally class-oriented and matriarchal. Male drow usually fulfill martial roles, defending the species from external threats, while female drow assume positions of leadership and authority. Reinforcing these gender roles, one in 20 drow are born with exceptional abilities and thus considered to be nobility, and the majority of these special drow are female. Noble houses define drow politics, with each house governed by a noble matriarch and composed of lesser families, business enterprises, and military companies. Each house is also associated with a demon lord patron. Drow are strongly driven by individual self-interest and advancement, which shapes their culture with seething intrigue and politics, as common drow jockey for favor of the nobility, and the nobility rise in power through a combination of assassination, seduction, and treachery.

**Relations:** Drow have a strong sense of racial superiority and divide non-drow into two groups: slaves, and those that are not yet slaves. In practice, however, races that may share similar inclinations (such as hobgoblins and orcs) and those who serve willingly may be treated as servitor races and granted a measure of trust and modest rank in drow society. Others, such as dwarves and halflings, are deemed fit only for the lash. Manipulative drow delight in exploiting the weak character of humans. Finally, the drow's hatred of elves sets these beings apart from all other races, and the dark elves desire nothing more than to ruin everything about their surface cousins.

**Alignment and Religion:** Drow place a premium on power and survival, and are unapologetic about any vile choices they might make to ensure their survival. After all, they do not just survive adversity—they conquer it. They have no use for compassion, and are unforgiving of their enemies, both ancient and contemporary. Drow retain the elven traits of strong emotion and passion, but channel it through negative outlets, such as hatred, vengeance, lust for power, and raw carnal sensation. Consequently, most drow are chaotic evil. Demon lords are their chosen patrons, sharing their inclination toward power and destruction.

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**Adventurers:** Conquerors and slavers, drow are driven to expand their territory, and many seek to settle ancient grudges upon elven and dwarven nations in ruinous and dreary sites of contested power on the surface. Male drow favor martial or stealth classes that put them close to their enemies and their homes, as either soldiers or spies. Female drow typically assume classes that lend themselves to leadership, such as bards and especially clerics. Both genders have an innate talent for the arcane arts, and may be wizards or summoners. Drow make natural antipaladins, but males are often discouraged from this path, as the feminine nobility feel discomforted by the idea of strong-willed males with autonomous instincts and a direct relationship with a demon lord.

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### Duergar

When veterans of campaigns in the deep caverns beneath the world gather, they hiss warnings to those of a mind to brave the world's depths. They speak with horror of the drow and shudder when describing the perversions of the derros, but avoid altogether talk of the gray dwarves and their grim enclaves. It's a difficult subject in the presence of friendly dwarves whose ancestors long ago heard the call of the surface world. The duergar's folly serves as a lesson on the hazards of pride and stubbornness, and lays bare those flaws of the dwarven people.



Clannish, hateful, and malevolent tyrants and slavers, the gray dwarves refuse to accept the consequences of their own actions and the reality of their chosen fate. Instead, they blame everyone else: the orcs, the drow, and especially their own surface-dwelling cousins. They believe—with an iron-hard certainty—that the surface dwarves are the true traitors of their race. But this is all delusion. The duergar are a race enslaved by themselves, the dark powers they called upon for succor, and the lightless labyrinths of their home.

The gray dwarves believe that other creatures are fit only for service and torment. The reasons for this perceived racial supremacy vary slightly from community to community, but the underlying narratives are the same: the strong nature of the duergar has allowed them to stand on their own in the depths, and this strength has forged them into a superior race.

The dwarves have always been people of the earth. In the early days of the world, they mined air-filled spaces miles underground, and the light and skies of the surface were unknown to them. But like all great empires, the doom of this one was written in the stars the dwarves had not yet spied.

The dwarves were lucky, for their gods were good and just, and cared for the welfare of the dwarven people. When the end was nigh, the gods sent warnings and portents, and the mystics and the wise among the race heard the call and warned their kin. But there are always those who doubt. Some cling to the life they know and foolishly think it is their birthright until the end of eternity. Some doubt because it is in their nature, or because they fear others wish to take what is theirs. While great masses of the dwarves headed upward to the new halls on the surface world promised to them, a number stayed behind, proclaiming themselves masters of the ancient dwarven holds.

Less than a generation after the great retreat, the calamities that were foretold came to pass. The once-grand subterranean holds were ripped apart by earthquakes and scorched by magma flows. Those who remained had to flee deeper into the earth in search of pockets of relative safety and calm, competing with an influx of ancient enemies, displaced predators, and unspeakable evils freed from once-sealed

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vaults deep under the earth. Within only a few years, most of the dwarves left behind had perished, and the survivors were scattered and utterly desperate. In their hour of need, their calls to the old gods were answered only with silence. Such entreaties were nothing more than screams into the darkness... but sometimes the darkness answers back.

According to legend, an outcast dwarven god heard the pleas of those left to suffer. A deceiver and a cheat, this god had lost nearly all of his former followers, but offered these forsaken dwarves one chance for survival: if they worshiped and served him, and bound their descendants to the same fate, he would restore them to glory. Given little choice, the desperate dwarves agreed. The outcast god turned the dwarves' skin ashen gray and caused most of the males' hair (except for eyebrows and beards) to fall out as a reminder of the bargain made, so their gray faces—or duergar in the Dwarven tongue—would set them apart from those cowards who fled the crucible that forged the true members of the dwarven race.

Since that cataclysm and the deal they wrought, the duergar have steadily taken back what was once theirs using the tools of their new lord: murder, slavery, toil, and hatred. Believing themselves the true race of dwarves, they have no interest in the land above other than engaging in occasional raids to murder their cousins or to replenish their stock of slaves. They see themselves as the masters of the only land worth having: the mineral-rich true homeland of the dwarven people.

Duergar believe their society is the ideal state of the dwarves. In many ways, duergar society is like a reflection of dwarven society seen in a distorted mirror. Rivalries are just as fierce, but among the duergar, they can easily end in murder or mutilation. Work is revered, but the duergar's greatest achievements are built on the backs of slaves, many of whom do not survive to see the end results of their toil.

The entire structure of duergar society is based on the sacrifice they made to their outcast god and the repercussions of that deal. Each is a slave to his master, and must submit to a life of toil in order to repay the debt the duergar owe. Of course, that debt can never be repaid, and no rewards for their labor await duergar in the afterlife. This leads them to create works that lack soul or beauty—highly utilitarian, but stark, cold, and lifeless.

Like their hated kin, duergar divide themselves into large kinship clans, forming alliances through marriage. The priesthood stands apart, and arbitrates in legal and familial conflicts. Duergar who enter the clergy are bound to sever their ties with family and clan, but this is rarely the case in practice. Obligations to kin often outweigh priests' sense of duty, resulting in a system of law with very little semblance of justice. Slavish devotion to the faith of their liberator and a strict adherence to the common law are lauded in duergar society, so much so that duergar's word is only rarely broken. In truth, though, a canny gray dwarf uses her words very carefully in order to keep her options flexible. A common duergar expression is "Dealings done within sight are slaves to law; deeds done in secret are slaves only to purpose."



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### Gillmen



Gillmen descended from humans. Aboleths captured several of these humans and muted them to survive underwater. The gillmen's ancestors were thus saved from extinction, but at a terrible cost: for centuries, they served the aboleths, physically and mentally twisted into the perfect tools of that ancient race.

In time, the aboleths abandoned their fleshwarped servants. Despite their freedom, gillmen still bear the psychic scars of their race's captivity. They face the distrust of others, who often suspect gillmen of ulterior agendas.

They view allies warily, wondering if they, too, want only to use the gillmen for their own purposes. Gillmen today are leery of everyone—even of their own kind.

Gillmen appear human at first glance, but the gills on their neck and their vibrant purple eye color give them away. Gillmen have soft, delicate skin in shades of pearly white, peach, salmon, or sandy brown. Their hair is often dark brown or black, but for some it takes on the colors of the sea, and they have thick, expressive eyebrows. Gillmen are physically bound to the sea; they must submerge themselves in water at least once a day or their skin dries and cracks, their organs begin to fail, and they eventually die.

When associating with others, gillmen prefer the company of their own kind, though they sometimes consort with humans or merfolk, usually as traders or messengers.

Rumors persist that some gillmen still serve aboleth masters willingly, moving among coastal regions as spies and saboteurs. The discovery of these agents perpetuates the pervasive belief that all gillmen are—knowingly or unknowingly—thralls to aboleth masters.

#### **Adventurers**

Though small gillman communities exist underwater, most gillmen operate independently or in small family groups. They share no overreaching racial goals or desires, banding together solely for survival. Each gillman has unique experiences and motivations that may lead to an adventuring life. Although gillmen are slow to make friends with other races, they are nonetheless a stable addition to any group of adventurers.

Some gillmen are unable to let go of their race's past.

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These adventurers follow rumors of aboleth activity and seek out villains that serve the deep-sea masters. They also pursue powerful allies and artifacts to aid them against the aboleth menace. Gillman adventurers quest for information on why the aboleths first created the gillmen, what purpose the gillmen were intended to fulfill, and why the aboleths gave up their thralls. These gillmen hope to ascertain their history so that it can be put to rest, allowing their people to begin building a unified future.

## Races of Zaldara

### Goblins

Goblins are a race of childlike creatures with a destructive and voracious nature that makes them almost universally despised. Weak and cowardly, goblins are frequently manipulated or enslaved by stronger creatures that need destructive, disposable foot soldiers. Those goblins that rely on their own wits to survive live on the fringes of society and feed on refuse and the weaker members of more civilized races. Most other races view them as virulent parasites that have proved impossible to exterminate.

Goblins can eat nearly anything, but prefer a diet of meat and consider the flesh of humans a rare and difficult-to-obtain delicacy. While they fear the bigger races, goblins' short memories and bottomless appetites mean they frequently go to war or execute raids against other races to sate their pernicious urges and fill their vast larders.



**Physical Description:** Goblins are short, ugly humanoids that stand just over 3 feet tall. Their scrawny bodies are topped with over-sized and usually hairless heads with massive ears and beady red or occasionally yellow eyes. Goblins' skin tone varies based on the surrounding environment; common skin tones include green, gray, and blue, though black and even pale white goblins have been sighted. Their voracious appetites are served well by their huge mouths filled with jagged teeth.

**Society:** Violent but fecund, goblins exist in primitive tribal structures with constant shifts in power. Rarely able to sustain their own needs through farming or hunting and gathering, goblin tribes live where food is abundant or near places that they can steal it from. Since they are incapable of building significant fortifications and have been driven out of most easily accessible locations, goblins tend to live in unpleasant and remote locations, and their poor building and planning skills ensure that they dwell primarily in crude caves, ramshackle villages, and abandoned structures. Few goblins are good with tools or skilled at farming, and the rare items of any value that they possess are usually cast-off implements from humans or other civilized cultures. Goblins' appetites and poor planning lead to small tribes dominated by the strongest warriors. Even the hardest goblin leaders quickly find out that their survival depends on conducting frequent raids to secure sources of food and kill off the more aggressive youth of the tribe. Both goblin men and women are ugly and vicious, and both sexes are just as likely to rise to positions of power in a tribe. goblin babies are almost completely self-sufficient not long after birth, and such infants are treated almost like pets. Many tribes raise their children communally in cages or pens where adults can largely ignore them. Mortality is high among young goblins, and when the adults fail to

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feed them or food runs low, youths learn at an early age that cannibalism is sometimes the best means of survival in a goblin tribe.

**Relations:** Goblins tend to view other beings as sources of food, which makes for poor relations with most civilized races. Goblins often survive on the fringes of human civilization, preying on weak or lost travelers and occasionally raiding small settlements to fuel their voracious appetites. Of the most common races, half-orcs are the most tolerant of goblins, sharing a similar ancestry and experiencing the same hatred within many societies. Goblins are mostly unaware of half-orcs' sympathy, however, and avoid them because they are larger, meaner, and less flavorful than other humanoids.

**Alignment and Religion:** Goblins are greedy, capricious, and destructive by nature, and thus most are neutral or chaotic evil.

**Adventurers:** Goblin adventurers are usually curious and inclined to explore the world, though they are often killed off by their own foolish misdeeds or hunted down for their random acts of destruction. Their pernicious nature makes interacting with civilized races almost impossible, so goblins tend to adventure on the fringes of civilization or in the wilds. Adventurous individuals who survive long enough often ride goblin dogs or other exotic mounts, and focus on archery to avoid close confrontation with larger enemies. goblin spellcasters prefer fire magic and bombs over almost all other methods of spreading mayhem.

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### Hobgoblins



Fierce and militaristic, hobgoblins survive by conquest. The raw materials to fuel their war machines come from raids, their armaments and buildings from the toil of slaves worked to death. Naturally ambitious and envious, hobgoblins seek to better themselves at the expense of others of their kind, yet in battle they put aside petty differences and fight with discipline rivaling that of the finest soldiers. Hobgoblins have little love or trust for one another, and even less for outsiders. Life for these brutes consists of duty to those of higher station, domination of those below, and the rare opportunities to seize personal glory and elevate their status.

**Physical Description:** Burly and muscled, hobgoblins stand a few inches shorter than the average human, and their long arms, thick torsos, and relatively short legs give them an almost apelike stature. Hobgoblins' skin is a sickly gray-green that darkens to mossy green after long exposure to the sun. Their eyes burn fiery orange or red, and their broad faces and sharply pointed ears give their features a somewhat feline cast.

Hobgoblins lack facial hair, and even hobgoblin women are bald. Except for their size, hobgoblins bear a strong physical resemblance to their goblin cousins.

**Society:** Hobgoblins live in militaristic tyrannies, each community under the absolute rule of a hobgoblin general. Every hobgoblin in a settlement receives military training, with those who excel serving in the army and the rest left to serve more menial roles. Those deemed unfit for military service have little social status, barely rating above favored slaves. Despite this, hobgoblin society is egalitarian after a fashion. Gender and birth offer no barrier to advancement, which is determined almost solely by each individual's personal merit. Hobgoblins eschew strong attachments, even to their young. Matings are matters of convenience, and are almost always limited to hobgoblins of equal rank. Any resulting baby is taken from its mother and forcibly weaned after 3 weeks of age. Young mature quickly—most take no more than 6 months to learn to talk and care for themselves. Hobgoblins' childhoods last a scant 14 years, a mirthless span filled with brutal training in the art of war.

**Relations:** Hobgoblins view other races as nothing more than tools—implements to be enslaved, cowed, and put to work. Without slaves, hobgoblin society would collapse, so reliant is it on stolen labor. An injured, sickly, or defiant slave is like a broken tool, useless waste to be tossed out with the day's garbage. Not surprisingly, hobgoblin communities count no other races as their friends, and few as allies. Elves and dwarves earn special enmity, and are devilishly hard to break into proper slavery as both races hold blood feuds against goblinkind. Halflings and half-orcs make especially prized slaves—

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the former for their agile skills and the ease of breaking them to the collar, and the latter for their talent at thriving under the harshest of conditions. Hobgoblins have little love for the rest of goblinkind, though they typically treat goblinoid slaves better than they do other races.

**Alignment and Religion:** Hobgoblin life is nothing if not ordered and hierarchical, and hobgoblins lean strongly toward the lawful alignments. While not innately evil, the callous and brutal training that fills the too-short childhood of hobgoblins leaves most embittered and full of hate. Hobgoblins of good alignment number the fewest, and almost exclusively consist of individuals raised in other cultures. More numerous but still rare are hobgoblins of chaotic bent, most often exiles cast out by the despots of their homelands. Religion, like most non-militaristic pursuits, matters little to the majority of hobgoblins. Most pay lip-service to one or more gods and occasionally make offerings to curry favor or turn aside ill fortune. Those hobgoblins who feel a stronger religious calling venerate fearsome, tyrannical gods and devils.

**Adventurers:** Hobgoblin adventurers tend to be iconoclasts, loners who chafe under the strict hierarchy of military life. Others have fled or been exiled in disgrace for showing weakness or cowardice. Some harbor dreams of one day returning to the hobgoblin flock flush with wealth and tales of great deeds. A few serve farsighted hobgoblin generals, who send the most promising youths out into the world that they might someday return as mighty heroes for the hobgoblin cause. Hobgoblins lean toward martial classes, particularly cavaliers, fighters, monks, and rogues. The arcane arts are distrusted in hobgoblin society and consequently their practitioners are rare, save for alchemists, who gain grudging praise and admiration for their pyrotechnic talents.



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### Ifrits

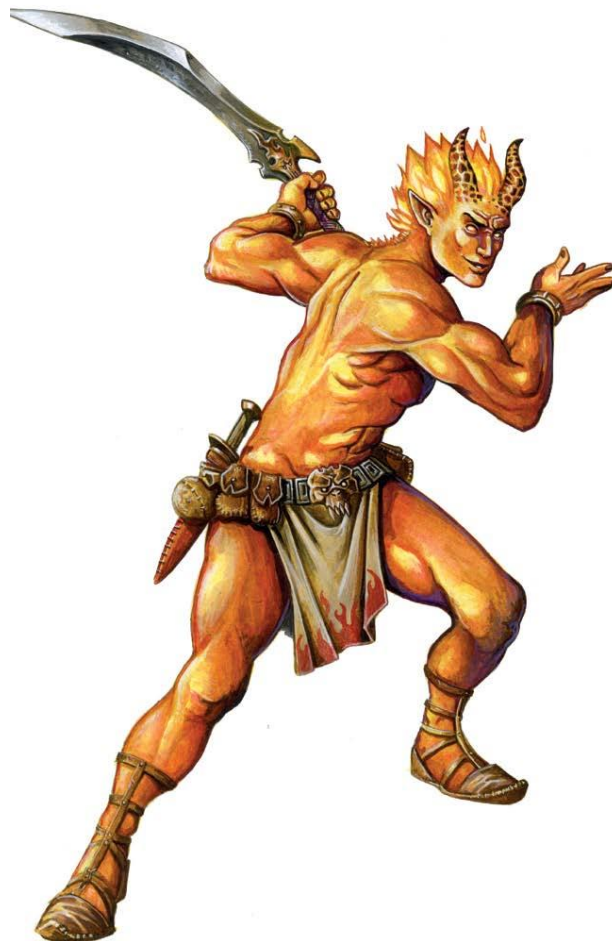
Humans whose ancestry includes beings of elemental fire such as efreet, ifrits are a passionate and fickle race. Most hail from the tribes of the Eastern Wastes and are rarely seen in the “civilized” lands of Zaldara. No ifrit is satisfied with a sedentary life; like a wildfire, ifrits must keep moving or burn away into nothingness. Ifrits not only adore flames, but personify multiple aspects of them as well, embodying both fire’s dynamic, ever-changing energy and its destructive, pitiless nature.

**Physical Description:** Ifrits vary in appearance as widely as their elemental ancestors do. Most have pointy ears, red or mottled horns on the brow, and hair that flickers and waves as if it were aflame. Some possess skin the color of polished brass or have charcoal-hued scales covering their arms and legs. Ifrits favor revealing and ostentatious clothing in bright oranges and reds, preferably paired with gaudy jewelry.

**Society:** Ifrits are most often born into human communities, and rarely form societies of their own. Those who grow up in a city are almost always imprisoned or driven off before they reach adulthood; most are simply too hot-headed and independent to fit into civilized society, and their predilection toward pyromania doesn’t endear them to the local authorities. Those born into nomadic or tribal societies fare much better, since ifrits’ instinctive urge to explore and conquer their surroundings can easily earn them a place among their tribe’s leadership.

**Relations:** Even the best-natured ifrits tend to view other individuals as tools to use as they see fit, and as such they get along best with races they can charm or browbeat into submission. Half-elves often find themselves caught up in an ifrit’s schemes, while halflings, half-orcs, and dwarves usually bridle at ifrits’ controlling nature. Strangely, ifrits sometimes form incredibly close bonds with elves, whose calm, aloof nature seems to counterbalance an ifrit’s impulsiveness. Most ifrits refuse to associate with sylphs, but are otherwise on peaceable terms with the other elemental-touched races.

**Alignment and Religion:** Ifrits are a dichotomous people—on one hand, fiercely independent, and on the other, imperious and demanding. They are often accused of being morally impoverished, but their troublemaking behavior is rarely motivated by true malice. Ifrits are usually lawful neutral or chaotic neutral, with a few falling into true neutrality. Most ifrits lack the mindset to follow a god’s teachings, and resent the strictures placed on them by organized faith. When ifrits do take to worship (usually venerating a fire-related deity), they prove to be zealous and devoted followers.



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**Adventurers:** Ifrits adventure for the sheer thrill of it and for the chance to test their skill against worthy foes, but most of all they adventure in search of power. Once ifrits dedicate themselves to a task, they pursue it unflinchingly, never stopping to consider the dangers ahead of them. When this brashness finally catches up with them, ifrits often rely on sorcery or bardic magic to combat their resulting troubles.

## Races of Zaldara

### Kobolds



Kobolds are weak, craven, and possess a festering resentment for the rest of the world, especially members of races that seem stronger, smarter, or superior to them in any way. They proudly claim kinship to dragons, but beneath all the bluster, the comparison to their glorious cousins leaves kobolds with a profound sense of inadequacy. Though they are hardworking, clever, and blessed with a natural talent for mechanical devices and mining, they spend their days nursing grudges and hatreds instead of celebrating their own gifts. Kobold tactics specialize in traps and ambushes, but kobolds enjoy anything that allows them to harm others without putting themselves at risk. Often, they seek to capture rather than to kill, taking out their frustrations on the helpless victims they drag back to their claustrophobic lairs.

**Physical Description:** Kobolds are small, bipedal reptilian humanoids. Most stand around 3 feet tall and weigh about 35 pounds. They have powerful jaws for creatures of their size and noticeable claws on their hands and feet. Often kobolds' faces are curiously devoid of expression, as they favor showing their emotions by simply swishing their tails. Kobolds' thick hides vary in color, and most have scales that match the hue of one of the varieties of chromatic dragons, with red scales being predominant. A few kobolds, however, have more exotic colors such as orange or yellow, which in some tribes raises or lowers an individual's status in the eyes of his fellows.

**Society:** Kobolds thrive in cramped quarters far from the light of the sun. Most live in vast warrens deep beneath the earth, but a few instead prefer to make their homes beneath tangles of overgrown trees and brush. Saving their malice for other races, most kobolds get along well with their own kind. While squabbles and feuds do occur, the elders who rule kobold communities tend to settle such conflicts swiftly. Kobolds delight in taking slaves, relishing the chance to torment and humiliate them. They are also cowardly and practical, and often end up bowing to more powerful beings. If these creatures are of another humanoid race, kobolds often scheme to free themselves from subjugation as soon as possible. If the overlord is a powerful draconic or monstrous creature, however, kobolds see no shame in submission, and often shower adoration on their new leader. This is especially true if the kobolds serve a true dragon, who they tend to worship outright.

**Relations:** Kobolds often seethe with hatred and jealousy, but their innate caution ensures that they only act on these impulses when they have the upper hand. If unable to safely indulge their urge to physically harm and degrade members of other races, they resort to careful insults and "practical jokes" instead. They consider both dwarves and elves to be deadly rivals. Kobolds fear the brute power of half-orcs and resent humans for the dominant status that race enjoys. They believe half-elves blend the best

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qualities of both parent races, which strikes kobolds as fundamentally unfair. Kobolds believe halflings, small in stature, make wonderful slaves and targets for kobold rage and practical jokes.

**Alignment and Religion:** Kobolds readily knuckle under to superior force but rarely stop scheming to gain an edge over their oppressors. Most kobolds are lawful evil, though some, more concerned with procedure than their own personal advantage, become lawful neutral instead. Kobolds often pray to Asmodeus or other evil demon lords in hopes of bringing ruin to their foes or power to themselves. In addition to these deities, kobolds, supremely opportunistic, also sometimes worship nearby monsters as a way of placating them or earning their favor.

**Adventurers:** Kobolds rarely leave their cozy warrens by their own choice. Most of those who set out on adventures are the last of their tribe, and such individuals often settle down again as soon as they find another kobold community willing to take them in. Kobolds who cannot rein in, or at least conceal, their spiteful and malicious natures have great difficulty surviving in the larger world.

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### Merfolk

Merfolk are among the best known and yet the least understood of the aquatic races. Folklore is filled with stories of merfolk: legends of beautiful merfolk falling in love with humans, or ship crews saved from storms by friendly bands of the creatures. Among land dwellers, merfolk are almost-legendary figures of impossible beauty and magic. In reality, merfolk are secretive and prone to intense xenophobia. They value their privacy and are more likely to react to surfacers with aggression than with friendship or passion. Merfolk communities guard their territories ruthlessly. They may warn away ships and travelers who seem nonthreatening or genuinely lost, but if trespassers appear hostile, merfolk attack first.

Merfolk have the upper bodies of graceful humanoids with fine, delicate features. Their skin can be deep, warm shades of brown, lighter shades of tan and gold, or very pale tones of peach and white. Merfolk have the lower body of a great fish, with a long tail ending in powerful fins to aid with swimming. Merfolk scales are iridescent and grow in many colors, most commonly the green and blue shades of the sea. Like many fish, merfolk have darker scales on their backs and lighter ones on their undersides, which helps mask their presence from creatures below them in the water.



Although many surfacer myths about merfolk are untrue, one bears out: most merfolk are genuinely gifted musicians.

Merfolk might experiment with a harp or woodwind, particularly one discovered on a wrecked ship or stolen from a seaside community, but many merfolk are practiced singers. Merfolk voices naturally and lightly span ranges that would make human bards envious, and their songs travel far underwater or across the surface of the sea.

### Adventurers

Merfolk are an insular and guarded race. While they might work with non-merfolk on occasion, only rarely do they trust these allies fully. Merfolk who adventure on their own often do so because nothing is left for them in their homes.

Sahuagin and merfolk clash frequently, and sahuagin have been known to destroy entire merfolk colonies, taking the few survivors as prisoners. A merfolk who escapes this fate may be left alone in the world, his friends and family dead or captured. Some of these unfortunates leave their former territory, suppressing their painful memories, and caring little where their travels take them. Other merfolk leave their homes only as a means to protect their own: to rescue loved ones captured by aquatic slavers, to recover powerful magic items to defend their lands, or to seek a cure for a disease or curse.

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On rare occasions, a merfolk community may exile a merfolk who has broken the trust of his neighbors. Exiled merfolk feel great shame and often lie about their origins to their fellow travelers. Some of these adventurers seek a way to regain the good graces of their community, such as by performing a great service, killing a ferocious predator, or finding a lost treasure to bring home with them.

Rumors exist of merfolk exiled from their community for no reason other than their lack of musical talent. Some merfolk tribes see musical expression as a sacred merfolk ability—a gift from the gods themselves. A merfolk who cannot sing, or one who sings badly, is thought to be cursed, destined to bring ill fortune to their kin. “Cursed” merfolk are gently but firmly turned out of their homes and left to make their own way in the world. Many become wanderers and adventurers, spending their time among races who do not recognize the stigma that caused their banishment.

Merfolk have the upper torsos of well-built and attractive humans and lower halves consisting of the tail and fins of a great fish. Their hair and scales span a wide range of hues, with Merfolk in a given region closely resembling each other. Merfolk can breathe air freely but move on dry land only with difficulty, and rarely spend long periods out of water. As a race, Merfolk are insular and distrustful of strangers, but individuals, especially adventuring Merfolk, break the mold and can be quite garrulous. Merfolk concern themselves more with nature and the arts than with morality and ethical debates, and have a strong inclination toward neutral alignments.

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## Oreads



Oreads are humans whose ancestry includes the touch of an elemental being of earth somewhere along the line, often that of a shaitan genie. Stoic and contemplative, oreads are a race not easily moved, yet almost unstoppable when spurred to action. They remain a mystery to most of the world thanks to their reclusive nature, but those who seek them out in their secluded mountain hideaways find oreads to be quiet, dependable, and protective of their friends.

**Physical Description:** Oreads are strong and solidly built, with skin and hair colored stony

shades of black, brown, gray, or white. While all oreads appear vaguely earthy, a few bear more pronounced signs of their elemental heritage—skin that shines like polished onyx, rocky outcroppings protruding from their flesh, glowing gemstones for eyes, or hair like crystalline spikes. They often dress in earthy tones, wearing practical clothing well suited to vigorous physical activity and preferring fresh flowers, simple gemstones, and other natural accents to complex manufactured jewelry.

**Society:** As a minor offshoot of the human race, oreads have no real established society of their own. Instead, most oreads grow up in human communities learning the customs of their parents. Usually seen amongst the tribes of the Eastern Wastes, Oreads are seldom seen in the “civilized” world. Adult oreads have a well-deserved reputation among other races for being hermits and loners. Few take well to the bustle of city life, preferring instead to spend their days in quiet contemplation atop some remote mountain peak or deep below the earth in a secluded cavern. Oreads with a greater tolerance for life among humans often join the city watch, or find some other way to serve their community in a position of responsibility.

**Relations:** Oreads feel comfortable in the company of dwarves, with whom they have much in common. They find many halflings far too brash, and so avoid these races in general. Oreads gladly associate with half-orcs and half-elves, feeling a sense of kinship with the other part-human races despite inevitable personality conflicts. Among the elemental-touched races, oreads have few friends but no true enemies.

**Alignment and Religion:** Oreads are, perhaps above all else, set in their ways, and any disruption of their routine is met with quiet disapproval. Oreads are fiercely protective of their friends, but don’t seem particularly concerned with the well-being of those outside their small circle of acquaintances. As such, most oreads are lawful neutral. Religious life comes easily to the earth-touched. They appreciate the quiet, contemplative life of the monastic order, and most dedicate themselves to the worship of earth- or nature-related deities.

**Adventurers:** Oreads are initially hesitant adventurers. They dislike leaving their homes and don’t handle the shock of new experiences well. Usually it takes some outside force to rouse oreads into action, often by threatening their homes, lives, or friends. Once the initial threat is dealt with, however, oreads often find they’ve grown accustomed to the adventuring life, and continue to pursue it through



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the rest of their days. Oreads make good monks and fighters thanks to their prodigious strength and self-discipline.

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### Ratfolk

Ratfolk are small, rodent-like humanoids; originally and plains, they are now more often found in rats they resemble, ratfolk are tinkers and masters of commerce, especially when it mechanical or magical devices. Though navigate the shifting alliances of black stockpiles of interesting items far more more such prizes to add to their successful crew of ratfolk traders bundle than they entered with, precariously high on a cart

**Physical Description:** Typical feet tall and weigh 80 wear robes to or conceal their other humanoids Ratfolk have a especially copper, ears and tails with small such metals. They are giant rats (dire rats creature simple they often use as

**Society:** Ratfolk are warrens with plenty of their hoards or flee in subterranean tunnels or tightly packed tenements in city slums. They feel an intense bond with their large families and kin networks, as well as with ordinary rodents of all sorts, living in chaotic harmony and fighting fiercely to defend each other when threatened. They are quick to use their stockpiles of gear in combat, but prefer to work out differences and settle disputes with mutually beneficial trades.

When a specific ratfolk warren grows overcrowded and the surrounding environment won't support a larger community, young ratfolk instinctively seek out new places in which to dwell. If a large enough group of ratfolk immigrants all settle down in a new, fertile area, they may create a new warren, often with strong political ties to their original homeland. Otherwise, individual ratfolk are inclined to simply leave home and take up residence elsewhere, or wander on caravan trips that last most of the year, reducing the pressure of overcrowding at home.

**Relations:** Ratfolk tend to get along quite well with humans, and often develop ratfolk societies dwelling in the sewers, alleys, and shadows of human cities. Ratfolk find dwarves too hidebound and territorial, and often mistake even mild criticisms from dwarves as personal attacks. Ratfolk have no particular feelings about halflings, although in areas where those races and ratfolk must compete for resources, clan warfare can become dogma for generations. Ratfolk enjoy the company of elves and half-elves,

native to subterranean areas in dry deserts nomadic trading caravans. Much like the pack hoarders by nature, and as a whole are comes to acquiring and repairing some are shrewd merchants who carefully markets and bazaars, many ratfolk love their than money, and would rather trade for hoards over mere coins. It's common to see a rolling out of town with an even larger the whole mess piled drawn by giant rats.

ratfolk are average 4 pounds. They often stay cool in the desert forms in cities, as they know find their rodent features distasteful. strong attraction to shiny jewelry, bronze, and gold, and many decorate their rings made of known to train with the giant template), which pack animals and mounts.

extremely communal, and live in large hidden crannies in which to stash times of danger, gravitating toward



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often seeing them as the calmest and most sane of the civilized humanoid races. Ratfolk are particularly fond of elven music and art, and many ratfolk warrens are decorated with elven art pieces acquired through generations of friendly trade.

**Alignment and Religion:** Ratfolk individuals are driven by a desire to acquire interesting items and a compulsion to tinker with complex objects. The strong ties of ratfolk communities give them an appreciation for the benefits of an orderly society, even if they are willing to bend those rules when excited about accomplishing their individual goals. Most ratfolk are neutral, and those who take to religion tend to worship deities that represent commerce and family.

**Adventurers:** Ratfolk are often driven by a desire to seek out new opportunities for trade, both for themselves and for their warrens. Ratfolk adventurers may seek potential markets for their clan's goods, keep an eye out for sources of new commodities, or just wander about in hopes of unearthing enough treasure to fund less dangerous business ventures. Ratfolk battles are often decided by cunning traps, ambushes, or sabotage of enemy positions, and accordingly young ratfolk heroes often take up classes such as alchemist and rogue.

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### Sahuagin



The sahuagin are horrid creatures that lurk in the oceans, ever ready to wreak devastation. These "sea devils" leave ships adrift and crewless, steal away whole villages in the dead of night, and force aquatic elves and merfolk alike to gird for war.

Sahuagin are complex beings. They have keen intellects and crave order and structure, yet they boil with barely suppressed rage and bloodlust. Even the smallest

provocation can tip a sahuagin from cold and calculating schemer to murderous assailant. To stay sane and sharp in times of need, sahuagin periodically revel in bloodstained waters—those who can't satiate their bloodlust either retreat into lethargic apathy or snap and turn against their own.

As a people, sahuagin seek nothing less than total domination of the seas. Though they love to unleash doom on other intelligent species, sahuagin also live in perpetual war with their own kind. Their kings and queens encourage these petty blood feuds, seeing them as a means to feed the blood frenzy, control their numbers, and further hone their race's already considerable skills in battle.

Unlike most aquatic humanoids, sahuagin thrive at any depth or temperature. Even still, they show a marked preference for warm coastal waters—perhaps due to an abundance of both food and beings to terrorize. Sahuagin can be found anywhere from sheltered atolls to lightless trenches, from the tropics to the poles. They have even spread to the Elemental Plane of Water.

Sahuagin live under a feudal system that embodies a ruthless enforcement of order. Each sahuagin holds a position earned with its prowess and skills, and risks demotion by showing any sign of incompetence—or death for any sign of weakness. Officers and lords rule minor holdings as vassals to the barons, dukes, and princesses; kings and queens rule entire oceans from their grand palaces within cities boasting populations in the tens of thousands. Each noble sahuagin aspires to bend the others to her will and become the ruler of an oceanic empire, ushering in the inevitable age of sahuagin ascendance.

Despite their use of noble titles, sahuagin put little stock in bloodlines. Accomplishment trumps parentage, and while sahuagin take pride in relatives with influence and strength, even the offspring of royals must swim unaided. Certainly those children have more opportunities and training than others, but the ambitious daughter of a common laborer might rise to rule a barony, while the inept son of a baron could very well become the meal of his betters.

Sahuagin view other creatures through the lens of their appetites—other races live only to serve as slaves, to die in sport or battle, or to fill the belly. Sahuagin rarely ally with creatures other than their

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beloved sharks and the shark-like adaros, though they occasionally enslave dragon turtles and other fearsome aquatic monsters as beasts of war. They despise aquatic elves, locathahs, merfolk, and tritons, seeing them as weaklings fit only for slavery and feasting. Aboleths and krakens earn a mixture of loathing and respect, as these beings represent the greatest impediment to sahuagin dominion of the seas.

Young sahuagin are born into clutches of up to 200 eggs, which females lay in well-protected egg chambers. A single settlement typically has one chamber, but larger cities can have up to a dozen. Eggs hatch 3 months after being laid, spawning eel-like fingerlings—all teeth, jaws, and tail. Hatching provokes a violent frenzy, as the newborn fingerlings devour the smaller and weaker members of their clutch. A number of the survivors fall prey to larger predators, or are eaten by their larger siblings when they grow hungry again after their brutal first meal. Only the clever, fast, or strong survive long in the egg chambers.

Sahuagin parents return to claim their surviving young after a year has passed, recognizing their offspring by scent. Some young remain unclaimed, because their parents either have perished or cannot track down the scent. The sahuagin barracks raise such foundlings communally, thrusting them into battle as soon as they can wield a trident.

Sahuagin mature quickly. They develop arms and legs at 6 months of age, grow to around 5 feet tall within a year, and reach their adult size of 7 feet tall around their sixth year. Upon reaching maturity, sahuagin of low social standing must fend for themselves or die—those of higher status are often trained and protected long enough by their parents to become skilled and deadly warriors.

As a species, sahuagin are particularly prone to mutation. Most mutants perish in the hatcheries, but those that survive command early respect, their strange abilities seen as proof of divine favor. The most common are the fearsome four-armed sahuagin, perhaps accounting for one in 100 surviving hatchlings. Other mutations appear to arise due to environmental conditions or nearness to other species, or perhaps in response to trace contaminants in the water. Of particular note are the malenti, those sahuagin who for unknown reasons are born looking exactly like aquatic elves.

Sahuagin have long, possibly unlimited life spans, though violence claims most before they reach their thirtieth year. Some particularly fierce princes and queens have ruled for hundreds of years, however, as sahuagin's bodies don't decline with age. Particularly old sahuagin are significantly larger than their younger kin (growing into Large creatures as they age). Sahuagin of all ages despise infirmity, and attempt to excise it from their midst with atavistic, violent reactions.

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### Sylphs

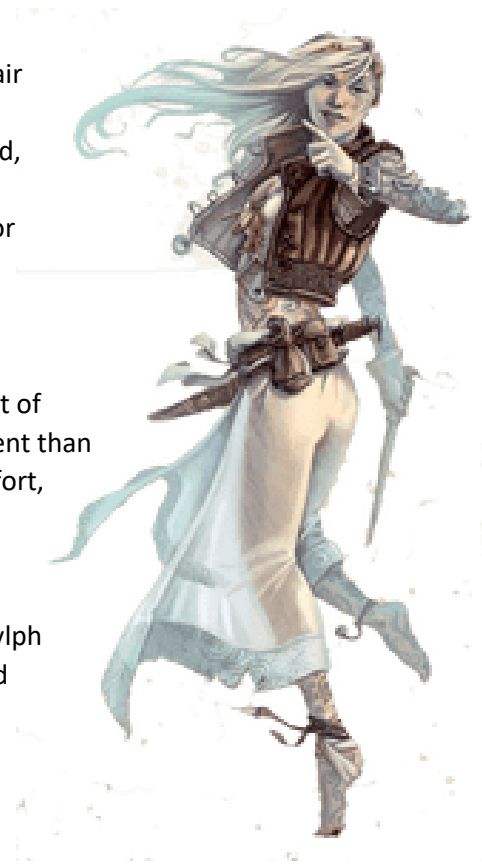
Born from the descendants of humans and beings of elemental air such as djinn, sylphs are a shy and reclusive race consumed by intense curiosity. Sylphs spend their lives blending into the crowd, remaining unnoticed as they spy and eavesdrop on the people around them. They call this hobby “listening to the wind,” and for many sylphs it becomes an obsession. Sylphs rely on their capable, calculating intellects and on knowledge gleaned from eavesdropping to deliver them from danger.

**Physical Description:** Sylphs tend to be pale and thin to the point of appearing delicate, but their skinny bodies are often more resilient than they look. Many sylphs can easily pass for humans with some effort, though the complex blue markings that swirl across their skin reveal their elemental ancestry. Sylphs also bear more subtle signs of their heritage, such as a slight breeze following them wherever they go. These signs become more pronounced as a Sylph experiences intense passion or anger, spontaneous gusts of wind tousling the sylph’s hair or hot blusters knocking small items off of shelves.

**Society:** Sylphs are usually born to human parents, and so are raised according to human customs. Like many elemental-human hybrids, most are found amongst the tribes of the Eastern Wastes. Most sylphs dislike the attention they receive growing up in human society, so it’s common for them to leave home soon after coming of age. They rarely abandon civilization altogether, however, preferring instead to find some new city or settlement where they can go unnoticed among (and spy upon) the masses. A Sylph who happens upon another Sylph unnoticed instantly becomes obsessed with her kin, spying on and learning as much about the other as she possibly can. Only after weighing all the pros and cons and formulating plans for every potential outcome will the Sylph introduce herself to the other. Rarely, two sylphs will discover each other’s presence in a community at the same time. What ensues thereafter is a sort of cat-and-mouse game, a convoluted dance in which each sylph spies on the other as both attempt to gain the upper hand. Sylphs who meet this way always become either inseparable friends or intractable enemies.

**Relations:** Sylphs enjoy prying into the affairs of most other races, but have little taste for actually associating with most of them. Sylphs can relate on some level with elves, who share their tendency toward aloofness, but often spoil any possible relationship by violating the elven sense of privacy. Dwarves distrust sylphs intensely, considering them flighty and unreliable. They form excellent partnerships with halflings, relying on the short folk’s courage and people skills to cover their own shortcomings. Sylphs are amused by the annoyed reactions they provoke in ifrits, and find oreads too boring to give them much attention.

**Alignment and Religion:** Sylphs have little regard for laws and traditions, for such strictures often prohibit the very things sylphs love—subterfuge and secrecy. This doesn’t mean sylphs are opposed to law, merely that they use the most expedient means available to accomplish their goals, legal or not.



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Most sylphs are thus neutrally aligned. Sylphs are naturally drawn to mystery cults, and to deities who focus on secrets, travel, or knowledge.

**Adventurers:** An inborn urge to get to the bottom of things drives many sylphs to the adventuring life. A Sylph who runs across the trail of a mystery will never be satisfied until she has uncovered every thread of evidence, followed up on every lead, and found the very heart of the trouble. Such sylphs make plenty of enemies by poking around into other peoples' affairs, and usually turn to their roguish talents or wizardry to defend themselves.



# Races of Zaldara

## Tengu



The crow-like tengus are known as a race of scavengers and irrepressible thieves. Covetous creatures predominantly motivated by greed, they are vain and easily won over with flattery. Deceptive, duplicitous, and cunning, tengus seek circumstances in which they can take advantage of the situation, often at the expense of others, including their own kind. They can be highly competitive, but impulsive and rash. Some claim their behavior is innate, while others believe their selfish mannerisms are cultural and developed as a learned adaptation that has enabled their people to endure through centuries of oppression.

Tengus are natural survivalists. For many, only theft and guile have afforded them the temporary luxuries other races take for granted. In the past, both humans and powerful races such as giants sought the

bird-folk as slaves and servitors. Many tengu scavenged for survival, scraping for food in the shadows of cities or living as subsistence hunters and gatherers in the wild. Their descendants now struggle to find their place in contemporary society, often competing against negative stereotypes or driven to embrace them, and they rely on thievery and swordplay to get by in a harsh and unforgiving world.

**Physical Description:** Tengus are avian humanoids whose features strongly resemble crows. They have broad beaks and both their arms and their legs end in powerful talons. Though tengus are unable to fly, iridescent feathers cover their bodies—this plumage is usually black, though occasionally brown or blue-black. Their skin, talons, beaks, and eyes are similarly colored, and most non-tengu have great difficulty telling individuals apart. Tengus who wish to be more easily identified by other humanoids may bleach certain feathers or decorate their beaks with dyes, paint, or tiny glued ornaments. Though they are about the same height as humans, they have slight builds and tend to hunch over. A tengu's eyes sit slightly back and to the sides of his head, giving him binocular vision with a slightly more panoramic field of view than other humanoids. Like many avians, tengus have hollow bones and reproduce by laying eggs.

**Society:** Tengus live in close-knit communities in which they keep to themselves. In urban centers, they tend to group in communal slums, while those living in rural areas establish isolated settlements. Overall, they remain secretive about their culture, which is a combination of old traditions laced with newer bits of culture scavenged from the races common in the neighboring regions. Cultural scavenging also extends to language, and regional dialects of Tengu are peppered with terms and colloquialisms from other languages. Unsurprisingly, tengus have a knack for language and pick up new ones quickly.

## Races of Zaldara

Most tengu communities tend to follow a tribal structure. Tribal rules remain loose and subjective, and tribe members settle any conflicts through public arbitration (and occasionally personal combat). While every tengu has a voice in her society, in most settlements, tengus still defer to their revered elders for wisdom and advice.

**Relations:** Few races easily tolerate tengus. Of the most common races, only humans allow them to settle within their cities with any regularity. When this occurs, tengus inevitably form their own ghettos and ramshackle communities, typically in the most wretched neighborhoods. Regardless of their tolerance, most humans maintain as little contact with tengus as possible. Tengus occasionally make friends with halflings, but only when they share mutual interests. Conversely, most dwarves have no patience for tengus whatsoever. Other races tend to view tengus in a similar fashion to humans, though many actively discourage them from settling in their realms.

**Alignment and Religion:** Tengus tend to be neutral, though those who allow their impulsiveness to get the better of them lean toward chaotic neutral. Religious beliefs vary from tribe to tribe; some worship the traditional tengu gods (most of which are aspects of better-known deities), while others take to the worship of human gods or celestial spirits. Tengus can be fickle with regard to their patrons, quickly abandoning religious customs when they cease to provide any tangible benefit. Many embrace polytheism, picking and choosing to uphold the tenets of whatever deities best suit them at the time.

**Adventurers:** With little at home to leave behind, many tengus turn to a life of adventure seeking fame, fortune, and glory. A common tengu belief portrays a life on the road as a series of experiences and trials that form a path to enlightenment. Some take this to mean a path of spiritual empowerment; others view it as a way to perfect their arts or swordsmanship. Perhaps in spite of the prejudices upheld by outsiders, many tengu adventurers embrace their stereotypes. These individuals seek to succeed by epitomizing tengu racial qualities, and proudly flaunt their heritage. Despite their avian frailty, with their quick reflexes and quicker wits, tengus make excellent rogues and rangers, while those with a strong connection to the spirit world often become oracles. Those disciplined in the practice of martial arts take jobs as mercenaries and bodyguards in order to profit from their talents.

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### Tieflings

Simultaneously more and less than mortal, tieflings are the offspring of humans and fiends. With otherworldly blood and traits to match, tieflings are often shunned and despised out of reactionary fear. Most tieflings never know their fiendish sire, as the coupling that produced their curse occurred generations earlier. The taint is long-lasting and persistent, often manifesting at birth or sometimes later in life, as a powerful, though often unwanted, boon. Despite their fiendish appearance and netherworld origins, tieflings have a human's capacity of choosing their fate, and while many embrace their dark heritage and side with fiendish powers, others reject their darker predilections. Though the power of their blood calls nearly every tiefling to fury, destruction, and wrath, even the spawn of a succubus can become a saint and the grandchild of a pit fiend an unsuspecting hero.

**Physical Description:** No two tieflings look alike; the fiendish blood running through their veins manifests inconsistently, granting them an array of fiendish traits. One tiefling might appear as a human with small horns, a barbed tail, and oddly colored eyes, while another might manifest a mouth of fangs, tiny wings, and claws, and yet another might possess the perpetual smell of blood, foul incenses, and brimstone. Typically, these qualities hearken back in some way to the manner of fiend that spawned the tiefling's bloodline, but even then the admixture of human and fiendish blood is rarely ruled by sane, mortal laws, and the vast flexibility it produces in tieflings is a thing of wonder, running the gamut from oddly beautiful to utterly terrible.

**Society:** Tieflings on the Material Plane rarely create their own settlements and holdings. Instead, they live on the fringes of the land where they were born or choose to settle. Most societies view tieflings as aberrations or curses, but in cultures where there are frequent interactions with summoned fiends, and especially where the worship of demons, devils, or other evil outsiders is legal or obligatory, tieflings might be much more populous and accepted, even cherished as blessings of their fiendish overlords. Tieflings seldom see another of their own kind, and thus they usually simply adopt the culture and mannerisms of their human parents. Only those of common bloodlines or those who manage to divorce their worldview from the inherently selfish, devious, and evil nature of their birth manage to find true acceptance, camaraderie, and common ground among others of their kind.

**Relations:** Tieflings face a significant amount of prejudice from most other races, who view them as fiend-spawn, seeds of evil, monsters, and lingering curses placed upon the world. Far too often, civilized races shun or marginalize them, while more monstrous ones simply fear and reject them unless forced or cowed into acceptance. But half-elves, half-orcs, and—most oddly—aasimars tend to view them as



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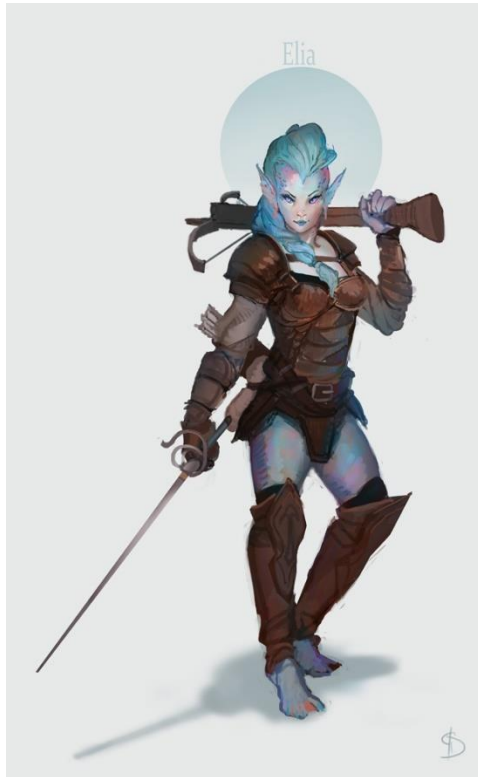
kindred spirits who are too often rejected or who don't fit into most societies by virtue of their birth. The widespread assumption that tieflings are innately evil—ill-founded though it may be—prevents many from easily fitting into most cultures on the Material Plane except in exceedingly cosmopolitan or planar-influenced nations.

**Alignment and Religion:** Despite their fiendish heritage and the insidious influence of prejudice, tieflings can be of any alignment. Many of them fall prey to the dark desires that haunt their psyches, and give in to the seduction of the whispering evil within, yet others steadfastly reject their origins and actively fight against evil lures and the negative assumptions they face from others by performing acts of good. Most, however, strive to simply find their own way in the world, though they tend to adopt a very amoral, neutral view when they do. Though many creatures just assume that tieflings worship devils and demons, their religious views are as varied as their physical forms. Individual tieflings worship all manner of deities, but they are just as likely to shun religion all together. Those who give in to the dark whispers that haunt the psyche of all tieflings serve all manner of powerful fiends.

**Adventurers:** Tieflings rarely integrate into the mortal societies they call home. Drawn to the adventuring life as a method of escape, they hope to make a better life for themselves, to prove their freedom from their blood's taint, or to punish a world that fears and rejects them. Tieflings make skilled rogues, powerful wizards and magi, and especially puissant sorcerers as their potent blood empowers them. Those who succumb to the evil within often become powerful clerics of fiendish powers.

# Races of Zaldara

## Undines



Undines are humans who trace their ancestry to creatures from the Plane of Water. Even at first glance, one notices the potency of their ancestry, for an undine's very flesh mimics the color of lakes, seas, and oceans. Whether they have the blood of marids or water mephits as their kin, all undines define themselves through their ancestry. They perceive their individual differences as gifts and explore the supernatural aspects of their unique heritage to the fullest.

The undines are a proud race and show little outward fear. While good-natured and somewhat playful among their own kind, they behave with slightly more reserve and seriousness in the company of non-undines. They have excellent emotional control, and can edge their tempers from calm to raging and back again within but a few minutes. While some might dub their behavior erratic, undines are simply a bit more outwardly melodramatic than most races. Certainly, they are not moody and do not become angered, excited, or otherwise emotional without provocation. As close friends, some find them overly possessive, though they are also extremely protective of those they care about.

Undines tend to settle near water, usually in warmer climates. Though land-dwellers, they spend a fair amount of time in the water. For this reason, most dress sparsely, wearing only enough clothing to protect themselves from the elements, and few wear shoes. They avoid wearing jewelry around their necks and keep their hair slicked back and tied into tight knots. This prevents hair or other objects from becoming a distraction or hindrance while swimming. Similarly, undines pursuing martial classes choose weapons that they can wield efficiently on land as well as in water.

**Physical Description:** Undines display a wide variation of skin tones, ranging from pale turquoise to deep blue to sea green. An undine's straight, thick hair tends to be of a similar, yet slightly darker color than her skin. All have limpid blue eyes. Physically, undines most resemble humans, and their physiques show human diversity in regard to overall height and body type. Aside from their coloration, their most racially defining traits remain their fin-like ears and webbed hands and feet.

**Society:** Undines define themselves as a unique race and are capable of producing undine offspring. While they remain able to interbreed with humans, they tend to keep to themselves, and form small, reclusive communities near bodies of water, or in some cases, floating settlements. A typical undine community lives under the guidance of a small council comprising officials appointed by consensus. Council positions can be held indefinitely, though a community unhappy with the performance of a council member can call for her resignation.

Intermarriage in undine communities is common, with children raised communally. A fair amount of regional diversity exists in undine culture, as influenced by the specific ancestry of independent

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settlements. It should also be noted that not all undine in a single settlement claim the same ancestry, as undines may marry other undines from outside their own communities.

**Relations:** Undines hold no biases or prejudices toward any particular races. Their communities rely primarily on trade, giving them ample opportunity to interact with a diverse range of outsiders and foreigners. They have no qualms about establishing neighborhoods within the settlements of other races, provided adequate respect is given to both the undines and any nearby bodies of water. Still, in such instances, a given undine community does what it can to retain its autonomy.

Undines get along quite well with elves. Often these races share protective duties over forested lakes and streams. Similarly, they interact favorably with good or neutral aquatic humanoids, sharing many common interests. They barter most freely with humans and dwarves for resources such as metal and cloth.

**Alignment and Religion:** Most undines are neutral. Their principle interests lie in the welfare of their people, and thus their moral concerns focus upon the community and upon themselves. This neutral view also allows them to interact with a broad scope of non-undine races with whom they trade. While not deeply religious, undines possess a strong spiritual connection to both their supernatural ancestors and to water itself. Those who pursue nonsecular paths almost always worship the gods of their ancestors or gods whose portfolios feature some aspect of water.

**Adventurers:** On occasion, an undine leaves her people to seek out a life of adventure. Like water itself, some undines simply feel compelled to move, and adventuring gives them an ample excuse for living on the road. Others adventure for less wholesome reasons, and exile is a common punishment for crimes within undine society. With few other options, most exiles turn to adventuring hoping to find a new place in the world. Undines' affinity toward water makes them particularly good druids, while undine sorcerers usually have aquatic bloodlines.