

Before the Empire, there was chaos and barbarianism. Monsters roamed the land. Nations, races, cities fought war after war for land, for power, for revenge, for politics. As the Empire coalesced, it brought peace and stability to many nations, whether they wanted it or not. Great wars were fought in the name of civilisation. Powerful magic was used to level cities and decimate armies. Portals to other worlds were opened in search of the perfect warriors. Heroes rose and fell but Empire grew. Now the Empire is old. It is 600 years since the end of the Last Wars but the land and its people are still scarred.

At the eastern edge of the Empire the (pompous) Grand Duchy of Karamiekos is ruled by Duke Stefan Karamiekos from the city of Specularum. The city is a grand port, gateway to a vast hinterland. The Duchy is a city-state, existing in an uneasy, politically turbulent state with several other city-states in this region. Karamiekos is mostly a coastal realm; several subservient towns pay tribute to walled Specularum along the ragged coast.

The law in this temperate region is rigorously enforced, but only when it suits the nobles who rule over these lands see fit. Mostly, the rulers are interested in turning a profit and enhancing their status at court. Aside from the noble houses – of which only the Duke's wield real power, the others are usually petty barons, counts and viscounts ennobled by the Duke for some political reason – the other real power in Karamiekos are the merchant houses. There are three powerful merchant houses that dominate trade in this region. Through their wealth and influence they also seek to dominate the politics of the region to further their ends.

There are three powerful merchant houses that dominate trade and politics in the Duchy: Radu, ship builders and sea-farers, this old house is well established in the region and well respected, some say feared, by commoners and nobles alike; Torenescu, merchants, money-lenders, landlords, this house controls land, buildings and businesses across the region. The head of this house recently died and the status of the house has suffered. Finally, Vorloi, controlled by the merchant prince, Baron Vorloi, this house have a huge merchant fleet that trade all along the coast, along rivers and across oceans. Vorloi competes aggressively with Radu.

Radu Coat-of-Arms



Torenescu Coat-of-Arms



Vorloi Coat-of-Arms



The Karamiekos city-state, along with several other city states in this area, sit in a disputed region in a distant province of a mighty empire. The city-states pay homage to the Emperor but these relative backwaters are left mostly to their own devices. The empire has stood for hundreds of years and has brought a degree of civilisation to most of the area it controls. Life has been peaceful despite a few minor wars, border skirmishes, political manoeuvrings and so forth.

Civilisation has drastically reduced the number of hostile monsters in the area. Tribes of humanoids still exist but they trade, raid and herd in equal portions these days. There are more monstrous incursions in this part of the world, particularly in the wilderness regions, such as the mountains and swamps that characterise the area.

In recent times, more monsters than usual have entered Karamiekos and troubled nearby states. Large monsters have laid waste to villages and outlying settlements before divisions of guards could be sent to end their menace. Many monsters were never killed and disappeared or moved into lairs beyond popular and lucrative trade routes. At the same time, over the past 30 years maybe, civil unrest has grown. People have become less hospitable, crime has increased, and violence has grown. Not to unmanageable levels but enough that scholars have noticed and studied this phenomenon. Some theories have emerged linked to a great earthquake some 30 years ago: some say that it stirred monsters elsewhere driving them here; others that the quake caused the fabric of reality to crack allowing magic from other planes to leak into this one, raising the levels of evil magic causing monstrous incursion and civil unrest; still others that it's all a co-incidence and that the monsters have always been there just that no-one paid any attention.

### **Player Character Races**

The following races are automatically allowed for starting PCs:

- Eladrin: a society of elves that were driven from the mortal realms to the feywild. Though eladrin have returned to the mortal realms since the end of the wars and founding of Empire, they are still rare, tending to stick to their own isolated communities. [PHB]
- Half-orcs: bred for war in pre-Empire days. Surprisingly common throughout the Empire, many mercenary companies are built around a tribe or group of half-orcs. [PHB2]
- Minotaurs: bred for war in pre-Empire days. Rare people in the outskirts of the Empire they are still bred in the heart of the Empire for military purposes. A few tribes of free Minotaurs are well documented. [Dragon]
- Revenants: results from necrotic magic. Very unusual creatures: sentient undead some are original creations that are now free from the long dead masters. Others are as a result of divine intervention, created for a purpose from divine energies. [Dragon]
- Dragonborn: bred for war from dragon eggs in the days before the Empire. Now free people, dragonborn are relatively common throughout the Empire. [PHB]
- Tieflings: corrupted humanoids driven into diabolic pacts for power often during past wars in pre-Empire days. Uncommon, generally loners either struggling with the echoes of their ancestry or generally free from diabolic taint and integrated with society. [PHB]
- Gnomes: originally from feywild, allied with eladrin. Scarce, elusive creatures rarely seen in the more civilised parts of the Empire but in the wilder, far-flung areas their villages can be found. [PHB]
- Goliaths: originally from another world but brought here by the Empire for war and service. Rare creatures, now free and found dwelling in mountainous regions. [PHB2]
- Shifters: interbred humanoids with lycanthropes originating in wilderness areas ravaged during past wars. Rare but wild. [PHB2]
- Deva: lost souls that have remained trapped in a cycle of reincarnation. Similar to ghosts they usually have some reason to be trapped – good or bad – but often cannot remember what. Unusual but could be found almost anywhere. [PHB2]
- Humans: ubiquitous humanity the foundation of Empire. [PHB]
- Elves: traditional forest dwelling civilisation. Many towns are integrated with the Empire, others still consider themselves apart. [PHB]
- Dwarves: traditional mountain dwelling civilisation. Many tribes dwell in mountainous regions pursuing traditional dwarven ideals. [PHB]
- Half-elves: traditional half breeds who often find great status in the Empire as peerless diplomats, ambassadors and politicians. Common throughout the Empire. [PHB]
- Warforged: living constructs build for war by the Empire. Many are now free, others still enslaved by those who consider them little more than machines. [Dragon]

Other races may be playable with DM approval.

## Character Classes

Any WotC D&D class from PHB or PHB2, including variants from the various “power” books, is playable, including those from Forgotten Realms and Eberron.

## Character Creation

Play the character you want to. Don’t worry about a balanced party, representing all the PC roles (defender, controller, striker, etc). It’s not important. Think about your character, who you want to play, what you want to be, how you got where you are today.

**Stats:** rolled using 4d6 for each statistic, summing the best 3 dice. Stats may be reordered.

**Backgrounds:** all players must begin with a defined back story; this may be quite vague but playable, e.g. at the most simple level create 5 facts about your character – family, career choice, home, likes, dislikes, fears, hopes, skill acquisition, etc. Players can develop all sorts of things for their background to fit in with the campaign world, e.g. guilds, merchant houses, religious orders, towns, cults, etc. The campaign world has been outlined above but there are many aspects of life and living in the Empire that have yet to be told... All subject to DM sanction. Bonuses will be awarded to players creating something interesting/good/useful for the campaign world, e.g. magic item at start of play, bonus to a stat, character-orientated adventure written for PC in campaign, etc.

In developing a background players should consider that play will begin with the PCs arriving in a small backwater fishing town, called Saltmarsh. The reasons for them being there are down to the individual players (or groups of players). There are some sample backgrounds which players might like to use but these are not essential for play and are included as examples only:

1. The Inheritance - the PC is not from Saltmarsh but somewhere else, Specularum or another town. They receive a summons from a lawyer in Saltmarsh to come to the reading of the will where they will learn they have inherited something from an obscure relative. This background can be taken by several PCs all of whom are named as co-inheritors.
2. On the run - the PC is on the run from someone (the law, villains, etc - PC choice) and arrives in Saltmarsh a one horse town that looks like a good place to hide out.
3. The local - PC is born and raised in Saltmarsh. Its a dull place but that house on the cliff has been deserted for ages, but there have been some strange lights up there recently. Isn't it about time you screwed up your courage and investigate those ghost stories..?
4. The trader – PC works for a trading house (large or small), they could be a young hotshot trying to break new markets or a jaded pro scraping the bottom of the barrel in a one horse town.
5. The rookie – you’ve recently joined the guards, maybe the local guards or maybe you’ve joined an elite unit in Specularum and sent to Saltmarsh as your first assignment. There are rumours of smuggling going on in the area.

## Gods

Standard PHB gods are all in play – but offers for others deities may be presented by players.