

MAJOR RACES OF BARSAIVE



Many of my people say that the other races are too big, take up too much space, and use up too much air. Theirs is a shortsighted view; they fail to see the irony. After all, how boring the world would be if there was no one to make fun of!

—Seethian, windling

Many different species and races of sentient beings populate the world of **Earthdawn**. This section describes the most numerous races in the region of Barsaive. They vary in size and shape, color and culture, and together bring the game world to life. These races are all Name-givers.

Your character will belong to one of the major races of Barsaive. In this fantasy world, the word “race” means the same as and replaces “species.” Besides the human race there are elves, trolls, and even more exotic races such as the obsidimen and the t’skrang. The descriptions in this section provide basic information about each of the races populating the world of **Earthdawn**.

These descriptions contain broad generalizations. Though we may say that orks are slow-thinking but quick-tempered, you may choose to play your character differently, creating an ork who is quick-thinking and/or slow-tempered. Players are always free to customize their characters. When roleplaying, remember that other races, particularly Gamemaster characters, may treat your character as though he or she is merely a stereotyped version of the description given here. You may even be able to take advantage of their misconceptions.

KINSHIP BETWEEN THE SPECIES

The elves possess fragmentary records claiming that dwarfs, elves, humans, orks, and trolls are profoundly similar members of a single, as-yet-unnamed species. Most scholars no longer accept this opinion as valid. Theran scholars, especially those in the school of Darok Thanalea, believe that the current high level of magic increases the differences between the races.

DWARF

Old King Varulus was a wise ruler. Young Varulus seems a bit hasty in his policies. We need to trade with all in Barsaive, that much is true. But just because I trade with the t’skrang doesn’t mean I want one of their damned lizard tongues in my cask of ale.

—Counselor Holliz of Throal

Dwarfs are of stocky build, with an average height of 4 feet and weight of 120 pounds. Their skin tone ranges from pinkish white to dark ebony. Some reports seem to indicate possible other skin colorations, but these variations are more likely the result of ritual tattoos begun during the time dwarf groups began to seal themselves off from the Horrors. Dwarf hair grows quickly and in abundance, particularly the hair on their heads. Dwarfs are broad-chested, tough, and strong for their size, though slow runners, as their legs are disproportionately short for even their squat bodies. Dwarf ears usually come to a gentle point on the tip, though less pronounced than elven ears. Dwarfs reach physical maturity sometime after ten years of life, whose span will average 100 years. Some individuals have recorded life spans of 150 years or more.

Dwarfs organize themselves into families, tribes, and nations. Though their social instincts comfortably embrace the idea of kingdoms and nations, a dwarf’s first loyalty is to family and tribe. A gift for large-scale organization and unshakable loyalties come naturally to dwarfs, as they are aggressive, quick to latch onto a single solution, and quite stubborn. Even other dwarfs admit that members of their race often seem curt and lacking in social graces.



One thing that sets dwarfs apart from other Name-giving races is their predisposition to making things with their hands. Dwarfs are very skilled craftsmen, and most often are taught from a very young age in the home, helping his family build necessary things for life. So as a child, their perspective is that everything in the world is something constructed, and as a result, they often question how something was built. Also, one of the most treasured items dwarfs have in their possession are their tools, which are often their first Pattern Items. Most often their tools are handed down to the next generation so that tradition and history are not lost to them; most every tool has a story that is a life lesson to be learned. It is a rarity for dwarfs to possess any item made by another race, as they believe it to be inferior to their craftsmanship. Some races are insulted by this arrogance.

Dwarfs prefer to live underground or as close to the earth as possible. While not adverse to travel and life above ground, they often develop a “home sickness” for subterranean life. Dwarfs generally refuse to ride animals, as their build makes the act ungainly. They also dislike travelling over open water, out of sight of land.

ELF

Our great Queen’s bright, terrible beauty shines like a beacon. Her whole court reflects that beauty, and reflects the choices made by the elves of Blood Wood. I think we must soon choose again, this time for ourselves. I think we should choose a different path.

—Elf Elementalist Furnithann, in a letter to his friend,
the Nethermancer Mestoph

Elves grow to an average height of 6 feet, 3 inches and weigh an average of 150 pounds. Elven facial features appear completely symmetrical, often flawless, and many of the other races of Barsaive find elves attractive. Elven skin color varies wildly by tribe and region, but the most common are pure white, pink, tan, brown, and midnight black. Elves with skin of a pale green or iridescent, pearly color called *cetharel* exist, but remain rare. Elves produce sparse body hair, but grow luxuriant facial and head hair, often in uncommon colors. In addition to white, blond, brown, and black, naturally occurring violet, blue, and even metallic colors have been seen. Elves have elongated, sharply pointed ears and move with unmatched grace, but the slight





build that makes that gracefulness possible also makes them vulnerable to injury. They have long legs for their height. Elves reach physical maturity in their twenties, and enjoy a natural life span of 300 years. Some records show individuals living up to 400 years. Legends speak of some elves rumored to live even longer.

Elves give their primary loyalty to their family, rather than their tribe or nation, and consider blood ties the most binding relationships of their lives. Elves prefer to establish and live in small communities, and elven cities generally consist of a loose confederation of villages grouped into neighborhoods. Elves may also live in human or dwarf settlements, but rarely feel anything more than a congenial friendship for the other races of such a settlement.

Elves prefer living in wilderness areas. They construct dwellings and other structures from living plants, integrating their community with the surrounding natural world. They find underground settings uncomfortable, and may experience a kind of claustrophobia in human or dwarf settlements if unable to visit a wilderness area two or three times a year.

Elves see all life as a journey of discovery, change, growth, and ascendancy. Throughout his life, the elf treads a metaphysical pathway represented by the Wheel of Life. The Wheel contains five paths, each corresponding to different stage of life. As an elf ages, his journey along the Wheel leads him until he reaches the Wheel's heart. At this still center of being, he prepares for ascension into the metaplanes, to the mystical place known as the Citadel of the Shining Ones.

Each Path represents ever-greater spiritual maturity. Though a few elves disagree, most accept the following five paths: the Path of Warriors, the Path of Scholars, the Path of Travelers, the Path of Sages, and the Path of Lords. Each Path has certain regalia and rituals associated with it that mark its followers.

HUMAN

Thera and the Kingdom of Throal. Those are the giants straddling this land. Our best strategy is to keep to ourselves, choose only if we must, and then choose Throal. Dwarf condescension is easier to shrug off than Thera's shackles.

— Adviser Kaj Ther of Landis

Humans average 5 feet, 7 inches in height and weigh an average of 150 pounds. They produce less body hair than most races, but more than elves. Skin tone ranges from ebony to tan and pinkish-white. Their ears are small and rounded. Humans reach physical maturity in their teens and live a natural life span of 75 years, although individuals have been known to live 100 years or longer.

Humans feel a natural loyalty to their families. Inclined to form social groups, humans easily transfer this loyalty to tribes, cities, or kingdoms, though they do not adapt to large-scale society as well as dwarfs. This reluctance to pledge allegiance to a government does not prevent them from quickly adapting dwarf advances into their own cultures.

Humans prefer to live in roofed dwellings, clustered with others of their kind. They have adopted the dwarf invention of the city, though many human cities spring up in too haphazard a fashion for dwarf tastes. Most humans find elven communities unsettling.

Of all the world's Name-givers, only humans can learn talents and skills widely disparate from their chosen Disciplines. The longer-lived elves and dwarfs, and other Name-givers, by contrast, can only learn certain kinds of magical and non-magical skills. Some scholars explain this so-called Law of Versatility by theorizing that the other Name-giver races are finely tuned, but limited, extensions of humanity. Magical energy heightens the particular attributes of a Name-giver race, but also limits the number of inborn abilities they possess.

OBSIDIMAN

Listen to the rocks of the earth. Those around you want to hurry, for they listen to the waters of their blood and the fire of their hearts. You are born from living rock. Listen to the rocks of the earth. The call of those around you is the call of the volcano. The fire of other hearts burns hot enough to melt your world around you. Listen to the rocks of the earth.

— Saying from "The Liferock," Dwarf translation

Obsidimen are tall, reaching an average height of 7 feet, 3 inches. Seen from a distance they seem squat, because their massive average weight of 900 pounds offsets their height. Their craggy skin and

bodily tissue incorporate the properties of stone, and their most common coloration is black or gray. Their blood is blue-gray. The skin of a few obsidimen, usually those of high-ranking families, shows veins of semiprecious stone such as tourmaline. Obsidimen are mostly hairless and have internal ears completely covered by a thin layer of skin. Obsidimen mature physically by the end of their first century of life. Natural life span has yet to be determined, because as they age, obsidimen spend more time attached to their Liferock, the largest source of stone within four hours' walk of their birthplace. They may remain attached to the Liferock for decades, showing no signs of being aware of their surroundings, then emerge again in a time of crisis. In one indication of obsidimen life-span, dwarf records show that individual obsidimen have traveled and lived away from their Liferock for at least 500 years after reaching maturity.

Obsidimen feel loyalty to their Liferock and all others formed from it. These loyalties loosely resemble human or ork loyalties to a tribe. Obsidimen do not form villages or cities, though they do erect ceremonial structures on or near their Liferock. Obsidimen prefer to live outdoors, exposed to the sky. Obsidimen can live underground for short periods, but those who spend too many months in a dwarf city without traveling outside to the open sky fall into a hibernation-like state. Once carried outdoors again, the obsidimen will awaken in two to five days.

Every obsidimen in all the world can tell you (if he chooses) the Name and the place of his Liferock and the Names of all obsidimen who have ever sprung from it. Obsidimen can no more disregard their Liferock than a dwarf might disregard his parents, or an elf his ancestral lineage. The Liferock brings them into the world, shapes what they are, and allows their race to endure. Like the other Name-givers, obsidimen are reluctant to speak too freely of a thing as close to their hearts as is their Liferock; for this reason, many of the other races do not know what a Liferock is. Another curiosity of obsidimen is their lack of gender. Most obsidimen dress and act like males of other races; however, there are some who have chosen to adopt female identity. In general, obsidimen find the other races' preoccupation with gender amusing nonsense.

ORK

Dwarfs pay well, but I don't like their attitude. Of course, I don't like most Name-giver's attitudes.

—Kraeg Yelloweye, ork Cavalryman in service to the Kingdom of Throal

Orks have powerful builds, averaging 6 feet, 3 inches in height and 225 pounds in weight. Large lower canines protrude over their upper lip and their body hair has a coarse texture, almost always colored black or gray. Some orks appear nearly hairless, and head hair usually grows in sparsely but with the thickness of fine wire. Common skin colors include olive green, beige, pinkish-white, tan, and ebony. Their ears are pointed, and about a quarter of the population show elongated ears. Natural life span for an ork averages 40 years, though some live 60 years or more. Orks reach their physical maturity in their early teens.

Orks recognize only a loose concept of family, giving greatest loyalty to their tribe. Social organization within the tribe varies considerably, as orks often adopt social structures of the other races with whom they interact. Isolated tribes usually contain only two authority figures, however, the warchief and the shaman. Most ork tribes live as nomads and willingly inhabit any kind of dwelling. They live in tents when with their own tribes.

The ork's reputation for violence grows from his passionate nature. You may say that your heart is full of love, or full of spite. When you say this, you are speaking poetry. When an ork says it, he means it. If you arouse an ork to desire or fury, they feel it in their heart as intensely as other races would feel a fever in their head or poison in their gut. Orks call this sensation *gahad*. If an ork's *gahad* is awakened, expect them to act on their emotions. They can try to resist the *gahad*, but resisting sets their brain to boil and curdles their stomach. This is not a simple metaphor – it hurts when an ork resists his *gahad*. Orks believe that such resistance shortens life – an able-bodied ork who suddenly drops dead at forty is said to have swallowed his *gahad* one time too many.



TROLL

Take no back talk from anyone, not even an obsidiman. Stand for your word and make them stand for theirs. I generally make an exception for windlings. They fly like blazes, and their tongues move just as fast. Open confrontation just encourages them. It is best to wait until they sleep, then pop their puny heads off.

—Larus Baldurion, Crystal raider captain, making his traditional speech to a new crew

The average troll height is 8 feet, 6 inches and average weight is 500 pounds or more. Skin colors range from olive to mahogany-brown. Troll skin has a rough texture, increased by the ridges, spines, or plating resulting from deposits of *trolthelia*, a substance similar to the material in rhinoceros horn. Body hair is sparse except on the chest, and head hair grows considerably thicker and longer than human hair. Lower canines protrude from the mouths of a slight majority of trolls. The nose is broader than the human nose. Trolls exhibit fierce, aggressive personalities. The average natural life span is 50 years, though some trolls have lived into their seventies. Trolls reach physical maturity in their early teens.

Trolls are fiercely loyal to their family or clan. Multiple clans can organize through the ritual of the trollmoot, gatherings of several clans whose leaders swear the loyalty of their clans to one another, but such unified action remains rare. Troll clans often war among themselves when other enemies are lacking. Trolls prefer to live in caves, ice caverns, or other natural geographic features. They find dwarf or elven settlements more comfortable than human or ork communities, and have been known to camp around obsidimen connected to a Liferock. Trolls find the serenity of the obsidimen calming and deeply moving. Their regard for the obsidimen mountains often prompts trolls to choose those sites for trollmoots.

Most other races recognize that trolls are governed by honor, but do not understand the many things that honor means to a troll. For a troll to explain the distinctions between the various meanings of their honor is like a bird trying to explain what it is to be a bird. Paradoxically, only a troll could even attempt to explain their view of honor, because only a troll understands it.



What a troll calls “honor” actually encompasses two ideas: honor and pride. Troll honor combines recognition of abilities with a sense of dignity and personal worth. Their honor tells them who they are and what they can accomplish. Without it, trolls believe they have nothing by which to know themselves and nothing to give to the world; they are Nameless and useless, and might as well die. The troll language has no single word for his concept of honor. Instead, they use three words: *katorr*, *kat’ral*, and *katera*, the meaning of all of which are simultaneously related and separate.

Katorr translates most closely as personal honor, the pride an individual troll feels in himself. *Kat’ral* refers to the honor of a troll clan, and *katera* might best be translated as racial honor. These three kinds of honor are intertwined like the strands of a rope, woven so closely together that they blend into a single thing. Yet, all the strands remain separate. The intricacies of the links between *katorr*, *kat’ral*, and *katera* are central to the life of a troll.

Troll legend tells us that many hundreds of years ago, long before the Scourge and even the Orichalcum Wars, most trolls married in the same way as other Name-givers. A man and a woman mated, raised children, and passed their family name and lineage in this way from generations to generations.

But with the advent of the Orichalcum Wars, many troll clans and families saw their ancient Names die out. All too often, the father and son(s) of a single family would be slain in the same battle, forever ending many noble bloodlines. In an attempt to ensure that a family might endure throughout years of warfare, two and sometimes three families within a single clan began joining together into a single family, increasing both their number and the likelihood that some scions of that family would survive and carry on. These joinings came to be called “line marriages.” Because far more men than women died in battle, the women took charge of the line marriages. All the wives together chose new members of the family as needed, adding both husbands and wives.

Within several years, the practice of line marriages spread throughout most of the troll clans and moots in Barsvaive. Even after the Orichalcum Wars ended, the tradition of the line marriage continued; current members of the families involved had never known any other way, and the marriages had preserved family lineage that otherwise would have died out. Over the centuries, the tradition of line marriages has become an important part of troll society and culture.

T’SKRANG

The name of our people? Well, my Theran friend, there are many stories that tell that tale. For the true one, you must listen very carefully to the sound inside your helmet. What? Oh, that’s just my tail. Listen carefully, for the truth will soon be revealed.

—From the transcript of the trial of the t’skrang pirate Theormaz

T’skrang are reptilian beings with a flair for the dramatic. They average 5 feet, 9 inches tall, and their tails add another 6 feet of length. T’skrang weigh an average of 200 pounds, of which nearly 40 is the tail. T’skrang skin color ranges from verdant green to green-yellow or green-blue, with aqua-blue and even sunset-red variants. T’skrang have cauliflower-shaped ears set into the sides of their heads. The t’skrang mature physically by the age of 10, and often live 80 or more years.



The t'skrang talent for tale-telling casts doubt on their claims of a 181-year-old t'skrang, particularly because careful dwarf observations place the oldest known t'skrang at a mere 115. T'skrang scholars blame this variance on faulty dwarf calculations, which of course the dwarfs vigorously deny.

T'skrang give primary loyalty to their families, though like humans, they can transfer this loyalty to tribes and nations. Some individuals pledge their loyalty to other races' societies, but pirate federations are the closest thing to a nation the t'skrang have built for themselves. Females lead t'skrang society, which is matriarchal in most aspects. T'skrang prefer to live in roofed dwellings along bodies of water, and submerge portions of their homes. T'skrang love to swim and immerse themselves in water, becoming sulky and irritable if unable to do so at least once a week.

T'skrang consider members of the other Name-giver races rather dull and boring. In turn, most other Name-giver races consider t'skrang overly flamboyant and somewhat frivolous. All races agree that each holds a unique and necessary place in the society of Barsvaie, and so agree to disagree.

Each t'skrang takes pride in the heritage and bloodline of his or her *niall*, or foundation. The foundation is a large communal family consisting of thirty to sixty kin, from infants to ancients, all living under a single roof. Lineage is traced through the maternal line. When a woman takes a husband, the male leaves his foundation to join the *niall* of his mate. Sometimes, allied *nialls* will band together in what is known as a "crew covenant," combining their numbers to operate a riverboat or fleet of riverboats.

The largest political units among the t'skrang are the *aropagoi*, or Great Houses. Just as a crew covenant consist of several cooperating foundations, so each *aropagoi* consist of numerous villages and crew covenants. Each Great House coordinates trade operations to the benefit of the crews and villages that compose it. The main purpose of the *aropagoi* are profit and trade advantage. Political ambition, especially as understood in Throalic and Theran terms of military alliance and land control, has no place among the t'skrang *aropagoi*. Each of the *aropagoi* controls a section of the Serpent River and regulates trade and passage in that territory. The *aropagoi* do not control the entire length of the Serpent; some villages do not belong to an *aropagoi*, but most see the advantage of that system.

WINDLING

"Wheeeeeeeeeee!"

— Poorht, windling Thief, as he fled for his life after stealing the dagger of Captain Larus Baldurion, troll crystal raider

Windlings are small, winged creatures. They average 18 inches in height and weigh an average of 13 pounds. They fly using two double-wings, similar to a dragonfly's, made of a tough, iridescent membrane. A windling's wings and hair, and sometimes even skin color, matches the brightest-colored elements of the environment in which it lives: icy white in a snowcap, the yellow and orange of meadow flowers, the glazed blue of the ceramic roof-tiles of the city of Vewbane. This coloration only changes after a windling has lived in the same place for two or three months. Then, in the space of three nights, the windling's skin changes to match its current surroundings. Windlings grow very little body hair, though their head hair can be luxurious. Their ears come to a sharper point even than elven ears. Windlings mature physically over 30 years, reaching a natural life span of 170 years. Their appearance does not age during this time.

Windling society can best be described as haphazard. Windlings often speak of a class of nobles who rule them. Though they will obey a direct order from a noble, the social hierarchy stops there. Windlings acting on orders from their queen cannot wield authority over other windlings by virtue of these orders, but may persuade other windlings to seek out the queen to determine for themselves that the orders are legitimate. Windlings are happiest when living outdoors, taking shelter under or inside whatever nature can provide and windling magic make comfortable. Windlings can tolerate cities, but consider them a colossal waste of time and effort. There are more males windlings than female windlings, though there is not a good explanation for this oddity. Because of this, if more than one male wishes to wed a female, the clan holds a contest they call a *sleerab*. Once every contestant has completed the competition, the female selects her husband from among the males, or may choose none at all!

