

Beholden

For centuries the great nations of Fane and Rakholm waged a war of fire and thunder. Fain, land of the true religion, had been long protected by the only gods known to grant power directly to their priests. Rakholm's power originated in the alien dragons that had propped up their sorcerous descendents as rulers of the land. The dragons craved a massive empire, and the church of Fane sought to wipe away the draconic beings whose arrival in this reality had upset the careful creation of the gods.

And then, three generations past, the gods and the dragons both looked at the horrors that their enduring war had wrought on their people. Cultures were stagnant save in the pursuit of war, civilization was slowly regressing into barbarism, and everywhere the titanic battles of avatars and wyrms had left burned and blasted landscapes where nothing grew but thorns. A fragile pact was established: a peace of necessity but not of agreement. No longer would the gods send their avatars into the world, but would only affect their worshippers indirectly through the spells granted to clerics. No longer would the dragons leave the boundaries of Rakholm, nor seek to expand these boundaries through direct aid. The armies of both sides would stand down, and cease pursuit of mutual conquest.

It has stood so for many years. The priests and wizards of Fane have advised its kings and queens on ways harmonious and wise, and much of the country has become stable and rebuilt. Lands once razed by battle have been tilled and turned into fertile fields. Those from the dragonlands to the east are treated with suspicion, but not open hatred, and the armies of the nation have been turned to internal use.

But a fragile peace can be doomed for reasons unforeseen. None truly appreciated the power that a massive war could have to deter other threats. Few understood that wyrms and avatars often exercised their power to eliminate indirect threats from beyond the borders of their lands. Yet these dangers waited and watched, and now they have begun to grow. From seemingly everywhere come reports of strange creatures and unknown soldiers emerging from the borders and the hidden places. None seem to have the interests of the populace of Fane in mind.

The wizards' council of Fane has begun the Companies to fight against these new threats. Placed strategically across the land, bases have been built and adventurers recruited to protect the nation. For training and stability, and the good of Fane, adventurers can turn their skills to eliminating the nation's threats and seeking out forgotten knowledge. Each company features precision units: highly trained parties that can deal with threats too small or too strange for the use of the armies.

You are a member of one such party. Welcome to the Companies.

CHARACTER CREATION:

The following section will give you a basic idea of making a character for Beholden, and how each group fits into the land of Fane.

DEITIES AND DOMAINS:

Builder: God of law and creation, the Builder embodies the power of order to create and stabilize, and grants the domains of Air, Earth, Fire, Law, Protection, Strength, or Water.

Trader: God of trade and adjustment, the Trader walks the middle road between what is best and what is necessary, and grants the domains of Animal, Healing, Knowledge, Luck, Magic, Plant, or Travel.

Sculptor: God of freedom and perfection, the Sculptor guards the power of chaos and destruction to refine a raw creation into true beauty, and grants the domains of Chaos, Death, Destruction, Sun, Trickery, or War.

(Clerics of any god can add the Good or Evil domains to their choices as appropriate to their alignments)

RACES:

Dwarf: Dwarves were once a great clan of miners and crafters that were blessed by the Trader with forms more suited to their calling. The dwarves of Fane live largely in the mountains to the south, many resenting the wizardry that they claim is a hypocritical use of the alien magics of the dragons. Their clerics are the most respected in the land, when they come from the depths.

(Half) Elf: Elves are thought to have once been men that mated with the fey, gaining the best aspects of both races. Long ago, the greatest elves wrested the secrets of sorcery from the offspring of the dragons, and turned it to safe use as wizardry. Well respected in the lands of Fane, elven communities rarely overlap with humans, but bear them no malice.

Gnome: A melting pot of races, gnomes are descended from various halfbloods that have achieved their own racial identity. This mixture of lines has granted them a wide range of proclivities and innate magics.

Halfling: Halflings were once a much derided tribe of outcast humans whose accident of birth left them much smaller than others. The Sculptor took pity on them and shaped them into a form more suited to their height. Since then they have become a race well-respected for their abilities as scouts and messengers.

Human: Humans are believed to be the original creation of the gods, and make up the majority of the citizens of Fane, from the great cities to the barbarous plains.

Half-Orc: Orcs are believed to be descended from men and elves who wrought magics so dark they forever tainted their blood. Strongly influenced by evil, some few, especially halfbloods, transcend this base nature.

Classes:

Barbarian: Elite berserkers from various hinterland tribes, barbarians are often seen traveling the lands seeking glory for their strange pagan clans.

Bard: A secretive group of lorekeepers trained in ancient arts of spellsong, bards may pose as foppish minstrels, but the dedication necessary to become a true bard requires more than just music. Many distrust the bardic order; while their members are free to take sides, the order as a whole remains neutral. This allows nations that do not have clerics some degree of healing magics.

Cleric: All known clerics universally follow the religion of Fane. No other faiths are provably known which provide miracles to their priests, though some are rumored to exist.

Druid: The mysterious druids are so deeply tied to the earth that meditation grants them similar magics to the clerics. Many claim that they are tapping the innately miraculous energies left in the world left by the Builder. The druids remain silent on the issue.

Fighter: Every land has men and women who feel called to war. They may be knights or soldiers or armsmen but all titles mean that their greatest skill is their prowess in combat.

Monk: Travelers from the unknown reaches, the monks follow a strange religion that sees the Sculptor as an agent of order rather than change, and gain strange powers for their devotion. The lands they hail from are said to be metal poor, such that all weapons are dual-purpose farming tools.

Paladin: Holy warriors called to do great works of good, the paladins are widely believed to be agents of the Builder. Not even they know for sure.

Ranger: Like the druids, the rangers are men so in tune with the wilds that it grants them miraculous abilities that many suggest are drawn from the energies of the world's creation.

Rogue: Just as all nations have fighting men, so do they have those who use their wits over their might. Thieves and raiders, scouts and merchants, they maintain the slightly dirty grease of civilization.

Sorcerer: Widely mistrusted, those that spontaneously develop magic all seem to have some lineage that can be traced to the dragons. Some may be expatriots from Rakhholm, while others are simply throwbacks with no knowledge of their origins, but all are closely watched by those who fear a renewed draconic attack.

Wizard: August scholars who gain through discipline and study the powers of the dragonblooded, wizards are widely respected. Most wizards are students of the council who are taught their craft purely for their vow to work in Fane's best interest.

House Rules and ERRATA:

- Characters are created with 36 point buy and always gain max HP when they increase a level.
- Skill-points and feat-slots can be saved to be spent later, within reasonable limits, instead of always having to be used at the same level (e.g. a third level feat slot can be saved until meeting a level prerequisite at 4th or 5th level).
- Characters gain one point-buy ability point every level rather than one ability point every four levels; these can be saved as needed but no more than one ability level can increase at once.
- Characters must train before increasing in level. This training is provided for free as part of being in a company, but still requires several weeks of downtime and even longer for multiclassing. Full rules available on request.
- NPC classes have been replaced by a single, more modular class called Citizen. PCs may take levels in this class if desired; it is less powerful but more versatile than normal classes.
- Items:
 - As members of a Company, characters are paid and equipped in a manner that keeps their possessions at their recommended wealth rating (so only broad tracking of wealth is required). Characters can freely purchase most non-permanent items from their Company, with a variable delay. Permanent items are harder to come by, but may be available if the character has reciprocated and granted other such items to the Company vaults. Characters will gain spending money at a standardized rate when on assignment.
 - Magic armor does not automatically adjust to fit the wearer, and thus give away its nature. I have a chart for the difficulties of modifying various armors with craft rolls, and the penalties for wearing poor-fitting armor.
 - Most permanent magic items are invested with an overwhelming goal that supports their magic. This purpose can be as broad as defending Fane to as specific as slaying half-dragons, or even stranger variants. Seemingly weak magic items may improve in power as they are put back to their long dormant purpose, while items taken from the bodies of their creators may wane in strength as their purpose is denied. Even a +1 sword may have a design and history that give clues as to how to increase its power greatly.
 - The Disruption and Vorpal weapons effects are slightly changed, should they ever come into play.