

Group Backgrounds: Five Examples

AN ACADEMIC EXPEDITION SETS OUT FROM THE PIER.
Childhood companions reconnect at their old camping site. Minstrels tour the countryside entertaining locals. Each of these groups will be tested, leaning on old bonds and learning the limits of their allegiances to one another.

A group background ties the characters together with a special bond that helps create relationships between characters, and therefore between players. This may include in-game benefits, but its primary role is to increase the ease and fun of character roleplaying. Consider how Henry Jones and Marcus Brody interact in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, or how Stephen King's childhood friends recall and confront the ancient evil Pennywise in *It*, or how Robin Hood's Merry Men plot and jest to defeat the Sheriff and Prince John. These are groups tied together in their shared adventures. They also identify character roles that complement one another thematically and encourage balanced play.

A group background may be a recent change in the life of the characters or something from decades (or even centuries) past. Not all characters within the group background are necessary. Consider how the roles that aren't filled may be performed by NPCs. This is especially useful when the party must uncover a mystery, allowing a reason for someone other than a player to stumble on a clue if the player character fails. For these reasons there are more group background examples provided than will likely fit into a single party. Some players may combine backgrounds to help create their character, too.

An Academic Expedition

Professors coordinate a group of students on an intrepid exploration of wilderness, ancient ruins, or a unique cosmological event. They've identified a pilot and guide, the university has assigned a chaperone, and the students are excited to leave. Little do they know that they'll be tested well beyond their final exam!

Many groups can begin as an academic expedition. The adventure may go as planned until they learn the true secret of their destination or someone amongst the team betrays the others. Alternatively, the expedition may be derailed by getting lost in obscure geography, by a storm, or some supernatural intervention fouls up neatly laid plans. The example roles can support a party of students or stick to the first few roles in character to maintain an adult retinue of characters. The student roles can be adapted to fill research assistant and technical positions as well.

Characters and Roles

Professor, Lead. You have organized the expedition and have the specific goal in mind (likely created with the game master). You have dual goals of protecting your students and gaining fame, which may compete with one another. The lead professor will be the oldest and most intelligent of the group, as well as fairly commanding.

Professor, Assistant. You play second fiddle and you know it. You may have a secret agenda to fulfill, a personal admiration or infatuation with the lead professor, or another connection to a student. Consider a supportive role that includes first aid and keep an eye on the youths.

Pilot. You are a businessperson on hire. You're not here to make friends. You rarely, if ever get lost. You will have control over vehicles and machinery and are likely quite physically capable as well. When push comes to shove, you may see the other players as disposable, though any that prove their worth can gain your respect.

Official. Everything must go by the books and be safe. The official is neurotic, fastidious, and sharp. You are also full of surprises because everyone underestimates you. Keep something in your back pocket, but be supportive and critical of the threats ahead.

Local Guide. Every team needs someone who knows the way. You're an outsider and a mystery to the group, though you may have worked with a professor or the pilot before. Consider keeping your details secret and your motives even more so. You may be in it for the money, to discover something personal, or even something nefarious.

Sponsor. As the well-to-do funder of the sojourn (or a representative thereof), you are keen to see its completion. Given your access to great wealth, you are not used to "roughing it" and see the trip as a philanthropic safari, of sorts. Or, you know its risks better than any, with a darker or more suspect motive in mind.

Student, High Achieving. You seek to ingratiate yourself with the professors, especially the lead. You are smart and hard working, perhaps seeing the expedition as a professional step. You have a personal stake in the success of the expedition.

Student, Loner. Someone always keeps their distance from the group, and that person is you. You aren't friendly, but you do have some goal in mind. Maybe you have academic aims or wish to escape the shadow of your family. Your skills are whatever they need to be, though you may have a dark, brutal streak.

Student, Good for Nothing. No one expects anything of you, perhaps due to tussles with the law, carrying contraband, or a tendency toward violence. You are likely physically capable, charming, and dexterous. The good for nothing is a classic rogue, sneaking into places you don't belong and learning secrets about other characters.

Student, Charming. The charmer is a sweet talker and may

even be a linguist. You are kind or conniving or both as you get people on your side. You're likely good at reading other people's intentions and have some cursory knowledge or relationships with your fellow travelers.

Student, Athlete. Through years of hard training and practice you have honed your body and are likely at the beginning of your career. While capable, a physical injury would change the whole course of your life, so when push comes to shove you may back away even if you are the most capable. Or, you may learn to put your teammates ahead of yourself.

Student, Wealthy. You have greater financial capacity than anyone else and have likely had more opportunities than anyone else, giving you immense flexibility. Has this largesse made you selfish and egotistic or generous and charitable? Consider what the expedition means for you and your family, and how those two either conflict or fit.

Impacts on Play

These roles identify a clear intellectual leader and practical leader, who may butt heads. The charming student may also rise to be a social leader in situations of conflict while others have clarified weaknesses. Each of these roles has some sort of background and tie to one another. These examples give weight and meaning to support roles that often go underutilized in parties. We can see how players may relate, compete, and interact in character. Unlike many of the other backgrounds, members of an academic expedition may have cross-purposes, giving party decisions depth and weight.

Many tropical themed films use the Academic Expedition group background as inspiration. *Anaconda* (1997) and *Congo* (1995) both have roles related to the above, which encourage intra-group conflict and engaging characters. The comic series *No Mercy* (Image) by Alex de Campi highlights a story of students wounded, reeling, and separated during a study abroad experience in a hostile, but mundane world. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and other Jules Verne stories employ an academic perspective in a classic science fiction setting, too.

Childhood Companions

You've known each other for years and meet up annually—if you can—to reconnect. Your group of old friends used to get into such misadventures, but life has changed and you all have grown. Have you all drifted apart? Has there been a falling out between different members? Who is quietly hurting? Who can you lean on when you need to?

The adventure can begin as part of one of these trips not going as planned, or it could be an attempt to reconnect after several years apart. Characters who have not seen one another in sometime can be close and strange simultaneously. Consider, also, how a non-player friend character may have invited the group, only to lead them into some strange nightmare or disaster, lending an air of paranoia and suspicion to the party.

Characters and Roles

Natural Leader. When no one else would, you stepped up.

Perhaps you were the early bloomer that gave you the physique to stand up to bullies. Maybe your older sibling inspired confidence in you that encouraged you to stand tall. Or your home life may have demanded greater responsibility and care than those of your friends. Whatever the reason, you stand up for your friends and, more often than not, between them and danger.

The Mediator. When things shake up, you keep them from falling apart. High emotional intelligence, personal insight, and a compassionate heart make you indispensable when situations go from bad to worse. Perhaps you helped your parents or siblings deal with similar crises, but you're a natural supporter of those who call you friend.

The Academic. Perhaps you had a nickname like "Specs" or "Worm" for your bookish nature, but it has paid off. You're the brains behind the group and everyone knows it. As an adult, you may be a teacher, professor, tech guru, or work for a think tank. You'll likely have some iconic hobby like chess or go. While not as tough as the rest, you're there to make sense of whatever mishap lies ahead.

Troubled Soul. While others were able to avoid or cope with the demons of your youth, you still sense them, just beyond your view. Some demons include the specters of unquiet homes, mental illness, fatal accidents, or the presence of the supernatural in your family or home. You have seen the shadows for what they are and have occult insights as a result. You dwell in an in-between world that few others can comprehend.

Sharpshooter. It may have been the slingshot, the BB gun, or your fastball, but you were always able to hit the bullseye. You likely have athletic prowess or perspicacity that others lack, giving you the edge from afar. When the danger gets too close, you'll have to lean on your friends.

Eagle Scout. When you apply yourself, and you have time and again, you accomplish whatever needs doing. Your commitment outshines everyone else and your skills in first aid, wilderness survival, and community service make you an exemplar to others, though you may still be the butt of their jokes. More than anyone else, you have a moral compass that guides your actions.

Homemaker. Not everyone learns to grow up, but you certainly have. While you may reminisce with your childhood friends, you see those dalliances as days gone by. Whatever traumas your friends suffer, you are the most likely to think of them as fantasies, embellished by youth and retelling. You are practical, hardworking, and caring; but ultimately you just want to go home to your spouse and children.

Scrapper. Somewhere along the way, you became separated from your companions. Perhaps you spent time in juvenile detention or a move landed you in with a tough crowd. You

learned to survive alone, and you've got the scars you earned along the way. Not everyone will value what you're capable of and few will understand it, setting you apart from the others, but you're indispensable in a pinch.

Golden Goose. You made it big. Maybe it was a patent you landed, a hit song you penned, a lucky break in the market, or you just married up. Whatever it was, it gave you the resources to excel financially. Whatever it is, you haven't forgotten your roots. Your wealth gives you ample ways to support your friends, but you often think that a gift will stand in for real emotional support and connection.

Popular. Perhaps you were a star athlete, from a well-known family, or you just looked good; whatever the reason, you were someone to know. Whether you have the physical charms or not, you know how to express yourself confidently and communicate clearly, which means plenty of people know you. You likely inflate your value to the group, but provide a resource few other characters have. As an adult, perhaps you capitalized on this to become a politician or the face of a powerful business.

Softy. Admit it, you were coddled. Perhaps it was the wealth of your family, a protective parent, or how everyone got between you and the big challenges of your youth. Whatever the result, you're not as tough as the rest. You are a natural caretaker, a back-up brainiac, or a genre-savvy sleuth. Stay out of the fray but provide the guidance and insight to get your group squared away.

Impacts on Play

Characters that have known one another for decades (or, in fantasy settings, maybe even centuries) build a natural, emotional hook. It is easy to see how two such aspects could be similarly aged siblings or even twins. These roles within the group background also suggest points of humanizing conflict between characters while they share goals. Using the Childhood Companions group background, it is also possible to tell the parallel story of youthful undertakings and adult adventures. Perhaps the Troubled Soul has the key to figuring out the puzzle of the current adventure or you must explore the dilapidated academy of the characters' youths.

Often, childhood companion groups are either all male, such as in the films *The Sandlot* (1993) and *The Goonies* (1985), or all female, like in *Now and Then* (1995). Don't feel limited, though. Stephen King's *It* (1990) shows a mixed gender group, for example. Adventurous yarns can highlight the uneasy tension of old infatuations left unspoken or build on failed relationships between, and may highlight LGBTQ relationships, as well.

Shared Memories, Shared Trauma

Childhood companions are a favorite of writer Stephen King. Often, his characters have experienced some traumatic experience that the group bears together, often in silence. Such characters have deep-seated care for one another and,

despite hardships, long for each other's safety. Childhood companions are all around the same age, but each has grown to adulthood and apart.

As part of this group background, each player can write up a memory of some experience with another player or players' character. Consider a mishap with a teacher, an adolescent infatuation, or exploring an old quarry or construction site. What relationships were strengthened by the memory and who was hurt? You may share these at the beginning, or use them as pressure points during the game. Doing so can create an emotionally loaded adventure, no matter the genre.

Crusaders On A Mission

The Crown has issued an edict and you and your compatriots are committed to fulfilling its mission. A charismatic leader gathers those who have suffered trespasses together in order to seek vengeance and deliver a blow against some ghastly threat. The omens of a prophecy have been sighted and it is up to your humble party to see that the prophecy is guided to its proper, sanctifying conclusion. In a dark era, those who share a faith must push on to shine what little light can be shone into the grim world beyond.

Crusaders share a faith or a higher mission. Often, they have confidence and resolve due to some blessing, either spiritual or political, that ensures their eventual victory. Alternatively, crusaders may be the only torchbearers in a tyrannical or demonic epoch in their world's history. Whatever the reason or setting, those who share a mission are bound by purpose, marked by symbols of righteousness, and stand out amongst the commonfolk.

The Faithful & The Scarred

You'll notice in the below list that there are roles that are either faithful to a higher cause or vengeful for some wrong against them, their family, or their people. Dynamic groups will likely include at least one pragmatic Scarred type and an idealistic Faithful type. The Scarred thinks of straightforward, often material ways to address a crisis, while the Faithful seeks divine guidance or divination through prayer. Such roles should bump heads, grow to respect the other, and reach painful points of conflict.

It is possible to create a group that is based exclusively on pragmatists or exclusively on the faithful. However, it is the opinion of the author that the natural conflict of these characters is a boon to the group as a whole. Unity of opinion and perspective will blind the group to alternatives, regardless of what that perspective is. There is also the possibility of a fallen Faithful, still committed to a principle despite feeling abandoned by their faith. Or, consider a Scarred idealist, who deals with the deformity of a childhood attack on their village who has taken that fury to the monastery. Such characters may have internal conflicts, such as a desire for mercy and a predisposition to dispatch people of a certain faction or background. Use these tools to tell compelling stories about deep characters.

Characters and Roles

Novitiate. While untested, your faith is bottomless. It shines brightly in the face of darkness. You feel the presence of the

divine dancing on your shoulders and guiding your every word, which is often more potent than laypeople. Whatever lays ahead, your path will be surely lighted. Or so you believe.

Teutonic Order. By royal decree, you will fulfill your mission. You have proven your worth in battle before and will surely do so again. You are loyal to the ruler of your land, who serves at the behest of the deity you worship. Your body and soul are stalwarts against the darkness, though you are aware of some crack that remains in your foundation.

Examiner. Perhaps you are a believer or perhaps you are simply profoundly well versed in your craft, but you bring a critical gaze and sharp mind to the party. You may have interrogated the claims of miracles and prophets, or have dedicated your life to archaeological inquiry; either way few would challenge your expertise.

Punished. Not all who practice the faith do so willingly. You have committed some crime or were born into servitude. Either way, you practice as diligently as any priest. It is up to you and your trials ahead whether that service is simply an act or if your rituals are more than just pantomime.

Healed. Once you were sick, but the power of faith has healed you. Perhaps a miracle healer came to your village, pressing hands to your boils; the monastery tended an infection that should have left you for dead; or, at your darkest hour, a divine light shone down on you, giving you the strength to fight and recover. You are not without scars, but this healing light strengthens you.

Forgotten. Whatever life you had before you found the light, it is gone. You are who you are now thanks to some power beyond you, and to that power you have devoted your life. Your role is fluid, but it is always in service, though some dark memory, or destiny, may await you.

Orphaned. For some, fighting dark powers leaves their flesh gnarled and bones broken. For you though, it is your heart, and ultimately your soul, that bears the burden of your loss. Your anger and yearning for justice urges you onward, each day, as you burn away the evil around you so that no one else must suffer how you have.

Seeker. Knowledge drives you. You are slender or even emaciated, as you consume only that which feeds the mind. No mystery will elude you as you delve into the secrets of the eldritch realms, turning otherworldly powers against your foes. Others may distrust you, but you know that truth is its own ideal and knowledge, the highest virtue.

Field Medic. Others would break at the horrors of the battlefield that you not only witness, but rush toward. Yours is a healing hand, steady and firm and stained after years of diligent service. By staving off death, by preserving those that share your mission, you fight evil in your own way.

Veteran. Few would question your devotion or your service. You have scars to show, stories to tell for those that badger

you, and a weapon that grows heavier with each passing day. Wield it you do, and will do long into the dark night in service of those closest to you, the faith, the crown, vengeance, or some combination thereof.

Beast. Whatever it is you fight, it has touched you more deeply than the others. Your cause is shared with your allies, but they only glimpse the battle, for it continues within. Even in the quiet, you hear the clang of metal, taste blood in your mouth, and see comrades you failed to save. What would it mean to win against this? What would it mean to loose that is within you?

Hollowed. Once you felt your heart beat steadily inside you. Once your eyes looked upon a comforting beauty. Once your hands knew the embrace of those who love you. Now you hold only what weaponry that feels mightiest. Now you drag your body toward some goal. Now you move, like a machine, inexorably toward that grim, necessary destination ahead.

Impacts on Play

Crusaders are generally a cocky bunch, underestimating what lies ahead and the strength of their convictions. That is, until their convictions and devotions break around them. Whatever vows they have sworn, they feel it will protect them from harm to their bodies, minds, and souls. Such a group gives the storyteller ample opportunities to create conflicts of faith and morals and provides a stage for ethical decision-making amongst the players.

Consider how a group of like-minded crusaders may confront strange challenges, unknown deities, and foreign lands. Perhaps they may act like conquistadors, pillaging and disregarding the local culture in the name of a distant church. This could be used for a lawful evil aligned group, or a traumatic confusion of cultures that leads to the party reforming and making amends. A more socially focused setting could lead to a religious reformation and the discovery of ancient texts. Or the group must seek out a powerful demon lord and defeat his growing army.

Arthurian legend tells of the quests of righteous crusaders who, even while sharing a mission, come to odds for various reasons. The comic book series *Baltimore* created by Mike Mignola (in the *Hellboy* comic universe) exemplifies Scarred characters and how they conflict with Faithful characters. The film *Blade* also demonstrates the duo of the eponymous hero and his mentor Whistler, both scarred and committed to combatting villainous vampires.

Gang of Ne'er-Do-Wells

A few buddies spring you from the local constabulary after a night of carousing. A corrupt government issues that people like you are now uniformly under suspicion. You are one of an established thieves guild looking to make your next big heist. Whatever the reason for a band of brigands such as yours, it ensure you'll be up to trouble.

Ne'er-Do-Wells are inveterate troublemakers, though that trouble may be as noble outlaws, conniving thieves, revolutionaries, or a dozen other reasons. Some of the crew may have joined up out of necessity, others to make a quick buck, or the remainder to make a name for themselves as master thieves and con artists. It is up to the group to determine what exactly brought them together, but it may sculpt how the below roles manifest.

Characters and Roles

Lead Hood. Definitely intelligent and often charming, you are the de facto leader of your merry men. While some Hoods are public, brazen, and outgoing, others function from the shadows, planning out the hits that will make the most impact and charming new recruits.

Friar. You are connected to some powerful institution, traditionally the Church, and provide special information to the band. You may also be the closest thing to a healer your allies have. Be mindful: If certain people in power figure out how close you are to those who live outside the law, you will have a pronounced target on your back.

Muscle. Sometimes ironically called the Little, you are the biggest and toughest of the bunch, though you likely have a kind-hearted disposition. When set to a task, few can dissuade you. The Lead Hood is the most likely to set that task in front of you, but you can listen to anyone.

Maiden. Arising from royalty and quite possibly abandoning it to get where you are now, you are charming, kind, wealthy, and connected. While not exactly the "in distress" type, you are not a frontliner. You are often able to avoid fighting with a few choice words and deeds.

Innocent. Either due to youth, poor schooling, or simplicity, you are unmarred by the weight of the world. You keep an unfailingly cheery view of the world, rarely see others' faults, and are otherwise an able ally to those you call friend.

Agent. Your power comes from your secrets, wits, and charm, though you likely have a favorite dagger, too. Some Agents dwell in shadows, avoiding detection altogether, while others hide in plain sight as a charlatan or con artist.

Avenger. Your purpose is more defined than others, and you often repeat it to your companions and those who cross you. You have lost a family member, lover, or your village to some villain. As a result, you have achieved an incredible level of expertise so that you might bring justice to whosoever caused it.

Apothecary. When your compatriots need to be treated, you are there. When they need an additional bite to their blade, you are there. When they need some concoction to fool the guards, you are there. And when they seek to delight in drink and merriment, well, you are there too.

Mastermind. While the Lead Hood may be the charming face of the troupe, you are the true brains. You are proud of your ability to think a half dozen steps ahead and are often

seeking bits of intelligence that will ensure victory. You likely do not socialize frequently with the others, but they all respect you.

Make Up Artist. Not all were made for fighting, but your skills offer their own arms. Skilled in make up, disguise, stitching, and similar crafts, you ensure that your allies can perform whatever role in the grand play of life that is needed. You likely have some experience with stage or song, besides.

Artisan. A blade needs sharpened? You have the whetstone at your side. A fine bit of armor was recovered? You know how best to fashion it. You are likely the first sought for the construction of a new building or how best to foil the tools and defenses of the powerful. After all, a dull sword is an opportunity for sharpness.

Impacts on Play

There is nothing quite like playing as Robin Hood and his Merry Men. The Ne'er-Do-Wells are built on this concept, but also leans on youthful rapsallions like *The Little Rascals*. This group has little respect for the law of the land, though they may observe some higher virtues. Or, think of them as a thieves' guild or band of troublemakers.

Oftentimes, it is the group that has little in common with one another that excels at hijinks and good fun. Consider the party in *Guardians of the Galaxy*: the misfits each offer a unique strength to the party while maintaining their own identity. Together they escape from prison, investigate an ancient artifact, and stop an exceedingly powerful warlord. Whatever the goal of the group, expect to play practical jokes on one another and have a few laughs on the way. The one-upmanship of such a party lends itself to contests of skill with rival characters and amongst the party, increasing the rate of success and playful competition.

Traveling Troubadours

A circus comes to town bedecked with wonders and performers. Bards roam between villages earning their keep and wowing onlookers. Entertainers entreat the court to amuse royalty and nobility. There are many types of Troubadours, and they are both physically competent and often up to mischief of one sort or another.

Amusements only pay the bills, the real joy comes from using the special skills of the circus to snoop in the dead of night, explore distant and exotic lands, infiltrate merchant guilds and academies, and undermine the unjust rulers of the land. Troubadours are necessarily believers in the freedom of the individual and will boisterously criticize tyrants. The dark circus is also a staple of horror stories, lending themselves to sinister undertakings.

Characters and Roles

Master/Mistress of Ceremonies. Larger than life and charming to all onlookers, you have no trouble gaining the

attention of a crowd and likely have a sweet spot for those of fine appearance. Your leadership, while unconventional, is unchallenged by your roustabout peers.

Acrobat. High flying, fast moving daredevil, you shy from nothing and for good reason: You have never met someone better than yourself in whirlwind feats. You're likely to rise to any challenge, confident in your capacities.

Jester. Often called the clown, joker, or harlequin, you entertain, but also highlight the dramatic ends of human experience. You are especially gifted at amusing children, though you may use your gifts to see through more mature audiences' defenses. You are by nature fleet of foot, nimble of hand, and high-spirited.

Minstrel. As an entertainer at heart who loves poetry and music, you provide the lyrical (and likely magical) accompaniment to your troupe. Perhaps you have tales of serving in noble courts or of making your way from tavern to tavern, your new company only increases your range.

Illusionist. Some may call you a magician, mage, or trickster, but you know that your craft is in illusions and mischievous devilry. You take great joy in amazing onlookers with mystery. While a proficient illusionist, your conjuration, evocation, or enchantment capacities are all the more potent when they come as a surprise!

Strongman. Most see you only for your brawn, but you are much more than that. Often a wrestler or pugilist to boot, the strongman is physically peerless. You know the value of higher ground and wrangling or binding a superior foe to gain the upper hand.

Deformed. Through a curse of your birth or some terrible accident, you have been called "monster" and "freak" more times than you can count. As a result you know that appearance is only a distorted reflection of character and that many people are crueler when given a reason and a select few are surprisingly kind. While unbecoming, you likely have some additional trait or ability few know.

Geek. Sometimes called a "wild man," the Geek is capable of odd and disturbing feats such as consumption of live beasts or human contortion. The range of the Geek is wide, but always disturbing to the uninitiated. You, on the other hand, are not easily dissuaded by the *outré*.

Animal Tamer. You may prefer the company of a massive cat with whom you have a rapport, or sing and dance with a constrictor snake, or maintain a team of well-trained critters, either way, you have a way with animals that has allowed you to earn your keep and then some. Like many performers, you have a penchant for over-the-top amazement if the opportunity presents itself.

Entrepreneur. Every act needs someone to arrange with the local council, manage the books, and issue payments, and you're that person. You keep your distance, often trying to think a few steps ahead of any rivals while your knack for numbers and politicking suggest your charms and wits may

have greater power than you've yet realized.

Diviner. Do you carry the Tarot, peer into a crystal ball, or cast bones to see the forked path ahead? As the diviner, also called a "fortune teller", you know that there is no one path for any spirit, though few feel the current of time and choice as you do. Most customers need only be charmed by your wiles, though some have quite the destiny ahead.

Maintain a Welcoming Table

Traveling Troubadours could be used to create maligned or even malicious characters. If such a path is taken, please consider the real experiences of people with physical and mental disabilities or afflictions. Many films equate physical appearance with moral goodness and ugliness or deformity with moral repugnance. Our goal with this set of roles is not intended to encourage ablist views. As with all player characters, we encourage multi-dimensional characterization. For the above reasons and more, it may benefit a group to be maligned by society but actually of pure and caring motive, as is the case with Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Evil parties should have reasons for their actions, just as good parties, which may include challenging a hateful government, revenge against an old tormenter, or slyly manipulating those who underestimate the party to some nefarious end.

Impacts on Play

Troubadour was a term often reserved for poets and musicians that traveled between towns or served in courts. While we have expanded the term to include a variety of entertainers, such bands always have a sense of rhythm and song to their adventures. Such parties are tightly knit as they have often been outcasts in the company of others or despised by those that spit on their peculiar gifts. The Master or Mistress of Ceremonies and Entrepreneur may see themselves as superior to the other roles, or even as not needing their compatriots, setting up conflict between player characters.

American Horror Story: Freak Show is an incredible model of such circus performers as outsiders and the uniquely gifted. Those within a traveling act may not share the same goals, though they likely see more than surface value in one another. The X-Files episode "Humbug" also depicts circus performers as developed characters, including a tattooed Geek. Kvothe's extended family in *In The Name of the Wind* is also composed of diverse performers and developed relationships. Most such groups identify with being chaotic and free-spirited, as they are outside local codes or mores.