Creating a memorable NPC

THREE ASPECTS OF CREATING A NON-PLAYER CHARACTER

➡ Part One: What's their objective?

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS, called NPCs for short, can be extremely important in your D&D adventures, not to mention a lot of fun to create. Memorable D&D adventures are filled with memorable NPCs!

A NPC can be a lot of things but often this character, which is played by the GM, is used to provide information necessary for the player-characters to perform a task or quest. The NPCs often carry virtal information, like the whereabouts of a sunken treasure.

CREATE TWO LEVELS OF INFORMATION ... Typically, each NPC has "need to know" information and secondly, additional information that may be delivered if a "trigger" happens. That trigger may be due to a positive experience – for example the player-characters have created a friendship with the NPC and he/she now feels obligated to let the players know crucial information that they didn't have to know.

So GMs should create two levels of information for each NPC: 1) information they must pass along and 2) a secondary list of information they could pass along if some trigger or event happens. The trigger could be good – like a friendship – or it could be negative, like the NPC was bullied into sharing their information.

A talking mouse for a NPC? Sure, why not! Animals and their funny habits make for great NPCs.

YOUR TURN: Below, write down the "must-tell" information your NPC will forward to the player-characters. Then create a list of information the NPC might tell the PCs – this could be information that could save them or at least make a quest easier to accomplish.

(Your answer goes here)

Part Two: What do they look like and how do they act?

Becoming a really good Game or Dungeon Master means giving your characters – the Non-Player Characters – as much personality as the players' characters. Just like player-characters, your NPCs should be given a name, a physical description and at least a couple of personality traits.

Common NPC personality traits include reluctant information-givers – perhaps an arrogant elf who can't understand why she's forced to spend her valuable time with the PCs; the compulsive-liar, who provides a bit of truth and a LOT of lies to the PCs; and of course, the short-term memory NPC who remembers half of what they're supposed to tell the PCs. Have some fun with the NPCs and make them stand out and your adventures will become that much more memorable!

When is the NPC encountered? ... At what point does a player-character encounter or meet your NPC? That's a great question to ponder as you're building your next encounter or adventure. It's not uncommon for NPCs to be encountered either toward the start or the end of a specific quest or encounter. For example, a NPC could be rescued from an underground prison.

Magical creatures, like Fey, make for great NPCs. These NPCs will at times hold back some info from the players unless convinced to share.

YOUR TURN: Write down information about your NPC, including what they look like and how they act.

(Your answer goes here)

Part Three: Know the NPC's stats – be prepared!

In most cases, the primary role of the NPC isn't one of combat. But it can be. And even if the NPC wasn't designed to be in combat, you never know. So always prepare a block of statistics for the NPC.

A simple way to do this is to use NPC statistics found in different D&D publications. A few of these publications worth checking out are:

* Monster Manual, pgs. 342-350;

* Tome of Beasts, published by Kobold Press, "Villain Codex", pgs. 418-426;

* Volo's Guide to Monsters, pgs. 209-220

How will the PCs get the necessary information? If the encounter with the players doesn't go as expected and the NPC does get in a battle with the PCs and loses that battle, what happens next? How would the PCs get the necessary information to continue their quest? Think through this scenario and be prepared. It could be the NPC carries a note that provides the players the information they need. Or perhaps the players will have to find another NPC who could have that same information. Think it through!

Your NPCs may not be what they first appear like. Nor do you, the GM, know how your players will react to them so always come prepared with complete information for your NPCs.

YOUR TURN: Write down a block of statistics for your NPC. Again, consider using a published NPC stat block or use one of these as a guide.

(Your answer goes here)