

100 Motives for the commoner on the street by Alric

Many Dungeons & Dragons players make a habit of flagging down non-player character (NPC) townsfolk in urban settings and asking them questions. While a Dungeon Master (DM) can usually fabricate answers relevant to the prepared adventure, when the player asks for more generic or personal information from an NPC, it becomes a bit more difficult to improvise an immediate, believable answer.

Instead of giving a generic, awkward or inconsistent answer – and ruining a perfectly good role-playing opportunity – the DM can roll percentile dice, (roll two ten-sided dice, reading the first die as the ‘tens’ digit and the second as the ‘ones’ digit; thus a roll of 4, then 3 is 43; a roll of 0, then 6 is 6; a roll of 8, then 0 is 80; and a roll of 0, then 0 is read as 100) compare the result to a number from the following list, and push ahead with the game.

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While he or she may or may not be willing to tell the heroes, the NPC...



Not all commoners in a Dungeon Master's Town need to be as confused as this fellow when questioned by heroes. (The figure is "The Village Idiot" by Hasslefree Miniatures, painted by SaxonAngel and posted on coolminiornot.com.

1. Just visited the barber/surgeon – where the bloodletting continued a little too long – and the NPC isn't sure if he or she feels better or worse after treatment.
2. Needs directions to a local temple or guildhall.
3. Lost a pet, and is out looking for it.
4. Is going to the magistrate to complain about a neighbor's new roof, which casts a shadow over the NPC's entire radish garden.
5. Wants everyone to know how proud he or she is about their child, who just joined the town guard.
6. Is going to work or home, after attending the funeral of a close relative.
7. Has been shopping all morning for an iron or tin pot, but hasn't found the right one yet.
8. Is a parent of six small children, and has stepped out into the street because it is quieter there than it is at home.
9. Is walking about town, dressed in his or her finest clothing, seeking a mate.
10. Is in a hurry to get home.
11. Isn't feeling well, and is seeking medical attention.

12. Found a perfect apple at the grocer's shop, and is trying to find a secluded place to eat the apple without having to share it.
13. Is out for a walk, trying to calm down after an argument with a lover or spouse.
14. Has just purchased a new outfit at the tailor, and is pretending to go on errands so that everyone can see the new clothes.
15. Is returning from a place of ill repute, and is trying not to draw attention to his or herself.
16. Just had a spiritual revelation and is heading to the temple to discuss it with a cleric.
17. Is returning home after losing his or her job.
18. Recently tripped and fell into the mud, and is embarrassed about his or her current appearance.
19. Just ate one herring pie too many, and wants to find someplace to lie down.
20. Is a concerned citizen who thinks that the heroes are engaging in suspicious activity. He or she is flustered and embarrassed when the heroes begin asking them questions.
21. Oversees an orphanage, and approaches the heroes for a charitable donation.
22. Has just been released from jail.
23. Is out shopping, and is in a fine good humor.
24. Has a catchy, but very annoying, song stuck in his or her head.
25. Is trying to learn the elven language, and is seeking a tutor.
26. Has a son/daughter that left home to be an adventurer 10 years ago, and hasn't been seen since. The NPC doesn't particularly like adventurers for that reason.
27. Is searching for a blacksmith.
28. Has decided to make a career out of teaching others the fine art of game calling, and wants to recruit the heroes as students. He is willing to give the heroes a free lesson in turkey gobbling.
29. Is lonely, and can't wait to share his or her life story with the heroes.
30. Is seeking employment, but has been unsuccessful for weeks.
31. Has just been betrothed, and is absolutely thrilled.
32. Has just been betrothed, and is trying to figure out a way to have the marriage annulled before the ceremony can begin.
33. Is carrying a dead fish back to the fishmonger, because the fish wasn't cleaned properly.
34. Was just scolded by a spouse, parent or superior at work, and is in no mood to talk.
35. Is trying to get an introduction to a local noble.
36. Believes that he or she was cheated by a local merchant, and is bringing a set of calculations etched into a wax tablet to the merchant to settle the matter.
37. Is looking for smooth rocks to add to his or her collection.
38. Suspects that his or her lover or spouse is being unfaithful, and is secretly following them.
39. Is returning home from the market, with spices to serve with tonight's supper.
40. Doesn't like a silver bracelet he or she just bought, and wants to sell it to a hero.

41. Is drunk, and is trying to find his or her home on the Street of Oaks. There is no Street of Oaks in this town.
42. Is a poet, who wants to share his/her most recent work: "There once was a wizard named Frick / Who could never perform a new trick / So all were surprised / When he squinted his eyes / And lightning shot out of his nose."
43. Just wants to be left alone.
44. Has an ugly daughter who is almost past marrying age, and thinks a male hero would be an ideal husband for her.
45. Is desperately searching for a privvy, to answer nature's call.
46. Just bought a new pair of boots, and can't decide if they are comfortable to walk in or not.
47. Has an uncomfortable itch, but is too embarrassed to ask a cleric about it.
48. Wants to court a member of the opposite sex, and is daydreaming about ways to legally eliminate a rival suitor.
49. Is looking for a good inn or tavern for his or her next meal.
50. Has a toothache, and is going to see a cleric about the problem.
51. Is expecting a delivery of a new table from a carpenter today, and is going home to accept the delivery.
52. Roll again on this table. The result is what the NPC is pretending to do while trying to carry a small pouch of gems inconspicuously; a DC 25 perception check is required to notice the pouch.
53. Isn't from this town, and is heading toward the inn where the heroes are staying. The NPC heard that the wine at the inn was exceptional.
54. Is going to the constabulary (or similar law enforcement office) to report the theft of jewelry from his or her home.
55. Thinks that adventuring is the least honorable profession there is, and reacts in complete disgust when the heroes begin asking questions.
56. Is returning a kitchen utensil to a friend.
57. Believes that the heroes would make fine converts to his new religion, "The Church of Divine Light." He or she believes that all current campaign religions are false.
58. Is looking for the stem of his pipe, which fell out somewhere between the NPC's home and a nearby tavern.
59. Isn't a commoner at all; instead, he or she is a rogue, who will attempt to pick the pockets of unwary heroes.
60. Is carrying a handful of broken lute strings, and is searching for a shop where replacement strings can be found.
61. Is an artist or writer looking for inspiration.
62. Is practicing a very old profession, and asks if the heroes are willing to pay for some "companionship."

63. Just found a gold piece someone dropped in the road, and is afraid that the heroes are looking for it. The nervous NPC may even accidentally say, "I didn't just find a gold piece in the road..."
64. Is in possession of several stolen items of jewelry (see No. 49), and discreetly asks the heroes if they would be interested in buying any of the items.
65. Is visibly shaken. The NPC is afraid of snakes, and is certain that he or she just saw a snake enter a nearby alley.
66. His or her spouse suspects that he or she has a lover; the NPC is going to see that lover now, and believes that the heroes were sent by the spouse to spy on his or her activities.
67. Is taking a dull dagger or knife to the weaponsmith to be sharpened.
68. Just bought a new hat, and is very proud of it.
69. Really enjoyed a play performed last night, and is going to visit one of the actors or actresses to offer patronage.
70. Keeps a restaurant, and offers to give the heroes a free meal if they will share tales of their adventures with his patrons that evening.
71. Was just rejected by the object of his or her affections, and presently thinks that all members of that person's gender are evil.
72. Is taking a circuitous route home, in order to avoid the passing a shop to which the NPC owes money.
73. Is bringing a bouquet of flowers to a loved one.
74. Wonders what the world would be like if there was no color red.
75. Is going to the prison to visit a relative.
76. Searches the street for his or her son, since the child didn't answer his parents' calling. And he is in serious trouble when his parents find him.
77. Is a crooked gambler, who is trying to remain inconspicuous while fleeing the site of a recent game.
78. Is sure he or she heard a crier state the name of a long-lost relative, and is desperately trying to catch up with the crier for more information.
79. Is walking to a neighbor's house, to ask the neighbor to stop singing; apparently, the neighbor's attempt at music is making the NPC's dog howl.
80. Is a cleric in disguise, who is trying to determine if the heroes are agents of an evil church.
81. Is secretly carrying messages for the local thieves' guild, and is suspicious of the heroes.
82. Is a child who develops a keen curiosity in items carried by the heroes.
83. Is traveling to the constabulary to pay a fine, in order to avoid being placed in the pillory.
84. Is in the process of negotiating an arranged marriage and dowry, and is bringing a portrait of his or her son to the parents of his future wife.
85. Is taking a walk to stretch his or her legs.

86. Carries a few sheets of parchment and a charcoal pencil, and is going to the village green to draw trees and birds.
87. Lost a button from his or her waistcoat or gown, and is searching the street for it.
88. Hopes to become an adventurer someday, and begins asking all sorts of questions about the adventurer's life.
89. Is trying to find the right official to bribe to have his or her son released from the magistrate's custody.
90. Has obviously been drinking for several hours, and wants to know which pubs and taverns he or she hasn't visited yet today.
91. Is worried that a normal spider has taken up residence in his or her doorway; the NPC asks a hero to lend a weapon, so the NPC can kill the wee beastie.
92. Is a beggar, who asks the heroes for a donation of coin or food.
93. Just ate a meal at the home of his or her mother-in-law, and is heading to the nearest tavern for a tall ale to wash down her horrible cooking.
94. Is an old army veteran, who wants to share his greatly exaggerated war stories with the heroes over a few drinks, which he hopes the heroes will buy.
95. Seeks a magistrate, in order to resolve a dispute about a neighbor's fence.
96. Is returning from a bakery, where arrangements were made to provide bread and cake at the wedding feast of the NPC's daughter.
97. Searches the street for suspicious persons; two fine cabbages were stolen from the NPC's market booth.
98. Has fallen upon hard times, and is trying to sell a gold ring that belonged to his or her grandfather.
99. Carries a broken wheelbarrow wheel, with the intent of bringing it to the wainwright to make a replacement.
100. Is jealously examining a neighbor's flower boxes, trying to discreetly see how the neighbor gets the flowers to bloom so fully.