

100 Descriptors for Nondescript NPCs

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By definition, urban settings in fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) are filled with people. Generally, only a handful of the non-player characters (NPCs) in a given city are likely to be sought by the heroes, so the remaining inhabitants are reduced to “generic townsfolk” status.

There is nothing inherently wrong with generic townsfolk living in an RPG setting. Having prominent NPCs quickly enter the story helps the players distinguish between NPCs who are clearly to be part of the story and the nameless NPCs who won't. It also helps the players avoid wasting time and energy on an NPC that won't be able to further the plot.

But it is important to remember that the background details make an RPG setting more believable to players, and having such details on hand - even if the players never ask for them - is part of being a well-prepared dungeon master (DM).

The following list of physical and behavioral descriptors was compiled so that a DM can provide better physical descriptions of generic folk with a handful of percentile rolls. Whether in response to a hero stopping passerby to ask questions or just to provide better background imagery when describing a street scene.

Roll percentile dice to determine that the NPC...

- Has missing or crooked teeth
- Walks with a limp
- Is unusually short
- Is unshaven
- Has a pet ferret
- Gestures often when talking
- Has unkempt hair or beard
- Has freckles or moles
- Is blind
- Has a pot belly
- Wheezes when breathing
- Wears an unusual hat
- Has a pet ferret
- Is deaf
- Has hairy knuckles
- Has a prominent, bulbous or hooked nose
- Has watery eyes
- Suffers from intestinal gas
- Has an unusual eye color
- Is exceptionally handsome or beautiful
- Carries a sachet of fragrant herbs
- Has breath heavy with the stench of garlic
- Has a bandaged wound
- Speaks very loudly
- Is missing one or more fingers
- Is gaunt or thin
- Smells of manure
- Talks to his or herself
- Wears well-made or finely-tailored clothing
- Carries a small pouch of sawdust for good luck
- Has ink stains on his or her hands
- Frequently interrupts others during conversation
- Smells of ale or malt
- Likes to eat or is eating carrots
- Is unusually tall
- Sings or hums to his or herself
- Tends to spit or drool while talking
- Just had a bath
- Has extremely bushy eyebrows
- Has large ears
- Wears a ring on every finger
- Wears muddy footwear
- Carries a small mirror, in which the NPC frequently checks his or her appearance
- Is balding or bald
- Frequently chews mint leaves to freshen breath
- Wears a necklace or brooch bearing a religious symbol
- Is pigeon-toed
- Laughs easily and heartily
- Is playing a musical instrument
- Wears an old cloak, like those issued by the army
- Has fleas or lice
- Is overweight
- Is sweating profusely
- Has perfect teeth
- Wears simple or homespun clothing
- Is barefoot
- Wears perfume
- Has calloused hands
- Has bloodshot eyes
- Obviously bites his or her fingernails
- Has sores on his or her face or lips
- Talks with a lisp or slurred speech
- Has a severe cough
- Whistles constantly
- Wears mismatched clothing
- Walks with military bearing
- Has numerous, visible tattoos
- Has one or more gold teeth
- Wears hobnailed boots
- Smells like fish
- Has a fine pewter stein tied to his or her belt
- Is heavily muscled
- Wears threadbare clothing
- Carries a weapon of high quality
- Has a thin layer of soot covering clothes and exposed skin
- Has several skin piercings or nose rings
- Talks very quickly
- Laughs nervously between sentences when speaking
- Smokes a clay pipe
- Wears a backpack
- Has profuse nose hair
- Is sun tanned or sunburned
- Carries a pet snake
- Wears a dead rat around his or her neck to ward off evil spirits
- Talks to his or herself
- Doesn't seem to blink (at least not often, anyway)
- Cracks knuckles often
- Sneezes frequently or suffers from allergies
- Has a high-pitched voice
- Has ornately braided hair or beard
- Grumbles to self
- Has very long fingernails
- Is bow-legged
- Has a habit of picking his or her teeth with a knife
- Is very affectionate, and punctuates most conversations with hand-shaking, back-slapping and hugs
- Has sausage fingers
- Likes to eat or is eating sardines
- Has hives or a skin rash
- Has full lips
- Has visible bruises