

Need An Adventure w/NPCs RIGHT NOW? Here's One

NPC by Matthew Neagley, plot by Martin Ralya.

Disappearances on the River

Tags: investigative, monster, sandbox, tactical planning

A fearsome monster has been preying on communities along a stretch of river about a dozen miles long. No one has actually seen it and survived, though many claim to have spotted the creature. It's generally agreed to be some kind of river monster, emerging from the river to claim its prey and then slipping back into the water.

The river monster can be one of a number of things, including: an actual river monster, a powerful psychopath (human or otherwise) who haunts the region, a band of humanoids diverting attention from themselves so that they can kidnap locals for their stewpots, slavers picking the region clean before moving on, or an assassins' guild initiation rite. As no one knows the true nature of the threat at the outset of the adventure, you can also suggest several of these options through clues and other signs, and eventually reveal the real threat.

After the PCs are recruited to find and eliminate the river monster, this adventure takes place over four encounters. The first is investigating the threat, and involves interviewing locals, examining at least one place from which someone disappeared, and trying to spot a pattern in the disappearances (time of day, location, who was abducted).

The second involves taking those clues and using them to attempt to catch the monster in the act; how this plays out depends on the clues you seed and the tactics the PCs decide to employ. Part of the fun of this adventure is the planning and guesswork involved for your players. You can build suspense by having another disappearance take place while the PCs stake out their first potential location, but be careful not to drag things out just for the sake of it.

The third encounter involves facing the threat and learning its true identity. If the PCs spotted the threat during the second encounter, this time around they get a good look and know exactly what it is. The fourth encounter is tracking down and eliminating the threat; the nature of this encounter will depend on what kind of threat you selected.

Colin Kern

Political Construct-Maker

"Machines aren't always perfect but, unlike society, machines can be repaired."

Appearance: Strong, commanding, and dressed in expertly tailored clothes, Colin's only visible flaws are a slight limp and an unusually heavy tread.

Roleplaying: Colin speaks in an authoritarian voice and uses his size to remind others that he's in charge. In his arrogance, he talks over others and is visibly surprised when anyone offers dissent.

Personality: Extremely intelligent, smugly superior, and used to being surrounded by toadies and constructs, Colin finds intellectual challenges, particularly in the workshop, irresistible. He holds little regard for anything or anyone, especially the unwashed masses. Faced with opposition, Colin relies on his position, power, and wealth to cow any who oppose him. If that approach fails, his minions are always available to show out unwanted visitors.

Motivation: Already a member of the ruling caste and commanding exorbitant resources, Colin now seeks political power and advancements in the crafting of his constructs.

Background: Colin holds a powerful political office and the constructs he has designed, though expensive, are widely used among the wealthy as guards and servants. By making his product indispensable and pervasive, he solidifies his political hold. When the moment is right, his golems will rise at his command and make him a major power.

Traits: Crafter, focal, genius, leader, political, power hungry, wealthy

The NPC comes from *Masks: 1,000 Memorable NPCs for Any Role-playing Game*, and the plot comes from *Eureka: 501 Adventure Plots to Inspire Game Masters*. Both books are system-neutral resources for GMs, extensively indexed and packed with tools to make these plots and characters your own, and both were written by the authors of *Gnome Stew* and published by Engine Publishing.



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Need An Adventure w/NPCs RIGHT NOW? Here's One

NPC by Troy Taylor, plot by Kurt Schneider.

Crimson Herrings

Tags: deadline, dungeon crawl, innocent, investigative, madness, magic, monster, race, sandbox, spirit

A friend's daughter is among a small group of kids, all six to eight years old, who have been kidnapped. Their small town is up in arms over the kidnapping, and just about everyone has volunteered to join the rescue posse being formed by the sheriff. Everyone suspects a local gang of bandits, but they've never kidnapped anyone before, nor have they ever raided the town.

The kids were taken from where they were playing near the river. It's at the edge of town, and child- and adult-sized footprints lead from the river to where some horses were tied up. The tracks then lead towards the bandits.

The kids were actually abducted by a water spirit who recently took up residence in the river. The water spirit has granted them the ability to breathe underwater, and they're all playing happily in a large pond nearby. The kids are having fun, but the lonely spirit is slowly enchanting them to forget about the village and their families. The water spirit plans to keep the children forever and will vigorously oppose their removal.

The tracks were made when the bandits came to fence some goods to the local shopkeeper, who had his kids cart them off for him. Unfortunately, there's been so much interference with the tracks that it's hard to tell exactly what has happened. The shopkeeper is either out of town selling the fenced items, or knows when to keep his mouth shut.

If the bandits are questioned or attacked, the party will learn that they know of a troll nearby who may have taken the children. The troll hasn't, of course, but the only way to know for sure is to kill it or drive it off and search its cave.

Once these suspects have been cleared, run off, or killed, subtler clues will lead to the water spirit. Talking to the other children in town is the key. They know about the water spirit, and how it has been looking for playmates. A good look at the tracks away from where the horses were tied up will also reveal some of the story. The tracks coming to town were much lighter than those going away. Some of the townsfolk know the bandits, and know that they'd never kidnap children, but also know better than to share this information easily.

Patrizia Costa

Sensuous Courtier

"You speak of spies and plots and intrigue. Perhaps you think they are mother's milk where I am from. I am not interested in such things. I have come to this country to relax, take in the fresh air, see the highlands, sip wine, and be free of the complications of court. I am on holiday. Surely, you can help me indulge in your local flavor."

Appearance: Her raven hair and olive complexion accent her allure. She is shorter than average, but so exotic-looking that she stands out even in the company of other beautiful women. The more resplendent the gown she wears, the more beguiling she appears.

Roleplaying: She never gives offense and flirts constantly. She has an easy, sensual manner that draws admirers.

Personality: She has a zest for life, and passion for every affair. Intrigue is second nature to her.

Motivation: She is completely loyal to her mother country.

Background: Patrizia is a minor courtier hoping to advance her position by acting as a spy. She plays the role of a foreign emissary on holiday, seeing the sites, sampling local wines and foods. She entertains local nobles with salons and parties, engaging in affairs and dalliances. She is here to make an account of the duke's troop strength and the competency of his local commanders. She is also here to gauge the sentiment of the common folk to the crown and see if she can sow discord.

Traits: Beautiful, charming, mysterious

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NPC by Don Mappin, plot by Phil Vecchione.

Stolen Treasure

Tags: difficult choice, monster, relationship hook, roleplaying-heavy, social, twist

The PCs come across a group of bandits pulling a wheeled cage with a woman inside. The woman is well-dressed and attractive, and she implores the PCs to intervene and set her free. If they do (running off the bandits with relative ease), she thanks them and explains that she comes from a town about two weeks away on horseback, and that the people there would gladly reward the PCs for her return. As the PCs trek to her town, she takes a liking to one of them and tries to initiate a relationship with that PC. This is the crux of the adventure: The plot won't play out well unless one of the PCs falls for her. She reveals little about herself, saying only that she's just a simple servant. She insists that she must return in order to fulfill a debt honorably, and will become sad and withdrawn as the party gets closer to her town.

When the PCs enter the town, the locals are elated at the woman's return. They send a runner to the mountain to inform the dragon of his treasure's safe return, which comes as a surprise to the PCs. The woman then confesses that her town betrothed her to the dragon in return for the dragon's protection. She has been with the dragon for five years, and her agreement requires her to stay for another 10 years. She was kidnapped by bandits several weeks ago, and in her absence the town was preparing to betroth another villager to the dragon. With the woman's return, she can now return to the dragon's keep.

This should cause great pain for the PC that has fallen for her. The PCs will have to decide what they want to do about this situation, and consider the possible consequences. The dragon will insist on her return, and if he is denied he'll demand another woman as his treasure. The townsfolk, while not fond of ceding anyone to the dragon, receive protection from the dragon and aren't ready to jeopardize the arrangement. The PCs must resolve this sticky situation.

Naomi Wyerrn

Impulsive War-Wizard

"There's nothing a firebolt can't solve!"

Appearance: Wearing golden robes trimmed in red, her own flaming red hair is tied back in the martial style. Smelling of brimstone and sulfur, her hands are dirty, her nails chipped and torn. She stands taught and ready for action, reaching for the pouch of components at her side.

Roleplaying: Naomi constantly interrupts and acts on the first conclusion she leaps to. Fortune favors the bold!

Personality: A firebrand—literally—Naomi doesn't understand "can't." This drives her to excel but keeps others at a distance. She respects those who follow their convictions with action. To most, Naomi is off-putting with her bold honesty and frank observations. She respects—and follows—authority.

Motivation: She strives to be better than the rest, to prove the impossible is possible, and to show her detractors that they're wrong.

Background: Naomi never fit in within her social circles; attending court and masques bored her to tears. A call to action burned in her blood, and when she came of age, she spent the majority of her inheritance pursuing magical art and instruction. Told she was too old and didn't have the aptitude, this merely spurred her on. Having joined the Wizard's Corps of the militia, few know of her wealthy background—and she prefers to keep it that way. Secretly, her family hopes this obsession will pass. Her fledgling ability sometimes endangers her and her companions—and she has the burns to prove it.

Traits: Magical, military, wealthy

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Need An Adventure w/NPCs RIGHT NOW? Here's One

NPC by John Arcadian, plot by Walt Ciechanowski.

Rekindled Flame?

Tags: intrigue, investigative, politics, social, stealth, twist

During their adventuring days, a powerful nobleman had a relationship with his companion, a wizard. They parted amiably; the noble married and settled down while the wizard continued her travels. The noble constantly regales audiences in his court and feast hall with tales of their exploits. His wife knows of her husband's past dalliance and harbors jealousy toward the wizard.

Recently, the noble has been sneaking out in the dark of night. His wife has learned that the wizard has come back into the area and it appears her husband is visiting his former lover. Furious, the wife has confronted her husband, but he admitted nothing. She has decided to take matters into her own hands, hoping to drive the wizard away.

As it turns out, the noble isn't rekindling an old flame. Something dark and sinister from his adventuring past is catching up with him, and the noble and the wizard are working together in secret to stop it. The nature of the dark secret is entirely up to you. What could be so terrible that the noble wouldn't tell his wife about it? Is he in fact involved in something even more scandalous than adultery?

The wife hires the PCs to find out what her husband is up to. Their first encounter is a scouting mission, spying on the noble and the wizard. The pair takes pains to avoid surveillance, hinder possible pursuers, and otherwise exercise caution. At first, it appears that the wife is correct and the two are having an affair. When the PCs report this news to her, she flies into a rage and asks them to take things to the next level: The wizard must be driven out of town.

She leaves the details up to the PCs, who have to concoct a plan for convincing the wizard to leave town; her only condition is that her husband not be harmed. Threats, coercion, deception, and public humiliation are all viable options for the PCs to use against the wizard. As they put their plan into motion, however, they run into another party of adventurers who were hired to assassinate the wizard--the wife's backup plan. In the ensuing chaos, the wizard, the noble, or both are killed.

When the dust settles, the PCs acquire several clues about what they were actually up to, and learn that they are now all that stands between the local community and an ancient horror that is fast approaching. They must quickly catch up on everything the former lovers were up to, scramble to devise a plan for combating the horror, and then defend the town.

Darius Bellwater

Focused Tactician

"Do not lie to me! Especially when it involves Jessica."

Appearance: Darius is muscled and tough. His face bears scars and hides his emotions, showing only his uncompromising nature.

Roleplaying: Darius is solid and dependable, but intensely focused.

Personality: He is tough, polished, and controlled, except when it comes to his sister, Jessica. He never turns on comrades, unless they hinder his pursuit of Jessica. Then he leaves to work on his own.

Motivation: Darius searches for news of his sister, who was kidnapped from their village years ago.

Background: When his sister was kidnapped, Darius tried to find her the correct way: contacting the king's guard, offering rewards, and using official resources, all to no avail. The search continued, and a run-in with a mercenary provided him two things: a message from the warlord his sister was enslaved to in the form of a humiliating beat-down, and proof that the official ways didn't work. He began investigating in new ways. He joined up with mercenary groups and proved himself a master of combat tactics and strategy. He also toughened himself up, covering his keen intelligence behind a rough and hardened frame. While not much of a fighter, he is tough enough to prove himself to employers. His wide web of contacts and diverse knowledge of tactics used by military groups has proven invaluable to many organizations, so long as they can get him closer to freeing his sister.

Traits: Military, police, zealot

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