

Bandits on the Road

A D&D Encounter for Fifth Edition to Plug into Any Adventure

from

THIEVES CAN'T

a comic about role-playing and chaos
from ramen-empire.com

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Bandit Archetypes & NPCs

Celestine Brightsky

Bandit Bowoman

Medium, Woolf Elf, Any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class: 11

Hit Points: 11 (2d8 +2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (0)	12 (+1)	10 (0)

Skills: Stealth +3

Senses: Passive Perception 10

Languages: Common, Elvish

Challenge: 1/8 (25 experience)

Cloak of Local Foilage

Spending 1d4 hours preparing this mildly magical item provides advantage to stealth checks in the terrain in which it was made, provided the wearer is stationary. Preparation requires local vegetation or minerals, which the cloak models itself after.

Steady Aim

The Bandit Bowoman gains advantage on her next attack if she spends a standard action taking aim.

Sneak Attack

Once per combat, the Bandit Bowoman may use a bonus action to add 1d4 damage to any successful attack that was made with advantage.

ACTIONS

Heavy Crossbow:

Ranged Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft, one target.

Hit: 6 (1d10 + 1) piercing damage.



Bandit Bowomen are often the misused conscripts of wars gone wrong; rebels and freedom fighters for the losing side, or victors who returned from the war, but after becoming killers, found they had no society fit for their return, nor people who understood their problems. Bandit Bowomen often turn to crime with fellow hold-outs, and see themselves as defending an ideology or monarchical bloodline that they firmly believe belongs in power. A sharpshooter who robs from the rich to give to the poor is as likely to be a good fit for this description as a distant-eyed killer who only sees targets instead of people—and these aren't mutually exclusive.

Bandit Bowomen are found in every alignment, and tend to keep cold distance from fellow bandits, who see them more as tools than companions. Bandit Bowomen are sometimes the leaders of their groups, and when this is true, their followers are deathly loyal, because those who weren't didn't see the arrow in time, and died alone in the wilds.

Celestine Brightsky, the Bandit Bowoman from this module, is a lover of joy and has a light-hearted heaviness to her words that tend to bog down other people's good moods and bolster hers. Her distant attitude, mixed with her gallows humor and tendency to subvert her companion's jokes, make her a dour travel-mate but the perfect edge to any threat that her bandit friends decide to make.

Celestine has a magical cloak, described briefly in her stat block, and in more detail later in the module.

She is strong friends with next character, and delights in tormenting him by ruining his jokes.

Bandit Bag-snatcher

Medium, Halfling, Any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class: 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 10 (2d6 +3)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (0)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	10 (0)	10 (0)	10 (0)

Skills: Stealth +4, Sleight of Hand +6

Senses: Passive perception 10

Languages: Common, Halfling

Challenge: 1/8 (25 experience)

Naturally Stealthy

As a halfling, this Bandit Bag-snatcher can attempt to hide even when they are obscured only by a creature that is at least one size larger than them.

Master Pick Pocket

After a successful stealth check, the Bandit Bag-snatcher can make sleight-of-hand checks to steal items as a bonus action.

Sneak Attack (1/turn)

The Bandit Bag-Snatcher adds an extra 3 (1d6) damage when they hit a target with a weapon attack and have advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the Bag-Snatcher that isn't incapacitated and the the Bag-Snatcher doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

ACTIONS

Dagger

Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 2) piercing.

Cob "Kneecapper" Shineshiv



Our Bandit Bag-snatcher, Cob, is everything you'd expect from halfling; he loves food, hates meeting new people, but loves meeting old friends. He cracks jokes whenever he thinks of them, and Celestine tends to find ways to subvert or corrupt those jokes – or else she delivers the punchline before him, completely deadpan, ruining the effect. The fights the pair get into over these (probably calculated and inherently elvish) misunderstandings have forced the tiefling brothers to conclude that only true love could be keeping them together.

In the manner of halflings, Cob is quite capable of moving around unnoticed, and uses this to pick marks for his friends.

Cob and Celestine have been traveling companions for as long as the tiefling brothers outlined on the following pages have known them. These brothers have a bet going about whether or not Celestine and Cob are going to end up together. The deal is quite involved, and has a "no love potion" clause that has been violated at least twice.

Often smaller races, such as halflings, gnomes, dwarves, mouse-folk, etc – Bandit Bag-snatchers tend to be parts of organized crime in urban areas. They are the acrobatic and the sneaky; they are the gust of wind that felt a touch too strong right before you realized your purse was gone. Just as how every thief is not a rogue, every pick-pocket is not a Bag-snatcher. Bag-snatchers are the designated pick-pockets, chosen either informally by their bandit friends to be their acquisitions expert, or by official channels, such as a guild of thieves or a mafia, to be their padfoot or contrabandist.

Bag-snatchers tend toward neutral evil alignments, and while they work for self-gain, they're almost never in a position to climb in the ranks – they're respected for being in the riskiest of assignments and still thriving, but that risk comes often with long stints in prison, or short drops to the end of a rope. Old bandits exist. Old bag-snatchers tend not to.

Bandit Barbarian

Medium, Tiefling, Any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class: 12

Hit Points: 17 (3d8 +3)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	9 (-1)	10 (0)	12 (+1)

Skills: Intimidate +3

Senses: Passive perception 10

Resistances: Fire Damage

Languages: Common, Infernal

Challenge: 1/8 (25 experience)

Reckless

At the start of its turn, the Bandit Barbarian can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against them have advantage until the start of their next turn.

Unarmored Defence

While the Bandit Barbarian is not wearing any armor, their Armor Class equals 10 + their Dexterity modifier + their Constitution modifier. The Bandit Barbarian can't use a shield and still gain this benefit.

ACTIONS

Battleaxe

Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 1) slashing damage.

Barbarians aren't always cut out to be adventurers, and those that aren't often find their way into the welcome arms of bandits, who are more than willing to part with a share of the loot to a strongman they can stand behind.

Bandit Barbarians are distinguished from other bandits easily; they'll often be the strongest or the largest, and prefer to fight unarmored, and with massive weapons that lesser men struggle to swing more than a few times. Their rages and the kratocratic nature of bandit groups means that Bandit Barbarians often gravitate to positions of leadership, but it's also common that a Bandit Barbarian will take fatal wounds without realizing it, destroy their opposition, and then die, leaving the bandits without a suitable captain.

Bandit Barbarians tend toward the neutral evil alignment.

Reconciliation



The intimidating figure of Truth's brother and our Bandit Barbarian, *Reconciliation*, goes hand-in-hand with silent but jovial tiefling who largely doesn't care about outer appearances. His long silences are often mistaken for brooding, but doesn't brood; he thinks about lunch. *Reconciliation* trusts his brother with his life. Plans that his brother says are good probably are good. Plans that his brother says are good that clearly aren't good? *Reconciliation* will correct for that, usually behind Truth's back, and usually with blunt force trauma to the problem areas of whoever is between Truth and his goals. Problem areas tend to be teeth.

Truth and *Reconciliation* (whose real names they never give) met Celestine and Cob a few years back, and decided to form an "adventuring" party, which has done little more than visit distant taverns and run elaborate scams. *Reconciliation* is fine with this. He's fine with anything, as long as he and his own are still drawing breath and happy.

Bandit Bard

Medium, Tiefling, Any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class: 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points: 9 (2d6 +2)

Speed: 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
## (+#)	## (+#)	## (+#)	## (+#)	## (+#)	## (+#)

Skills: Performance +4, Deception +4

Senses: Passive Perception 10

Resistances: Fire Damage

Languages: Common, Infernal

Challenge: 1/8 (25 experience)

ACTIONS

Spellcasting

The Bandit Bard is a 1st-level spellcaster. Their spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). They have the following Bard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will):

Unearthly Chorus, Thaumaturgy, Vicious Mockery

(*Unearthed Arcana: Starter Spells PDF, PHB*)

1st level (1 slot):

Longstrider

(*PHB*)

REACTIONS

Hellish Rebuke

The Bandit Bard points a finger, and the creature that damaged them is momentarily surrounded by hellish flames. The creature must make a Dexterity saving throw and take 2d10 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

In general, Bandit Bards are non-combatants who have fallen in with unscrupulous folk of action. They are the lives of the party, and often the ideas behind the brains of their criminal friends. If a dumb, brutish Bandit Captain decides to try to kidnap a royal princess, the odds are good that the friendly neighborhood Bandit Bard has been dropping sly hints that this is a good plan. The Bandit Bard shies away from leadership roles – but never from attention.

They'll tend toward chaotic neutral alignment, but their easy-going natures typically mean they absorb the bad habits of the people they've associated with. At first glance, a Bandit Bard may seem like a good choice for reformation – but if they're removed from one criminal group, they inevitably find their way into the ranks of another.

Truth



A slender tiefling of average height, our Bandit Bard goes by the name Truth. It's not his real name, but Truth is all about presentation, and what presents better than a tiefling with a virtue name?

Truth is a charismatic con-man whose confidence is heavier than his intellect, and whose slippery tongue (and massive younger brother) has saved him from this fact repeatedly. He's devoted to his friends, and tries to stay far away from his enemies – especially if they've ever been the victims of his scams.

Truth is only ever himself around his brother and his best friends. When he's around strangers, he'll don foreign accents, pretend that he's a warlock, or all sorts of other extroverted, outlandish behavior that serve to both get him the attention he craves while hiding his actual persona in plain sight. If he put his mind to it, he would make a decent actor, but he prefers a life of grifting and odd jobs of dubious morality.

The Scam

The Bandit Bard will collide with people or their vehicles and feign injury in urban settings. In wild or rural settings he will be traveling in the opposite direction of the party, challenge the strongest person there to a seemingly trivial feat of strength, and “hurt” himself in the process.

In either case, if the party approaches him, the protective Bandit Barbarian will rush from either a nearby crowd, or from cover, demanding to know what they’ve done to his brother. In an urban setting, they are doing an insurance hustle – money in exchange for not involving the authorities. In a wilderness setting, the Bandit Barbarian is in a killing rage and the Bandit Bard is trying to calm him down, promising that they did nothing wrong. Both of these are covers. As the DM, you are attempting to trick your party into seeing this as an RP encounter – which it, of course, can be. The tieflings are both trying to cover for the Bandit Bag-snatcher, though, who is making a stealth check at advantage (The other two bandits are assisting him) to steal from the party. Additionally, the Bandit Bag-snatcher has bardic inspiration from the Bandit Bard, who cannot grant this again for the encounter. The Bandit Bag-snatcher only uses this bardic inspiration to stealth or steal.

If the Bandit Bag-snatcher is successful, he will steal items in this order, as determined by the DM.

1. Story McGuffins, forcing the players to track the bandit group.
2. A magical item, goading the players into tracking them.
3. Items of deeply personal significance.
4. Gold or Valuables (getting these things is the others’ jobs!)

The moment that the Bandit Bag-snatcher is successful, the brothers will either try to finish the scam quickly, or if they think they can’t get money from the players, will become agreeable suddenly, and take their leave. This should probably prompt a passive insight check, and realizations that items are missing. The Bandit Bag-Snatcher has used his bardic inspiration by now, and is much more likely to be caught on the way out.

The Plan

If the scam goes violent, the bandits have a plan – of course. In the distance, hiding with the aid of a low level magical item, the Bandit Bowoman has taken aim with her heavy cross bow and is ready to intervene. She and the bag-snatcher can be close friends who communicate without words, and simply pick the same target together, or the bandits could have had ample time to choose a target together in advance, but either way, their plan is to take down the weakest person first and gain leverage. If they don’t steal what they want quickly and can’t bring down a player in one or two rounds, their plan is to flee under covering fire.

Where to Go Next

These bandits could be self-motivated hucksters who’ve chosen the party as their next target, or hired guild thieves who are trying to acquire something specific from the party (or something specific that your villain thinks the party has.) This could also be just a random encounter, too, but be careful – players hate it when the DM steals from them, and if there is not an immediate connection between what was lost and a way of finding it back, your table can get angry over their sense of lost agency. If the bandits are successful, make sure the party has a way of quickly following this lead and solving this problem.

For example, if the bandits escape with the players’ loot, tracking them could be a pair of easy nature checks (to find the tracks, and then to follow them) or, in an urban setting, a pair of easy investigation checks (the group is notorious, or they were witnesses). This connection will hopefully serve to motivate the party and to ensure them that you have a plan that is acting in a well-constructed world.

And a party chasing a lost story McGuffin or a lost magical item is a party that will go willingly where they may not have, before, if they’ve been studiously avoiding that ominous tower you put in the middle of your urban adventure, or if they decided not to go on the forest road, and instead go looking for hags. (Die in a fire, Reynauldo.)

Remember that these bandits are scammers and professionals, not cultists or

zombies – they won't fight to the death unless the players gave them a damn good reason to do so. They're also very unlikely to betray one another, and they won't sacrifice anyone to a party of murder hobos. If one of them takes a bad hit, they're likely to flee under the covering fire of their Bowoman, and they may even make a last-ditch effort to steal their mark when they do.

If it looks they can't win or get away, consider having them surrender and offer the information that the players would have gotten by following them, or offering their services, or to take a message back to their client.

If the bandits are slain, consider having a letter on one of their corpses declaring that it's open season on these heroes, implying that more villainous types will be coming for them, or a letter that's signed by the villain and drops a hint about what the next move might be. Alternatively, a guard or a wandering merchant can have witnessed what happened, and explain to the party that these were known consiglieres of a new villain – one who is either already interested in the party, if the attack was planned, or if the encounter was random, who will be very interested in the party now that some of his best thieves are dead.

If the bandits defeat the party, they do not deliver killing blows. This is a low level encounter, and isn't designed to take over the dramatic moments in your campaign where PC death will be a better risk. They might stabilize the party, for instance, relieve them of all of their loot, and then be trackable as if the party had simply failed to catch the Bag-snatcher in action.

Or the players could awaken in cells within the sumptuous palace of an infamous crime boss, who has promoted these bandits for bringing you. The bandits (or one of them) realizing this person has intentions worse than they are comfortable with, could return and let the players out of their cells. Or the crime boss could summon them, and offer the "choice" between a mission and execution.

Since the bandits don't fight to the death if they're losing, consider not letting them fight to the death if they're winning. After KOing a

player, one of the bandits might threaten to finish off the unconscious character unless the PC's hand over the story McGuffin, magical item, or what have you.

And if the fight goes more than a few rounds with everyone missing each-other, consider letting the bandits try to laugh it off and say, "This is pointless! The drinks are on us, what do you say?" Then, at the tavern, the disloyal bandits could spill the beans about the people who hired them, or the Bag-snatcher could make a second attempt at stealing.

And if the bandits fled, keep them easy to track. Revenge and curiosity are both great motivators.

An example.

Cob is successful and steals the sacred relic from your Cleric. The bandits seemed like they'd be easy to track, but a pair of awful rolls left your players lucky to find their way back to the road. All seems lost – until the next morning, when the party is brought a letter by a child who's been paid two copper to bring it.

The letter declares that the payment the bandits had been offered wasn't good enough. They're willing to make a deal, if the party lets the past die – just a little. But they don't want money, anymore. The villain they were working on, they discovered, wanted not only to underpay them for the relic, but to use it for a horrific necromantic ritual. They can't live with that on their consciences, and they'll say where they've hidden the relics – after the necromancer who hired them is dead.

And they're no slouches. They'll help. Celestine is even willing to part with her magical cloak over it.

Another example.

That +2 sword you gave your party is clearly the Paladin's pride and joy, and locals couldn't help but notice that his weapon is glowing.

Cob almost steals it, but is caught. Battle flares to life and the Sorcerer is almost slain by a strategic pair of blows from

Reconciliation and Celestine. On his next move, grapples the sorcerer, succeeds, and declares her his hostage, holding a knife to her neck.

“Her life for the magic blade!” he shouts, and no one can tell if he’s bluffing.

The Cloak of Local Foliage

We gave Celestine a magical cloak, which can be a bargaining chip for the bandits, a reward for players who defeat them, or even an object Celestine can offer the players to sweeten a deal, if the bandits end up becoming something other than bad guys (there’s never any telling where an RP encounter can go!)

The cloak appears to be normal, drab fabric until someone attuned to it spends 1D4 hours preparing the cloak lacing it with local vegetation, minerals, sand, or stones and speaking the activation word. Once activated, the cloak provides advantage on stealth checks in the terrain in which it was prepared, provided that the wearer is stationary. The cloak, once prepared, slowly morphs to look like anything behind its wearer, blending in magically to trees, sand dunes, buildings, etc. The magic wears off in 2D20 hours or if the player goes more than fifteen miles from the site of preparation, or if the scenery drastically changes – such as by going from the town hall to a nearby cave. Moving while the cloak is on removes the advantage bonus it granted on stealth checks, but if it still resembles its surroundings, it’s the DM’s discretion about whether or not the item is still benefiting the stealth of a moving person. Becoming stationary again activates the cloak’s power in one minute.

While wearing the cloak, the wearer can make attack rolls and miss without their location being given away automatically. Seeing through the cloak’s power is possible, and requires a 20 perception roll or Truesight. Successful attack rolls can still reveal the wearer’s location.

Minis and Tokens

This encounter is a pay-what-you-like module, and you’re welcome to use and adapt it as you see fit. Please don’t host it for more than a handful of close friends or fellow D&D enthusiasts. If you found this for free, somewhere, please consider supporting it, our comic strips, and other modules like this one at patreon.com/thievescant.

The art for this encounter is included in a \$3 version as a set of tokens and paper figurines (with additional art for the backs of the characters), and our Patreon Patrons gain access to all of our tokens and figurines under this reward tier.

If you haven’t already, please check out our comic strip, *Thieves Can’t*, at ramen-empire.com, or at tapastic.com/series/Thieves-Cant.

Thank you!

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