

NEVER ASK DIRECTIONS

This 4th Edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® sidetrek is intended for four or five characters of levels 1 – 3.

When the party stops to ask directions of a reclusive halfling they find him eager to point out the way. Unfortunately the path he directs them on is straight towards a troop of bandits, and the halfling intends to use the party to settle an old score.

BACKGROUND

Carum Half-hand has seen better days. The halfling and his pack of outlaws were once the scourge of unwary travelers. Although most bandits are proud to have their names spoken in fear, Carum observed that those men typically ended up showing their pride on the gallows. Carum valued self-preservation as much as the takings from ill-defended merchant carts.

So it was never Carum who led the band of ruffians, but always a highwayman of his choosing, someone who knew how to listen to a good idea. But also someone who liked to brag that it was his band of rogues that stalked the trade routes, someone who would satisfy cries for justice when he robbed one traveler too many.

Unfortunately, Carum's latest protégé, Hedrun Tul, took note of the halfling's ways. And, when his turn came to lead, he ran Carum out of the pack, declaring the halfling too old and unfit to be of any use.

Threatening to deliver his predecessor to the constable himself, dead or alive, Tul's alternative of exile seemed a reasonable option.

Carum settled in a small cottage along a rarely traveled road, slowly spending his savings in a nearby town to keep himself in salted meat and wine. All the while he cultivated a small garden and a large grudge. When a band of heroes appears, the "old and unfit" ruffian sees the opportunity to emerge from retirement or, at the very least, to obtain a morsel of revenge.

SYNOPSIS

When the party finds themselves close to Carum's meager home, the halfling does his best to be ingratiating and accommodate them with what they might need. Of course, there is an agenda accompanying his hospitality: he wants to manipulate the party into confronting his former compatriots, but keep a safe distance from both the fighting and potential incrimination by either side.

Carum points the party in the direction of the camp, unaware that Tul has set up several outposts that might catch the party. Once they get past the outpost, the party can make their way to the camp where they confront the bandit leader and his men.

While events are likely to go according to plan for Carum, if the party proves successful in defeating Hedrun Tul, there is a chance they mention the halfling and draw out more of the story from the bandits. Then it is up to the characters to decide how to deal with Carum who, at least recently, has done nothing criminal.

Placement

Carum's dwelling can be placed in any wilderness setting within a short distance of a nearby town by road. On foot, the journey is likely one or two days as Carum is none too fond of the idea of a traveling merchant passing through the town and recognizing him as the bandit who robbed his caravan several years ago.

Locals are aware of the bandits, but they have not located their hidden campsite in the forest. The regional constable's resources are too limited. He and his militia are unable to hunt the raiders down unless they leave the town dangerously under-protected. Meanwhile, the cost of hiring additional caravan guards could soon deter merchants from visiting the area.



Using a Sidetrek

Short sidetreks are ideal for resolving unexpected situations that arise at the table, such as when the party "goes right when they should have gone left" or when attendance on game night suddenly leaves the party without one or two key members. Even short some party members, the encounters in a sidetrek should be within their abilities, although potentially more challenging. As with any adventure, you may need to adjust the encounters by adding or removing several foes.

Inserting a sidetrek allows the heroes to continue their adventuring without interruption and can add some verisimilitude to the world, enabling the party to go where they want and making sure the players do not feel as if they are "on

rails." A sidetrek can usually be resolved in the course of a single session or less, ensuring there's time to "get back on track" for next session. There are also opportunities for adding new NPCs to potentially aid the characters in their current quest or set up their next quest.

In "Never Ask Directions," defeating the bandits provides an excellent chance for the party to get in the good graces of local merchants, traders, or the constable. Any of these people could become patrons for future adventures. For parties of a shiftier bent, Carum might also prove to be an interesting contact, but there should always be concern over just how much he can be trusted. Finally, jailing either Carum or Hedrun Tul could make an enemy of either of the brigands who reappear later to exact their revenge.