

The Apprentice in the Web

Scene 1: Introduction in Cobblecrest

Setup

Location: Ironhand's Anvil, a renowned blacksmith shop in the heart of CobblecrestCobblecrest Locations a...Cobblecrest NPCs Guide. The forge emits a steady glow, and the rhythmic clang of metal echoes through the air, though today the sound is muted as Balin Ironhand paces anxiously outside the shop.

Atmosphere: The morning light filters through the bustling village streets, but the mood is tense. Balin's normally gruff and commanding presence seems overshadowed by worry. Villagers pass by, casting concerned glances at the pacing blacksmith, who mutters to himself about his missing apprentice.

Mood-Setting Narration for DM: "As you approach the center of Cobblecrest, the comforting sounds of industry surround you—the hum of conversation, the creak of wagon wheels, and the hammering of tools. But outside Ironhand's Anvil, Balin Ironhand, the village blacksmith, looks far from his usual composed self. His thick arms are crossed over his soot-streaked apron as he paces, his brow furrowed and lips moving as though he's speaking to himself. The glow from his forge feels dimmer today, matching the unease that hangs over him."

Scripting

Initial NPC Interaction

DM Narration: "As you approach, Balin's sharp gaze locks onto you. He strides forward, his boots thudding against the cobblestones. Despite his apparent worry, his voice carries its usual firmness."

Balin Ironhand's Dialogue:

- **Introduction:**
 - *"Adventurers, I'm glad to see you. I could use your help. My apprentice, Emeric, left at sunrise to gather ore in the Maerthwatch foothills, but he should've been back hours ago. The lad's young—eager to prove himself, but green as spring grass. The foothills are no place for someone like him to be alone."*
- **Details on the Task:**

- *“Emeric went to an iron deposit we’ve used before. It’s about two hours north along the main path. The way is narrow, and the rocks above tend to shift—dangerous terrain, especially if you don’t know how to watch your step.”*
 - *“And that’s not the worst of it. The spiders... they’ve been seen near those cliffs. Nasty, web-spinning things that’ll snatch a man quicker than you can shout for help.”*
 - **Plea for Help:**
 - *“Please, find him. Bring him back safely. I’ll pay each of you five gold for your trouble—and you’ll have my gratitude. The forge can wait until he’s home.”*
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Player Interaction

- **Questions Players May Ask Balin:**
 1. **Where exactly did Emeric go?**
 - *“He went to a known iron deposit. Follow the trail north past the Silverstream Rapids, then up into the foothills. You’ll see the pickaxe marks where he’s been working.”*
 2. **What does Emeric look like?**
 - *“Emeric’s a young lad, barely grown into his boots. Brown hair, thin build—he wears a brown leather apron, though I doubt it’ll help much against those spiders.”*
 3. **What dangers should we expect?**
 - *“The path’s tricky—rockslides are common, and those damnable spiders like to lurk near the cliffs. Watch for webs; they’re a sure sign of trouble.”*
 4. **What if we can’t find him?**
 - *Balin’s face hardens. “Don’t even think like that. He has to be out there somewhere. He’s not the kind to wander off.”**
 5. **Any supplies we can borrow?**
 - *“Take what you need from the shop. I’ve got some rope and a few torches if you need them.”*
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Skill Checks and Roleplay Opportunities

1. **Insight (DC 10):** Players can sense Balin’s genuine concern for Emeric, as well as a hint of guilt for sending him out alone.
 - **Success:** *Balin is deeply worried about the boy, and his pacing suggests he’s blaming himself for the situation.*
 - **Failure:** *Balin’s gruff exterior makes it hard to tell whether he’s more concerned about Emeric or his own reputation.*

2. **Persuasion (DC 13):** If players ask for more payment or resources, they can negotiate for additional supplies.
 - **Success:** Balin reluctantly agrees to throw in **50 feet of hempen rope** or a **lantern with 3 flasks of oil**.
 - **Failure:** *Balin crosses his arms.* "I'm already paying you fair for the job. This isn't about gold—it's about saving a life."
 3. **Perception (DC 12):** Players may notice Emeric's unfinished work near the forge, including a partially assembled iron chain.
 - **Success:** *The unfinished project reflects Emeric's inexperience and eagerness to learn the trade.*
 - **Failure:** Nothing unusual stands out beyond the usual bustle of the forge.
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Treasure (Optional)

While there's no immediate treasure for this scene, Balin offers:

- **5 gp per person** upon Emeric's safe return.
 - If the players excel (e.g., roleplay well or perform additional favors for Balin), he may later offer discounted or customized equipment from his forge.
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Transition to the Next Scene

Narration for Leaving Cobblecrest: "Balin thanks you once more, his eyes lingering on the road leading north. The sound of his hammering resumes faintly as you depart, though its rhythm feels heavier, weighed down by worry. The path ahead winds through Cobblecrest's outskirts, past the Silverstream Rapids, and toward the jagged shadows of the Maerthwatch foothills. The morning sun filters through the trees, but the journey ahead feels anything but serene."

Scene 2: Travel to the Maerthwatch Foothills

Setup

Location: The trail leading from Cobblecrest to the Maerthwatch foothills. The path follows the Winding River, weaving through lightly forested areas and eventually climbing into the rocky terrain of the foothills.

Atmosphere:

- The early part of the trail is tranquil, with the sound of rushing water from the Silverstream Rapids. As the adventurers progress, the terrain becomes more rugged and foreboding, with jagged cliffs looming above and the faint smell of damp earth and moss.
- The party senses the shift in mood as they ascend—the air grows cooler, and the cheerful sounds of the village fade behind them.

Mood-Setting Narration for DM: "The trail ahead follows the winding curve of the river. The morning sunlight glitters on the water, and the chatter of birds fills the air. But as you leave the comfort of Cobblecrest behind, the forest grows denser, and the path narrows. The further you climb, the more the terrain shifts—trees give way to rocky outcroppings, and the sound of the river is soon replaced by an eerie quiet. The wind whistles through the cracks in the rocks, carrying the faint smell of damp earth."

Scripting

Narration for Key Stages of Travel

1. Early Journey (First 15 minutes of travel): "The first leg of your journey is peaceful. The path meanders along the riverbank, where the Silverstream Rapids rush in a chorus of tumbling water. Tracks of carts and hooves crisscross the dirt path, suggesting this road is well-used. Occasionally, the shadows of birds cross overhead, breaking the rhythm of sunlight filtering through the trees."

- Roleplay Opportunity:
 - Players might engage in conversation, reflect on Balin's concern, or prepare for potential dangers ahead.
 - If a character inquires about the terrain: *"The path is manageable, but loose rocks and sudden shifts in the ground could prove dangerous once you reach the foothills."*

2. Transition to the Foothills: "As you continue, the ground begins to climb. The forest thins, replaced by jagged cliffs and crumbling ledges. The path narrows here, forcing you to walk in single file. A sudden gust of wind whistles through the rocks, carrying with it a faint rustling sound from above."

- Add tension: "A few small rocks tumble from a nearby ledge, bouncing down the trail and clattering into the bushes below."

Skill Challenges

This section introduces hazards that allow players to use a variety of skills while traveling. Failing these challenges doesn't result in immediate failure but instead adds tension and narrative consequences.

1. Falling Rocks Hazard

A section of the trail is unstable, with loose rocks ready to tumble down the steep cliffside.

- **Trigger:**
 - As the players move along the trail, the DM describes: *"The path narrows here, winding beneath a sheer cliff face. Above, jagged rocks cling precariously to the edge."*
 - **Passive Perception DC 13:** Characters notice the unstable rocks above, giving them a chance to act before the hazard triggers.
 - If they fail to notice or don't act, a rockslide occurs.
- **Rockslide Checks:**
 - **Dexterity Saving Throw DC 12:** Each character must succeed or take **1d6 bludgeoning damage** from the falling rocks.
 - Creative Solutions: Players may avoid the hazard by:
 - **Strength (Athletics) DC 14:** A character climbs ahead to knock down loose rocks safely.
 - **Wisdom (Perception) DC 13:** A character spots a safer detour, adding 15 minutes of travel time but avoiding the hazard.

2. Tracking Emeric

Near the foothills, the trail becomes harder to follow. The party must locate signs of Emeric's presence.

- **Wisdom (Survival) DC 12:**

- Success: *“You spot faint boot prints in the dirt, leading off the main trail toward a narrow path that climbs into the foothills. Drag marks near the prints suggest Emeric was carrying a heavy bag of ore.”*
 - Failure: The party loses the trail temporarily, delaying them by 10 minutes and creating tension as the day grows later.
 - Critical Success (Nat 20): *“Not only do you find tracks, but you also notice a few broken twigs and torn fabric caught on a nearby bush, likely from Emeric’s apron.”*
 - **Perception Check (Optional, DC 13):**
 - Players hear faint, distant noises—possibly rustling from above or the faint echo of a muffled voice (Emeric).
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3. Webs on the Trail (Foreshadowing)

The group comes across the first signs of spider activity as they approach the foothills.

- **Narration:** *“As the path steepens, you notice faint strands of webbing clinging to the bushes and low-hanging branches. The closer you look, the more you realize the strands are unnaturally thick, glistening faintly in the dappled light.”*
 - Possible Player Actions:
 - **Arcana or Nature Check DC 12:** Identifies the webs as belonging to Giant Spiders, known for ambushing prey.
 - **Survival Check DC 12:** Discovers that some of the webbing stretches into a nearby crevice, hinting at a spider den.
 - If ignored: *“The webs grow denser as you move forward, sticking to your boots and slowing your pace slightly.”*
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Roleplaying Opportunities

While traveling, players might:

- Discuss their plan for dealing with potential spiders or other hazards.
- Reflect on Balin’s concern for Emeric and his willingness to send the boy out alone.
- Spot environmental details (e.g., wildlife, the changing landscape).

Encourage players to engage with the setting and ask questions about the environment.

Transition to Scene 3

Narration for Reaching the Foothills: "After hours of travel, the path crests a rise, revealing the jagged peaks of the Maerthwatch foothills. The ground here is uneven, marked by loose stones and thick strands of webbing clinging to the rocks and bushes. The wind carries the faint scent of damp earth and something metallic—likely the ore deposits you were told about. The rustling noise you heard earlier is louder now, coming from a crevice ahead. Whatever lies ahead, Emeric's trail ends here."

The party arrives at the **site of the ambush**, setting up the next encounter with the Giant Spiders.

Scene 3: Ambush and Rescue

Setup

Location: A narrow, shadowed crevice in the Maerthwatch foothills, flanked by jagged rocks and overgrown with thick webbing. This natural spider den is eerily silent, with faint rustling noises echoing from unseen corners. Emeric is trapped inside a cocoon of webs near the center of the crevice, his faint, muffled cries for help breaking the oppressive quiet.

Atmosphere:

- The air is heavy and stale, with the musty smell of damp rock and old webs. The rocky walls are streaked with faintly glowing veins of ore, casting an unsettling light across the webs.
- The silence feels unnatural, broken only by the occasional sound of something skittering across stone.

Mood-Setting Narration for DM: "As you press further into the crevice, the world around you grows still. The air is thick with the scent of damp rock and the faint tang of something metallic. Veins of glowing ore glimmer faintly in the dim light, their silvery-blue hue casting eerie shadows across the terrain. The webbing thickens here, stretching in sticky curtains from jagged rocks to the ground. At the center of the chamber, a cocoon of webs dangles precariously between two rocky spires. From inside, you hear the weak, muffled cries of a voice calling for help. Suddenly, the air is pierced by a harsh, chittering screech, and movement stirs above you."

Combat Setup

Trigger: As the party approaches the cocoon or attempts to interact with it, two **Giant Spiders** emerge from above and ambush the group.

Narration for Combat Trigger:

"Without warning, two large shadows drop from the cliffs above. Their chitinous bodies glisten in the faint light of the ore veins, and their eight black eyes reflect your movements with unblinking malice. They let out piercing screeches as they scuttle into position, their fangs glistening with venom."

Emeric's Condition and Role in Scene

- **Condition:** Emeric is unconscious but alive, trapped within a cocoon of thick, sticky webs. His breathing is shallow, and his muffled cries fade as the battle intensifies.
 - **Cocoon Stats:** The web cocoon has **AC 10, 10 HP**, and is immune to poison and psychic damage.
 - **Rescue Mechanics:**
 - Players can use an **Action** during combat to cut open the cocoon. Freeing Emeric requires one round to fully remove the sticky webs.
 - If the cocoon is cut open, Emeric falls limp to the ground and is restrained until healed or stabilized.
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Enemies

Enemy 1 & 2: Giant Spiders (Monster Manual, CR 1, pg. 328 Monster Manual [11th Pr...])

- **AC:** 14
- **HP:** 26
- **Speed:** 30 ft., climb 30 ft.
- **Actions:**
 - **Bite:** +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. Hit: 1d8+3 piercing damage + 2d8 poison damage (DC 11 Constitution save for half poison damage).
 - **Web (Recharge 5-6):** Ranged Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, range 30/60 ft., one target. Hit: Target is restrained by webbing (DC 12 Strength check to escape).

Environmental Elements:

- **Webbed Terrain:** The ground near the cocoon is difficult terrain. Moving through it requires double movement or a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check to clear a 5-foot section.
 - **Rocky Cliffs:** The spiders can use their climbing speed to retreat to higher ground for half cover. Players can climb the rocks with a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** check for an advantage in melee combat.
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Tactics

1. **Ambush:**
 - The spiders begin combat by leaping down onto the party, attempting to **Web** one or two characters to restrain them.
 - One spider focuses on attacking anyone trying to cut open the cocoon, while the other uses its webs to immobilize the more vulnerable party members.
2. **Combat Adjustments:**

- If one spider drops to below 10 HP, it retreats up the cliffs and uses ranged **Web** attacks to slow the party.
 - If both spiders are defeated, their screeches alert a **Young Giant Spider** deeper in the crevice. The Young Giant Spider does not immediately attack but prepares to ambush during Scene 4.
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Skill Checks and Player Actions

1. **Spotting the Ambush:**
 - **Passive Perception DC 14:** Characters notice faint movement in the shadows above, avoiding the surprise round.
 - Failure: The spiders ambush with surprise.
 2. **Dealing with Webbing:**
 - Players may clear webs to create safer ground:
 - **Strength Check DC 12:** Clears a 5-foot section of webbing.
 - **Fire Damage:** Any fire clears 10 feet of webbing instantly but risks agitating the Young Giant Spider.
 3. **Rescuing Emeric:**
 - A player can attempt to cut open the cocoon:
 - **DC 10 Strength Check or AC 10 Attack:** Successfully removes the webbing in one round.
 - Once freed, Emeric remains unconscious and restrained until healed or stabilized:
 - **DC 12 Medicine Check:** Stabilizes him without magic.
 - Healing magic revives him, allowing him to weakly assist in his own escape.
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Treasure

1. **Hidden in the Webs (Optional, DC 14 Investigation):**
 - **Potion of Healing:** Found tangled in the webs near a skeletal victim.
 - **2 Gold Pieces and a Small Silver Brooch:** Emeric's family heirloom, found stuck to the cocoon.
 - **Glowing Ore Samples:** Three chunks of faintly glowing, silvery-blue ore embedded in the rocky walls, useful for magical crafting or as a future quest hook.
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Aftermath

Narration if the Party Succeeds:

"As the second spider collapses, its legs curling inward, the crevice falls silent once more. The faint glow of the ore veins illuminates the thick, sticky webbing that clings to every surface. Cutting through the cocoon, you reveal Emeric—his face pale and streaked with dirt. His breathing is shallow, but his eyes flutter open briefly as he whispers weakly, 'Thank you... I thought I was done for.'"

Transition to Scene 4

Narration for Leaving the Crevice: "With Emeric freed and the spiders defeated, the crevice feels emptier but no less ominous. The faint scuttling of distant legs suggests the danger is not entirely gone. As you guide Emeric out of the webbed lair, his whispered warning lingers in your mind: 'Bandits... I heard voices... they were planning something. Something bad for Cobblecrest.'"

Scene 4: Escape from the Foothills

Setup

Location: The narrow trails leading out of the Maerthwatch foothills, descending back toward the Silverstream Rapids and the outskirts of Cobblecrest. The environment is still treacherous, with loose rocks, jagged cliffs, and faint remnants of spider webs hanging in the brush.

Atmosphere:

- The party feels a mix of relief and tension as they leave the spider's lair, but the eerie quiet and faint sounds of distant movement suggest they're not entirely out of danger.
- A growing sense of unease accompanies the group as they traverse the foothills. Shadows lengthen as the afternoon begins to wane, and the forest edges feel watchful.

Mood-Setting Narration for DM: "As you leave the spider's lair behind, the path ahead feels no less perilous. The faint glow of the ore veins fades into memory as the jagged cliffs and loose rocks dominate your focus. The air is still thick with tension, and every gust of wind carries the echo of distant sounds—rustling leaves, snapping twigs, and perhaps something more deliberate. The comforting sights of Cobblecrest lie hours away, but the journey feels far from over."

New Encounter: Bandit Ambush

Trigger:

As the party approaches a narrow section of the trail, they are ambushed by a small group of **Blackthorn Syndicate bandits**, hinting at the larger threat looming over Cobblecrest.

Narration for Encounter Trigger:

"The trail narrows sharply here, forcing you into single file as you wind between two steep rock walls. The rustling noises you've been hearing grow louder, but they still seem distant—until they don't. Without warning, a gruff voice barks from above: *'That's far enough! Drop your weapons and leave the boy. You're on Blackthorn Syndicate land now!'* Looking up, you see a shadowed figure with a crossbow trained on you, while more shapes step out from the underbrush ahead."

Enemies

Blackthorn Syndicate Bandits:

1. **Bandit Leader (Bandit Captain)** (Monster Manual, pg. 344):
 - **AC:** 15
 - **HP:** 65
 - **Actions:**
 - **Multiattack:** The leader makes two melee attacks with their scimitar or one ranged attack with a dagger.
 - **Tactics:** The leader directs the ambush and prioritizes taking down the strongest-looking party member to assert dominance.
2. **3 Bandits** (Monster Manual, pg. 343):
 - **AC:** 12
 - **HP:** 11 each
 - **Actions:**
 - **Crossbow Attack:** +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., 1d8+1 piercing damage.
 - **Tactics:** The bandits use ranged attacks from cover until they can close in for melee.

Environmental Elements:

- **Rocky Cliffs (Elevation):** Two of the bandits have high ground and use the rocky cliffs for cover. Attacking them requires climbing (DC 13 Athletics).
- **Narrow Trail (Difficult Terrain):** The narrow path makes it hard to maneuver, restricting characters to single file unless they use the steep sides (Athletics DC 12).
- **Hidden Snare Trap:** The bandits have laid a snare trap along the trail:
 - **Perception DC 13:** Spot the trap before triggering it.
 - If triggered: The character must make a **DC 14 Dexterity saving throw** or be restrained by the snare (escape requires a DC 12 Strength check).

Tactics

1. **Opening Moves:**
 - The **Bandit Leader** demands the party's surrender but delays attacking if the party attempts to negotiate or roleplay. If the players resist or make sudden movements, the ambush begins.
 - The **Bandits** use crossbows from cover to weaken the group, prioritizing restrained or low-HP characters.
2. **During Combat:**
 - The **Leader** engages in melee if the party breaks through the initial ambush or threatens the snipers on the cliffs.

- The **Bandits** focus fire on spellcasters or ranged attackers who threaten their position.
 - 3. **Morale:**
 - If the **Leader** drops below 15 HP, they call for a retreat, yelling, *"Fall back! We'll deal with them another time!"*
 - Any surviving bandits scatter into the forest, leaving behind clues about the Syndicate's plans.
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Skill Checks and Roleplay Opportunities

1. **Avoiding the Snare Trap:**
 - Players can detect the trap with a **DC 13 Perception check** before triggering it. If detected, they can disarm it with a **DC 12 Dexterity (Thieves' Tools)** check.
 2. **Negotiation (Optional):**
 - Players can attempt to negotiate with the Bandit Leader. Possible outcomes:
 - **Persuasion (DC 15):** The leader offers to let the group leave unscathed if they pay **10 gold pieces** or leave behind the glowing ore samples.
 - **Intimidation (DC 15):** The leader hesitates but orders the ambush anyway, though the bandits start with **disadvantage on initiative rolls**.
 3. **Investigating the Aftermath:**
 - If the bandits retreat or are defeated, players can search their belongings:
 - **DC 13 Investigation Check:** Reveals a crude map marking a planned **raid on Cobblecrest**, targeting the market square.
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Treasure

1. **Loot from Bandits:**
 - **25 gp** total from the bandits' coin pouches.
 - **2 Healing Potions** (carried by the Bandit Leader).
 - A **crude map** of Cobblecrest with a note scrawled in charcoal: *"Market square—dawn. Take everything."*
 2. **Narrative Loot:**
 - **Blackthorn Insignia:** A small wooden badge shaped like a thorn, marking the bandits' allegiance to the Blackthorn Syndicate. This item can be used as evidence when warning Cobblecrest.
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Aftermath

Narration if the Party Defeats the Bandits:

"The final bandit collapses, their cries fading into the stillness of the foothills. The trail is eerily quiet once again, save for the labored breathing of Emeric and the creak of wind through the trees. Searching the fallen enemies, you uncover a crude map scrawled with plans to raid Cobblecrest. The urgency of your mission weighs heavy as you press onward, knowing the village has little time to prepare."

Narration if the Bandits Retreat:

"The remaining bandits disappear into the dense forest, their laughter and curses echoing as they vanish from view. Left behind are scattered weapons and a crumpled piece of parchment—a map of Cobblecrest, marked with a chilling note: *'Market square—dawn.'*"

Scene 5: Return to Cobblecrest and Aftermath

Setup

Location: The final stretch of the trail leading from the Maerthwatch foothills back to Cobblecrest, transitioning into the familiar outskirts of the village. The players carry the weight of their harrowing encounter with the spiders, the ambush by bandits, and the troubling evidence of a potential attack on the town.

Atmosphere:

- As the group nears Cobblecrest, the tension of the wilds gives way to a brief sense of relief. The warm glow of village lights flickers through the trees, and the hum of life begins to fill the air again.
- However, the party's recent discoveries—the crude map, the glowing ore samples, and Emeric's weakened state—leave a lingering unease as they consider what lies ahead.

Mood-Setting Narration for DM: "The rugged trail finally begins to even out, the jagged cliffs and shadows of the foothills receding into the distance. In their place, the soft light of Cobblecrest's lanterns appears through the trees, the sound of crackling hearths and faint laughter breaking the tense silence of the journey. Despite the sight of home, the urgency of your mission and the memory of the bandit ambush weigh heavily. Emeric stumbles slightly as he walks, his pale face etched with exhaustion, and the crude map found on the bandits clutched in your hands speaks to danger still to come."

Arrival in Cobblecrest

Narration as the Party Enters the Village:

"As you step into the outskirts of Cobblecrest, villagers glance your way, their curiosity quickly turning to concern as they notice Emeric's battered state and the determined expressions on your faces. A few call out to one another, and before long, Balin Ironhand emerges from the forge, his hammer in hand, his face a mixture of relief and worry."

Balin Ironhand's Reaction

Dialogue Options:

1. **Relief and Gratitude:**

- *“Emeric! By the gods, you’re alive! What happened up there?”*
 - Balin pulls Emeric into a rough embrace, visibly shaken by his apprentice’s condition. After checking the boy for injuries, he turns to the party, his voice thick with gratitude: *“I don’t have the words to thank you for this. You’ve done more than I could’ve asked—Cobblecrest owes you a debt.”*
- 2. If Players Mention the Bandits:**
- *“Bandits? Planning something against Cobblecrest?”* Balin’s expression darkens as he looks toward the village square. *“We need to get this to Mayor Greenfield immediately. If what you’re saying is true, we don’t have much time to prepare.”*
- 3. If Players Mention the Glowing Ore Samples:**
- Balin examines the glowing ore curiously, running his thick fingers over the strange veins. *“This is... remarkable. I’ve heard rumors of enchanted ore deep in the mountains, but I never thought I’d see it myself. Leave it with me—I’ll see what I can make of it. With time, I might be able to craft something special for you.”*
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Player Interaction Opportunities

- 1. Questions from Balin:**
- **“What happened up there?”**
 - Players can recount the spider encounter, the ambush by the bandits, and the discovery of the crude map.
 - **“Did you find anything else?”**
 - If the players show him the glowing ore samples or the bandit insignias, Balin offers insight:
 - Ore: *“This is rare material. I’ll need time to test its properties, but it might have uses far beyond crafting simple weapons.”*
 - Bandit Insignia: *“Blackthorn Syndicate... I’ve heard of them. A nasty bunch. If they’re here, we’re in for trouble.”*
- 2. Roleplay with Emeric:**
- Emeric is weak but coherent enough to express his gratitude:
 - *“Thank you for saving me. I thought I’d never make it back... Those spiders, and then those bandits... It all happened so fast.”*
 - If asked for details about the bandits: *“I didn’t hear much, just that they were planning to hit the market square... soon. I’m sorry I couldn’t do more.”*
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Cliffhanger and Mayor Greenfield

Meeting with Mayor Greenfield:

If the players decide to bring the crude map and the warning to Mayor Greenfield, they find him in the town hall, speaking with the constable.

Narration for Arrival: "The Cobblecrest town hall is quiet but bustling with energy as the evening approaches. Inside, Mayor Greenfield sits at a sturdy wooden desk, his spectacles perched on his nose as he reads over some documents. The constable stands nearby, a stocky dwarf with a no-nonsense expression. Both men look up as you enter, and the mayor's face tightens with concern as he notices the worn expressions on your faces and the map in your hands."

Mayor Greenfield's Dialogue:

1. Upon Hearing the Warning:

- *"Bandits, you say? Planning an attack on the market square? This is troubling news indeed."*
- Greenfield examines the map and nods grimly. *"We can't take chances. I'll organize a militia at once. But we'll need more information—do you think you can track these bandits to their camp before they strike?"*

2. If Players Refuse to Help:

- *"I won't force you, but without more information, the village will be vulnerable. I hope you'll reconsider."*

Treasure

1. Balin's Payment:

- Balin hands over **5 gp per party member** as promised.
- If the players returned the glowing ore samples, Balin promises to craft something special for them in the coming days.

2. Mayor's Support:

- If the players assist with the defense of Cobblecrest or agree to track the bandits, Greenfield offers a **20 gp reward** for additional information or successful elimination of the bandit threat.

Foreshadowing and Hooks

1. Hooded Figure (Optional):

- While the players speak with Balin or the mayor, they may notice a **Perception Check (DC 13)**:

- Success: *"You catch sight of a hooded figure lingering near the village well, their gaze fixed on your group. The moment your eyes lock, they turn and vanish into the nearby alley."*
- Failure: Villagers later whisper about a stranger spotted near the market square, adding tension to the bandit subplot.

2. Tracking the Bandits:

- If the players agree to investigate the bandits, Mayor Greenfield provides a rough idea of their possible location based on the map. This sets up a follow-up adventure to infiltrate or ambush the bandit camp.

3. Glowing Ore Mystery:

- Balin's promise to craft something from the ore serves as a narrative incentive for the players to return to Cobblecrest in the future, linking the ore to broader campaign elements.

Narration for Session Ending

"As the last of the day's light fades over Cobblecrest, the town hall bustles with quiet preparation. Villagers whisper nervously about shadows on the horizon and danger in the woods. Balin's forge burns brightly into the night, its glow a beacon of hope as you reflect on the battles you've fought and the threats that still linger. Whatever comes next, Cobblecrest will need you again soon."