

# AN ASSASSIN'S ANTHEM

## Chapter 11 - Bloodbath

Riley stood along with everyone else. The entire group began a rapid exit, streaming out the door and toward the wall. The fog rippled around them as they walked down the cobblestone street.

A small army of people walked over to the picket, where leaders were barking orders and distributing supplies.

Riley approached and saw someone gesturing. Splintering off, he joined the line of people below level fifty.

Shuffling forward, he took a pail of stones and the offered sling with a nod. Then he followed the line of others, a smile spreading across his face as he saw his friends.

“Stay close,” Hassan said as he eyed them. “I think they stole my breakfast.”

Riley turned and dropped his jaw in feigned surprise. “No. They wouldn’t do that.” He shook his head while glancing at the noble’s coin purse. Should I do it?

“They would,” Hassan said, shooting a dirty look at Arjun, who grinned at them both.

Antonio started to walk in their direction before a guard stopped him. Riley chuckled and turned back toward the forests, trying to see anything out there. I hope the traps worked. All I see is fog. He waved his hand in the mist.

“We need a druid,” Hassan said. “The Rangers can clear some of it.” He stepped up onto a small platform and held out a hand.

Riley took his hand and stepped onto the platform.

“We’ll get better shots. Use the cover,” Hassan gestured at the small wall.

“Thank you, sir,” Riley said while turning and rolling his eyes. Then his smile grew as he saw Arjun sneaking closer. He’s going for that coin purse.

Hassan nocked an arrow. “I’m Hassan Mishra, second son of the Baron.”

“Course, sir,” Riley said and bobbed a curtsy. Then spun and took in the surroundings, eyeing the nearby rooftops and cottages. Rotating back, he grabbed a rock. “I’m Maddie. You met my pa. He’s funny; likes his stories, he does.”

Hassan chuckled. “I suppose. Though they’re completely outrageous.”

Riley smiled and nodded. “He likes his fun.” He hefted the sling and then began spinning it. Releasing a strap, he sent a stone soaring off into the fog. Feels alright. Loading another, he stood there and waited.

A snap and squeals rang from the forest. A silence fell on the group and city. The sound of branches breaking reached their ears.

“Fire when you can,” a man in uniform ordered as he passed the group.

Riley listened and waited, watching the higher levels from the corner of his eye.

Roger whirled the sling into a blur. Releasing an end, he sent the stone singing out into the woods. A squeal rang out as arrows and stones flew through the fog.

Roaring, the goblins charged toward the city. Riley sent a stone flying into the mist and frowned. I’m going to be useless if I can’t see.

Riley used Ambush and appeared on the rooftop. Whirring his sling in a circle, he released the stone into the mist as the rain droplets fell.

Riley grabbed another stone as the rain came crashing down in a torrent. Struggling to see, he blinked back the water and pulled his cloak tighter.

The torrent of water deluged, knocking any arrows and stones from the sky. Everyone stood still as it crashed around them.

As suddenly as it began, it slowed to a light drizzle and revealed the scene. Wet goblins were running through the mud. Like a plume of water, they'd burst from the trees and blanketed the farms.

Riley shook himself from the shock, loaded up another stone, and sent it zipping out into the goblins, who were now wading through muddy fields.

A man below yelled loudly. "No quarter!"

Bolster! You regain two stamina, and your strength is boosted by 5 for one minute.

Riley shot off another stone, smashing it into the skull of a goblin that slammed into the mud. Reaching down, he grabbed another stone and launched it, bouncing it off a goblin's skull. The goblin tumbled, falling into the mud. The one behind stepped on it and continued forward.

Grabbing another stone, Riley spun up the sling, found his next target, and launched. The rock shot through the air and bounced off a goblin's raised shield. With a scowl, Riley grabbed another rock to try again.

The screaming goblins ran forward, wading through the mud with surprising ease. Grabbing stones, they threw them back as they charged.

Riley ducked behind a chimney, spun, and fired at one goblin who was slinging rocks. The rock smashed into its chest with a crack, sending it sprawling in the mud.

Ducking behind the chimney, Riley grabbed another stone and slung them as fast as he could.

“Spears up!” a man shouted as the goblins closed the final gap.

People below lifted massive spears, letting the goblins stake themselves as they ran forward. Blood sprayed as the horde slammed into the defense with a loud thump and then a crack.

A portion of the picket snapped and buckled under the weight of the horde. It slammed down, taking out five defenders that didn’t retreat in time.

People screamed and panicked as the goblins spilled through the hall. Roger dashed down the line, moving so fast that he blurred. With a short sword in both hands, he began a whirring dance of decapitation. Blood erupted in a storm as he cut down the surging goblins.

Riley watched in silent awe as he saw his dad moving like an acrobat while people panicked. Wish I could help him, Riley thought as he watched. Then he glanced back to his resources. I do have bardic inspiration.

Pulling on it, he began singing loudly. “Listen all and listen well. Gather in and hear the tale about a man who saved a town and the people who stood their ground. For once there was a goblin horde that invaded and surged forward. But Matt the Slayer was in town. Though in danger, he held his ground. The guard and all the people, too, fought with honor as they slew. The goblins did not stand a chance. Divided fall. Make your stand.”

He felt all his inspiration drain away. Text flashed in front of him.

Skill Unlocked: Inspiring Song (F). Bolster your allies with magic and music. Strength and Move Speed increased by 1 for one minute. Costs five Bardic Inspiration and impacts allies within ten meters. The radius of influence expands by one meter for each additional inspiration spent.

Skill automatically assigned to Bard.

Smiling, Riley grabbed another stone and began slinging them into the horde. Other soldiers surged out into the fields, cutting down the goblins.

The horde surged while a group of guards countered, plugging the hole and cutting down goblins.

With his sling whistling, Riley fired off dozens of shots before another crack rang out. Another chunk of picket came crumbling down.

Grabbing swords, guards began fighting. Riley glanced down. Panic filled him as he saw his friends. Arjun was on the ground. Antonio was bleeding, and Tahani was trying to pull them both from the mess.

The goblin above Arjun raised his club. Riley dropped the sling, grabbed his knife, and used Ambush. Slamming his blade into the goblin, he shoved it away from his friend and then felt pain slam into his shoulder.

Spinning, he slashed the goblin in front of him and sidestepped one club while another slammed into his legs, sweeping him off his feet.

Slamming into the ground, Riley blinked and sat up in time to see a club descending.

Shit. Raising his knife, he tried to dodge away as time seemed to slow. The morning sun dimmed and went dark as if warning him of his demise. He tried vainly to get out of the way as it descended and then vanished.

The sunlight suddenly returned. The goblin's head, along with several others, dropped to the ground. Blood sprayed everywhere, erupting out in geysers. The sound of battle fell away as every remaining goblin tumbled to the ground.

Riley shivered as the icy breeze hit. He looked up at a familiar face.

"What?" someone whispered.

"Gods watch over us," a woman responded.

Riley took his dad's hand and stood. "Thanks."

Roger pulled him into a hug. "Be careful. My stamina is gone," he whispered. "You run if anything else happens. Got it?"

"Got it," Riley whispered back.

"Was that you?" a soldier asked in surprise as he approached the man who'd appeared in their midst. "You have an S-rank skill? Why not use it before?"

"A Father's Wrath has conditions," Roger replied tersely, pulling Riley towards the hole in the fence.

The guard nodded.

Riley followed his dad out into the gore-covered fields. Stepping lightly, he matched his father's steps to avoid the mess.

"Where are you going?" Hassan called out.

"Cleaning up the rest before they show up." Roger continued walking while pulling out the occasional arrow.

"We're coming," Hassan said and jogged forward. Several guards followed.

"If you wish." Roger leaned close to his son. "Are you alright?"

Riley nodded. "Yes. Thanks." He pulled up his notices.

You have killed 19 goblins from levels 9 to 41.

You have assisted in killing 2362 goblins from levels 3 to level 484. (Variable penalty based on contribution).

You have reached base level twenty-two!

Assassin has reached level sixteen!

Ranger has reached level sixteen!

Bard has reached level sixteen!

Nearly tripping on a body, he turned his focus back to the ground as he walked through the field of dead.

“Why sing?” Hassan asked as he closed the gap. “I had a buff from it. Are you a Bard?”

Riley smiled. “Music gave me a skill. It’s a nice one. I had to refuse the class, sadly. Maybe I shouldn’t have.” He shrugged and headed towards the trees.

Roger turned, his hands flashing. “Quiet. More.”

Riley pulled down his bow and began searching the obscured trees for outlines. Finding one, he nocked an arrow, aimed, and fired. The arrow cut through the fog and sunk into a goblin. It tumbled to the ground as Riley grabbed another.

A small group of goblins charged forward with clubs raised. A volley of arrows greeted them, dropping the dozen instantly. Riley lowered his arrow and went to get his first one, ripping it free from the body.

Then he turned and followed Roger into the trees, pausing momentarily to grab some leaves. He rapidly used them to clean off some of the blood off him while he walked.

Roger moved closer to his son. “We’re clear, but stay close.” He steered around their traps, which had small trails of blood.

Hassan jogged forward. “If we find a place of power, it is reserved for nobility. Though I’ll consider bringing her along if she adheres to the rules.”

“What rules?” Riley asked with a quirked brow.

“All crystals and items belong to the possessing noble. That is the law. How do you not know?” Hassan asked.

“She’s never seen one. So, didn’t matter much,” Roger replied with a shrug.

“She’ll listen ter yeh.”

Riley nodded. I should have stolen his coin purse. A crooked smile spread across his face. Then again. There are plenty of ways to lose one, and I have time.

Spoiler