

AN ASSASSIN'S ANTHEM

Chapter 16 - The Art of the Riot

Sound rolled around the cavern, rebounding off the walls. The kobolds removed their cuffs, and the beat drowned out their noises. Goblins began searching the area, trying to find the noise source.

I might be found... I should be someone else. He triggered Assume Disguise. "I need to look like a goblin."

Ew! You'd better upgrade my pretty skill for this! ~Beauty

Riley looked at the message and then felt his body shrinking. His attire shifted to fit. Makeup caked his face and hands. He looked down at the green mess that coated them. "Too far a jump?" he prayed up.

Correct. Humans and elves are similar enough. ~Disguise.

You look so gross right now! I love it! ~Mischief.

I hate it! ~Beauty

Riley continued drumming as he crept into the room, moving towards the center. Glancing toward the forge, he nearly faltered as he saw the red text and the chained elemental. Like liquid fire, it was blazing in the center of the forge, shackled with heavy metal manacles.

Fire Elemental - Level ???

Blinking, Riley looked away from the blazing thing and drummed more rapidly. A goblin looked over and barked at him. Not waiting further, Riley targeted the kobolds and triggered Inspiring Song, burning all but four Inspiration.

Magic washed across the large stone cavern, bouncing off the smooth rock. The nearby goblin reached for its sword, and complete pandemonium broke out. Kobolds everywhere turned on their captors, clawing and biting into the goblins. The group in the makeshift prison came charging out.

Riley ran straight for the fire, dashing straight past the other goblin. The goblin pulled out its sword, turned, and stumbled, a rock bouncing off its skull from a nearby kobold.

Riley skidded to a stop, sending a shower of gravel and dirt into the flames. Smoke and ash spewed out into the air. Bolting once more, Riley raced into the shadows and looked back at the forge. Shame I can't get the elemental loose. He considered ways to do it and then gave up; elementals weren't intelligent or rational. It would attack him if he got close.

Turning back to the rebellion, he grabbed a rock and pulled out his sling. A kobold staggered and fell, bleeding from a wound. Riley whipped a stone at it, ending its suffering and giving him some experience.

Grabbing another rock, Riley began working to aid the kobolds and steal whatever kills he could.

Goblin guards began streaming into the room from the side corridors. They joined the ranks and pulled out blades, hacking and slashing into the kobolds. Blood sprayed and splattered, mixing with the smoke and ash to create a red fog.

A goblin began barking orders, pulling others to its side. Kobolds, who'd grabbed weapons, charged into the line. One twirled, chopped, and clawed in a blur, shredding into a goblin's face. The goblin hacked away at the kobold, cutting out chunks of flesh.

Riley fired a stone, bouncing it off the goblin's skull with a loud crack. The enraged goblin took it out on the next kobold, cutting off an arm and leg before it staggered and fell.

The victorious, bleeding kobold chirped loudly. Riley bounced a stone off its skull. The dazed kobold staggered and then was hacked down by another goblin.

Riley grabbed another rock and squinted into the mess. Not fast enough. Embracing a new strategy in the red room, he looked at his stamina pool and pulled out his knives.

Spotting a goblin lying there coughing, Riley used Ambush and stabbed its chest. Then he dashed past another, slitting its throat on the way by.

Like a phantom in the smoke, he raced forward and slammed his blades into another goblin. As it twisted toward him, he used Ambush and stabbed the kobold it was fighting. It spun as red droplets of blood sprayed.

Riley used Ambush and stepped to the next fight, slashing at a kobold's spine. As the kobold spun, the goblin ran it through and turned.

Riley slammed both blades into it. He felt the skin harden to prevent the attack. The goblin swung. Riley triggered Ambush instantly and stabbed a new goblin in a cut across its side.

The goblin squealed and spun. Riley didn't wait; he triggered Ambush again, slamming blades into a bleeding kobold. It lashed out, swinging for his face. Riley triggered Ambush and disappeared, letting the strike hit another kobold.

The two started hissing and fighting each other. Three goblins charged toward them. Riley stabbed one and vanished again. The goblin swung, its blade smashing into its counterpart and sending a spray of blood splashing on the stone.

Chaining Ambush, Riley repeated his ruse, destroying trust with every strike. The battle quickly became a brawl as the creatures all attacked each other.

Darting into the shadows, Riley looked to his escape path and waited, listening to the sound of loud steps.

The group of goblins that went to investigate emerged into the mayhem. They began barking out loudly. That got the nearby kobolds' attention. Stones and weapons flew and smashed into the group.

The group charged forward, hacking and slashing at any kobolds. A blood-crazed, desperate goblin stabbed one with its sword, sinking it between its ribs.

The group went wild, cutting down the goblin. Riley crept forward and used Ambush, appearing up in the passage. Opting to defer experience for survival, he peered around the corner and did his best to watch.

The goblin group stuck together and began using non-lethal force on the goblins while cutting down kobolds. Order began to be restored as other goblins gathered with them.

The sound of battle ebbed. The goblins started trying to quell the kobolds instead of just killing them. Riley sighed and looked at his resources. I'll need a night's rest and can only try this once more.

Studying once more, he looked out to the dozens. I won't clear this group, will I? Disappointment filled him while he walked away, heading up the passage.

The last sounds of the battle died out. Riley pulled up his notifications as he crept up the passage.

You have assisted in killing 34 goblins from levels 151 to level 197. (Variable penalty based on contribution).

You have assisted in killing 57 kobolds from level 100 to level 158. (Variable penalty based on contribution).

Your base level has advanced: 25 → 26!

Assassin has advanced: 19 → 20!

Ranger has advanced: 19 → 20!

Bard has advanced: 19 → 20!

Riley perked up as he read it. Closer. Then, a glowing chest formed in front of him. Please let me be lucky, he thought as he shut his eyes and was reminded of the makeup. “Right. Back to Maddie. Let’s hide my level. Subtract one for now.” He triggered the skill and let out a breath of relief as the paint vanished.

Biting his lip, he reached down and flipped open the chest. Four crystals sat there, glowing softly. One was perfect. He gently picked them up and smiled broadly. Placing them into his bag, he looked at his classes and skills. It’ll increase the odds if I wait, but I may need them.

Debating it, he headed up the passage and then grimaced. He’s up there. And if I want him to wait a night, I need to make it worth his while. Riley pulled out his coin purse and dug into his armor for another.

He picked up a single crystal and moved it into the purse. Then he sighed and looked at the others. You know what Dad would say. “Always have a cover. Then rob them blind, little thief.” Riley giggled and moved five more lesser crystals along with a perfect one.

Stashing the rest in his armor, he headed to the cliff and grabbed the rope. He used the knots to climb the face of it rapidly. Then he paused midway and swung to the side.

Landing in a small cave, he saw a chest sitting there. Grabbing a pebble, he chucked it at the chest; it bounced off.

Pulling out his sword, he walked forward and stabbed. The sword sunk into the wood, causing the old thing to crumble. Whoops. Oh well. Better safe. Riley blushed and opened it.

A rusty old sword sat there. Next to it was a coin purse and two imperfect F-tier crystals with no attunement. He grabbed the purse and opened it to find a dozen old gold coins.

He placed the crystals in the purse and grabbed the sword. Then he walked back to the rope and resumed his ascent, climbing up the rope and calling out with a warning. "It's jus' me. Don' attack me."

"Maddie?" Hassan asked as he poked his head over the edge while holding up an ember. His smile grew as he looked at the sword. "You found a chest?"

"Aye. In a little cave," Riley said as he scaled. He climbed over the lip and then walked to the stream.

Sitting down, he took a long drink.

"Well?" Hassan asked as he took the sword. He sighed at the rust. "Is it magic?"

"Doubt it. It's rusty." Riley shook his head and took another sip of the mineral-rich spring water.

"The purse, Maddie," Hassan said as he held out his hand.

Riley scowled and huffed. "But I earned 'em. Yeh didn't do nothin', and yeh took my share!"

"Those are the laws, Maddie. Do not make me use the guards." Hassan's eyes glinted with anger. "I'm asking you to trust me. I will reward you if you behave. Don't you want a nice mayor to marry instead of some commoner?"

Riley pouted and crossed his arms. "Could have both," he mumbled.

"Maddie, now!"

Riley threw the crystals at him, hitting him in the shoulder. Hassan grabbed it and looked inside.

Riley leaned against the stone wall and listened to the stream while considering other options. If I skip it, there must be more out there. I could look... But it'll be higher levels. He grimaced at the thought.

Hassan tucked away the purse. "Let's go, Maddie."

"I can do one more. An' it's worth it," Riley replied.

Confusion spread across Hassan's face. Then, it was replaced with greed. "You killed some?... Maddie! We just discussed this. Don't make me your enemy."

Riley gasped and covered his mouth.

"You're a terrible liar," Hassan said as he reached down and pulled the coin purse off Riley's neck.

"Please. I can' do this with nothing," Riley begged while forcing emotions forward. Calling on a distant ache inside and the feeling of losing the crystals, he let his eyes start to water. "Please."

"It'll be alright, Maddie," Hassan said as he looked inside. His smile grew further. "Well done! And you can do it again?"

"Once," Riley mumbled. "But I need ter sleep."

Hassan nodded. "My men can wait. Let's go up to the prior passage and make a quick camp." He emptied the purse and handed it back.

Riley gave the room a final once over. He looked at the cliff and steam. Then he slapped his forehead. I'm a bloody fool. "Change o' plan, sir. Change of plan." He grinned and headed for the rope.