

AN ASSASSIN'S ANTHEM

Chapter 7 - Early to Bed

Riley looked at the text while stars blurred around him. He looked and saw a giant ball that grew larger and larger. Then everything went blurry as he staggered into two arms.

“Easy now. The journey back can be rough,” Roger said as he grabbed his son.

Riley clamped his eyes shut while his head throbbed. He massaged his brow.

“And that’s what happens when you drink,” Roger said. “Never do it.”

“Seriously?” Riley asked.

“It can,” the priest said as he walked over. Then he stopped and stared. “You got a bard class?” he asked with shock plastered across his face. The words bounced around the room.

Time to bend the truth, Riley said as he blinked. Is my disguise active? If not, the priest will know... Unless Dad can hide us both. I’m not sure how that skill works. I should have gotten the details.

“Take another C-tier, please,” the priest said.

Riley willed himself to take the Ranger class.

Ranger class slotted. One class slot remaining.

The priest nodded and wrote it down. “And the other two?”

Riley triggered Assume Disguise, “Me, but with Guard and Butcher showing as the disguise.” He felt energy wash across his skin like rain from a storm.

“Butcher and guard?” the priest asked.

Riley kept his eyes shut as he felt the nausea diminish.

“Butcher and guard?” the priest asked again.

“Yes, sorry,” Riley murmured while he looked up and blinked. “That’s a trip.”

The priest chuckled and nodded. “Of course. It is an experience to leave their presence, and the first is most shocking.”

“Did you make a vow?” Riley asked as he looked at the man in his robes.

The priest shook his head. “I just volunteer one day a week. I’m hoping the gods will view it favorably, and it is helping my insight abilities.”

“Excellent. I’ll have it noted. Since you are sixteen and awakened, you will be recruited for the goblin fight. If the alarms ring, report to the barracks with Guard and Hunter.”

Riley nodded. “Of course, sir.”

Roger began escorting his son out. “Thank you,” he called out, dropping a half gold on the donations tray.

The priest perked up and waved. Riley followed his father down the aisle and out into the street. “Goblins?” Riley asked.

“That’s the plan... Bard?” Roger asked back with concern visible on his face.

“Long story,” Riley murmured. “It’ll be fine. I have a really strong movement skill, and I have my third class slot.”

“So, it’s locked in.” Roger gnawed on his lip. “We’ll have to make it work.” He let out a long sigh as they walked through the busy streets.

Riley grimaced. “Sorry,” he said softly. “We can still do it. And it should help with social stuff.” He smiled nervously at his dad.

Roger nodded. “That’s true. It’ll be fine. Try to get her to give you something more if she gives you something worthless.”

“Will do.” Riley walked down the dirt lane. “Dad? Have they mentioned me? Do they, umm, hate me?” He forced himself to ask it. “They won’t just use me, will they?”

Roger let out a pained breath. “I’m sorry, Riley. The races aren’t exactly unified here. I’m working on it, and they’ve come around. If they do that, talk to me. I won’t let that happen.” His eyes blazed with commitment as he looked at his son.

Riley nodded and glanced at his skills. Good penalty for insight and perception. I’ll need to level them though. The first fifty shouldn’t take too long if I do it right. “When are we leaving?” Riley asked.

“We’ll head there tonight,” Roger said while walking into the cottage. “Did you wind up with a disguise ability? And what is your other class? Thief?”

“Spellthief. Will your assassin skill still work?”

Roger chuckled. “Of course, you got one. My skill will work for a year, so abuse it. Your stealth and deception will be boosted significantly.” He mussed with Riley’s hair. “What skills?”

“A disguise ability that’s S-tier, but the gods get to decide what I look like. Death’s Cloak, Ambusher, and Dancer’s form, which is a movement boost.”

Roger whistled softly. “That’ll make it easier. Can you use the disguise for a guard and ranger combo? Pick something temporary because we’re gone afterward.”

Riley nodded.

“I have some things for you to study. But focus on your bard book first since that’ll draw attention. We’ll focus on the others as we travel. Divvy up your skills. Put as many into Assassin as you can.”

Riley nodded and pulled them up. Seeing they were all compatible, he assigned them to that class, boosting its level by eleven.

Walking forward, Riley skidded and flailed as his legs and body surged with newfound strength, dexterity, and speed.

Like a child on the ice, he skidded and caught himself on the wall while blushing furiously.

“Do some stretches while you study,” Roger called out with a chuckle before turning toward the cooking pot.

Riley blushed and walked into his small room. He grabbed the book. Music, I ask your guidance. Don't let this be a waste. Our family falls. The time has called for us to regain place. So help me on this journey. Let our family rise once more. I cannot wait to meet them. That I now implore.

Riley took a seat in the wooden chair and smiled. I'll show them, and we'll restore the family. He looked down at the book.

“I'll be back in a bit,” Roger said as he poked his head in. “Happy birthday, Riley. And congratulations. I'm sure you'll have your own wanted poster in no time.”

Riley laughed, waved, and turned back to the book. He flipped it open and started reading.

The bardic class excels in social endeavors. As many social skills have a justified negative stigma, this has caused several problems for the class. You must carefully walk the path lest you develop abilities that can ensnare minds. That will cause you a great deal of trouble when living in any form of civilization.

In this book, I will walk over some of the more practical uses as well as the social skills that are highly beneficial to those around you.

For now, we shall start with the unique bard resource, Inspiration. This fuels many skills and spells. It's also a core resource. So, start by finding the pool inside yourself. Most find it as some inner song. Recognize it, feel it, and then try to use it by directing it toward someone using your voice or by playing music.

Riley turned focus inward and began trying to sense it. Minutes turned into an hour as he eventually felt the strange churning flow inside him. Then he tried willing it out by humming lightly in the direction of his father, who was back home.

A spurt of water jetted out and splashed against the wall, crashing down in little droplets. With a look of horror on his face, Riley tried to will it away. As it seemed to vanish, he felt the river diminish a little. Is that my mana? Text in his vision answered the question.

Skill Unlocked: Conjure water. Cost varies based on the amount created or removed.

+10 XP to Ranger, Bard, and Spell Thief.

With a giggle and grin, he began searching again, idly humming as he kept finding his mana.

The feeling of the roaring water surged through his body, washing across his skin like summer rain. He embraced the feeling and began humming along with the roaring waters inside.

Roger walked over. "Bard does suit you."

Riley hummed louder, willing some of the song out. He felt it fly away like a gust of wind. "It's just so soothing. Is it all like this?"

Roger's eyes glowed as he felt a burst of energy hit him. "I don't know. Mana was never my specialty. Come get lunch. Then we'll get some sleep. We'll go hunt during the night."

Riley nodded. "Disguises?"

"If it'll help your stealth, use it," Roger said with a smile. "Does it need to be active?"

Riley studied the text again and shook his head. "It has that apart from the disguise."

"Then you won't need one," Roger said as he walked down the narrow hallway.

Riley stood and walked out of his small room, entering the kitchen. He took the bowl of stew and began eating, enjoying the flavor. Where'd Dad get this? He looked up.

"I bought it," Roger said with a chuckle. "It is your birthday. Sorry about the lack of gifts. We'll get some after we head home."

Riley chuckled. "I was just surprised. I wondered if you had finally gotten a cooking skill."

"Nope," Roger said proudly and resumed eating.

Riley chuckled and resumed eating, dunking the bread in it. The two ate quietly, the sounds of the city carrying into the small cottage. Riley took another bite and looked around the small thing. The hearth was cold, the pot hanging over the ashes. The table was worn with several cracks. He patted it as he finished the meal.

Then he heard a bell ring once. The thunderous boom rolled out, warning that the gates were now closed. They are going to stay closed, Riley thought to himself as he stood and grabbed his bowl.

Roger took it. "Get some sleep while you still can. Tonight is going to be very bloody."