

AN ASSASSIN'S ANTHEM

Chapter 9 - Massacre

Slashing, Riley cut a line through both fog and the goblin's throat. Blood spilled down its neck as it thrashed and went still. Lowering it, Riley turned to the next target.

Goblin Warrior - Level 51

The gray outline was larger. Riley crept forward.

The large goblin woke as its Danger Sense triggered. Rolling over, its hand smacked into the embers of a dying fire. It snarled as it jerked its hand back.

Using ambush, Riley appeared behind it and stabbed into the resilient skin. The goblin jerked right into the waiting knife, sinking it into its chest.

With a bark, the goblin swung for Riley, who danced back. Blood began pouring from the wound as it barked and lunged.

Riley didn't wait around for a fair fight, dashing back into the mist and hiding behind a tree. He waited for it to bleed out, poking his head out to watch.

The large goblin staggered, kicking a little one. The little goblin woke, sniffed the air, and grabbed a club. Running forward, it swung and smashed the club into the larger goblin. It dropped in a heap.

The little goblin raised the club high. Riley used Ambush, reached forward, and slit its throat. The blade quickly cut through its flesh, sending a burst of blood onto the ground.

Letting it slump to the ground, Riley danced forward, stabbing a prone goblin in the chest and then cutting the throat of another. Without bothering to still them, he focused on the next target.

It rolled over and blinked as it heard a thump. Sniffing the air, it looked up and saw a sword. Riley slammed the sword down, hacking through its spine before repeating it to the next.

Blood splattered around him. The camp of twenty goblins quickly became a gruesome pool of blood and bodies.

As the last died, Riley turned and locked onto another camp. The low embers made the mist look like a wall of white. With blood dripping from him, he stalked forward, impaling a scout he found on the way.

As it crumpled, Riley looked over at a small pile of corpses. Dad was here, alright. Each was decapitated. Wonder what level they were?

Even as he thought it, he forced his thoughts elsewhere. Limited time. He stalked into the bank of white and searched.

Once more, he locked onto the sleeping goblins and began his execution. Blood splattered. Heads rolled. Bodies crumpled, and Riley dripped as he stalked toward another camp.

In the distance, Roger hacked down every goblin in sight, spreading arcs of blood and viscera across the forest. The goblins that woke died instantly, their heads removed from their bodies.

As he cut down a level two hundred, he turned and searched the mist, ensuring his son was fine.

Riley saw the level one hundred and decided to use a different strategy. I'm just here to wake it up, not hurt it. He placed his sword directly over its heart and drove it down on the prone goblin. The goblin woke and jerked upwards, impaling itself on the blade.

Ripping it free, Riley used Ambush and hid in the fog, killing a small goblin nearby while he waited. Not bothering to return, he continued forward, passing a massive tree.

He paused to study it. Oh! That boar hunt by the canyon. Nodding to himself, he kept an inner map as he resumed the executions.

Clearing another two camps, Riley walked forward. Dread washed over him as a loud squeal rang through the air. He frantically searched for the source and failed to find it.

It went silent for a few moments. Then, a low roar spread through the air as goblins woke. Riley didn't wait for another second; he used Ambush and then ran, sprinting recklessly away from the massive camp.

Branches and leaves cracked under his feet as he bolted. He left bloody footprints as he hurtled out of the camp and ran for the forest.

The goblins locked onto the noise and gave chase. Screaming goblins grabbed clubs and ran, stirring others to join them. Within seconds, the camp was alive and in hot pursuit.

With his heart thundering, Riley ran and tripped over a fallen tree. Crashing into the ground, he bounced like a rag doll, tumbling head over heels.

Slamming into a tree, he stopped while the horde raced forward. Burning another charge of Ambush, Riley teleported and began trying to sneak away from the bellowing horde.

He heard screaming and several thumps. Glancing into the corner of his vision, Riley saw a message.

+12 XP (Penalty due to incidental death).

It popped up again and again as he heard thumps. Realization hit as he slammed into a log and spun through the air. They're tripping and getting

trampled. Covering his head, Riley slammed into the ground and grimaced as the jarring motion vibrated through him.

He changed his plan, forcing all his attention to his path. An eager smile spread across his face as he abandoned stealth entirely.

Opening his mouth, Riley began singing as he raced towards the distant ravine. His voice rolled through the fog like a bell in a canyon. The goblins responded in kind, shrieking and screaming in a cacophony of noise.

Riley continued singing as he zipped by the foggy outlines of trees and rocks. With his eyes and focus spent only on surviving his run, he mumbled and stumbled over the song with little care while speeding up a large hill.

A stone went flying by his head as a speedy goblin raced forward. The fog seemed to solidify into Roger as he slit its throat and vanished. The goblin's corpse fell, bouncing like a loose rock falling off a mountain. It rolled and smashed into another goblin, sending it flying.

Riley giggled and scrambled over the top. Then he raced down the other side of the hill, heading down toward the ravine.

With the ground blurring under his feet, Riley began rapidly calculating. When do I need to hide?

"One hundred," Roger shouted from up ahead.

Riley marked the spot in his mind as he vaulted a fallen tree. Dirt shot behind him. His legs churned as he hurtled towards his father.

"Fifty," Roger shouted.

Riley continued, skidding through some loose rock and skidding as he smashed into another tree. With a throbbing shoulder, he raced toward his dad and then leapt.

Roger plucked his son out of the air, sprinted, and leapt. The mist swirled as the two soared out into the air. Riley pulled himself into a ball as he prepared for the landing. He slammed into the ground, rolling and bouncing until he crashed against a rock.

Groaning loudly, he massaged his arm and felt blood. Pain rolled up his arms and legs. That was painful.

Roger walked over and picked him up. "Break things?" he tapped out.

"Maybe," Riley whispered as his eyes watered. Quickly wiping it away, he stood and felt pain spike up his leg. He let the scream out to vent his frustration and lure the foolish horde, who screamed right back.

The noise suddenly shifted as the first goblin stumbled over the ledge. With the momentum and mists, the screaming goblin only encouraged others to shove.

Riley watched as notifications began to flood the corner of his vision. Then he looked over at his father.

Roger signed. "Throw. Stone. Finish." He gestured to the ravine.

Riley nodded and then hobbled over, picking up any rocks he found. As the two neared the edge, Riley looked down and saw nothing. He heard screaming and the pushing horde, but he couldn't see anything that far away. Guess I just try anyway. He threw the first stone, sending it whizzing off into the night.

A scream rose in reply, along with several notifications as goblins shoved each other once more. He frowned and looked over at his dad.

Roger nodded and gestured. "Sing. I shove."

Riley began singing loudly. "Goblins are the dumbest race. They're not unlike the bugs. Each one runs in circles. And they all have ugly mugs. Their teeth

are like a forest, bursting from their mouths. And they've got a massive nose that looks just like a snout. And if you ever see one. You've got to let them know. They couldn't win a single fight because they are so slow."

Laughing, Riley heard several shouting something back. Can they even understand it? Then he heard something else. A crack rang through the air. Moments later, a massive whump filled the air as trees began to domino into the horde.

Several goblins screamed and fell as the horde shoved and went wild. Riley chuckled and pulled up his notifications while singing another verse.

You have killed 87 goblins from levels 2 to 123. (3917 XP).

You have indirectly killed 182 goblins from levels 2 to 239. (5925 XP. 50% experience penalty).

You have assisted in killing 49 goblins from levels 3 to level 161. (759 XP. Variable penalty).

You have reached base level twenty-one!

Assassin has reached level fourteen!

Ranger has reached level fourteen!

Bard has reached level fourteen!

Riley stared at it, his mouth dropping and his song halting. What? He looked toward the ravine and failed to see anything. Are they going to punish me for this? He swallowed and hoped they weren't.

His relief grew as Death didn't reply, leaving behind the pain. He glanced down at his blood-covered gear and then wiped some off using damp leaves.

Roger appeared and walked forward. "We go," he signed.

Riley nodded and hobbled forward, nervously testing his leg and grimacing as he nearly fell over. He looked down. Please say it isn't broken.

Frowning, Roger grabbed him and began carrying him back to town.

Spoiler