

CRAB MEAT WAS FAIRLY VALUABLE, BEING REGARDED AS A “rare” and highly flavorful meat, but some of its meat was actually poisons. Now that I thought of it, this was probably the source of the crab’s resistance to my poison. Even with that, the crab meat wasn’t what we are after. The job was to grab the ligaments that bound the shell and skeleton together. Between the shell and the skeleton, I was convinced the crab was equal parts muscle and bone. Assuming the shell was considered bone for this argument. Anyways, once getting inside it, I was no longer surprised that the crab was so hard to kill.

Even after harvesting the creature there was plenty of left over mass, so I started in on replacing my losses. I was able to create three new skeletons, bringing me back up to eight. I deliberately saved the crab’s skull, which was part of its shell. Carefully looking at both the inside and the outside, I came to some conclusions. My tactic worked, the creature’s skull was cracked all over the place. I know it wasn’t just Dot’s gunshots doing damage, because they caused deeper pitting, yet there were cracks all over the place, some clearly originating from places she had never hit.

Even if I hadn’t broken all the way through, the brain was bleeding when it was removed from the skull, so I should be able to kill the crab with just head trauma. So even if I couldn’t break the skull open, the crab would still die.

The next fight went even easier at first, as we had a working strategy. However, I struggled to poison the crab or fully use my skeletons, as Dot was more aggressive than before. She kept darting in out of the normal order, forcing me to double-check everything.

After the fight I noted that it was difficult to avoid tripping up Dot when she kept attacking outside of the normal pattern, but she just complained about not wanting me to get an unfair amount of “experience.” At least I’d managed to get a full load of skeletons at this point.

The third fight started even worse. Dot was dodging in and out all the time, and I was struggling to find openings to get my skeletons in to fight. The result was that the crab turned its full attention on Dot. Two close calls seemed to give Dot a boost of confidence, as she was starting to taunt me about being unnecessary.

Then Dot was tripped by a swipe of the monster’s claws, tumbling to the ground. Only me getting a skeleton between the monster and her slowed it down enough for Dot to stumble away. At that point my skeletons had to hold the creature’s attention. The plus side was I didn’t have to work around the overly aggressive Dot any more.

Unfortunately, this required a more aggressive approach from me, and getting that down resulted in a skeleton being lost to the same maneuver that had caught Dot. Only this time the creature crushed my skeleton’s chest with a hammer blow long before I had a chance to slow things down.

Still, the crab taking the time to land that blow on my skeleton allowed another one to get two hard swings in, and gave Frank time to get into position to land a half-dozen rapid shots into its head.

That forced it to stagger back, and after two more blows to the head it slumped down, barely moving. Just to be sure, I ordered one of my skeletons forward to crack its skull at full strength. Two hits later its skull started leaking

blood through a number of large cracks caused by the large depression in its skull.

Turning back to the group, I was about to take a look at Dot when I saw her toss a glass bottle off to the side.

"I'll be back up in about five minutes."

"Was that an alchemical cure?" I asked.

"Yeah. Concussion cure," Dot said, putting her head between her legs.

Obviously it was more than just a concussion cure, as the blood on Dot's skull stopped flowing, grew brittle, and started breaking off from even the slightest movement. This revealed that there was no injury underneath the damage.

That was completely unfair. Those things were expensive. I knew that Divers over level 20 tended to keep them stocked, but when you could make tens of thousands in one month you could afford to drop a couple thousand on single-use cures. Especially as that cure would have been unneeded if she had just worn a helmet like most melee combatants.

Shaking my head at the unfairness of life sometimes, I turned around and got my surviving seven skeletons to flip the Hardback. It was more difficult with Steven fawning over Dot and Frank acting as lookout, but we managed it. I then set into harvesting the meat and ligaments, which I handed out to each person to divide the weight. Creating three more skeletons, and realizing I'd officially replaced all the skeletons I'd created before picking up the Organizer Perk, I was ready to go. Noticing Dot was tentatively checking to make sure her head was back on straight, I checked my notification.

*< Magic Mass I was created! >*

*< Magic Mass*

*Effect: Increases one's total magic based on the level of the skill. >*

Well, that was interesting. I vaguely remembered reading about this skill. I didn't remember what it did exactly, or how you picked it up. Checking my mana, I wasn't certain how much it is helping, but then again, I saw no need to memorize the exact maximum mana so the change might just be small.

"Feeling better, Dot?" I asked.

"Yeah," Dot nodded.

"Most melee combat jobs wear something of a helmet for this reason," Frank said.

"That's what the alchemy is for." Dot shook her head then grinned. "Yep. All better."

I rolled my eyes but didn't say anything. The FDA might have refused to accept alchemical cures as real medicine, but hundreds of users have shown that they work exactly as they're supposed to. Plus, even if I couldn't use the magic involved, I actually understood the underlining rules of the processes. Dot's concussion was cured, otherwise nothing would have happened or she

would have puked up the toxic concoction. Alchemy didn't do anything partially, it either worked fully or not at all. A problem when dealing with damage too extensive to be repaired with a single dose.

In other words, we went back to hunting without any fear that she still had a concussion. Rational fear anyways. Steven actually asked her if she was feeling better what felt like a hundred times. I would have been fucking with him if I were Dot, but she didn't seem to mind at all.

We stayed away from the denser parts of the boulder field. The result was another five fights before we stopped for an early lunch. I took this chance to work on my poison spells. The goal was to make them potent enough to effect the crabs faster.

I was leaving the command spell for later, mainly because I had enough control for the attack pattern I needed right now. And I didn't want to mess things up by making my skeletons more responsive and messing up the timing. It was kind of funny that doing better would do worse, but it was a real concern when you needed to have the timing of orders down.

It was around noon when we ate. Every day at 7 exactly it started raining so hard in the dungeon that travel was impossible. Thus, we only had a few hours of hunting left before we had to head to the entrance. Especially as we were all getting sore and tired, we wouldn't make as good of time on the way back as we did getting here.

"I think we should maybe take an hour or two to hunt, then head back." Dot sounded more bored than tired. "I've had all the rocks and crabs I can stand for a week."

"Yeah, no." Frank was the first to deny it. "At the rate we are going, it will take us at least four hours to fill out

the contact. And we might take longer and have to push on the way back.”

“Uhm, Dot. I think we should try and finish this today. A contract failure at this point could make it harder to pick up later ones.”

Dot sighed. I wonder what was going on there, but I was going to keep quiet unless it sounded like she is winning the argument.

“How about we go deeper into the field? Then we can get done quickly.” Dot seemed to get a bit of energy back into her voice.

“Not worth the risk,” Frank answered after a second of consideration. “Deeper in we’re likely to have to fight multiple monsters at once. While I think we’ve learned enough, I don’t want to try.”

Steven nodded. “I’ve also heard about a boss crab the size of a small hill!”

“Is that why you didn’t want to take this contract?” Dot sounded surprised. “Seriously, you’ve been playing too many video games.”

“While there have been reported cases of more powerful monsters for no reason, every case has been much closer to the scale point,” I answered. “Here in Balltown, that would be on the other side of the Forest region.”

Steven just shrugged, and I had to sigh. Fortunately the conversation stayed on topic, and we decided to give it two hours and see where we were. Knowing we might be fighting multiple crabs in the future, I focused on trying to get the least number of skeletons in the fight. Hopefully it didn’t become a problem, but it was a skill I’d need unless Dot happened to perform perfectly.