

NEEDLESS TO SAY, AFTER A NUMBER OF FIGHTS WE SAT DOWN and considered it. And we decided that our best chance was to head deeper in. I had a full set of skeletons and hadn't lost more than three to a fight yet. Plus, my tinkering with the Miasma Bomb spell managed to get slightly more area on the poison cloud. Not the best, but it made it far more effective in flushing out crabs. Thus useful for a full fight.

Eyes narrowed, I looked at the collection of boulders in front of us. "You guys realize that this field is like five times larger than what we've faced before."

"Scared?" Dot taunted.

"Yes. How do you want to handle it?" Frank asked.

"I dump poison on the group, and when they attack we retreat as long as we can. Let's move to a position where we have plenty of room without worrying about drawing more crabs."

"Yeah, no," Dot shot back. "I'm not sitting back while you guys get all the experience for poisoning them."

I sighed. "Let's at least maintain enough distance that we have time to really weaken them before we run into range."

Dot didn't say anything, which I took to mean she agreed. Which had been becoming par for the course today.

We moved to a spot where we could run backward without fear of blundering into another boulder field. Then I launched a pair of Poison Bombs into the boulder field. I wasn't surprised that two Hardbacks stood up. More surprising was that two more, outside of the area of my poison, also stood up.

“Fuck.” I cursed as I prepped a pair of Miasma Bombs.

Which I let fly at the closet crabs, a second volley got started on the back ones. Frank and Steven were firing as fast as they could, but unless they hit the heads or got really lucky, we’d learned that this range was a bit of a waste. Though given the situation no one suggested they stop.

We all started back as I poured Miasma Bombs into the group. Two of them were close enough together to hit with one bomb. But the others were further apart and prevented such time-saving tactics. As soon as the group of crabs began to slow, Dot stepped forward.

“All right, we each take one. Cat, stall until I get done and come to help you.”

“Fuck you.”

I moved my skeletons to one side to intercept one of the lone ones and Dot shot forward toward the close pair shooting at one of them to draw its attention. Frank and Steven shrugged, and each split up to take the remaining ones.

As bad as the plan was, it was probably the best plan we had. But I refused to be “rescued” by Dot.

I put as much poison downrange as I could. I remembered to dump extra miasma on both Seven’s and Frank’s crabs just before I had to focus on my skeletons. Dot was already too close to do anything to help.

With my skeletons immune to poison, I was less restricted on combat tactics. First, I sent my skeletons in using the standard tactic. Shuffle forward, smash the head, and shuffle backward. Worried about hitting the backs of my skeletons with the actual projectile, I held them back a

step to lob in my Miasma Bombs. However, I sent my skeletons charging in as soon as I could, right into the poison cloud.

Unfortunately, I was used to Dot's loud gunshots distracting the crabs. But apparently my skeleton's attacks weren't quite enough to always divert attention. And every so often the crab would continue to chase one skeleton after a different one landed an attack. This meant my skeletons were forced to shamle backward even more than normal. And they weren't that coordinated.

Two skeletons died by tripping and getting crushed by the creature instantly. Eventually I started noticing cracks in its head, but they weren't that big.

Then I launched a Miasma Bomb that went off target and slammed into the back of one of my skeletons. It staggered forward, getting in range of the crab, which quickly cut it into thirds with its claws.

Then the crab suddenly charged toward me, and the change in direction meant I didn't react fast enough and another two skeletons got their legs snapped off in an offhanded attack. I was able to nail it with a few more Miasma Bombs but had to quickly retreat.

Stumbling backward, I gulped. I was close enough to see blood seeping from its skull, but the crab was still moving. My skeletons were giving chase, but I had about a minute before they could catch up to the crab I thought. Only one choice.

Taking a deep breath, I stopped running, letting the monster catch up. Once I judge the distance right I cast Toxic Breath, creating the spell inside my mouth instead of in my hands. Exhaling a long breath, a stream of blue-

green smoke left my mouth, billowing out eight feet, right into the crab monster.

I then put on the speed and put more distance between it and me, turning back around to see one of my skeletons smack the crab and back up, avoiding a weak and unsteady retaliation.

Looking around me, I saw that Frank was limping away from his crab, but not fast enough to actually get away. I sent three of my skeletons after him, leaving the other two to finally bring down my Hardback. With the much slower movement I figured it would be safe enough. Plus, I could keep poisoning it if I pay attention. Instead I focused on the three heading to support Frank. I called to him and he angled his retreat to allow my skeletons to intercept much faster.

I dropped a Miasma Bomb on my crab and turned toward the three just as they reached the crab now nearly on top of Frank. The crab is moving fast enough that I had no idea how to stop it with my skeletons.

Desperate times and all. I ordered the foremost skeleton to drop to the ground as it got close to the crab and smash at limbs. I lost my connection to the skeleton and had no idea if it actually hit a leg. However, the crab seemed to stumble, and definitely slowed down, so my two remaining skeletons ran forward and smashed the crabs head. A glance at my crab and I sighed, the head was smashed a little more than was needed, and I ordered those two to head toward Frank's crab.

Turning back, Frank stumbled up towards the crab and fired seven rounds right into its head. The crab stopped moving. I ordered my skeletons back to me and looked

around. Dot was done, as was Steven though it looked like he was favoring one side as well. I was down to four skeletons, but I was alive and had more than enough crabs to replace everything.

I hadn't moved all that much, but I still bent over and supported myself on my knees. My head spun as I pulled up my status. I was down to eighty-seven mana. How many Miasma Bombs did I fire off?

"Run around too much?" Dot spat, trying to not sound winded.

Ignoring her, I attempted to draw in mana from the environment. There was a skill that let you do that, and I'd never considered the need to learn it. Guess I needed to change that now.

"Shut up, Dot," Frank ground out. "She saved my life. I twisted my ankle and couldn't outpace it."

"Ok, ok, let's just grab our crap and move away from here and rest," Steven said.

I nodded in agreement and we began harvesting the Hardbacks. Pulling up my stats, I checked my mana regeneration and realized I probably wouldn't have enough mana to recreate all six lost skeletons without some time to rest. Oh well, a little extra rest wasn't a bad thing.

Kathrine's Status, Spells, and Skills:

*< Kathrine Baulcom | Human(Female) | Age: 20*

*Necromancer Lvl 4.03 | Bone Walker | Organizer  
STR: 10 | END: 13 | DEX: 15 | SPD: 12 | WIS: 15 | INT:  
18 | CHA: 11 | MNT: 17*

*Minion Control: 10*

*10x Skeletons(Mace/Shield): 11 mana/min*

*Stamina: 125/125 | Mana: 785/785 | +2.1 stm/min |  
+14.8 mana/min*

*Mana Conversion: 75% >*

*< Necromancer Spells >*

*< Poison Bomb*

*Description: Launches a bladder of poison gas with bursts and spreads the gas over a wide area. The poison gas is heavier than air and must be breathed in, which limits the range most would be threatened by it.*

*Effect: A weak poison that makes it hard to breathe and causes nausea. Non-lethal.*

*Necromancer | Runic | Poison*

*Miasma Bomb*

*Description: Launches a fleshy sack pressurized with a dangerous miasma that causes difficulty breathing, loss of balance, and lung damage after extended exposure.*

*Possibly lethal, but very debilitating.*

*Effect: Wide-area effect debilitating poison cloud.*

*Necromancer | Runic | Poison*

*Toxic Breath*

*Description: Allows the user to exhale a cloud of toxins without risk of breathing it back in. The cloud causes numbness, loss of motor control, and possibly death. It also magnifies the effects of any trace elements of poison that might be in the target's system.*

*Effect: Exhale a small cloud of poison that causes extreme issues and magnifies the effects of other toxins. Immunity to this spell lasts three seconds after exhale.  
Necromancer | Runic | Poison | Contact >*

*< Skeleton Creation >*

*< Command Undead*

*Description: Allows the user to order commands to their undead minions. Places a burden on the mind of the one who is controlling them.*

*Effects: Provides a way for maintenance mana and commands to control undead.*

*Necromancer | Runic | Elemental | Golem Creation  
Create Skeleton (Shield & Mace)*

*Description: Creates a skeleton wielding a small shield and rudimentary mace.*

*Effect: Creates a skeleton minion under the control of the spellcaster.*

*Necromancer | Runic | Elemental | Bone | Golem Creation  
>*

*< Necromancer Skills >*

*< Runic Magic (Poison) V | Runic Magic (Flesh) V | Runic Magic (Bone) VII | Runic Magic (Contact) I | Golem Creation VII | Magic Accuracy V | Mana Channel XVII | Mana Control XVIII | Magic Mass I >*