

Overnight
Sunday – 10.10.62

“THE HELL IS THAT?” DOT ASKED IN THE MOST AGGRESSIVE manner possible.

I took a deep breath, well aware she hadn't actually done something yet today that should get me mad. It didn't help as much as I would have hoped.

“The fuck does it look like? It's a skeleton with a gun.”

“How? You can't have leveled up on the last hunt. I didn't,” Dot growled out.

I glanced at the other two people with us, neither of which I really knew. Just two fighters who got the short end of the straw and had to work with us. Most likely they just couldn't find a group in time to run an overnight job today.

“Well, it's simple.” I spoke slowly while holding Dot's gaze. She immediately turned red at my tone. “I've been working on a ranged skeleton from the beginning. It just turns out to be more difficult than I thought. I just succeeded today.”

“Just because I can't use magic doesn't make me stupid!”

“Then why do you keep insisting that I have to level up to get new spells? Clearly that isn't because you're so smart.”

“Shut it, Cat...”

“My. Name. Is. Kathrine,” I ground out. I didn't need that smug face to know she thought she had won some

kind of point. If she could see inside my head she might even have a reason for that look. But I didn't think my mounting frustration was unexpected at all. At this point.

The gun was only made possible thanks to my study with Sandra and Adam. Their tips on the creation of new knots had allowed me to create spells that could produce weapons independent of skeletons much faster than I'd expected. Thus I was able to turn to new weapons sooner. And it simplified the weapon creation spell, allowing for guns rather than simpler weapons.

This in turn showed me how to attach an elemental knot to the weapons themselves and tie behavior to said knots. Basically, my new skeletons' combat behaviors were based on the weapons they were using these days.

The guns were single-fire rifles superficially related to muskets. Unlike those old-world weapons, these ones were made from bone and had a simple breach mechanism like some shotguns. This allowed easy loading of the weapon.

Of course I couldn't create an explosion. But some of the runes we looked up to help Adam create his "summon" turned out to be kinetic runes, and that allowed me to create an effect where the magical energy in the gun accelerated a bony projectile down the barrel. Much like a rail gun. Despite their large size, I was 100% certain the rifles wouldn't produce fully modern weapon velocities. Mostly because it was my mana powering it.

The increased mana maintenance aside, I'd also have to create more shot regularly. The shot was a round ball of bone about the size of a quarter, kept in a bag made from leather produced by Flesh runes. The shot was much

heavier and denser than normal bone and thus needed more mana and resources to make. In fact, the initial load of a hundred shot cost almost as much mana and dust as a normal skeleton.

I currently had eight ax and shield minions and a single ranged one. The plan was to build two more, for a total of three rifles and eight axes, and the shot I'd already made would be split between them. This, I think, would be the best set-up for what we were doing today. Because today we were hunting something new. Or at least something I hadn't hunted before.

However, my guns weren't a result of choosing my level 6 perk. Although there was a tempting option or two, I decided to get an old one. The Poisoner perk was excellent, as I was able to put a potent poison on my minions' axes with ease and at almost no cost. I still hadn't figured out how to put the poison on my ranged minion's shot instead of the rifles.

< Poisoner

Requirements: Necromancer Lvl 3, Runic Magic (Poison)

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Description: There are many ways to deliver poisons. The Poisoner seeks to deliver their poisons through their undead.

Effects: Gain specialized Golem Creation knowledge, decreases maintenance cost of poison enhancements to undead. >

I also had good faith that there was more to it. Knowing how to mount poison on my minions' weapons, I was left wondering about armor and other things. Who knew where this might go.

The only downside was that my skeletons were costing more of my mana. My natural regen was on target to be around ten per minute now that I had the gun-toting skeletons.

Heather and Jack—one of the Jacks, as there's a couple in our "class,"—seem to have been warned about our constant bickering because they studiously ignored us. A tactic that had been utilized by just about everyone eventually. I wish they would speak up, because having someone other than Dot to talk to would be nice, but Dot attacked anyone who was even slightly nice to me. Apparently that was all it took to be her enemy, being mildly conversational with me.

Whatever. We continued to the next Styire attack. Having a single ranged skeleton didn't do much, but the ability to reach out and hurt my enemy was still a great bonus. Fortunately, it was clear there were a couple of ways to improve the bone gun with limited effort. Until I got more skeletons and optimized the weapons a bit, AOE poison would have to remain my opening move, however.

As we walked, I did try and engage the two new members in conversation but nothing really helped. Dot would glare at them if they responded conversationally at all. And even if she refused to speak to me, she would

argue, insult, and degenerate anyone who agreed with me. Dot made it clear that she took it as a direct insult if anyone was even mildly polite to me.

After a few of Dot's barbs, Heather and Jack decided to outright state that they would rather be quiet and focus on getting the job done. I wish I could say there were people other than mages who were willing to speak with me, but there weren't.

Five hours of silence and easy (compared to the Rat Way) fights later we arrived at our destination, though it was also time for a slightly early lunch. As was normal, Dot had brought packed meals for herself but no one else. Then she got pissed as we took time to cook up some Styire soup. Her grumbling about the smell of the soup was just unnecessary. It smelled delicious, though that might be all the spices we used.

We then headed back toward the back wall of the Scrag, a massive cliff over three hundred feet tall. Our actual destination was an opening in the wall. A canyon, around a hundred feet wide, stretched upward. This one was covered in ice, which explained the minor modification I'd made to my skeletons this time around—small ice spikes on the bottom of their feet. Such a modification was so simple it didn't even require any extra effort. At least not compared to the skeleton's own spell.

The rest of us had to carry attachable ice spikes for our feet. I don't know if Dot had noticed that I'd already solved the problem of my skeletons or not. Somehow I doubted it from the way she was smirking.

We stopped to slip on our ice spikes right at the entrance of the canyon. Just as I was attaching my second

spikes to my shoe, Jack called out and we all spun to look in the indicated direction, just in time to see a flying monster heading our way. It was a four-foot-long lizard gliding on wings, and it smashed into one of my skeletons, tearing it to pieces because the skeleton hadn't noticed the attack in time to raise its shield.

Still, once on the ground the Cliff Hugger was stupidly easy to kill. It was the smashing hit from behind us that caused everyone to jump, and my skeletons had already fallen on the Cliff Hugger, killing it before anyone else could even fire a shot.

"Well, that proves we have to keep our eyes open," I said as I scanned the nearby cliffs, not seeing anything else.

"The fuck were you playing at, Cat?" Dot said.

Knowing it was only going to make things worse, I still couldn't convince myself to actually say anything. "Cover me while I replace my skeletons. Then we can head up."

"Sure," Jack answered.

"Stop ignoring me, you asshole." Dot stormed over and shoved me hard.

I stumbled, not used to the ice spikes on my feet just yet. This was also the first time she'd gotten physical.

"What the fuck is your problem, Dot?"

"You stealing my kill and ignoring me when I talk to you!"

"Use my name. I've told you dozens of times. My name is *Kathrine*." I glared right back.

"That's what I'm saying, you asshole."

“No you’re calling me ‘Cat,’ which is a fucking animal. Not a name.”

“Well, blame your parents for using a name that’s too fucking long.” Dot stepped up into my face. “Now stop ignoring the fact that you just stole my kill.”

“I’m not leaving monsters alive when we’re in *ambusher* territory. All the advice I’ve seen online is to pay extra attention to the area around you, as Ice Drakes are smart enough to wait until you’re being attacked by Cliff Huggers. Or other Drakes.”

“They’re monsters, dumber than animals and twice as easy to run circles around,” Dot snapped back.

“Have you done no research into what we’re facing?” This was Heather, who hadn’t turned from looking outward. “Shit, girl. Ice Drakes are considered one of the smartest monsters in the dungeon.”

Dot turned to glare at Heather. “Shut it, you. This isn’t about anything but the fact that Miss Princess ‘I ignore all the guild rules and get away with it’ here just stole a kill. Experience none of us got to share in!”

“We’ll all get plenty of chances to fight. Just leave Kathrine alone so we can continue.”

I walked to the nearest corpse, careful to keep an eye on Dot while she attempted to bully Heather, and Jack when he was asked his opinion, into supporting her assertion that it was all my fault. Thankfully neither one cared enough to agree with her. Maybe there was hope yet.