

Special Contracts

Friday – 10.22.62

THE RAT WAY WAS KNOWN FOR THE DANGER OF FACING FAR too many monsters at once, and this raised the difficulty above and beyond what the simple strength of the monsters was. A danger that every guide for the Rate Way mentioned prominently.

As I was backing away from the press of monsters heading my direction I got the feeling that I was about to experience this problem. It wasn't that my poison was less effective this time, it was that I had to focus the cloud of poison at the interception where a path branched off, but monsters could also come from further down the hallway I was currently in, and I didn't think I could kill them fast enough with the cloud I currently had built up if they could get a running start.

So putting some extra distance between me and the monsters was a necessity. I took a moment during spell casting to throw some light behind the poison cloud, revealing that the further corridor was clear, but I had no idea how long that would remain the case. Two more steps back gave me the full range of my Miasma Bombs as a head start. If I was going to run I needed some kind of strategy, but I had no idea what I would do. Or even where I would go.

And no more time to deal with it, because I could see a group of Ratigers entering the light farther down the corridor. Not willing to take any chances, I started backing

up, dropping Poison Bombs between myself and the main poison cloud.

As the group of new Ratigers jumped over the bodies of already fallen monsters, I turned and ran. Poison Bombs that I dropped behind me hopefully slowed down pursuit, but I needed a corner. And I needed that corner badly.

After running about halfway down the corridor back toward the entrance, I glanced over my shoulder and could still see rats heading my way. Not a good look, and one that prompted another Poison Bomb over my shoulder as I tried to run even faster.

Up ahead I saw where this corridor branched off the main one that headed toward the entrance. Grinning because I now had a target, I pushed, breath ragged, as I ran through the entrance, spun around, and started dumping as many poison spells as I could into the doorway. A second behind me was the leading edge of the Ratigers, but they skidded across the ground trying to turn fast enough, and that only left them in the poison longer.

Fortunately, Ratigers had difficulty with the Miasma/Poison Bomb combo, and a quick Toxic Breath ensured that this initial group went down instantly. I then backed up a bit, giving myself more room to build up the cloud of poison.

I struggled to control my breathing and keep the cloud of poison thick enough to deal with the incoming monsters. But the situation was almost the same as my first time here, the rats had to come around a corner to get to me. And that meant they didn't have any room to build up speed. So I was quite confident, now.

"You need help?"

The call from behind me caught me off guard, but I guess the squeaking of the rats caught the soldier's attention.

"I'm fine now. Thanks," I called out as best as I could through my heavy breathing.

The National Guard member walked up next to me, but upon seeing what was happening he lowered his weapon. After about a minute he took a few steps back and I could hear him calling into his radio, letting them know I had everything under control.

After that I basically ignored him, focused instead on dealing with the incoming monsters. Over all I didn't think this group of monsters was any larger than the last time I was in here, but the set up was problematic.

Once the last Ratiger died I took a moment to catch my breath. With the run and the panic I had used more mana than normal. Fortunately, I had enough to start creating undead. As soon as I felt like I had regained my equilibrium, I started creating skeletons.

"Wait, you're the necromancer?"

"Yup. Kind of a pain to fight in these dungeons until I get my undead up and running," I answered easily.

"Why don't you come to the dungeon with your undead?"

"What do you think the reaction would be if I tried to march my undead onto the bus?" I gestured at the newly formed shield skeleton in slight amusement.

The Guard member chuckled and nodded. "Yeah, that makes sense. I just figured there would be a way to save them or something."

“Probably is, but no idea how to discover it right now,” I answered.

That got a frown, but I just rolled my eyes, unwilling to argue about the nature of magic at the moment. I was here to do a contract, and I was so unbelievably glad I’d decided to arrive early and create my skeletons before the clients arrived. Running with them in tow would have been terrible for business and could have ended all kinds of horribly.

Today I had a special contract I’d managed to set up outside of the not-so Sanctified Devils. I was even able to discover that they were throwing out any contracts that directly referenced wanting to work with me. Of course, if those contracts were anything like the ones I’d chucked myself I wasn’t bothered. The least objectionable one I chucked on principal alone was a minor porn studio looking for protection while filming.

Of course, background checks resulted in even more people getting dismissed. But the end result was that I had a short list of possible clients that passed everything that could happen. And today was my first contract outside the guild.

So, I couldn’t say I was happy that it was also the first time I had to run from monsters. But at least my clients didn’t need to know what had happened. Fortunately, I didn’t need to go all the way back to where I was first ambushed, as the majority of the dead were right here. After creating my skeletons, I popped a couple tails off the remaining Ratigers and we headed back to the entrance. I could see the slightly nervous look from the Guard member next to me.

"I'm meeting a pair of clients in about fifteen minutes. I just needed to get these guys up and running before anyone else became a problem," I explained. I guess the guard was wondering what I was going to use the undead for after pointing out the issues with bringing them out of the dungeon.

As we exited the dungeon another soldier jogged up, though he seemed more interested in the skeletons behind me.

"Your client just got here I assume. She's unpacking her equipment," he announced.

I grinned at him. "Thanks. You can take a closer look."

He nodded and stepped forward to look. "What's keeping them together?"

"Magic," I snorted.

This got him chuckling. "Yeah sorry. Stupid question."

"Not really, but not one I know how to explain otherwise," I said, looking off. "It's mostly a set of runes that define what the magic determines as a joint and a solid connection."

Seeing my clients walking our way, I smiled at him. "Looks like I've got a job to do. I have a channel, NecroDive, if you want to see more. I try to include more technical explanations on there and have more time to think of them. It's a new thing, but keep an eye out."

The National Guard soldier nodded and headed back to the line. At the same time my client came down.

"Sorry if I made you wait!"

Looking my client over, I had to say she was smarter than Dot. Not that I considered this a huge

accomplishment, but she was wearing decent armor rather than skin-tight bullshit and even had a shotgun slung across her back. The shotgun was considered to be the best weapon for non-combat jobs in all circumstances, dungeons included. Even then, the “best weapon” against monsters wasn’t much.

Rama Stilo, the client, and her assistant, Rolf Vann, were quick to introduce themselves. The main reason I was willing to take this one was that both individuals were on the original contract, and as a result I was able to run them both through the background check. Even better, I could charge for two people.

“Welp, time to head back in,” I said, and we headed back inside. I let them get a good look at my skeletons as I snapped off my simple lighting spell and set up the escort order. Right now I was running three shield bearers in the back, four in the front, and four with guns. I believed that would be the best choice.

“So why this composition?” Rama started us out as we walked.

“Mostly because I’ve found it useful in my past work in here. Attacks from behind will usually be smaller. This is because you spend most of your time with your back to already cleared regions of the dungeon,” I answer patiently. “The ranged skeletons are very, very good at dealing with Way Fishers.”

Which was kind of an assumption. I’d found out recently that those monsters had very little armor, so they died quickly when actually attacked. “So a quick lesson in safety. Stay behind the skeleton line when monsters are

attacking, and only shoot when there's a solid line of sight."

The other two nodded, but I could see that Rolf was a little uncomfortable. I didn't need to ask what was wrong. "Don't worry, fights here in the Rat Way are stupidly long. So don't worry if a few gaps appear and you can't shoot through. I've gotten used to this and know how to keep that from being problematic."

I'd been in the Rat Way four times over the last two weeks. No idea why Dot refused to go on a hunt in the last two weeks. But whatever. It had allowed me to grow my level swiftly.

Rolf actually relaxed a little, which made me really wonder about his understanding of reality, but whatever. Rama looked relieved.

After that, we headed into the dungeon. It wasn't long before we came upon the point where I'd finished the fifth. Oddly enough, almost all the Ratigers that had been left behind were gone, although two of the creatures looked half-melted like something had been interrupted.

"Ugh. What is that!" Rolf asked, shocked. Rama seemed far too interested to notice the smell. Lucky.

"This is where I finished my fight with the first wave of Ratigers. It appears the dungeon had started reclaiming them. I've never seen this in person before," I answered. The sight was disturbing, but I moved forward quickly to get a closer look. I even pulled out my phone to get some close-ups. Seeing the odd looks from my clients, I explained my desire to show this to my audience online.

Rama was halfway through unpacking her own gear when she asked, "So you put out videos online? Why?"

“Err. Well, I was already reviewing video. You know, video of my performance, and I realized people would actually like to see it.” I shrugged, “Or it was the kind of thing I would have liked to see online if I wasn’t already living it. So yeah.”

“What about that Dot character?”

Rolf nodded along with his boss as he started setting up a set of cameras. Apparently the point was to document an ample collection, as Rama was clearly setting up some containers.

“I acknowledge that I don’t like Dot, and I almost certainly show her in a worse light than reality,” I answered smoothly. This was a question I’d gotten way too much online. “I believe that I do show her as fairly as possible given the antagonism between us. Other than that, I have no idea what’s going on.

“Besides, all my raw footage is on Dungeon Mapper, so if you want to see for yourself you can get the information there.”

Rama grinned. “Well, if we’re going to be in the episode, you should know that so far we have only had video evidence of this process and one or two samples collected under proper procedure. Most believe information is lost when samples of partly reclaimed monsters are brought back without being stored in properly sterilized containers.”