

## Apocalypse 697

### Chapter 697 The Newcomers

"Oh! Right," Kisha finally reacted, a beat too late. Realizing her mistake, she quickly pulled a vial of shimmering blue liquid from her inventory and handed it to Keith. "Here, drink this first. You'll be good as new in no time."

Keith eyed the suspicious liquid in Kisha's hand before looking up at her, his skepticism evident. For some reason, resentment bubbled up inside him—was she not even truly worried about him?

If this had been before, just scraping his knee would have been enough to send her into a panic, fussing over him as if the world were ending.

But now? She looked mildly embarrassed for hitting him too hard, maybe a little concerned, but not nearly as frantic as he expected.

His gaze shifted to Duke, who was still laughing on the sidelines, clearly enjoying the spectacle. Keith narrowed his eyes.

'It must be because of him,' he thought bitterly. 'This man stole her love for me.'

Keith resentfully snatched the vial of blue liquid from Kisha's hand and downed it in one go, his pout deepening. Just as he was about to grumble, Kisha seemed to realize why he was sulking. She stepped closer, standing beside him, and gently ruffled his hair.

"Good job," she murmured, her voice soft and coaxing. "You're doing great. Such a brave kid..."

Her words, though meant to comfort, only made Keith puff his cheeks in frustration. But despite himself, he leaned ever so slightly into her touch.

Keith pouted even more and grumbled, "Stop treating me like a kid already..."

Yet, despite his protests, the small smile creeping onto his lips betrayed the joy he felt at Kisha's display of affection. Even Duke, who had been laughing moments ago, stopped and shot Kisha a look filled with unmistakable jealousy.

Caught between the two, Kisha hesitated. No matter what she did, one of them would end up feeling left out. Instead of choosing sides, she decided to remove herself from the situation altogether, turning on her heel and walking away, leaving the two to sort out their silent rivalry on their own.

"Alright, I'll stop," Kisha said with a smirk. "But instead, why don't you two train together while I go check on the newcomers?"

Just as she finished speaking, her grandfather arrived, catching the tail end of her words. His gaze flickered between Kisha and the two men, a knowing look in his eyes as he took in the situation.

"Right, make sure to whip that kid into shape so he stops dragging everyone down when he joins the others on missions outside," Grandpa Alden said, his tone firm, as if reprimanding his grandson while fully expecting Duke to push Keith even harder.

Keith's eyes widened in disbelief, staring at his grandfather as if he couldn't believe what he had just heard.

Did Grandpa really think he was slacking off?

Was he a burden during supply runs and patrols? In truth, he had been performing well—so well that even Ethan no longer had to keep a constant eye on him.

Keith had learned the ins and outs of survival, what to do and what to avoid, yet here was his grandfather, making it sound like he was a dead weight.

"Beat him a few more times so his bones turn to steel and his skin toughens like concrete," Grandpa Alden added, throwing more fuel onto the fire.

His mischievous smile only deepened as he turned to Keith, whose horrified expression made him look thoroughly bullied.

Keith quickly turned to Kisha, his eyes pleading for help, but she only laughed. She knew her grandfather was just messing with him. However, Duke—Duke was taking this far too seriously. The smile he gave Keith was filled with something... ominous.

A shiver ran down Keith's spine as he instinctively rubbed his arms, feeling an unsettling sense of doom creeping in.

Before he could grumble and beg Kisha to save him, she was already walking away, leaving him alone with two mischief-loving tormentors. She knew better than to intervene—after all, even Grandpa Alden was just having his fun.

After leaving the three man-children behind, Kisha made her way toward the newcomers, who stood not far away, watching the Winters' men train with fascination.

The only ones absent were the children, who were resting in the shared quarters under the watchful eyes of the elderly. Meanwhile, the able-bodied men and women wandered the hidden base, looking for something to do.

Restlessness gnawed at them. Unlike the established residents, each with their own role in the base, they had nothing to contribute—just idle hands and uncertain futures.

The feeling was unsettling, a grim reminder of their past shelter. Back then, they had been just as useless, just as expendable. And in the end, they were abandoned, left to die because they were nothing more than extra mouths to feed.

Having learned from their past mistakes, they now understood the importance of making themselves useful.

They refused to be seen as dead weight—easily discarded when times got tough. More than that, they wanted to reclaim their pride, to stand tall rather than wait for scraps tossed their way on someone else's whim.

Their harsh experience had taught them a valuable lesson: survival meant self-sufficiency. Now, that realization made them restless, eager to find purpose.

Watching the Winters' men train, the men in their group began wondering how they could join the training. Meanwhile, the women considered other ways to contribute—perhaps helping in the cafeteria, assisting with cleaning, or taking on laundry duties for the base.

Anything to pull their weight and earn their place.

As Kisha made her way toward them, she discreetly examined their status windows, assessing their general nature—whether they were good or bad people. To her surprise, most leaned toward being good, while many fell into a neutral category, meaning their actions could be swayed by circumstances.

More importantly, she identified several individuals with valuable Talents, people who could be just as useful as the rest if placed in the right roles.

By the time she reached them, she had already sorted them into categories, mentally assigning them to specific departments or jobs within the base, ensuring that everyone had a purpose and a role to fulfill.

The women who had been observing their surroundings noticed Kisha approaching and quickly nudged the men, who were engrossed in watching the Winters' men train. They also called over the others who had arrived with Sparrow, ensuring everyone was present.

After witnessing the events in the cafeteria and hearing various discussions, they now understood the power dynamics within the base. While Duke was referred to as "Master" by Sparrow and the Winters' men, Kisha held an equally—if not higher—position in the hierarchy.

Duke treated her like his queen, making it clear that she wielded just as significant authority.

Realizing that their chances of staying and securing a place in the hidden base depended on Kisha's approval, they knew they had to make a good impression.

"H-Hello, ma'am!" the leader of the group quickly straightened up before bowing deeply to Kisha. Without hesitation, he then dropped to one knee before her, mimicking the posture of a knight pledging loyalty.

"There's no need for such formalities. Please, stand up," Kisha responded with a calm yet polite tone.