

Apocalypse 818

Chapter 818 Kickstarting The Trade 5

“Everyone, please stay close and follow our lead!” Fred called out as he glanced at Jason and the others.

Without wasting a second, his team swiftly moved into formation, surrounding Jason and Adam’s group from all sides. The sudden movement made them tense up instinctively. Unease flickered across their faces as they exchanged glances, and almost in unison, their eyes turned to Kisha for reassurance when they realized Fred’s team had encircled them.

Seeing their worried expressions, Kisha hoarsely reassured them, “Don’t worry. They’re warriors from HOPE Base. Their job is to protect the base and its people. They’re here to escort us back, just like I promised.”

Although Jason and the others already knew this, the aura surrounding Fred and his team was on a completely different level. Especially during combat, their sheer strength was intimidating. But thanks to Fred’s team, the journey back to HOPE Base was smoother and safer than any of them had expected.

That was until they were just a kilometer away from the base.

Suddenly, Fred and the others broke into a sprint, moving so fast it was nearly impossible for Jason, Adam, and their team to keep up. Their lungs burned, their breathing turned ragged, and sweat poured down their faces, soaking their clothes as they pushed themselves to the limit. But they had no choice—they couldn’t afford to fall behind. A massive horde of zombies was chasing them from behind, and slowing down meant death.

After all, they were already deep within the heart of the City.

Most would avoid building a base in such a dangerous area. Those who did settle within city limits typically chose safer zones—locations with easy access to the outside. But HOPE Base was different. It was established right in the city's core, a place swarming with the undead. To whoever built this base, the endless zombie hordes weren't just a threat—they were a natural barrier, a wall of death that shielded the base from intruders.

At the same time, however, this so-called natural barrier was a double-edged sword. If things ever went south, the horde could just as easily turn on them—waves upon waves of zombies crashing against the base, potentially overwhelming its defenses. But if managed well, these millions of undead surrounding the city could become a terrifying weapon. Any intruders foolish enough to try and spark a territory war would have to face the swarm first—HOPE Base wouldn't even need to lift a finger to wipe them out.

Right now, though, the tide hadn't turned in their favor.

Jason and the others were struggling to keep pace, running at full speed as they pushed toward the safety of the base's perimeter. Then—finally—they saw it: a towering 10-meter-high wall, sturdy and formidable, with soldiers stationed on top holding rifles at the ready. And just below them, an imposing iron gate loomed ahead.

Compared to this fortress, their own camps seemed like nothing more than a roadside outpost.

“Move, men! Move! Open the gate! The City Lord has arrived!” the gatekeeper shouted from atop the wall, waving frantically to signal the ground crew. Warriors and soldiers immediately jumped into action. Some worked the gate's heavy metal doors, while others prepared to lay down covering fire.

As Kisha and the others crossed into range, the warriors launched their awakened abilities at the zombies trailing close behind—flames, earth, wind, and more exploding through the horde and cutting their numbers down before they could get too close.

Meanwhile, additional soldiers and warriors were stationed just inside the gate, weapons drawn and eyes sharp. Any undead that managed to slip through the opening would be dealt with instantly. No one would get past them.

Because of the commotion at the gate, several people nearby gathered to see what was going on. Word had already spread that the training warriors along with their captains, were frantically searching for their City Lord, who had suddenly run off into the city.

Of course, they were worried about her—Kisha had gone out alone, and everyone was well aware of how dangerous the city had become with the rise of evolving zombies. No matter how strong she was, they couldn't help but worry about her like she were family.

So when they saw Kisha returning, flanked by Fred and his team, smiles broke out across their faces. Relief flooded the crowd. But then, their eyes shifted to the unfamiliar faces trailing behind her—worn down, dirt-smudged, and clearly not from HOPE Base. These newcomers looked exhausted and hollow-eyed, their clothes travel-worn and their bodies half-starved.

It was a stark contrast to the people of HOPE Base, who looked healthy, well-fed, and strong.

Even Jason and Adam noticed the difference. Still bent over, hands on their knees, gasping for air with their mouths wide open, they slowly looked up and took in the scene before them. There were people—lots of them—crowded just inside the walls. But what caught their attention most were the armed

soldiers standing guard with cold eyes and loaded guns, and the warriors with their arms crossed or hands resting on their hips, staring at the newcomers with thinly veiled curiosity.

It felt like they were being observed—measured—as though they were part of a show.

“Young Madam, you’ve returned,” Tristan said, stepping forward the moment Kisha crossed through the gate.

Duke’s elite assistant lived up to his reputation—calm, efficient, and always prepared. In the few hours Kisha had been gone—three, maybe four—Tristan had already wrapped up his tasks and was now ready to take over, prepared to guide the visitors and escort them to the marketplace.

Fortunately, by now, Kisha had adjusted somewhat to her condition. Though still sluggish, she could move with more ease, and the discomfort that had wracked her body earlier had dulled. The burning sensation within had lessened, and the cold that clung to her skin was now more tolerable. Her body temperature had begun to even out—still cool on the surface, but at least her core warmth was returning.

“Hmm. I’m back. Anything change while I was away?” she asked simply, exhaling as she steadied her breath.

“The marketplace has been fully prepared,” Tristan explained. “And if the visitors wish to eat at the cafeteria, pricing has already been arranged. In short, the entire base is ready to receive them.”

This meant that Tristan and Mr. Winters had not only discussed the retail prices of supplies to be sold at the marketplace but had also addressed matters concerning the Supply Center. Since they were already organizing things, they included the cafeteria in their preparations as well.

Originally, the cafeteria had been created for the convenience of the warriors and soldiers—especially those who didn't have families to cook for them. After exhausting missions or patrols, the last thing they needed was to prepare food. The cafeteria served as a vital support system for them.

However, it was also open to the general public, albeit with different pricing. To avoid making this difference too obvious, pricing was listed in two forms: workpoints and crystal cores. Residents paid with workpoints, a currency they earned through labor and contribution to the base. Outsiders, on the other hand, paid with crystal cores.

This dual-currency system created a clear but subtle distinction between residents and visitors. If a resident wished to use crystal cores instead of workpoints, they would quietly request a discount to avoid drawing attention.

After all, those crystal cores would be funneled directly into the base's treasury—a resource managed by Kisha and her team. Considering she provided nearly everything for the base, it was only fitting that these cores were used to strengthen her forces and upgrade the base's defenses. In the end, it was an investment in their survival and future.

Hearing this, Kisha smiled, pleased that Tristan and Mr. Winters had taken care of something she herself had forgotten. The group she picked up outside looked utterly exhausted—half-starved and ready to collapse from the run and hunger.

So, when Jason and his team heard the mention of the cafeteria, their eyes lit up, and some even began to drool. They didn't know what kind of food was served there, but just by seeing the healthy, well-fed complexions of the people around the base, they could tell Kisha hadn't lied.

This place truly had resources, and there was real potential to begin trading. They could only imagine what kind of food was available—canned goods, maybe even something rich in carbohydrates. At this point, even simple rice or bread sounded like a feast.

As both groups looked around the base with wonder and excitement, Kisha turned back to Fred and said, “Fred, thank you for your help. You and your team can return now and grab a meal at the cafeteria. Once you're back, have your team collect an extra bottle of Scarlet Honey. All of it will be covered by the base. Also, spread the word—those who participated in the search should receive their rewards as well.”

Kisha knew that the stick-and-carrot method worked best. By rewarding those who served well, she not only encouraged loyalty but also sent a clear message to the newly listed warriors about how their City Lord treated her people. And with the recruitment still ongoing, showing generosity now would boost morale and inspire them to work even harder. The result would be faster progress in training her target of 1,500 new warriors—an essential step for the base's future.