

Apocalypse 820

Chapter 820 Kickstarting The Trade 7

Jason and the others watched closely, observing how the cafeteria operated. They saw people step up to the counter and point at the dishes they wanted. A staff member behind the counter would scoop generous portions onto a plate, place it on a tray, and move on to the next item until the tray was full.

At the end of the counter, the diners would hand over a stamped and signed paper currency to the cashier. If any change was due, the cashier would return a similar paper slip with the appropriate amount, functioning just like real money.

Once their meals were paid for, people found a seat and began to eat.

The entire system was smooth, efficient, and well-organized—completely different from the chaos they were used to back in their old camp. There, food distribution was centralized, meals were handed out in rations, and most people simply wandered aimlessly, paralyzed by fear.

But here, everything operated on contribution. If you worked, you earned work points—and with those, you could buy what you needed. It was a system built on purpose, not pity.

Adam couldn't help but feel that their own camp needed a serious reorganization. They had spent too long clinging to the hope of rescue from the government, treating their situation as temporary.

But seeing how structured and self-sufficient this base was made him realize—it was time they stopped waiting and started building something of their own. They needed rules, systems, and a working structure if they wanted their community to truly function and survive.

When it was finally their turn at the counter, Jason stepped forward and hungrily pointed at the beef and broccoli drenched in rich, savory sauce. Then he added the braised pork and roasted duck to his order. His stomach growled just looking at the food—he wanted to order everything, and so he did.

But the man behind the meat counter gave him a friendly reminder. “One meat dish comes with the full set,” he said. “If you want to add more, there’s an extra charge.”

Jason paused, unsure of how much more he could afford. He glanced over at Kisha, uncertain, his hunger battling with his hesitation—it had been almost two months since he’d had a proper meal, let alone meat.

Kisha met his gaze and gave him a small nod of approval.

“How many meat dishes do you want?” Kisha asked.

Jason pointed eagerly at all three he had his eyes on. Kisha added, “That’ll cost you two crystal cores in total—you’ll get the full set with one meat dish, and the other two as extras. Are you okay with that?”

Jason nodded without hesitation. “I’m willing. My team and I have collected 586 crystal cores. I can share the extra meat dishes with them, so each of us only needs to spend one core for a full meal.”

His teammates nodded eagerly in agreement—some even looked like they were about to drool. Seeing their reactions, Kisha chuckled and nodded at the man behind the counter. The man smiled back and generously scooped all three meat dishes onto Jason’s plate. Since it was their first time visiting the cafeteria, he even added a bit more than usual, piling the food high.

Jason grinned from ear to ear and moved to the next counter, choosing stir-fried cabbage, radish and meat soup, a fruit platter for dessert, three portions of rice, and a bottle of oolong tea.

When Jason reached the cashier, he set down his tray. The man behind the counter glanced at it and asked, “Paying with work points?”

“No,” Jason replied, shaking his head. “I’m paying with crystal cores.” He gently placed the cloth pouch full of cores on the counter—carefully setting it a bit away from his tray, afraid the grime might somehow taint his hard-earned, delicious food. Just the thought of that happening made his heart ache.

The cashier looked up in surprise, clearly recognizing that the man before him must be an outsider and this would be his first time handling crystal cores as payment. They had just been briefed about it earlier. His surprise quickly turned into a broad smile as he said, “Ah, right! One full set plus two extra meat dishes—that’ll be a total of two crystal cores, sir.”

Without hesitation, Jason handed over the payment. “Thank you for your business!” the cashier said cheerfully.

Before leaving, Jason pulled out six more crystal cores and passed them over. The man blinked, confused for a moment, until Jason gestured toward his team who were still choosing their meals. “That’s for them—I’m covering their meals too.”

Understanding dawned on the man's face, and he grinned as he accepted the payment, carefully recording everything in the sales log.

Adam also bought an extra meat dish like Jason and shared it with his team. Once everyone had chosen their meals, they gathered and filled up three tables in total. Jason and Adam sat with Kisha and Tristan, who also joined them for the meal.

Since Kisha and Tristan were among the leaders and core members of the base, they didn't need to pay. The cashier simply logged their meals as "officer meals" in the sales journal. It wasn't unusual—leaders like Kisha rarely ate in the cafeteria, and even when they did, no one would question it.

After all, the food they were enjoying came from the efforts of Kisha and her people, who had risked their lives to secure supplies and continuously sought ways to increase food production. In the eyes of the base, their meals were well-earned.

Jason and the others ate with ravenous enthusiasm, devouring every bite as if they might accidentally bite their own tongues from sheer excitement. The food was so delicious they couldn't tell whether it was because they hadn't had a proper warm meal in so long—or if the cafeteria's cooking was simply that good.

In truth, it was both.

Everything served in the cafeteria was made with fresh, high-quality ingredients. The vegetables and meat all came from Kisha's Territory Space—grown and raised in an environment untouched by pollution. Although the meat was frozen during transport, it was still remarkably fresh, sourced directly

from the livestock raised in that pristine space. Thanks to the Territory's unique buffs and the expert care given to both crops and animals, the ingredients were nothing short of exceptional.

Even before the apocalypse, this kind of quality would have stood out in any marketplace. Here, in this new world, it was practically a luxury—and the taste proved it.

No one spoke during the meal. Everyone was too focused on eating, and even Kisha remained quiet, savoring her own food in silence. It wasn't until the plates were empty and stomachs full that the mood began to lighten.

Jason and Adam's teams lounged back in their chairs, bellies rounded and satisfied, looking like sleepy pigs as they lazily picked their teeth with the toothpicks provided in the middle of the table.

"Boss, your base is seriously the best," Jason finally said, half-joking as he cast a hopeful glance at Kisha. "Do you accept more people? What if we just brought our group back and joined you?"