

Apocalypse 821

Chapter 821 Kickstarting The Trade 8

Kisha shook her head lightly, but not without sympathy. She didn't want to crush their hopes entirely, so she explained, "We've just expanded our territory and are still in the middle of building more infrastructure. Right now, we're working hard to develop this place into a self-sustaining base. We already have over 5,000 residents, and living arrangements are tight. Taking in more survivors at the moment would strain our living spaces and delay our progress."

She paused briefly, then added, "That's why, instead of opening our gates to more people right now, we're opening trade routes. It gives other survivor groups a chance to survive on their own terms—without overwhelming our systems. Once we've stabilized and expanded enough, then we'll see how many more people we can safely bring in."

Kisha carefully chose her words, striking a balance that ensured her message wouldn't be misunderstood. She made it clear that while her base currently lacked the space to accommodate new survivors, her intention was not to reject them outright but to propose a strategic alliance with other settlements instead. By sharing her resources, Kisha aimed to foster cooperation and mutual benefit—extending her influence without overburdening her own facilities.

This way, both sides stood to gain: the allied settlements would receive vital support, and Kisha's base could strengthen its external ties. Moreover, she emphasized that the current limitations were not permanent. Plans were already underway to reorganize the living arrangements within her base, which would eventually free up space. When that time came, there was a strong possibility that new survivors would be welcomed as full residents.

Once Kisha accomplished that, her base would undoubtedly become a position of high value—one that many would aspire to attain. She could then use this status as leverage to recruit more capable and resourceful individuals into her ranks.

Furthermore, permanent residency at HOPE Base could serve as a powerful incentive—a reward offered to alliance members from other settlements. The promise of greater security, fortified walls, and a stable food supply would motivate them to contribute more actively, all for the chance to relocate to a safer and more prosperous environment.

“Oh... I see.” Jason lowered his head, deep in thought. No one could quite tell what was going through his mind, but he understood the reality well enough. Every settlement had limitations—most couldn’t take in more survivors without putting a strain on their resources or available space.

And considering Kisha’s base wasn’t lacking in supplies, the only logical explanation was that they were short on living space. Expanding a base’s territory was no easy feat, so it made sense that they’d have to wait before accepting more people.

Still, Kisha’s offer to open a trade route wasn’t a bad deal—in fact, it was a great opportunity. It gave them more options for the future. After considering it thoroughly, Jason looked up and nodded in agreement.

“You’re right, boss. Securing a trade route with HOPE Base is already a big win. My brothers and I will finally be able to eat well—as long as we can bring in enough crystal cores. Plus, it gives us the chance to grow stronger.”

Then, with renewed enthusiasm, he stood up and added, “So, would you please show us where we can start trading?”

Seeing Jason so fired up, his brothers quickly followed suit, rising to their feet with satisfied grins and full bellies from the hearty meal they had just enjoyed. Even Adam and his group looked eager, their eyes

lighting up at the thought of finally seeing how much they could trade for the crystal cores they had collected.

After all, they had managed to gather a significant number of cores in just a single day—and it was largely thanks to Fred and his team, whose support had made the battles much easier. The thought of returning with even more crystal cores next time stirred excitement among them. The more they collected, the more supplies they could trade for. And that simple reality sparked genuine hope in their once-uncertain hearts, making the future seem a little less bleak.

“Alright, you guys follow me,” Kisha said as she stood up, smoothing out her clothes before picking up her tray. She carried it to the designated drop-off area where the dishwashing crew would handle it, then turned to leave the cafeteria. Tristan and their guests followed close behind.

They walked at a relaxed pace, allowing the food in their stomach to settle while giving the visitors a chance to observe the base more closely. Jason and the others took full advantage of the opportunity, their eyes roaming curiously as they passed various sections of the compound.

Eventually, they arrived at what used to be a massive parking lot adjacent to the Central Hall. Now, it had been repurposed into a bustling marketplace. Numerous stalls lined the area, some well-constructed and neatly arranged, while others were still under construction. A few vendors had simply laid out large cloths on the ground, displaying their goods in makeshift setups and sitting cross-legged behind them. Despite the humble conditions, the space was shaded by large tarpaulins stretched overhead, providing comfort for both merchants and buyers alike.

As soon as the stall owners caught sight of Kisha’s silhouette approaching in the distance, a wave of excitement swept through them. This marked the first official day of opening their stalls to trade—and more importantly, their first opportunity to interact with survivors from outside the base.

They knew this was just the trial phase of the marketplace, but it was a critical one. If they managed to do well, they could not only earn more within the base but also trade for valuable items that outsiders had gathered—things they might never find without leaving the safety of HOPE Base. Some were even hopeful about acquiring rare supplies or crystal cores through these exchanges.

Eager to make the most of the moment, the stall owners sprang into action. They called out with enthusiasm, trying to draw attention to their goods. Many had brought along family members to help attract customers, creating a lively and bustling atmosphere. Others quickly scribbled prices on boards and propped them in front of their stalls, determined to stand out and make a strong impression on this important day.

“Handsome brother, won’t you come and take a look at my cured meats? They’re tender, flavorful, and even packed with added nutrients!” one of the stall owners called out enthusiastically, trying to catch Jason’s attention.

Kisha’s curiosity was piqued as her gaze shifted to the large stall. Hanging prominently at the front was an entire cured pork hind leg—thick, rich in color, and clearly aged in the style of traditional ham. It looked impressive even at a glance.

Her instincts kicked in, and with a subtle flicker of her ‘Eye of Truth,’ Kisha inspected the item more closely—only to discover...

[Cured Meat]

[Description: Made by a skilled Artisan who mastered the art of butchery and meat preservation even before the apocalypse. Their expertise has only grown stronger since awakening their abilities.

Quality: A

Additional Effects:

Strength +3 (Duration: 1 hour)

Stamina Regeneration (Duration: 30 minutes)]

Kisha's eyes widened in pleasant surprise at the details revealed by her 'Eye of Truth'. Then it hit her—of course! The stall owners were all Artisan-type Awakened ability users. It was only natural that their creations would carry special properties, functioning as support items with practical combat or survival benefits.

Her smile slowly grew as she glanced around, her curiosity sparked. While she hadn't yet seen another item with effects quite like this one, it made perfect sense. These Artisans had only recently begun applying their abilities to production. With time and experience, the quality and utility of their items would only improve.

She stepped closer to the stall, intrigued.

The stall owner, noticing her interest, grew visibly flustered. A nervous sweat gathered on his brow as he quickly stepped out from behind the table and gave Kisha a respectful bow. Unsure if the City Lord was inspecting his goods out of interest or disapproval, he anxiously glanced back at his hand-written price board to double-check whether he'd accidentally overcharged.

Despite the stall owner's obvious nervousness, Kisha calmly said, "Tristan, please add to our agenda that the stall owners should submit samples of their products periodically for quality inspections."

The stall owner's anxiety spiked immediately. He feared Kisha thought his products were subpar or didn't meet the standards, and for a moment, he felt on the verge of tears.

Sensing his worry, Kisha quickly reassured him, "This cured meat is of exceptional quality, with additional effects comparable to support-type items. These kinds of products are truly special and invaluable for our combatants."

She continued firmly, "Assign Awakened ability users with Appraisal skills to the marketplace. They can identify which items possess special effects and classify them as 'special items'—those should be priced accordingly."

Kisha's eyes lingered on the cured meat. Among all the goods on the table, it was the only one with a special effect—and that was already impressive. After all, the Artisan community was just beginning to create such items, and even the workshop artisans hadn't yet produced anything comparable. This was a promising start.