

Apocalypse 823

Chapter 823 Kickstarting The Trade 10

Of course, to make this plan work, she needed her people to be well-prepared. Since the marketplace stalls were now open to outsiders, she took steps to ensure her base wouldn't be taken advantage of. All stall owners from her community were required to learn how to detect spiritual energy from crystal cores—this was a mandatory qualification to operate a stall. Otherwise, they risked being scammed by people trying to pass off shattered glass as genuine crystal cores.

“Wait, wait, Boss—is it true?” someone asked excitedly. “Even if we're not residents here, we can still trade as long as we have something to sell? But what if the items we're selling aren't anything special?”

“It's okay—not all items here are considered special,” Kisha explained to Jason and the others. “That's why we've designated a 'Special Items' category, and we've assigned appraisers to roam the marketplace. Their job is to help stall owners identify which of their goods have unique properties, explain the additional effects, and provide buyers with accurate information.”

Everything she was saying was new to them, and Kisha understood that this entire concept might feel overwhelming at first. But all they needed to do was remember the key points. She hoped that the next time they returned, they'd bring items they wanted to trade, rent a stall, share knowledge with the residents of the base, and help spread the word to other survivors they encountered.

After all, only by letting the message spread would more people learn that HOPE Base had finally opened its gates to welcome trade and cooperation with other settlements.

It was true that Kisha and her base could have broadcast the announcement over the radio, letting people from far and wide hear about HOPE Base and encouraging them to travel there. But that approach came with significant risks.

Right now, the reason Kisha was allowing the news to spread only through word of mouth was because HOPE Base lacked any strong alliances with powerful settlements. Even Jason and Adam's camps were relatively small, housing perhaps a few dozen people—at most, a hundred. Calling them "allies" was still a stretch.

Kisha's strategy was to help these smaller settlements become independent and stronger. Ideally, she wanted them to form a ring of allied communities around HOPE Base, acting as a natural line of defense against any external threats—especially from distant regions or larger, more resource-hungry bases whose intentions could be good... or not.

In short, Kisha wanted to first cultivate a secure and stable network around City B. By observing how trade developed within this region, she could gradually position HOPE Base as a central trading hub for all settlements. But before anything else, she needed to establish HOPE Base's presence and reputation in people's minds, while simultaneously strengthening her warriors to ensure no one would dare underestimate them.

Hearing Kisha's explanation, both Jason and Adam were genuinely happy. The information she shared was not only valuable but also potentially game-changing for their small settlement. Excited, they eagerly looked around, checking out the various goods being offered.

Jason, who was often out fighting and clearing the perimeter around their camp, found himself especially interested in items with special effects. He understood how something as simple as enhanced food could boost their combat abilities and survival rate.

He approached the stall owner with a hopeful look. "Excuse me, sir, would it be possible to sample a piece of this cured meat? I'm interested in buying some. It might help my people fight better and fend off zombies more effectively around our camp. If it really works, we could collect more crystal cores and return here to trade for even more supplies."

His sincere words made Kisha smile. After all, that was all it took—one small step for them to realize just how useful Special Items could be in their daily struggles. She was confident that once they experienced the benefits firsthand, they'd understand the true value of trade and the strength it could bring to their communities.

“Sure! Sure! Just give me a moment to grab my knife and cut a piece for you!” the stall owner said enthusiastically. He quickly ducked back inside his stall, pulled down the slab of cured meat, and placed it onto a chopping board. With practiced hands, he trimmed the excess dried fat around the hind leg until the rich, reddish meat beneath was revealed. Then, he sliced a few thin pieces and arranged them neatly on a wooden plate.

Turning to them with a bright smile, he offered the plate. “City Lord, please try some as well. While the additional effect of this cured meat may not be particularly useful to someone of your strength, I'd really appreciate your thoughts on the taste. That way, I can adjust my recipe to make it better.”

Kisha glanced around and noticed a small container of toothpicks placed at the front of the stall. She picked one up, used it to spear a slice of the cured meat, and placed it in her mouth, curious to sample the flavor.

The burst of flavor spread across Kisha's tongue as she chewed. The cured meat wasn't overly dry, nor did it have an overpowering taste. Instead, it carried a lingering aftertaste that subtly whetted her appetite.

“It's surprisingly good!” Kisha admitted openly, licking her lips. While the additional effect might not benefit her much, she had to acknowledge that the taste was exceptional. “How long does it take to make this kind of cured meat?” she asked curiously.

The stall owner smiled, clearly pleased with her reaction. He didn't hesitate to answer, since it wasn't as if she was asking for his secret recipe—just the general process.

“City Lord, this particular hind leg took me about a month to cure fully and reach its current quality. I've still got a few barrels of cured meat at home—this one's just a sample I brought to test the market. Since you like it, I feel more confident about bringing out the rest once more outsiders start coming in.”

He continued with a hint of pride in his tone, “Of course, the curing time and method depend on the size and type of meat. The one you tasted used the simplest curing method, which takes about two to three weeks. But if I use a more delicate and refined process, it can take anywhere from three months up to three years. The longer the cure, the more superb the taste.”

Kisha nodded with approval, genuinely impressed by the effort and dedication behind the product.

She began to wonder if the curing process itself influenced the type and strength of the additional effects the final product possessed. After all, this cured meat already had a 'Quality: A' rating and offered a beneficial boost to fighters who consumed it. If higher-quality cured meats with stronger effects were introduced to the market, just how much more powerful could they be?

Kisha was genuinely curious to see how far these kinds of support items could go in aiding survival and combat.

As she glanced around the bustling marketplace, a new idea suddenly sparked in her mind. Didn't O08 once mention that a 'Heavenly Chef' had a similar ability? That their cooking could infuse dishes with spiritual energy and grant powerful additional effects?

If that was true... what would happen if she introduced spiritual cuisine into this market?

How big of a ripple would it cause?

Should she try it?