

## Apocalypse 921

### Chapter 921 Going To Battle

Kisha froze for a moment as she compared her stats to Duke's. Her own base attributes had only risen by 90, bringing her total to 280 points, without counting the stat boosts from titles, achievements, and other system rewards. Respectable, certainly.

But Duke? His base stats sat at a staggering 400... at just Level 4.

Her jaw dropped. That wasn't just a small gap; it was monstrous. Against normal awakened ability users, Duke's strength was the equivalent of being two to three levels higher. The comparison stung, and Kisha could only swallow the bitter truth: she was lucky to have her cheat, which was her system, or Duke would've left her in the dust long ago.

His so-called "Gift: Tyrant" was exactly that—a tyrant among gifts. On top of that, he wasn't just a dual ability user with both mental and elemental powers. His elemental affinity stretched across three different elements.

Kisha sucked in a sharp breath, then quickly shut her mouth, refusing to compare any further. Some things were better left unquestioned.

She closed the status window and steadied her thoughts just as 008 chimed in. "Host, I got what you wanted. It cost 10,000 system points. If only you could make this yourself, not only would we save points, we could even sell it in the store's sales channel."

008 let out a dramatic sigh, as though its imaginary heart ached at the loss. But Kisha knew better. Deep down, 008 was always the happiest when she spent more points. After all, every purchase benefited it too.

Why else would it constantly nudge her toward the mall and sales channel, coaxing her to buy more things? The more she sold, the more she spent, and the higher 008's ranking climbed among the other systems under the same Constellation.

"Host, you can't accuse me of that..." 008 protested weakly, sounding as if it didn't even believe its own excuse.

Kisha rolled her eyes at 008 before pulling the item from her inventory, the very thing she made 008 into buying. Turning to Duke, she asked softly, "Are you ready?"

Only then did she notice the state they were in. The steam that had surrounded them was beginning to fade, but not before leaving their clothes damp.

Duke's shirt clung to his chest and shoulders along with every ridge of his muscle, already soaked through, and Kisha realized her own clothes were no different, sticking to her curves like a second skin.

When she met Duke's gaze, she caught the flicker in his eyes as they instinctively swept over her. His darkening expression betrayed the thoughts he fought to suppress. With effort, he looked away, jaw tight.

He couldn't afford to let his body react to his wife now, not when something more important demanded their focus. But resisting the temptation of the alluring siren before him was a battle in itself.

But unfortunately, his sharp eyes still caught a fleeting glimpse. The tips of his ears burned crimson, the color spreading across to his face and down to his neck as he held his breath, silently chanting every mantra he could muster inside his head.

The sight amused Kisha. To think that this husband of hers, so beastly and relentless in bed, still had traces of innocence left made her heart flutter in a way she hadn't expected. It was endearing, almost disarming.

Still, she reminded herself they didn't have the luxury of lingering in this ambiguous atmosphere. Pretending not to notice his flustered state, she simply said, her tone calm and practical, "I think we need to change clothes before going out..."

"Um..." Duke nodded quickly before dashing off like someone was chasing him with a whip. The sight of him scurrying away made Kisha burst out laughing. She was never used to seeing Duke in such a flustered, shy state, trying so hard to hide his embarrassment; it was almost too adorable.

But she didn't linger either. Gathering herself, she ran out, only to find Mike pacing anxiously outside the steam. His hands tugged at his hair, his face drawn and haggard, as if he had been standing there for hours.

Clearly, he had been waiting since the moment she and Duke started cultivating until now, helpless and worried sick.

Her amusement faded when her eyes fell on his hands, red and blistered from the heat. Unlike her and Duke, who had naturally high defenses, Mike couldn't withstand such conditions. This boy was no fighter; aside from his rare gift to nurture and tame animals, he was no different from an ordinary human.

Still, seeing Mike worry for them so earnestly warmed Kisha's heart. The sight of his blistered hands and haggard face softened her even more. She pulled out a vial of shimmering blue liquid from her inventory and stepped closer. "Take this. Your hands need it. We're fine, thank you for worrying."

Mike blinked, caught off guard, and looked from her face to the vial in her hand.

The moment he realized they were safe, it was as if the strength drained right out of him. After fourteen straight hours of waiting and worrying inside the Territory Space, the tension he had been carrying finally snapped. His knees nearly buckled, and he would have fallen had Kisha not steadied him.

Relief overwhelmed him so completely that he didn't even notice her damp clothes clinging to her figure. His red-rimmed eyes grew even wetter as he nodded again and again. "No worries, Young Madam..." he murmured hoarsely.

"Alright, go and rest for now," Kisha urged gently. Only after watching him turn away, stumbling a little, but gradually finding his footing, did she allow herself to head off into the forest, searching for a suitable spot to set up the screen divider so she could change.

Not long after, Kisha finished wiping herself down and changed into fresh clothes—a black tank top paired with tactical pants and boots—before draping her Erebus Cloak over her shoulders for added protection.

When she stepped out, Duke was already waiting. He had cleaned himself up as well, washing away the grime from working on the biogas project, and now wore tactical pants, boots, and a fitted black shirt that clung to his frame.

The fabric stretched across his broad chest and the define ridges of his abs, his taut biceps flexing with the slightest movement. He was every bit the kind of eye candy Kisha could happily spend all day admiring, if only they weren't in the middle of an important mission.

On top of that, he wore his Kratos' Cloak, the fabric draping over him with quiet authority, while his hand rested firmly around the shaft of his Kratos' Spear.

Looking at him now, dressed to match her, they really did make a striking pair. Kisha flashed Duke a grin before pulling him out of her Territory Space, and in the blink of an eye, they were back at the Villa of HOPE Base. Without wasting time, she drew out the scroll she had made 008 buy.

"Hold on to me," Kisha instructed.

Though Duke had no idea what she was planning, he obeyed without hesitation, wrapping his arms around her from behind. The moment his embrace tightened, Kisha tore the scroll's seal.

Instantly, the world around them warped, the scenery stretched, twisted, and shifted with such violent force that Duke nearly lost his grip on her. His stomach lurched, dizziness swarmed over him, and for a terrifying instant, it felt like he was being hurled from a great height. Then, just as suddenly, everything stopped.

When his senses steadied, Duke realized the world around them had completely changed. He and Kisha were no longer standing on solid ground—they were floating in the open sky.

Kisha's telekinesis held them aloft as she stared downward. Following her gaze, Duke's breath caught. Below them, an endless tide of zombies surged forward, flooding across the land like a tsunami. The sight was so overwhelming that even Kisha felt her scalp prickle at the sheer scale of it.

She scanned the area with her heightened senses until she pinpointed the shelter Keith had mentioned.

Fortunately, Keith had sent her the coordinates earlier. With that in mind, when she tore open the Teleportation Scroll and focused on the location, she and Duke were instantly transported straight to Maple Leaf Town.

There was no time to waste—Keith and the others were in dire straits, and traveling by car or any other means would have taken far too long. The scroll was expensive and single-use, but Kisha had plenty of points to spare. Compared to the lives at stake, the cost was nothing.

And just as she witnessed, Keith hadn't been exaggerating. At this rate, they wouldn't be able to hold out much longer; the entire shelter could be wiped out within half an hour under the sheer scale of the zombie wave.

It wasn't as massive as the one that struck their base weeks ago, but this horde was no less dangerous, especially with Adam's shelter being so much smaller and far less fortified in comparison.

#### Chapter 922 A Pitiful Child

As Kisha watched, countless flashes of light lit up the battlefield, streaking toward the incoming zombie wave, abilities unleashed by the awakened ability users.

「Two Hours Earlier」

Sparrow had tried to contact HOPE Base, but every attempt failed. He was wracking his brain for a way to send a message quickly, because the longer he remained in that place, the heavier his chest felt.

It was the same suffocating dread he once experienced when he faced the mutated tree. Back then, he had ignored the warning and charged ahead, nearly losing his life. Now, with that brush against death still etched into him, he had learned to recognize the feeling for what it was: a premonition of danger.

Perched on the rooftop, acting as the eyes for Vulture and the others, Sparrow kept watch over the shelter from a distance. His gaze swept beyond, searching for threats, but the streets held only a few scattered zombies. The mutated zombie that had disappeared into the forest still hadn't returned, which only deepened his unease.

He felt as if he were sitting on pins and needles. Without any visual on the mutated zombie, paranoia gnawed at him—anything could happen the moment he looked away. Unable to shake the unease, he finally grabbed his radio and keyed it on.

"Vulture, over."

"I'm here, over."

"I lost sight of the mutated zombie, and I've got a really bad feeling about this. I tried connecting to the base, but my signal just won't go through. Do you think Young Madam's family has a way to reach her?" Sparrow asked.

She was the only one he could think of, after all, he'd seen their Young Madam pull out countless mysterious items no one could explain. If she had let her beloved grandparents and younger brother join this mission without hesitation, it likely meant she had more safeguards in place than just life-saving talismans. Perhaps even a way for her family to contact her in times of danger.

"I'll ask around," Vulture replied, nodding as his voice came through the radio. "For now, keep your eyes on the shelter from above." With that, he glanced around the meeting room, gave the second-in-command a nod, and went off in search of Keith.

Keith, who was with his grandparents speaking to the survivors, finally saw just how different life was outside their hidden base and HOPE Base. Here in Adam's shelter, the situation was grim.

Although the population was not that large, the only structure they had was a single kindergarten building, nowhere near the size of a proper school, with just a few floors. Most people had no choice but to sleep on the cold, hard ground, lucky if they managed to find a blanket thick enough to dull the chill seeping into their bodies.

Supply runs were rare and dangerous. Whenever they ventured out, food always came first; clothing and other necessities were considered luxuries, nearly impossible to secure, and it wasn't because there were no such supplies to be found outside but because they didn't have the time to gather such supplies aside from the food.

It wasn't that the streets outside looked swarmed with zombies; in fact, they often seemed strangely empty, but the moment anyone tried to move further out, the undead would appear as though watching and waiting for their chance to strike.

Only Adam's team had the strength to go far for supplies; the rest could barely manage routine patrols around the perimeter before facing sudden attacks.

More than that, everyone in the shelter was dirty, their skin and clothes coated in layers of blackened dust and grime. With water and electricity gone long ago, washing up was a luxury they could no longer afford.

When the scorching heat pressed down, they had no choice but to retreat into the basement, and when the bitter cold set in, they huddled together just to keep warm. Even the children, usually a source of energy and laughter, looked weary and subdued, so different from the lively kids in HOPE Base.

And yet, this was already an improvement compared to before Adam and the others discovered HOPE Base. Back then, desperation had driven these people to the point of stripping bark from trees in the back forest, boiling it just to stave off hunger.

Grandma Alden's heart ached as she took in the sight of the shelter's survivors, especially the children and the frail elderly among them. Compassion welled up inside her, but so did a sobering realization: if her granddaughter Kisha hadn't been so capable, their family might have ended up in the same state.

In truth, in their past lives, that was exactly what had happened. Because Kisha struggled to earn system points and was constantly pushed to the frontlines by the missions forced upon her, her grandparents and younger brother had lived in conditions no better than these survivors.

Her grandparents, believing themselves to be a burden, often chose to give up on living just so Kisha wouldn't have to risk her life scavenging supplies from the most dangerous places just to keep them alive.

Worse still, those whom Kisha had saved in those lives would use her family against her, blackmailing her, threatening her, exploiting her love and sense of responsibility.

Keith glanced around the shelter. The place was tidy, the furniture pushed aside to make space, with flattened cardboard laid across the floor so the children wouldn't have to sleep directly on the cold ground.

The adults, however, have to make do with whatever they can, giving up their comfort so that the few available blankets can be reserved for the little ones.

Keith rubbed the tip of his nose, a heaviness settling in his chest. Coming here had given him a deeper understanding of how other survivors lived, how harsh and unforgiving life was outside HOPE Base.

But more than pity, what he felt most was pride. Pride in his sister, who had not only managed to raise the standard of living in HOPE Base but also quietly supported the hidden base without its people ever realizing just how much they owed her.

Keith's eyes fell on a little girl sitting off to the side, her small frame curled up with her face buried in her knees as she sniffled quietly. She looked so pitiful that Keith couldn't help but walk over and crouch down beside her.

A pang of memory hit him; he, too, had once been like this child, small and helpless, and his heart softened.

"Little girl, why are you crying?" he asked gently, pulling a chocolate bar from his pocket. "Here, have my sweets. They say sweets make girls smile, so... I hope you smile too."

But instead of brightening, the girl lifted her tear-streaked face, saw the kind, handsome stranger in front of her, and promptly burst into even louder sobs.

Keith froze, flustered. Heads were already starting to turn his way. He panicked, waving his hands quickly. "W—Wait, kid, I didn't do anything! Why are you crying?" he blurted out.

He wanted to retreat before anyone accused him of bullying a child, but at the same time, his conscience wouldn't let him abandon the little girl, who couldn't have been more than five.

"M-My dad was taken away by the monster outside... and he's not coming back anymore... Huhuhu, I'm so sad..." the little girl sobbed, her face streaked with tears and snot.

It seemed the person she was talking about was the very man Sparrow had seen dragged into the forest earlier. The girl had only overheard the adults whispering, but it was enough to shatter her world.

She had been waiting eagerly for her father to finish his shift so she could cuddle with him, but instead of warm arms and comfort, she was met with devastating news.

Earlier, she had cried so hard she nearly hyperventilated, and despite the adults' attempts to soothe her, nothing worked. In the end, with everyone overwhelmed by their own burdens, they had no choice but to leave her be until she calmed down on her own.

"Oh..." Keith was stumped. He didn't know what to say or how to comfort such a young child. All his life, it had always been his sister who comforted him, his emotional anchor ever since she was adopted by their grandparents.

"Kid, don't cry," he said gently. "Your dad is a hero. He did his best to protect you and your friends, and right now... he must be watching over you from the heavens. So, stop crying, okay? Otherwise, your father would be heartbroken seeing you like this."

Those were the very same words Kisha had once told him when he was little, when his mother died protecting him from his father's beating. Saying them now to the girl stirred something deep inside him, making his nose tingle and his eyes sting with unshed tears.

"Really? Is my dad like Superman now?" the little girl asked between sniffles. She didn't fully understand, but she grasped the heart of Keith's words, that her father had gone up to heaven, maybe to be with her mother.

#### Chapter 923 Incoming Zombie Wave

"Really? Is my dad like Superman now?" the little girl asked between sniffles. She didn't fully understand, but she grasped the heart of Keith's words, that her father had gone up to heaven, maybe to be with her mother.

Yet the thought only made her tears flow again. Now she was truly an orphan, without a mother or father.

Before the apocalypse, children without parents were often bullied, and the little girl knew all too well how sad it was to be one. The fear of that fate hit her, and she began crying even harder.

Keith pressed his lips together, glancing helplessly toward his grandmother in the distance. She had already noticed the sobbing child, and his pleading eyes begged her to rescue him from the situation.

He had repeated the same words his sister once used to comfort him, but somehow, when he said them, they only made the little girl's grief heavier.

Grandma Aldens let out a heavy sigh. Watching Keith gently coax the crying child stirred memories she had long buried. She remembered all too well what he had been like before they adopted Kisha, how withdrawn and pitiful he was after being branded a jinx to his parents.

The grief and pain he carried back then were unbearable for a child, yet he kept it all inside.

He never dared to complain or lean on the adults around him, terrified that he would become a burden or, worse, that he would also bring misfortune to his grandparents for taking him in. So, he built walls around himself and hid away in his own small world.

Everything began to change the day Kisha arrived. Bit by bit, she reached through his shell and pulled him back into the light. Grandma Aldens still remembered the words Kisha used to say to him—gentle, reassuring words that gave Keith strength.

Every time, Keith would look up proudly at the sky, convinced that his mother had become an angel watching over him.

It had been more than a decade since then, and the once pitiful, withdrawn boy had grown into someone so lively and full of light. The sight of him now made Grandma Aldens' lips curve into an uncontrollable smile.

With that warmth in her heart, she slowly stepped forward to comfort the crying girl.

"Sweetie, you may not see your father, but he's still protecting you. He wouldn't want you to feel sad, he'd be heartbroken," she murmured softly as she pulled the little one into her arms, cradling her with gentle care. "Shhh... don't cry, don't cry. Grandma will give you some chocolate, and then... how about we let that big brother show you a trick?"

Her gaze shifted toward Keith. He had just breathed out a sigh of relief, only to freeze stiff when his grandmother's eyes fell on him.

But Keith understood exactly what his grandmother wanted. Without a word of protest, he raised his hand and conjured a small snow-white rabbit, its fluffy form so lifelike it seemed ready to dart away at any moment. The tiny creature hopped around adorably, drawing curious eyes.

"Look, little one," Keith said gently, crouching closer. "A rabbit came to see you."

At the mention of a rabbit, something she hadn't seen in so long, the girl hiccupped mid-sob, her crying stopping as she peeked down. Her wide eyes followed the little white rabbit as it hopped about, while Grandma Aldens tenderly wiped the tears from her cheeks.

Seeing her reaction, Keith smiled faintly and conjured another illusion, a golden retriever with bright, gentle eyes.

His long hours of training were finally bearing fruit; the illusions he created now looked so vivid and real that only a touch would reveal their emptiness. For the little girl, though, they were magic brought to life.

The little girl was instantly captivated as more and more animals appeared around her. Soon, a patch of soft green grass spread beneath her feet, completing the magical scene. Her eyes lit up with wonder, her earlier sorrow forgotten; after all, she was only five, still easily distracted.

For the moment, her pain gave way to pure curiosity as she tried to figure out where all these enchanting creatures had come from.

After a short while of playing, the little girl finally drifted off to sleep. All the crying earlier had drained her tiny body of energy, and now she rested peacefully in Grandma Aldens's arms. Just then, Vulture stepped out of the meeting room. The moment he spotted Keith standing beside his grandmother, he immediately approached.

"Sir, Keith, may I have a moment?" he asked. Having just discussed a grave matter with Sparrow, one that could endanger all their lives, he hadn't managed to steady his tone, and his voice came out sharper and louder than intended.

The sudden sound startled the little girl, causing her to stir in Grandma Aldens's arms. At once, both grandmother and grandson turned and shot Vulture a glare. Startled, Vulture froze, only now noticing the child. His expression softened, and he lowered his voice apologetically.

"Sir, Keith," he repeated quietly, "may I speak with you? It's very urgent."

"Go on, you need to help the team..." Grandma Aldens urged, shooing her grandson away. Just then, Grandpa Aldens entered from outside, having finished his round checking the condition of the shelter. When he noticed his wife cradling a small child, he approached with concern to find out what had happened.

Taking the chance, Vulture guided Keith aside and into the meeting room. After sending the others back to guard the perimeter and continue monitoring the movements of the mutated zombie, the two were finally left alone.

"What's going on, Brother Vulture? Is something wrong?" Keith asked as soon as the last person stepped out and the door clicked shut behind them.

"Yeah. We believe that the mutated zombie here is on the verge of evolving into a Zombie King, and it already seems capable of controlling every zombie in this town. If that happens, we won't be able to defend this place on our own. We could lose everything... maybe even our lives if it decides to unleash a zombie wave, like what happened to HOPE Base weeks ago," Vulture explained gravely.

He didn't want to pressure Keith outright. Instead of directly demanding contact with Kisha, he chose to let Keith come to that decision on his own. Vulture knew that if he pushed too hard, the boy might grow defensive.

After all, anything belonging to their Young Madam was considered a priceless treasure in the eyes of others, and while outside, Keith was bound to be wary and vigilant.

Keith nodded, already picturing the possible disaster in his mind, so Vulture continued. "We tried contacting the base, but Sparrow couldn't get through. And our satellite phone... It's still under repair, so we didn't bring it. Right now, we're out of options." Vulture let his words trail off as he carefully studied Keith's expression, hoping the boy would catch his drift.

Keith nodded firmly. "Don't worry, Brother Vulture. I have a way to contact my sister directly. Just leave it to me."

His open admission caught Vulture off guard. A flicker of surprise crossed his face, quickly replaced by relief. Whether it was because Keith trusted them so deeply that he spoke without hesitation, or because he was simply too unguarded in front of others, Vulture wasn't sure.

If it was the latter, then he silently vowed to protect the boy no matter what. Keith wasn't just under his care as the team's second-in-command; he was also the younger brother of their Young Madam.

While Vulture's thoughts raced, Keith had already started clicking through the limited access granted to him in Kisha's Territory communication interface. Unlike the other leaders who held full administrative authority over the Territory Space, Keith's access was almost the same as Duke's access; it was not only restricted to the map, basic communications, and a few monitoring functions. And it was more than enough for what he needed to do.

Keith quickly located Kisha's name and opened the chat interface. For a moment, he considered calling her directly, but hesitated. If his sister was busy concocting stamina boosters, crafting magic scrolls, or cultivating, a sudden call might break her focus.

It was safer to message her instead—quiet, unobtrusive, and less likely to disrupt her work.

Just as he was about to type, the radio crackled to life.

"Vulture, over!" Sparrow's voice came through, tense and slightly frantic.

Vulture immediately snatched up the radio. "I'm here, over."

"Go on defense immediately! A zombie wave is coming in five minutes—they're flooding in like a tsunami! I think the mutated zombie has already sensed your presence inside the shelter and wants to wipe you all out!" Sparrow's frantic voice blared through the radio.

The moment the transmission ended, Vulture and Keith exchanged a sharp look before sprinting to the wall. Sure enough, in the distance, the horde surged forward like a monstrous tidal wave.

#### Chapter 924 Fighting Head On

They weren't just shambling, they were running. The sight was so terrifying that chills ran down the spines of even seasoned fighters like Vultures and his subordinates. Survivors on the wall shuddered, some collapsing as their knees buckled, overwhelmed by the sheer horror of the oncoming swarm.

"We're doomed! We're all going to die here!" one of the survivors cried, clutching his head in terror.

"Why are there so many zombies?! What's happening?!" another shouted hysterically. He wanted to run, but his legs refused to move; there was nowhere to go anyway. The wave was closing in from all four directions, trapping them like prey with no escape.

"YOU! It's you and your people! You brought them here!" one of the guards on the wall shouted, finger trembling as he pointed at Vulture. Fear twisted his face, and with no escape in sight, he poured his terror into rage. Hatred was easier to carry than helplessness.

At his outburst, the other panicked survivors turned their eyes on Vulture and his team. None spoke, but their accusing stares said enough. Vulture clenched his jaw because deep down, it wasn't entirely false.

The mutated zombie likely attacked because it sensed them inside, realizing they were trying to free its prey. Denied its game, it had chosen to wipe them all out.

Vulture pressed his lips into a thin line, saying nothing more. The survivors here were greenhorns, unfamiliar with battles of attrition like this. A wave of this scale would be enough to topple the shelter if it were left to them alone.

But with him and his team present, the odds shifted. They might not crush the wave entirely, but at the very least, they could hold the line until reinforcements arrived.

"Everyone, listen up!" Vulture's voice rang out with authority. "Awakened ability users, split into two groups. When you're at eighty percent exhaustion, rotate with the next group. STAUs, handle logistics. Keep the stamina boosters and black vials ready at all times. Non-ability users, arm yourselves. The STAUs brought weapons, use them, but don't waste ammo. Every shot counts, so make it efficient."

He then turned to the shelter survivors, his gaze hard. "Anyone who can fight, step forward and join us. Women and the elderly fall back into the inner rooms and guard the children. Protect them with your lives!"

"Why should we listen to you?" one of the survivors on the wall snapped, his voice trembling with both anger and despair. "Can't you see it's impossible to fight back now? There are thousands of them coming! Even with firearms, there's no way we can hold them off!"

He gripped his weapon with shaking hands, torn between rage and hopelessness. A part of him wanted to surrender to despair, but the thought of his child inside the building kept him standing.

Yet, as his eyes fell on the endless tide of zombies surging toward them, his heart cracked under the weight of fear.

"Why? Are you planning to give up?" Vulture's voice was sharp, his expression hard. "Why did you even survive this long if you're not willing to grasp the smallest sliver of hope? You should fight with everything you have until the very end. Miracles don't just fall into your lap—you have to fight for them, bleed for them, make them happen!"

He had seen such miracles before. He'd endured a zombie wave that lasted twenty-four hours straight, a storm of death that nearly crushed them all, and somehow, they had survived.

Back then, he believed it was a trial from the heavens. But this wave... this one was different. This one reeked of the mutated zombie trying to evolve into a Zombie King.

If they could just hold out long enough—find its location and kill it—there was still a chance to turn the tide. He had no proof, only instinct, but Vulture trusted his gut. And his gut told him he was right.

"Do you think it's that easy?!" one of the men snapped, his voice breaking as he spoke through clenched teeth. He hadn't even realized he was crying, the tears born not from anger alone, but from crushing hopelessness.

Yet, deep down, he knew Vulture was right. They had clawed and bled just to survive this far. If they gave up now, if they stopped fighting, they, and their children, would surely die. Then what was the point of everything they'd endured?

His shoulders slumped, the tension draining as he finally made his decision. "I understand... I'll follow your commands." It wasn't because he wanted to, but because he knew there was no other choice. Pointing fingers wouldn't save anyone.

"Good!" Vulture grinned, his voice ringing with authority. He turned to the STAU's. "Distribute the firearms and weapons we brought with us. Everyone, hold your formation!"

At once, the camp stirred into action. The awakened ability users, Clyde, Reeve, Fred, Evelyn, and the others, took their positions on the platforms behind the walls, while the ordinary survivors spread out across the second and third floors of the building, securing vantage points.

The STAU's handed out assault rifles and placed crates of ammunition nearby for quick reloads.

Fortunately, this batch of ammo was the newly improved version designed by the blacksmiths after the last zombie wave at HOPE Base, packing far greater firepower. To match it, the assault rifles had been reinforced with enhanced barrels, making them heavier and sturdier than before.

For awakened ability users and trained fighters, the extra weight was manageable. But for ordinary survivors, just lifting and aiming the upgraded rifles was a struggle.

Luckily, both the second and third floors had balconies that the survivors could use as makeshift platforms, resting their rifles to steady their aim without straining under the weapon's weight.

Those who couldn't secure a good position there climbed onto the roof instead, lying flat on their bellies to brace themselves, hoping the stance would help them endure longer while handling the heavy assault rifles.

Once everyone was in position, the first wave of zombies came crashing toward them. The moment the undead entered the awakened ability users' range, they unleashed a barrage of fireballs, wind blades, and other devastating attacks.

Zombies fell one after another, and some were even sent tumbling, their sudden collapse causing those behind them to stumble as well. For a brief moment, the chain reaction disrupted the horde's momentum.

"Keep attacking!" Vulture roared at the top of his lungs, his voice nearly drowned out by the deafening chorus of roars and growls from the surrounding zombies.

The survivors, many of whom were witnessing awakened ability users in action for the very first time, were momentarily stunned by the overwhelming display of power. It wasn't until Vulture's thunderous command shook them from their stupor that they finally snapped into action and began opening fire.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Soon enough, everyone began to take advantage of the stumbling zombies, hammering at the same weakened section until corpses piled into a grotesque wall of flesh. Any that managed to crawl or push past the growing mound were quickly cut down.

Then Evelyn moved.

Unlike the others, she was a melee fighter. Without hesitation, she vaulted off the wall, drawing gasps from the survivors. Some nearly shouted for her to get back, but the words died in their throats when her skin shimmered, transforming into gleaming metal.

Her hands twisted and elongated into razor-sharp blades, a sight so uncanny it reminded them of the movie 'Terminator'.

Their awe, however, came too soon. The moment her transformation was completed, Evelyn charged headlong into the zombie horde. Every slash was precise and lethal, each strike severing a neck with effortless grace.

One hit, one kill.

As if by unspoken agreement, the other awakened ability users shifted their attacks away from her position, leaving that section of the battlefield entirely to Evelyn, who carved her way through the tide of undead like a living blade.

Vulture leapt down right after, and he also encased his body in a thick layer of earth armor. On top of that, he was fully equipped with the 'Blast Set' Kisha had prepared for him. Looking like a walking fortress, he gripped his massive 'Blast Hammer' and swung it with brutal force.

The weapon connected with a zombie's skull—

CRACK!

Its head exploded like a smashed watermelon, the body collapsing limply to the ground. Vulture stomped his feet forward with a heavy thud, and in response, jagged 'Earth Spikes' erupted from the ground, skewering the undead in front of him.

From the second floor, Rakan steadied his assault rifle and couldn't help but whistle when he saw Vulture in action. "That was badass!" he muttered, eyes gleaming as he watched both Vulture and Evelyn tearing through the horde.

He had never witnessed their combat up close, as he was stationed at a different wall when the zombie wave happened in the HOPE base, but seeing them now filled him with adrenaline.

The sight wasn't just thrilling for him; the survivors around the shelter felt the same surge of hope. Watching the awakened ability users carve through zombies like they were nothing lit a fire in their hearts, strengthening their will to fight.

#### Chapter 925 Forgot To Call For Back Up

Keith raised his bow, angling it at forty-five degrees. After a steady breath, he released a barrage of energy arrows that rained down on the approaching horde, striking several zombies at once.

Meanwhile, his grandmother was tending to the elderly and children, coaxing and calming them. Fortunately, her awakened ability allowed her to ease their panic, and with her help, many regained their composure and joined the fight against the incoming wave.

"Don't stop, keep attacking!" Keith shouted, already readying himself for another strike. Drawing back the bowstring, he gathered his strength, channeling energy into the weapon. With each pull, the attack charged, preparing to unleash yet another storm of arrows.

Fred pulled the trigger, releasing a single bullet charged with spiritual energy. The shot detonated like an RPG, obliterating a dozen tightly clustered zombies in a thunderous explosion.

He was careful to aim only at groups, making the most of each round without wasting its devastating power. The blast reduced those caught in its radius to nothing more than shredded flesh and shattered bone.

The sight was so gruesome that many survivors from the shelter gagged and vomited, though after a moment to recover, they forced themselves back into the fight. In contrast, Vulture's subordinates didn't so much as flinch, their eyes fixed forward as they unleashed relentless barrages.

Only the newcomers—fresh to the frontlines—showed weakness. They gagged a few times, their eyes reddened from both the stench and the strain, but even so, they gritted their teeth and kept firing.

Sparrow, who had yet to join the fight, kept his sharp gaze fixed on the horde, searching for that one figure. He dared not reveal his presence to the mutated zombie—not yet. If it sensed him and chose to hide, their chances of finding and defeating it would shrink drastically, even if they brought Kisha and Duke into the battle.

Though every instinct urged him to leap in and support Vulture and the others, Sparrow held back. He knew every bit of strength counted now, yet the numbers were overwhelming.

Zombies continued to pour in as if conjured from thin air. Even Sparrow, with his keen eyes, hadn't noticed their approach until it was too late.

That left him with only one conclusion: these creatures had been lying in wait, concealed in underground garages and basements, released into the open at the command of the mutated zombie.

Since he and his people hadn't checked each building when they first arrived, they completely overlooked the possibility of zombies hiding inside. In truth, he had missed them all.

From the very beginning, the mutated zombie had already cast its net across Maple Leaf Town, ensuring that none of its prey would be able to escape.

"Fuck! I still can't get a glimpse of that mutated zombie!" Sparrow muttered under his breath. He shifted his position again, careful not to stay in one spot for too long. He couldn't afford to miss any possible hiding place near the shelter, and more importantly, he feared that while he was stalking the creature, it might have already noticed him.

If that were the case, it could strike at him when he least expected it. As a sniper, he knew better than anyone that staying still too long invited death; constant movement was the only way to keep his position from being exposed and countered.

"Not here either!" he hissed, gritting his teeth as he activated his 'Hawk Eyesight' and scanned the dense swarm below.

Then, for the briefest moment, something flickered in his vision, a shadowy figure darting swiftly between the zombies. They parted for it so subtly that it would have gone unnoticed by anyone not watching closely. Sparrow narrowed his eyes, focusing as he tracked the shifting mass of the horde.

But just as quickly as he spotted it, the figure vanished, skittering through the horde with the speed of a cockroach on four limbs. The only reason Sparrow had caught even a glimpse was the glint of its black, scaly hide.

Clearly, the mutated zombie knew how to stay hidden, never lingering in one place long enough to be tracked.

"Damn it... this is harder than it should be," Sparrow muttered, reaching for his radio. "Vulture, over..."

Sparrow heard the crackle of the radio, but no reply came. Turning his gaze back toward the shelter, he spotted Vulture in the thick of the battle, wreaking havoc with his massive 'Blast Hammer'.

With a powerful swing, Vulture crushed through the advancing horde, then vaulted into the air and brought the weapon down like a falling comet. The impact shattered the asphalt, leaving a small crater in its wake.

But Vulture didn't stop there. Using the hammer's immense weight as momentum, he spun like a raging top, smashing apart any zombie that dared draw near. He was far too consumed by the fight to even notice his radio.

Watching this, Sparrow clenched his teeth. He couldn't tell if Vulture had already managed to contact their Young Madam and Master or not.

Sparrow fell into deep contemplation, torn between stepping out to reach Vulture or remaining hidden to continue his surveillance. If he revealed himself now just to deliver a warning, the mutated zombie would almost certainly sense his presence, and worse, mark him.

If that happened, he would lose the chance to stay concealed and keep tracking it. The creature might even retreat into hiding, refusing to emerge again until everyone else was wiped out.

Now Sparrow found himself faced with a difficult choice.

From his vantage point, Sparrow continued to observe the battlefield. His people were doing well, holding the zombies at bay and preventing them from getting too close to the shelter.

Yet a nagging feeling gnawed at him and made him feel like the mutated zombie was holding back. To Sparrow, it seemed clear: this wasn't a full assault. It was testing the shelter's defenses, gauging their firepower.

If that was true, then the real danger would come later. Once the first wave of awakened ability users and fighters exhausted themselves and shifted out, the mutated zombie might unleash its true strength, driving the horde into a far more ferocious frenzy.

He and Vulture had seen it before, zombies whipped into such savagery that the battle turned into nothing short of a nightmare.

Perhaps the others hadn't noticed it yet. The fighters inside the shelter were too close, too focused on surviving each clash to see the bigger picture. Sparrow, however, had the distance and the perspective.

Unlike the ten-meter-high walls of HOPE Base, which allowed a clear view of the horde's movements from afar, the shelter's low walls offered little vantage. From his elevated position, Sparrow could already tell that the zombies' agility was still that of the early-stage zombies. But when the real wave came, it would be worse. Much worse.

The realization made Sparrow draw in a sharp breath. This mutated zombie wasn't just strong; it was intelligent.

Too intelligent.

It commanded the horde like a general, testing the waters, lulling its enemies into complacency, making them believe they were holding the line when, in truth, they were only being toyed with. It was waiting, watching, letting them think reinforcements would come in time.

The thought made Sparrow's urgency spike. He needed to know if Vulture had already informed their Young Madam and Master. Without hesitation, he pressed down on the radio again.

"Vulture, over!"

"Vulture, answer me—it's urgent. Over!"

"Vulture, you pigheaded muscle-brain! You'd better answer me or I'll curse you to die loveless and young!" Sparrow spat furiously into the radio.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, you motherfucker?!" Vulture roared back. From Sparrow's vantage point, he saw Vulture freeze mid-leap, then push himself back to a safer distance.

With a thunderous stomp, he sent jagged 'Earth Spikes' erupting from the ground, forming a wall of earth like a porcupine's back to block and impale the advancing zombies. Only then did he snatch up his radio, his voice booming with nothing but curses upon curses, his fury spilling through every word.

But Sparrow ignored Vulture's stream of curses and pressed on. "Have you informed the Young Madam and Master about the situation here? Have you even tried contacting them?" he asked, his tone edged with condescension.

Even amidst the deafening chaos—the roars and growls of zombies, the relentless gunfire, and the thunder of explosions—Vulture caught every word. His awakened senses made it impossible for him to miss it.

And only then, with Sparrow's pointed words ringing in his ears, did Vulture realize that he and Keith hadn't managed to reach out to their Young Madam at all.

"Shit, I forgot! I'll go back and inform them!" Vulture cursed, spinning on his heel and sprinting toward the wall. The others stared in confusion, baffled at his sudden retreat, until he vaulted the towering barricade as if its height meant nothing to him.

Landing inside, he rushed straight to Keith, his expression pale and strained. "Sir Keith... I think we forgot to inform your sister about this zombie wave," he admitted, breathless.

#### Chapter 926 Calling For Back Up

The weight of his oversight hit him hard; he had been so consumed by the fight, counting on reinforcements to arrive soon, only to realize now there might be none... unless they called for help themselves.

Keith had just lowered his bow after loosing a storm of energy arrows, cutting down swathes of zombies, when he froze. At first, it was confusion, then sheer dread washed over him as Vulture's words sank in.

They really hadn't contacted his sister yet. He had meant to, but the sudden arrival of the zombie wave had shoved it from his mind. Panic surged through him, and he scrambled to pull up the Territory interface once more.

"Sir... Keith, what are you doing?" Vulture asked, noticing Keith swiping and tapping at something only he could see, fingers moving across an invisible interface.

"Contacting my sister," Keith answered calmly. He had already sent word, and to his relief, she wasn't too occupied. Her reply had come quickly. "She'll be here soon... I think."

Hearing this, Vulture gritted his teeth and pulled out his radio again. "Sparrow, we just contacted the Young Madam. She's on her way, but we don't have an ETA. All we can do now is hold out for as long as possible. You stay up there and keep your eyes sharp, find the mutated zombie. Once you spot it, don't let it out of your sight."

"The Young Madam has to face that thing head-on if we're going to end this zombie wave." Vulture's voice was firm, carrying both urgency and determination.

"You really want to go through with this? Are you certain the Young Madam and Master can contend with a mutated zombie that's both this intelligent and this strong? Have you forgotten how much trouble we had back at the chemical warehouse in City A, against that one with the potential to become a zombie king?"

"With the scale of this horde under its control, I'd wager this one is even stronger. We might need our entire force just to cover the Young Madam and Master, and even if reinforcements rushed here, they'd still be hours away." Sparrow reasoned grimly, his words cutting with hard truth.

But Vulture stood firm, convinced his instincts were right. No one else could deal with this creature better than their Young Madam and Master. He had seen it with his own eyes; their strength grew with each battle, their power unlike anything the rest of them could wield. Though he couldn't name it, he had felt it when they fought.

And Vulture wasn't wrong. The force he struggled to put into words was 'Aura'—the unique power Duke and Kisha commanded, the very power they had once used against the parasite-like mutated zombie that could seize control of other powerful corpses.

Sparrow let out a weary sigh, finally conceding to Vulture's reasoning. Still, frustration gnawed at him; he hated standing guard while everyone else was locked in battle.

This was the first time he'd been forced to hold back during such a large-scale fight; usually, he was among the first to charge into the front lines. Now, all he could do was stand still, watching from above, feeling useless.

But once Vulture confirmed that Kisha and Duke were on their way, Sparrow forced himself to clear his thoughts. Lowering his radio, he steadied his gaze on the battlefield, searching for that elusive mutated zombie that seemed to be playing a cruel game of hide-and-seek with him.

And so, after that brief exchange, both Vulture and Keith threw themselves back into the fray. Vulture leapt to the front lines, determined not to let a single zombie slip past him. Thanks to the 'Blast Set', his defenses were greatly enhanced, scratches and bites barely left a mark on his 'Earth Armor'.

That only fueled his confidence as he bulldozed through the horde, smashing zombies left and right as if he were playing a brutal game of whack-a-mole.

Any zombies that managed to get close to the wall were left for Clyde and Reeve to handle. Clyde unleashed his 'Gravity Impact' skill, crushing everything within range into the ground until nothing remained but mangled flesh and shattered bones.

Beside him, Reeve used his 'Siren's Call', the sound waves rupturing zombie skulls with explosive force, heads bursting like grotesque balloons. Thankfully, the pair fought at enough distance that no one was showered with the foul spray of black blood and brain matter.

Still, the sheer display of power was something the survivors had never witnessed before, and it left them utterly stunned.

Thanks to Grandma Aldens' awakened ability, no one panicked. A blanket of calm and peace settled over them, easing their nerves despite the occasional gagging at the gore before their eyes.

Whenever the awakened ability users felt their spiritual energy dip near the danger threshold of having to experience a backlash, they quickly drank a vial of black liquid to replenish it.

Those on the frontlines, like Vulture and Evelyn, relied instead on stamina boosters, since they are burning through their physical stamina far more than their spiritual energy.

Once the first group grew mentally exhausted, they ceded their positions to the second group, giving themselves time to recuperate and recover from the strain of constantly taking stamina boosters and vials of black liquid.

Thanks to Grandma Alden's calming awakened ability, their mental fortitude rebounded much faster than it normally would.

"STAU's, keep the stamina boosters and vials of black liquid in constant supply!" Fred barked, glancing back at the logistics crew scrambling to deliver both ammunition and potions to the fighters.

He swapped out his assault rifle, cursing under his breath as the first one's muzzle had warped and burst into a flower-like shape, unable to withstand the strain of his specialized bullets.

If this kept up, he would burn through their stockpile of rifles far too quickly. The thought made him grit his teeth; he needed to commission a custom-made weapon from the blacksmiths.

Even with careful bursts to prolong each rifle's lifespan, the damage was inevitable. By the time he shouldered his second rifle, Fred had already decided: a reinforced, customized assault rifle was no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

Worse still, because he had to carefully ration the use of his assault rifle, Fred could only fire off a limited number of explosive rounds. This restraint gnawed at him, especially now, when his ability would have been most effective against the massive clusters of zombies surging before them.

"Captain, don't worry. Just focus your fire on the zombie clusters, we'll handle the stragglers that escape the blasts," one of the wind ability users assured him. As he spoke, he conjured two shimmering 'Wind Blades' in his hands and launched them toward the scattered zombies across the battlefield.

Each blade cut through the air with lethal precision, sharp enough to slice down as many as three zombies in succession before dissipating.

"Alright, I'll leave my back to you." Fred nodded with a smile before raising his new assault rifle and firing into the horde. Instead of the usual thunderous blast like an RPG, a strange sticky fluid shot out, splattering across the zombies. It clung to their bodies like glue.

One of the fire ability users hurled a fireball at the mass, and to everyone's shock, the fluid ignited instantly. Flames raced across the zombies with terrifying speed, burning them to ash before they could even screech. Both Fred and the fire ability user exchanged a stunned glance, realization sparking between them.

Fred had only intended to slow the horde by turning the first line of zombies into a stumbling barrier, but the unexpected flammability of the sticky fluid had transformed his tactic into something far greater: a blazing wall of fire. Even after the zombies collapsed into charred corpses, the flames continued to roar, refusing to die out.

Working in perfect sync, Fred unleashed more rounds to coat the front line while the fire ability user followed with precise fireballs. Together, they forged a scorching barricade, an inferno the remaining zombies had no choice but to push through, only to be consumed and reduced to charcoal.

"This is great, Captain!" one of Fred's subordinates shouted, their voice filled with excitement. But even as they rejoiced, their hands didn't stop moving, hurling wave after wave of attacks onto the battlefield. Seeing Fred's tactic working so effectively, everyone felt their morale soar, pouring even more of their awakened abilities into the zombie horde.

Meanwhile, Evelyn was like an unstoppable juggernaut of living steel, carving through the swarm with ruthless efficiency. The zombies had no chance of slowing her down; these were nothing more than ordinary ones, the strongest barely reaching level 1.

There were no mutated variants among them, aside from the hidden mutated zombie pulling the strings, and against Evelyn, which meant no real threat.

Level 1 zombies might have been faster and stronger than their level 0 counterparts, but their meager improvements were useless against her.

#### Chapter 927 Toothless Tigers

Level 1 zombies might have been faster and stronger than their level 0 counterparts, but their meager improvements were useless against her. Their bites shattered their teeth harmlessly against her hardened metal skin, while their claws broke off the moment they tried to rake her.

To Evelyn, these creatures weren't monsters at all; they were nothing but toothless tigers throwing themselves into the grinder.

As the battle against the zombie wave dragged on, three rotations had already passed, more than an hour of nonstop fighting. Exhaustion was setting in, and despite their efforts, the horde kept pressing forward.

The survivors could feel it: the line was slowly being pushed back, the undead creeping closer and closer to the shelter walls. Panic began to spread among those watching from within.

"This is bad! This is bad! They're almost at the walls!" one of the survivors cried out, his voice breaking as terror overtook him. His legs gave way beneath him, and he collapsed onto the ground, trembling uncontrollably.

In his state of panic, he lost control of himself, a yellowish liquid pooling beneath him. The sight and smell made the others freeze in dread, their fear spiking even higher as they realized just how close the zombies had come.

At that moment, Kisha arrived with Duke, hovering above the shelter unnoticed by the exhausted defenders below. From her vantage point, she could clearly see the strain on the fighters, fatigue written in every movement.

Even Vulture and Evelyn, holding the front line with unyielding resolve, were beginning to falter. Scratches and near-bites marred their armored bodies, yet their formidable defenses kept the zombies from inflicting real damage.

Still, it was evident that their strength was waning, and the horde showed no sign of stopping.

But even after Kisha and Duke appeared, they did not act immediately. Instead, they scanned the battlefield carefully, searching for the mutated zombie suspected of commanding the horde.

Unfortunately, the creature was nowhere to be found. With no other choice, the two descended from the sky—like gods stepping down into the mortal world. Cloaked and imposing, they radiated a celestial aura that froze the battlefield. For a brief moment, both gunfire and awakened abilities ceased as everyone gazed upward in awe.

"The City Lord and Vice City Lord have arrived!" a warrior from HOPE Base shouted, his voice brimming with excitement as he caught sight of Kisha's side profile.

And the moment those words rang out, every gaze turned upward to see Kisha and Duke descending. Instantly, morale surged.

As soon as Kisha set foot within the city, her passive skills activated, her stats skyrocketing tenfold thanks to 'One Man Team' and the restorative field of her 'Healing Dome'. But she didn't stop there.

"Let's go and kill them all!" she roared, her voice carrying the power of her skill 'Lion's Roar'. The battlefield trembled as her next ability, 'Survival of the Fittest', spread across the fighters, boosting their survival instincts by 20% and hardening their resolve. Fear melted away, replaced by a burning determination.

The crowd erupted into cheers, their fighting spirit reignited. It was as if raw adrenaline had been injected into their veins, abilities flared brighter, powers struck harder, and their attacks came faster than before.

Finally, Kisha unleashed 'One Body', amplifying the synergy of the entire force. Combined with Clyde and Reeve's own synergy effects, the buffs exceeded 100%, flooding everyone with boundless energy. The

shelter was small enough that not a single soul was left untouched; each fighter felt their strength swell, brimming with power as the tide of battle shifted.

The moment Kisha descended, she unleashed her 'Rainbow Cube,' letting it dominate the battlefield. The 'Rainbow Cubes' that scattered in the battlefield encased dozens of zombies at once, crushing them flat in quick succession. With her stats amplified tenfold, her mere arrival shifted the tide of battle, driving the horde back step by step.

Duke, meanwhile, charged into the frontline alongside Vulture and Evelyn, his spear slicing through clusters of zombies with lethal precision. At the same time, he summoned his devastating 'Fire Meteor.'

Flames rained from the sky like a storm, and every strike reduced the undead not to charred corpses but to ashes, leaving behind only glittering crystal cores. The sheer power of his awakened ability was all thanks to the purity of Duke's spiritual energy, though the skill itself hadn't leveled up; its power had grown immensely, each attack consuming only a fraction of his spiritual energy.

Feeling the difference, Duke didn't hold back. He called down 'Fire Meteor' after 'Fire Meteor', a relentless storm of flames. Between each fiery strike, he bound the zombies in front of him in place with ice that crawled up their legs, freezing them solid until their bodies shattered like brittle glass.

Then, Duke unleashed another disaster-level ability, 'Lightning Rain'. Bolts of lightning poured from the sky in a deadly storm, striking the battlefield at random. The zombies had no way of knowing who would be struck next, and in an instant, the massacre turned entirely one-sided.

The survivors from the shelter fell silent, their wails dying in their throats as they stared in stunned disbelief. Even those firing their weapons gradually lowered them, realizing it was wiser to conserve ammunition than waste it.

With only Duke and Kisha holding the front line, it felt as though an entire battalion was tearing through the horde—just the two of them were enough to wipe out the zombies.

Yet the awakened ability users from HOPE Base didn't hold back. On the contrary, they were even more exhilarated, hurling their abilities into the fray with renewed fervor. To fight alongside their strongest couple was not just a battle—it was an honor.

...

Ding!

[New Mission Available!]

[Sudden Hidden Mission — Class SS: "Strike Down the Rise of the New King"]

[Description: A mutated zombie is on the verge of evolving into a Zombie King. It has already hunted down every other mutated zombie in this city, devouring their crystal cores to fuel its growth and power. Because of this, it now stands as the undisputed ruler of this land.

If left unchecked, it will fully evolve into a Zombie King—capable of commanding millions of zombies with terrifying intelligence. Even now, its cunning has allowed it to scheme from the shadows, posing a dire threat to humankind.

Mission Objective: Eliminate the mutated zombie before it evolves into a Zombie King and prevent Maple Leaf Town from being overrun.

Mission Completion:

100,000 System Points

Awakening Fruit x5

Mission Failure:

Automatic failure of:

S-Class Mission: Commander of a Thousand II

Sudden Mission: Class-A — Whack-A-Mole

Chain Mission: Class-A — Whack-A-Mole II

Failure to meet requirements will result in death.]

...

Seeing the new mission notification pop up before her, Kisha nearly choked on her own saliva. It felt like the mission board was back to tormenting her again with another brutal chain quest.

Unlike the two recent missions, which didn't reveal their 'Completion' or 'Failure' conditions upfront, she had assumed the system would continue that way. That alone had piled enough pressure on her to complete everything flawlessly.

But now, she realized those missions were the exceptions—and this new one spelled everything out clearly, just as it used to.

That could only mean one thing: the stakes this time were even higher. If she failed, every mission she currently held would automatically fail as well.

Kisha groaned inwardly. 'Great. Just what I needed, another pain in the ass.'

Kisha silently read through the mission description while continuing to strike down the enemies before her. Once she grasped what was required, she only frowned briefly before dismissing it.

After all, she had already planned on killing the mutated zombie. Leaving it alive would only allow it to grow stronger and become a bigger threat later. Why burden her future self with such a headache when she could simply end it now?

And so, she kept attacking without pause, and even deliberately aiming to explode the zombies' heads one after another.

Watching its army of undead fall like flies, the mutated zombie grew restless, its guttural growl echoing across the battlefield. Unable to remain hidden any longer, it began to creep closer, its sharp gaze fixed on Duke and Kisha.

Having realized they were the leaders of the humans and the ones responsible for slaughtering the largest portion of its horde, it resolved to strike them down first. If it could ambush and kill them, it might finally put an end to their killing spree.

And so, the mutated zombie made its move, weaving skillfully through the horde while concealing its presence. The lesser zombies served as both shield and camouflage, masking its approach as fiery meteors and bolts of lightning rained down from above.

With no other mutated zombies left to command, since it had already devoured them to fuel its own strength, it had no choice but to act alone. Yet, even in solitude, it was cunning, using the mindless swarm as cover to inch closer toward Duke and Kisha.

#### Chapter 928 Going After The Mutated Zombie

Sparrow, who had been scanning the battlefield with sharp eyes, was the first to notice the mutated zombie's subtle movement. It wasn't heading for the frontline at all—it was creeping along the side, aiming to ambush Duke and Kisha. Sparrow immediately snatched up his radio, trying to warn Kisha.

From a distance, he spotted Kisha, effortlessly dominating the battlefield. When the radio clipped to her belt crackled, she snatched it up with her left hand while her right hand remained raised in position.

Her telekinesis surged outward, latching onto a massive school bus abandoned in the middle of the road that wasn't far from her. With practiced ease, she swung the hulking vehicle like a battering ram, smashing into the swarm of zombies charging toward them.

Her control was precise; she avoided Duke, Vulture, and Evelyn fighting on the frontline, yet the sweep of the bus left carnage in its wake. The ground before Duke was littered with mangled flesh, black zombie ichor, and splattered brain matter.

Severed limbs and minced meat were scattered everywhere, the stench of rot thick enough to choke the air.

The sight was so gruesome, far worse than watching heads burst like an overripe fruit or bodies flattened beneath the gravity like thin cans. The frontline now looked less like a battlefield and more like a colossal meat grinder, and the nearby survivors, unable to stomach the horror, doubled over and vomited uncontrollably.

The survivors couldn't help but feel both fear and reverence for Kisha as she effortlessly crushed the zombie tide surging toward them. Yet Duke wasn't about to be overshadowed. Watching his wife dominate the battlefield, his own fighting spirit flared.

Pressing one hand firmly against the ground, he summoned his 'Ice Storm'. Frost immediately spread outward in a rapid crawl, racing across the terrain and swallowing the horde. One by one, zombies were encased in solid ice, their grotesque forms frozen into eerie statues.

But Duke didn't stop; he kept pouring his spiritual energy into it until the storm reached several hundred meters in every direction, a frozen wasteland in the middle of the battlefield.

Vulture and Evelyn, recognizing the surge of power, quickly retreated to give him room.

Then, with deliberate poise, Duke rose to his feet. His body twisted to the left, spear angled like a baseball bat ready to swing. His 'Aura' surged, pouring into the weapon until it thrummed with power.

In one sweeping strike, he unleashed a violent gust of wind and raw energy, the impact racing across the ice field. The frozen zombies shattered instantly, collapsing into glittering shards that clattered to the ground like broken glass.

In a single move, Duke had cleared the battlefield, erasing the wall of corpses that had been shielding the mutated zombie from his and Kisha's sight.

At that exact moment, Kisha answered Sparrow's call through the radio. But Sparrow didn't even need to say a word—she had already spotted the mutated zombie.

With the ice field cleared, the creature stood exposed, like prey caught in a pair of headlights. For a brief instant, it froze, wide-eyed and panicked, before stumbling back.

It clearly wanted to bolt, to vanish into the tide again and wait for another chance to ambush. Facing Kisha and Duke head-on was never part of its plan, and now it realized just how fatal that mistake would be.

But how could Kisha and Duke possibly allow it to escape?

Duke immediately gave chase, his spear flashing as he sprinted forward. Kisha clipped the radio back onto her belt, her body lifting from the ground as her telekinesis carried her into the air.

Hovering above the battlefield, she swept forward after Duke, refusing to let the mutated zombie escape.

With Kisha gone from the frontlines, Vulture was forced to take command once more, though he was still locked in the thick of battle. Thankfully, Sparrow finally descended from his vantage point atop the building.

He leapt into the open, using his 'Whirlwind' to control both his fall and direction, until he touched down near the shelter. The survivors, awestruck, greeted him just as they had Duke and Kisha, like a messenger of the God of War.

Without hesitation, Sparrow assumed command from the shelter, easing Vulture's burden and allowing him to fight without restraint.

But even with Sparrow's arrival, the situation didn't lighten. Though Duke and Kisha had carved a bloody path through the horde, another wave surged out from the city, as if something was deliberately luring the dead into this single choke point.

The defenders had no choice but to keep fighting.

Yet without Kisha's presence, morale wavered; even her passive stat boost, the support skill that helped others to feel more powerful and invigorated, all vanished with her departure. It felt to the survivors as though their sudden surge of power had been stripped away, leaving them exposed.

Still, Kisha's eyes never left Duke. She couldn't allow him to face the mutated zombie alone.

Kisha knew the mutated zombie was far too dangerous for Duke to face alone. Even though it appeared to be fleeing, she suspected it might only be a ploy to catch him off guard. She had no choice but to follow.

Leaving the people at the shelter to fend for themselves once more wasn't ideal, but letting the creature escape would be far worse. If it managed to regroup, it could easily seek out another county, city, or town, amassing an even larger horde before returning to strike again. With its ability to command so many zombies, losing sight of it wasn't an option.

Kisha knew she couldn't allow that creature to escape. If it succeeded in regrouping, it might eventually evolve into a Zombie King—a disaster they couldn't afford to face in the future. Though she understood her absence would weaken the defense of the shelter, she had no choice but to trust her people to manage without her and the boost her presence provided.

Fortunately, Sparrow had also realized the danger. With his task above building as the eye completed, he descended from the rooftop to reinforce the battlefield. His arrival gave Vulture the freedom to unleash his full strength on the front lines.

Sparrow immediately unleashed massive whirlwinds that tore through the horde, sweeping zombies into the air. Within the storm, he hurled razor-sharp 'Wind Blades', turning the whirlwind into a colossal blender that shredded anything caught inside.

Though Kisha and Duke's devastating area of attacks were gone, Sparrow's relentless assault helped fill the gap, keeping the defenders from being overwhelmed by the endless tide of the undead.

"Everyone, keep fighting! We just need to hold on until Young Madam and Master finish off the mutated zombie controlling this horde. Once it's dead, these creatures will lose their focus on us, and the rest of the zombies in this town will stop swarming our way!" Sparrow shouted as he hurled another 'Wind Boomerang' into the frontline.

"Sir, yes, sir!" the warriors roared in unison. Though the surge of strength they once felt with Kisha's presence had faded, Sparrow's words reignited their spirits. Gritting their teeth, they pushed their bodies to the limit, determined to hold the line.

Meanwhile, Kisha and Duke pursued the mutated zombie. It had already noticed Duke closing in from behind, while Kisha hovered above, her sharp aerial view tracking its every move. Between the two of them, the creature found it nearly impossible to slip away.

The mutated zombie darted across the tops of abandoned cars, trying to lose its pursuers. Each time it attempted to hide, Kisha hurled massive objects with her telekinesis, forcing it back into the open.

She even tried to seize its body directly, but the creature seemed to sense her invisible grip, like it had an antenna tuned to her presence, and could always slip away with uncanny agility.

Unable to restrain it outright, Kisha turned to sheer force. Whenever it tried diving into the sewers or slipping into a building, she slammed cars and debris into the paths it targeted, sealing off every escape route.

From above, she tracked its every move, her 'Perception' skill reading the twitch of its muscles and letting her predict feints and sudden turns.

It was a grueling task that demanded razor-sharp focus and high intuition, but she had no choice—this was the only way to keep it from vanishing. Meanwhile, Duke hammered its retreat with volleys of 'Ice Spears' and bursts of 'Fireballs', never letting it catch a breath.

#### Chapter 929 Does Taunting A Zombie Would Work?

And even with their seamless coordination, Duke and Kisha still couldn't pin the mutated zombie down. Kisha even had to divide her focus, not only keeping it from escaping, but also staying wary of a possible ambush lurking nearby. The strain on her mind and body was mounting with every second.

Duke, meanwhile, poured both his spiritual energy and Aura into relentless barrages of attacks. His aim was precise, yet the mutated zombie's speed and instincts let it slip past every strike. All Duke could do was unleash a storm of 'Ice Spears' and 'Fireballs', hoping that sheer volume might land a decisive hit.

"Wifey! Leave the rear to me!" Duke shouted as he unleashed another barrage of attacks on the mutated zombie, giving Kisha some breathing room. Her mental capacity was being pushed to its limits as she split her consciousness across multiple fronts to cover a wider area.

But in her focus, she had overlooked one critical detail: when she broke away from the battlefield to chase the mutated zombie, her skill 'One Man Team' had deactivated. The tenfold boost to her strength had vanished, leaving her back at her normal state.

Though her situation was no less dangerous, the skill only activated when she was outnumbered. Now, she no longer had that advantage.

Fortunately, even without her stat-boosting skill, Kisha still had her aura, and she had already leveled up.

"Alright! I'll leave it to you!" she shouted back to Duke.

With a sweep of her telekinesis, she hurled an abandoned car from the roadside straight at the mutated zombie. They couldn't afford to let it escape now. One after another, six abandoned cars floated into the air around her, suspended in her mental grip before being launched like massive projectiles.

The mutated zombie's growls and roars faded into the distance, a clear sign that she and Duke had already pushed far beyond the shelter's range. But as they pressed the chase, a horde of zombies suddenly spilled from a nearby building, flooding the street in an unending tide to cut them off.

It seemed the mutated zombie, denied the chance to retreat into hiding, had unleashed its army instead, using them as both a shield and a distraction. If it managed to vanish into the crowd, tracking it again would be nearly impossible.

"I'm not letting you flee," Kisha murmured, her eyes narrowing as the six abandoned cars she controlled swung violently through the air. She swept them across the street like colossal hammers, smashing zombies aside before slamming them into the walls. Duke instinctively sidestepped, careful not to get caught in the devastating arcs of her wide-range attack.

After several sweeps, the vehicles were battered and twisted, their metal frames drenched in black zombie blood. One car even had a severed hand dangling grotesquely from its bumper.

"Eck!" Kisha wrinkled her nose in disgust, tossing the mangled wreck aside. She quickly drew in another set of cars with her telekinesis, this time layering them with a thin coating of her Aura. The effect was immediate; the makeshift weapons became sturdier, sharper, and far deadlier.

As she unleashed the next sweeping strike, the cars carved through the horde with brutal force. A powerful gust of wind burst out from the sheer momentum, sending zombies flying before they were crushed against the walls. Limbs snapped, torsos flattened—some legs and feet remained planted where the zombies had once stood, grotesque reminders of the carnage.

Kisha let out a low whistle, impressed by how much more destructive her attack had become with just the slightest infusion of Aura. She couldn't resist sneaking a glance at Duke.

He was already watching her. A moment ago, he'd said he would cover the rear, clearly intending for Kisha to ease up and let him handle the heavy work. Yet one sweeping strike from her had pushed him to the sidelines, leaving him with nothing to do but watch as she tore through the horde on her own.

For some reason, that stung. Duke gritted his teeth, frustration burning in his chest. He refused to just stand there looking all useless. Shifting his stance, he charged forward to engage the mutated zombie directly, keeping its attention locked on him.

If he couldn't match Kisha's rampage against the horde, then he would make damn sure the mutated zombie had no chance to escape.

Duke enveloped both his spear and body in Aura, the black purpleish energy seeping out until it coated him entirely. The air around him grew heavy and cold, sharp enough to raise goosebumps. The mutated zombie froze, trembling slightly before letting out a hiss. Then, like a beast preparing to lunge, it dropped onto all fours in a defensive crouch.

But Duke only smirked, his voice low and taunting. "Do you really think you can beat me?"

His words dripped with disdain, each syllable meant to provoke. If this mutated zombie truly had intelligence, then it would understand the insult that Duke was mocking it, belittling it.

And that was exactly what he wanted. If he could make it lose its composure, if it attacked recklessly, then he could buy Kisha more time. And when she was finished clearing the horde, the two of them could strike together and crush the creature once and for all.

When his first words drew no reaction, Duke took a slow, deliberate step forward, the corner of his mouth curled into a smug smirk. "Just because you can herd a pack of these mindless maggots, you think that makes you king of the mountain? Pathetic."

The way he said it, with his cool, aristocratic poise, made him look less annoying and more like the composed villain of some grand tale. Kisha, glancing over to check on him, caught his expression and words.

Her brow lifted. She understood what he was trying to do, to goad the mutated zombie into becoming reckless, but part of her couldn't help thinking he was too polished, too dignified. Instead of sounding mocking enough to enrage the creature, he almost seemed... too striking.

"Why the hell are you wasting words on a brainless zombie?" Kisha called out from the other side, a smirk tugging at her lips. "Its brain rotted away ages ago; it's dumber than a bird. Even the smallest animal's got more sense than that thing. Honestly, Duke, being eloquent with it is pointless... even its own mother wouldn't want to claim this pathetic creature."

She shook her head in mock exasperation, as if truly baffled by Duke's theatrics, while knowing full well the mutated zombie probably didn't understand a word.

But it turned out Kisha's words were far more infuriating than Duke's. The moment she finished, the mutated zombie let out a piercing shriek and snapped its furious glare toward her.

Maybe it was because of being called brainless, or maybe it hated being called stupid or bird-brain, Kisha couldn't tell which nerve she'd struck, only that she'd done it better than Duke. She shot him a smug grin, her eyes practically saying, "See? I'm better at this than you."

Without missing a beat, she pulled two abandoned vehicles into the air with her telekinesis and slammed them together, crushing three zombies between them. A wet spurt echoed from the impact, thick black blood spraying out. Kisha quickly veered aside, narrowly avoiding the splatter.

After its shriek, the mutated zombie only continued to glare at Kisha without making a move. Kisha smirked and piled on, her voice dripping with scorn. "See? It doesn't even realize I'm mocking it. No wonder it died so miserably when it was still a human; it's always been brainless. Can't even attack properly, let alone evolve into a zombie king. What a pathetic weakling... hahaha, what a loser!"

Her laughter rang loud and unrestrained, sharp enough to echo across the street. Even Duke, watching from the side, almost felt sorry for the poor mutated thing.

Enraged by Kisha's words, the mutated zombie lunged, its long claws aimed straight at her, but Duke intercepted it, spear flashing as he cut it off. Kisha, however, wasn't finished taunting.

She wanted it furious, so blinded by rage it wouldn't think of running away, but only focused on tearing her apart. If she could fix its focus on her, they could drag it into their preferred ground and strip away what advantage, little judgment, and intelligence it still had.

"Hahaha! What, are you angry now? Why? I only told the truth. All you can do is shriek and cower behind level-zero trash zombies. Those weaklings can't even protect themselves, let alone you! What does that make you if not stupid and brainless?"

Chapter 930 Unmoving Zombies

ROAR!!!

The mutated zombie bellowed furiously, and in response, the horde surged like a raging tide, rushing straight toward Kisha in a frenzy. Its reaction made it clear just how enraged the mutated zombie was.

But Kisha showed no fear—if anything, her mocking gaze seemed to taunt it further, as if saying, "Just as I thought."

Infuriated, the mutated zombie forced more of its kind under its control. Because of this, the zombies assaulting the shelter suddenly halted, as if someone had hit pause. Then, those from the rear broke away, turning sharply before stampeding in Kisha's direction.

At the same time, Sparrow soared into the sky, riding his "Whirlwind." He unleashed an even greater storm of Whirlwind, feeding it with countless "Windblades" until it became a massive blender, tearing through the horde. Yet, as he focused on maintaining control from above, he noticed something strange: the zombies beneath him froze mid-attack. Suspicion flickered in his chest just as he caught sight of the rear ranks breaking away.

Dust clouds billowed as thousands of feet pounded the ground in unison, the horde stampeding like wild beasts. Sparrow's heart skipped a beat, and a chill crept into his bones. He knew that direction. It was where Kisha and Duke had vanished.

Without wasting a second, Sparrow snatched up the radio and called out urgently.

"Young Madam, can you hear me? Over."

"Yes, what's wrong?" Kisha's calm voice answered almost immediately, even as she continued controlling the six vehicles that swept through the streets, mowing down clusters of zombies like weeds.

Not far from her, Duke was locked in a brutal one-on-one with the mutated zombie. His spear, cloaked in a shimmering aura, clashed against the mutated zombie's tough hide.

Thanks to that aura, he had already managed to inflict several wounds. The creature's defenses were monstrous, but Duke's aura cut deeper than any ordinary weapon could. Without it, even scratching the mutated zombie would have taken unimaginable effort.

"Young Madam, the zombies in the back just turned around, they're running straight toward your direction!" Sparrow quickly reported, his eyes locked on the shifting horde while Vulture and Evelyn pressed their assault against the ones still attacking from the front.

"I understand..." Kisha replied calmly, though her lips pressed into a thin line. That meant she and Duke had only a small window of time before thousands of zombies arrived. She deduced that the mutated zombie's earlier shriek had summoned the ones at the rear; its call clearly carried a radius.

Fortunately, it hadn't been able to pull in the zombies already near the shelter. Those had only paused, confused, instead of retreating.

It seemed the shriek had severed the mutated zombie's control over the zombie horde that was farthest from it, leaving their minds in disarray. That brief lapse gave Sparrow, Vulture, and the others a rare opening to push back before the swarm fully reorganized.

And so, Vulture and Sparrow immediately ramped up the frequency of their attacks, taking full advantage of the sudden pause. The awakened ability users from the shelter noticed it too, and without hesitation, unleashed everything they had.

Even the ordinary humans manning assault rifles joined in, raining bullets down on the unmoving horde. With the zombies frozen in place, it was like shooting at helpless targets lined up in the open, easy prey in a battlefield that rarely offered such an opportunity.

"Hooahh! Everyone, push harder!" Rakan bellowed as he pulled out the RPG supplied by the STAU. Dropping to one knee on the second floor, he steadied his aim through the scope, locking onto the cluster of zombies at the rear, the same area where the horde had begun retreating from.

If this disturbance truly came from the mutated zombie severing its control over thousands of drone zombies to better focus on commanding the reinforcements it called, then cutting off that retreat was crucial. Better to crush the rear first while the awakened ability users tore through the front lines.

Rakan wasn't the only one who saw this. Sparrow had already begun channeling his 'Whirlwind', directing it toward the back ranks. Noticing this, Rakan adjusted his angle carefully, making sure his RPG's trajectory wouldn't intersect with Sparrow's attack. After all, Sparrow's whirlwind was already packed with deadly 'Windblades' inside; there was no need to risk wasting a shell by detonating an RPG shell inside it.

"RPG incoming!!!" Rakan roared as he pulled the trigger. His warning wasn't for show; it was to keep Vulture and Evelyn from charging too far back and getting caught in the blast. Even before the rocket

struck, Rakan was already moving with practiced efficiency, sliding another round into the launcher to reload.

BOOM!

A fiery explosion tore through the zombie ranks, scattering limbs and dust into the air.

"Hooo! Nice shot!!!" Fred hollered, flashing a thumbs-up from the wall as he glanced toward Rakan on the second-floor balcony. He let his own assault rifle hang at rest; its barrel was glowing hot after his last string of explosive shots.

If he kept firing recklessly, the gun would warp and twist into a useless iron flower. Ammunition and weapons weren't limitless, and Fred knew he had to ration his firepower carefully, so while he let his weapon rest, he too was recovering his spiritual energy.

"One more RPG incoming!!!" Rakan shouted after slamming another round into the launcher. The area he'd struck earlier was still burning, a smoking crater surrounded by shredded remains of what used to be zombies.

The creatures hadn't regained their senses yet, and Rakan wasn't about to waste the opening; he'd kill as many as possible while they were still unmoving.

He locked onto another cluster just beside the first impact, pulled the trigger, and sent another rocket screaming through the air.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

Each explosion echoed like thunder, shaking the ground and painting the battlefield with fire and gore.

"Master, you rock!" one of Rakan's subordinates shouted gleefully, laughing as the explosions lit up the battlefield. Even Vulture and Evelyn, clad in full armor, felt the shockwaves ripple through the air. All around them, patches of ground burned and smoked from the relentless blasts.

Not wanting to be outdone while everyone else was pushing their limits, Vulture hefted his massive hammer and dove into the fray. Each swing crushed skulls like melons, his movements brutal and unstoppable, like a rampaging Hulk.

At the same time, he conjured 'Earth Spikes' with every step, jagged earth spears erupting from the ground to impale zombies in his path.

With every strike, his connection to his elemental ability deepened. What once took him five full seconds to summon now snapped into being in less than one. The earth no longer felt like a tool to command; it felt like an extension of his own body.

"Holy shit! I feel amazing!" Vulture roared as a hardened earth formed over his left arm, forming a massive claw. With his hammer gripped in his right hand, he rampaged through the horde, smashing skulls with bone-crushing swings while raking the claw through anything that got too close.

The results were horrifying. Each swipe shredded zombies as if a massive beast had mauled them, leaving their faces gouged beyond recognition. Brain matter and blood sprayed with every strike, the claw tearing through their skulls as easily as paper.

"Uweh!!!" Keith gagged, stumbling back with a pale face. "I'll pretend I didn't see that... disgusting!" He looked ready to vomit after catching a glimpse of the mangled corpses Vulture left in his path.

"I didn't know the City Lord had a brother with such a faint heart." Levi sneered, standing just close enough for Keith to catch the taunt. The corner of his lips curled upward, not quite a smile, more like a deliberate provocation.

Keith's nostrils flared. The urge to slap that smirk off Levi's face nearly overwhelmed him, but instead, he channeled his anger into action. He yanked his bowstring back, aimed at a forty-five-degree angle, and infused his shot with spiritual energy.

In an instant, dozens of glowing arrows materialized, streaking into the sky before raining down. Zombies collapsed one after another like toppled mannequins.

"Ha! Take that, now tell me who's weaker!" Keith barked, his earlier disgust already forgotten, his focus now locked on proving himself in a rivalry with Levi.

Levi, as if he had expected this exact reaction from Keith, only smirked wider. His taunting seemed to fuel Keith's determination, and the young man's area-of-effect attacks grew even more vicious and powerful as he threw himself into competing with Levi, who was steadily mowing down zombies at the frontline with his assault rifle.

Surprisingly, Levi actually has a high accuracy rate, so every shot hits the target, which fired up Keith even more.