

## Apocalypse 951

### Chapter 951: Rakan's Awakening 7

Either way, she was lucky that her three energies weren't acting up, otherwise, she wouldn't have had the stamina to handle it and would have suffered once more. It took her a moment to catch her breath before she turned to 008.

"Why didn't you remind me earlier?" Kisha asked, though she wasn't trying to blame him. 008 could sense that, and he didn't take offense.

"Host, as much as I wanted to, I couldn't disrupt your focus... or you would've suffered a severe backlash from mana disruption..." 008's voice wavered, almost like it was about to cry. It knew Kisha wasn't reprimanding or blaming it, but the thought of her almost putting her life in danger again made it feel helpless.

Truly, although she had grasped the profound knowledge of mana cultivation, she hadn't grown up in the fantasy world of mages. There would inevitably be gaps in her understanding, moments where she didn't know what she was doing, and times when she acted without prior knowledge.

But who would have thought that, on her very first attempt, she would directly inscribe a teleportation scroll with a hundred-mile radius?

Well, Kisha had actually hesitated for a few seconds over the distance, but in the end, she decided on the hundred-mile radius. After all, inscribing a teleportation scroll was difficult, the materials were rare, the process complex, so why not make the most of it?

Who would have thought, though, that such a choice would trigger such a severe backlash? By a hair's breadth, and perhaps thanks to her more than 700 points of luck, she had narrowly escaped disaster. She let out a sigh of relief and mentally buried the incident. If Duke ever found out, she'd be in for a lesson.

After all, Duke might be a sweet, clingy puppy most of the time, but when he got angry, he could easily become a Cerberus, a relentless hellhound who wouldn't rest until she learned her lesson. And she shuddered at the thought of him spanking her until her butt "bloomed." Embarrassing as that would be, she decided to take this as her lesson and move on.

"Hmm... but then again, maybe this wasn't such a bad thing after all," Kisha murmured to herself. "It's good to know just how far my Luck stat really goes. I thought it only affected item draws, helping me get better rewards, but it seems like it does a lot more than that..."

She recalled catching a few system notifications earlier, though she had been too focused to read them properly. Still, she was sure her Luck stat had activated, proof that it really did save her this time.

That thought gave her a bit of confidence. Maybe she could push herself a little more next time... though not enough to risk her life again.

With that, Kisha took a short rest before carefully picking up the finished teleportation scroll. The scroll glowed faintly gold as the inscribed runes settled into place, a sign of a successful enchantment. Once the glow faded, she rolled it up, sealed it with wax and ribbon, and stored it safely in her inventory.

Since it was her first success, and she wasn't sure if she had already used up all her luck for the day, she decided not to sell it yet on her Sales Channel. She'd test it later, after she'd fully recovered.

Satisfied with her decision, Kisha relaxed against Duke's chest. Before she knew it, exhaustion took over, and she drifted into sleep in his arms.

As Kisha's eyelids fluttered shut and sleep claimed her, Duke quietly watched her drift off in his arms. He could tell she had pushed herself again, just like before, and the sight filled him with a familiar ache of worry.

Part of him wanted to scold her for overexerting herself, but seeing how pale and exhausted she was, the words caught in his throat.

With a heavy sigh, Duke simply gathered her closer, wiping the sweat from her brow and gently brushing away the strands of hair that clung to her flushed skin. "You really are something else..." he murmured softly, his voice a mix of helpless affection and quiet frustration.

He adjusted her in his arms, letting her rest more comfortably, and stayed still as her breathing evened out. Listening to her calm rhythm soothed him as he continued his own work in silence.

Two hours passed before Duke finally lifted his gaze. The light outside had turned a deep red, the sun sinking low on the horizon.

By now, Grandpa Aldens and the others are returning from the cleanup, their faces tired but determined after clearing nearly a quarter of the zombie carcasses outside. Grandma Aldens, meanwhile, led the women in preparing dinner.

This time, no one felt embarrassed accepting the meal offered to them. Gratitude replaced hesitation, and in their hearts, they silently vowed to remain loyal to HOPE Base. This moment became the foundation of a lasting alliance, one that would endure for generations to come.

It was only then that Duke realized his legs had gone completely numb. He hadn't moved for the past two hours, afraid to disturb Kisha's sleep.

She hadn't stirred once, her breathing soft and steady against him, so all he could do was gently massage her limbs now and then to keep her from cramping up. In doing so, he'd completely forgotten about himself.

Now, as he tried to shift a little, he felt the sharp sting of a thousand needles prickling through his legs. He gritted his teeth, his eyes twitching slightly from the pain, but he made no sound; he didn't want Kisha to wake up feeling guilty.

Slowly, carefully, he began to move, supporting her with one arm while trying to get the blood flowing back to his legs.

He endured the discomfort in silence, determined that when Kisha finally woke up, he'd be able to stand and walk out with her as if nothing had happened.

"Hmmm..."

Before Kisha could even stir awake, the other person in the room, Rakan, began to move. He was lying on a mattress surrounded by 'Ice Shards' and 'Ice Spikes', yet he looked as though he had just enjoyed a peaceful beauty sleep.

His face was refreshed, even radiant, but Duke immediately sensed the shift in the air.

Rakan's aura had changed. There was something beastly about it now, untamed, wild, and brimming with strength. Duke raised an eyebrow, watching as Rakan shook his head to clear his thoughts and pushed himself upright.

Then, out of nowhere, Rakan wrinkled his nose as though catching a foul scent and made a face that looked like he was about to throw up.

At that, Duke almost burst out laughing. Rakan's expression was so exaggerated that he looked exactly like a silly dog making a mess of its own dignity. But Duke restrained himself, biting back his amusement as he didn't want to wake Kisha. Instead, he silently observed Rakan, curiosity flickering in his eyes.

Still groggy, Rakan looked down at his hands, then slowly traced his gaze along his arms, as if studying something unseen, or perhaps feeling the unfamiliar flow of his newly awakened power.

His brows furrowed slightly, confusion flickering in his eyes as he tried to make sense of the strange sensations coursing through him. He opened his mouth to speak, but instead of words, a low, guttural sound escaped his throat.

"Grrr..."

Duke couldn't help but wonder if Rakan's brain had been fried by the force awakening. Glancing down at the woman sleeping peacefully in his arms, he felt a twinge of hesitation; he didn't have the heart to let Kisha see this sight.

If she thought Rakan had turned into a failed test subject, it would surely dampen her enthusiasm and fill her with guilt for turning a capable warrior into a fool.

But before Duke could dwell on the thought, his eyes widened in surprise. Rakan's fingernails suddenly elongated, transforming into razor-sharp claws like those of a great feline. Intrigued, Duke leaned forward slightly, his curiosity piqued.

Then, without warning, Kisha stirred awake. As her eyes fluttered open, she too froze in awe as Rakan's body was shifting, his bones cracking and muscles expanding until a massive tiger stood where the man once was. The beast was twice the size of an ordinary tiger, its presence filling the entire meeting room and making the air feel thick and heavy.

Both Kisha and Duke fell silent, captivated by the sight. Rakan, now fully transformed, moved cautiously, his tail sweeping behind him as he turned in a slow circle, still clumsy on all fours as he tried to adjust to his new form.

They had expected Rakan's awakening to take the whole day, just like the others before him. But to their astonishment, it had only taken him six hours at most, and now, seeing him transform into a tiger, confirmed Kisha's earlier speculation about his potential awakened ability.

Her heart skipped with excitement as she quickly summoned his status window to confirm it with her own eyes.

Chapter 952: Rakan Awakened Status Window

...

[Rakan]

Level 0

Morality: Neutral

Strength: 20

Stamina: 27

Defense: 21

Agility: 19

Mental Capacity: 20

Charm: 20

Leadership: 20

Title: None

Skills: None

Talent: King Of The Jungle

Gift: The Animal Kingdom Codex

Ability: Shifter

...

Based on what she was seeing now, if his Talent was 'King of the Jungle' and his Gift was 'The Animal Kingdom Codex', then his Ability — 'Shifter' — was already self-explanatory.

That meant he could transform into any animal he wanted, as long as it was registered in his Animal Kingdom Codex. But how exactly did an animal get registered? Did he just need to know what it looked like to transform into it?

If that was the case, Kisha realized, then his awakened ability had to be one of the most remarkable and irregular abilities she had seen in her life. His strength couldn't be measured like that of a regular awakened ability users, and his potential to surpass others was enormous.

Suddenly, a thought hit her: 'Could he transform into dinosaurs or even dragons? After all, they're almost like animals, aren't they?'

She felt a thrill at her own speculation as she watched Rakan in his massive tiger form, amusing himself by staring at his own fluffy tail. Or... had he really just turned into a fool?

Both Duke and Kisha stared at Rakan in amusement. Kisha was suddenly wide awake, leaping out of Duke's embrace. Only then did Duke remember that his legs had gone numb, and when Kisha moved, a tremor ran through him.

He gritted his teeth, feeling as if thousands of ants were gnawing at his legs, and he almost peed himself. Shooting Kisha a pitiful, resentful glare, but Kisha was too excited to even notice his glare at the back of her head, and Rakan, startled by her sudden movement, jumped back.

The fur along his back bristled like a frightened big cat, and although he tried to hiss at her, all that came out was a low, rumbling growl.

"Grrr..." Rakan growled, but the moment he realized the "sneak attack" had come from Kisha, his fluffy ears instantly drooped. He looked suddenly meek, settling onto his hind legs with his tail coiled neatly beneath him, as if awaiting Kisha's command like a warrior.

Seeing this, Kisha was even more amused. Just because Rakan had shifted into a tiger didn't mean his consciousness had become that of an animal too; he still seemed to have full control over his body.

'That was incredible.'

With his massive paws, he could be a formidable damage dealer, or even a tank, on the front lines, easily tearing through countless zombies and clearing a path for anyone.

"Rakan, can you understand what I'm saying?" Kisha asked, eager to confirm her speculation.

“Grr...” Rakan let out a low growl, as if to show his agreement. But realizing Kisha couldn’t understand his sounds, he simply nodded, sitting up straight with his chin held high.

No one seemed to remember Duke, who was slumped in his chair, massaging his numb legs.

Even his little resentful glare toward Kisha went unnoticed, so he only pouted briefly, watching his wife’s excitement over Rakan’s transformation. Resigned, he focused on working out the numbness in his own legs before daring to get closer to Rakan.

Seeing Rakan nod his massive tiger head, Kisha was over the moon. She took in his massive transformed body from head to toe, and to be absolutely sure, she moved closer. Noticing her approach, Rakan stayed perfectly still, but the tip of his fluffy tail wagged slightly, betraying his own happiness.

Kisha wanted to confirm that what she was seeing wasn’t some illusion-type awakened ability, like Keith’s. Stepping closer, she ran her hand over Rakan’s tiger form, letting her fingers sink into his glossy, soft fur.

The vivid sensation made her heart race even faster. It was proof that his awakened ability was genuine, a true shifter, and had nothing to do with illusions.

Then she stepped back and said, “Paws,” holding her palm out in front of Rakan. Instinctively, he placed his massive paw on hers and tilted his head to the side. Only then did he realize that Kisha was treating him like a dog.

He had nothing to say, or perhaps he dared not, so he bit his tongue. Besides, it wasn’t as if he could speak in his current form.

Behind them, Duke couldn’t help but chuckle, holding his laughter in. He watched Rakan’s bewildered expression, his feline eyes dilating in realization, and found the sight funny in countless ways.

“Pft!” Duke bit his lips and lightly tapped his legs with his fists to shake off the numbness. But because he was holding back his laughter, he used a little too much force and hit his legs harder than intended, forcing himself to stop abruptly.

Karma, it seemed, was a real bitch and taught him a lesson; he could no longer laugh at anyone else's misfortune.

"Good! Then, can you shift back to your human form?" Kisha asked Rakan, her eyes shining with excitement. She wanted to see if he could control his transformation at will, or if there were conditions that had to be met before he could shift back to human form, or vice versa.

"Rawr..." Rakan opened his massive mouth and let out a low growl, as if trying to tell her something she couldn't understand. Kisha stared blankly at him, and he repeated it. "Rawr..."

Then he pulled his paw away from her and stood in front of her. When Kisha still didn't get it, Rakan carefully made his way toward the door, navigating around the furniture with surprising difficulty for his size.

At the door, he tried to turn the knob with his paw, but it was twice as big as a normal tiger's, making the knob look like a tiny toy. He hesitated, afraid of breaking it, and delicately tried using the tip of his claw.

Watching him struggle so adorably, Kisha finally understood what he wanted.

"Do you want me to leave first?" she asked, a little unsure, stepping closer to Rakan.

Hearing her, Rakan looked back with a pitiful expression, unable to open the doorknob, and gave a small nod.

"All right, then. I'll leave first," she said. Her eyes caught the mattress, pillow, and blanket, and she waved her hand to store them in her inventory. Then she approached the door, turned the knob, and stepped out, Rakan's tiger form lingering just behind the door.

Just after Kisha left, the sound of bones cracking echoed again, just as it had when Rakan shifted into his tiger form. His muscles shrank rapidly until steam rose from his body, and he returned to his original human form.

Duke, who had been forgotten in the corner, witnessed the entire transformation. Seeing that Rakan's clothes had been shredded during his first shift, he quickly threw some spare clothes to him. Rakan was completely naked now, and Duke didn't want Kisha to see him this way, so the spare clothes were all he could offer for the moment.

Rakan didn't move immediately after shifting.

He heaved breathlessly, as if still adjusting to the pain of his bones cracking and muscles growing and shrinking during the transformation. His entire body was slick with sweat, and steam billowed from him as if he were overheating.

After a moment of catching his breath and calming his rapidly beating heart, he slowly stood up, but immediately staggered, feeling unsteady like a newborn calf. For a brief moment, he couldn't fully sense his own body, and walking properly felt impossible.

Duke didn't move; he simply watched as Rakan reacquainted himself with his body. Perhaps it was the disorientation from shifting, first walking on all fours as a tiger, then suddenly back on two legs, that might be confusing his senses, especially since it was his first time.

Duke didn't say a word; he simply watched as Rakan slowly made his way to the set of clothes Duke had tossed him. When Rakan bent down, Duke noticed his legs trembling slightly, but he quickly looked away. He had seen enough, and frankly, watching a middle-aged man struggle to get dressed wasn't something he was eager to witness.

Because of his lingering disorientation, it took Rakan almost half an hour to fully regain his senses and change. When Kisha returned, after Rakan had finally managed to open the door for her, she was greeted by his human form.

Realizing that he could now answer her earlier question, she stepped inside without hesitation.

As soon as she stepped inside, Kisha noticed Duke still sitting where she'd left him. Only then did she remember that he had been there the entire time, completely forgotten while she was busy being fascinated by Rakan's awakened ability. Feeling a twinge of guilt, she strutted over to her husband, her expression turning adorably apologetic as she acted cute.

Duke gave a soft snort. "Hmph." But despite his show of annoyance, he still pulled her onto his lap. Rakan, seeing the couple settle, walked toward them, clearly aware that Kisha's curiosity about his awakened ability hadn't faded in the slightest.

#### Chapter 953: About Rakan's Awakened Ability

"City Lord, Vice City Lord, I first want to express my deepest gratitude for your guidance during my awakening. I swear my loyalty to you for the rest of my life, and I expect my children and all my descendants, as well as my subordinates, to uphold the same," he said, bowing deeply to the two.

Duke raised an eyebrow at the display but remained silent. After all, the one to whom this man owed his loyalty wasn't him, but his wife. Still, he couldn't help but be amused.

This mafia lord's humility and seriousness, combined with the weight of such a promise, which held the same gravity as a formal decree, spoke volumes about his honor and pride. Once given, he would never renege.

Kisha didn't pretend to be overly kindhearted or act as if her help was insignificant. Instead, she let Rakan express his gratitude; after all, that was what she deserved.

Rakan continued, "As for my awakened ability, it seems I can fully control my body and shift between human and animal forms at will. As for how many animals I can transform into... right now, I only have the tiger in my Animal Kingdom Codex. As for why, I have a theory..."

"Oh?" Kisha leaned in closer, curiosity sparkling in her eyes. "And what is it?"

"I think... in order for me to gain more options for shifting, I need to register the animals I want to transform into in the Animal Kingdom Codex. Once an animal is registered, I can freely shift into it, but to register one, I have to deeply understand its physical form, how its body works, its strengths and weaknesses. In short, I need extensive knowledge of the animal before it can be fully recognized in the codex."

"Right now, for example, the tiger in my codex is only at around 67% proficiency. That means I can't yet fully utilize its strength and abilities. I still have a long way to go before I can truly become one with it. I

need to understand it on a deeper level; essentially, I have to become the animal to fully embody and manifest its power. Only at 100% proficiency will that happen.”

He paused, and Kisha finally understood his explanation.

But Kisha couldn't help asking, “Then... how come the tiger was already in your Animal Kingdom Codex the moment you awakened your ability? Was it like a newbie gift pack, or just luck?”

“No... the reason I came up with my theory is because of that tiger. Before I became a well-known mafia boss and the head of all the gangs, I once raised a tiger cub. That tiger fought alongside me, and its ferocity, its ability to eliminate my enemies... it was a huge part of how I secured my position as the mafia boss. That tiger was my companion for years.”

“Even at its last breath, it protected me from a bullet that could have killed me, taking the blow itself. We couldn't save it; it was too old and couldn't survive the surgery....”

His voice cracked slightly at the memory, and he paused, swallowed, and continued. “Everyone feared that tiger, because it was suspicious of anyone but me. No one could get close. Yet, in front of me, it was always gentle, like a cub, wanting to cuddle and sleep beside me.”

“Since I raised a tiger cub and understood most of its habits, physiology, and ferocity, that must be why I have 67% proficiency, not because I shifted into a tiger immediately upon awakening.”

“Right now, whenever I open the Animal Kingdom Codex in my mind, all I see are grayed-out cards with question marks. The only card that's lit up is the tiger, showing its proficiency. This means I can choose freely from the list of cards, once I register more animals, that is...”

Rakan wiped his reddened eyes and took a deep breath, composing himself before continuing.

“But I think my awakened ability isn't truly omnipotent. Right now, I'm still at a lower level, so the number of cards, or slots, I can use to register animals is limited. That means I have to choose wisely which ones to add.”

“As I level up, I believe I’ll be able to unlock more slots and register additional animals. Of course, this is just my theory for now, but I think it’s best to stay cautious...” Rakan concluded.

Both Kisha and Duke were genuinely impressed by his ability, even with its current limitations. It was understandable because Rakan was still only at Level 0. If his awakened ability allowed him to register countless animals right from the start, his body might not withstand the pressure and could collapse.

After all, that’s usually how awakening abilities progress, gradual and controlled...so their bodies could adapt to the sudden surge of power coursing through their veins; otherwise, the overwhelming force might cause them to literally explode from within.

What truly amazed them, however, wasn’t just his ability, but his openness. Rakan shared every detail of his power without hesitation, a gesture that spoke volumes of the trust he placed in them. It was a rare and heartwarming display of loyalty, one they both silently vowed to honor in return.

Kisha nodded thoughtfully. “That’s good to hear. In that case, you should carefully choose a few powerful animals, maybe something like an elephant and a gorilla.”

“But what I’m really curious about is whether your awakened ability could also let you shift into dinosaurs or even dragons. After all, aren’t those technically animals too? Dinosaurs were the ancient beasts of Earth, so maybe it’s possible?”

Kisha couldn’t let go of that thought. After all, there were only a handful of truly powerful animals for Rakan to choose from, and the tiger was already at the top of that list. He was incredibly lucky to have unlocked it right from the start, as it greatly boosted his overall strength.

“I’m not sure, City Lord,” Rakan admitted, scratching the back of his head. “But there’s a possibility. I can feel that as I level up, my animals will also grow stronger. How powerful they’ll become or what kind of strength I’ll gain... that’s still a mystery. It’s just a gut feeling for now.”

Despite the uncertainty, Rakan felt genuinely happy. When his tiger companion died, he had fallen into a deep depression, and that was when he began taking in poor kids and street thugs, feeling a strange kinship with them.

Those rough, prickly kids who had lost their way reminded him of his tiger cub: wild, wary, but fiercely loyal once trust was earned.

Now that the tiger was the first creature registered in his Animal Kingdom Codex, it felt as though his old companion had returned to him. The warmth of that memory made him lower his guard and speak freely, without worrying that Kisha might one day use this knowledge to suppress, manipulate, or even harm him.

His instincts told him she and her husband weren't that kind of people, and Rakan had learned long ago to trust his instincts.

Because of Rakan's openness, Kisha had learned a great deal about his awakened ability. However, since he needed to have a deep understanding of an animal before he could register it into his Animal Kingdom Codex, that requirement alone posed a major limitation.

While it was technically possible for him to register creatures like dinosaurs or dragons, the problem was, how could he truly understand them? The only feasible option would be to study fossils, research papers, and museum archives compiled by archaeologists and paleontologists.

Yet, since most of that information was based on theory, it might not be enough. For Rakan to fully register a creature, he would likely need firsthand experience by observing how it lived, hunted, and fought. That, of course, was impossible for both dinosaurs and dragons.

Still, Kisha's mind was already working on a solution. Perhaps there was another way to help him learn and expand his Animal Kingdom Codex. With that thought, she turned to him and spoke.

"Rakan, I really appreciate your openness and the trust you've shown us by sharing everything about your awakened ability without fear or reservation. And thanks to that honesty, I think I might have an idea on how we can help you gain a better understanding of the animals you want to register in your available slots."

Hearing this, Rakan couldn't hide his excitement as he said, "There's no need to be so formal with me, City Lord and Vice City Lord. I owe my survival to you and your people. The fact that I'm still standing here today is all thanks to your kindness."

"If I hadn't met your men, people who clearly reflect your values, I would've long died back in Port City along with my most trusted subordinate. My soul wouldn't have found peace then."

"So please, let me at least repay a fraction of that debt. And the fact that you're even willing to help me deepen my understanding of more animals so I can expand my arsenal... that alone is already more than I could ask for. I truly thank you for this favor."

#### Chapter 954: Future Plans

His words made both Kisha and Duke raise an eyebrow; they hadn't expected Rakan to be so eloquent or so flattering. For someone with such a fierce reputation, he certainly knew how to speak beautifully when he wanted to.

Then again, it wasn't too surprising. Having clawed his way up from the bottom rung of society, Rakan had long ago mastered the art of fawning over others to survive. It was a skill that served him well back when he was just another small-time gang lackey.

But once he rose to power and became a mafia boss, he no longer needed it, because people around him were the ones flattering him instead. He'd almost forgotten how to speak like this until now, when he found himself serving under someone else once again.

And it wouldn't hurt for him to fawn over Kisha and Duke a little; making them happy also made him happy. Besides, hadn't Kisha just offered him her help? If he had to do everything alone, he might know the basic process, but it would still be difficult to move forward.

His knowledge of other animals was limited; all he really understood was that they were creatures of nature who lived with nature. That alone wasn't enough to get them properly registered in his Animal Kingdom Codex.

Kisha continued with her proposition, though she cleared her throat first. It would be a lie to say she wasn't pleased by his praise for her values, but she knew better than to let it get to her head, so she pushed the conversation back on track.

"As I was saying," she resumed, "I have an idea that might help you understand animals better. I think it would be best if you teamed up with Mike Wyatt. His awakened ability is Mental (Special: Beast Taming Land Animals), and he can understand and tame animals better than anyone I've seen."

"If you want deeper knowledge about other species, then having him by your side is the smartest choice. He can explain anything you don't understand. Honestly, I believe he'd have more answers than any survival guide or animal book we could find in a library."

"And besides," Kisha continued, "we already have a plan to start taming mutated animals and raising them under our warriors. They'll be used in the future, especially during the larger battles we expect against other bases that might want a piece of ours. Since that's already part of our agenda, adding you to the project won't be a problem."

"When we capture a mutated animal and Mike manages to tame it, you can be the first one there to study it to your heart's content. Just remember, Mike is a busy teenage boy. He's the one in charge of taking care of the base's livestock, so he spends most of his time with the animals. But honestly, that works in your favor..."

Kisha explained patiently.

What Rakan didn't know, however, was that the "livestock" he thought Mike was tending were just the small animals Sparrow and Vulture pretended to capture from the northern part of the city, something everyone else in the base was aware of. He had no idea that Mike was actually spending most of his time inside Kisha's territory space.

So, Rakan assumed that Mike's responsibilities only involved the few truckloads of animals and mutated creatures that Sparrow and Vulture's team had captured. Kisha didn't bother correcting him, not yet. The more people who knew about her secrets and her territory space, the more dangerous it would be.

Thanks to the slave contracts and the Heart Gu Pill, she didn't have to worry too much about internal threats, but still... she couldn't just let everyone in the base know the full extent of her abilities. Of course not.

For now, she could only give vague explanations and wait to hear Mike's thoughts on the matter before deciding what to reveal, and to whom.

"But first, I'll need to inform Mike. If he agrees, good. If not, then I'll leave the convincing to you..." Kisha said. She almost added, "If you can even find him, that is," but she held her tongue. Rakan would only end up confused. After all, where could Mike possibly be hiding if he wasn't anywhere in the base?

"I understand, City Lord! Thank you so much!" Rakan exclaimed, bowing so deeply in excitement that he nearly dropped to his knees. Kisha was so startled she almost jumped off Duke's lap. Before he could fully kowtow, she quickly halted him with her telekinesis, freezing him mid-movement.

With a firm wave of her hand, she sent him out to rejoin and help the others with the cleanup work and the patrol, so they could finish preparing to leave Maple Leaf Town soon. From there, Sparrow and Vulture's teams would head straight to Jason's territory to help clear out the mutated zombies infesting his hunting grounds.

Jason needed those areas cleaned not only to keep his people safe, but also so he could continue to let his people hunt zombies around those areas while he was taking on missions from the HOPE Base's mission board.

The more zombies he and his people hunted, the more crystal cores he could gather, crystal cores he could trade for supplies, weapons, and armor for their growing fighters. With better gear, their combatants could harvest even more crystal cores, creating a strong cycle of growth.

By helping clear Maple Leaf Town and Gale City, Kisha was ensuring that her first two allied forces could grow stronger as quickly as possible. Once strengthened, they could secure their territories faster and establish firm perimeters to guard against outside threats.

By helping them establish their perimeters as early as possible, Kisha ensured greater security for the HOPE Base, too, since these two forces would serve as its frontline defense against any future threats.

"So... does this mean we'll have to start looking for mutated animals to tame?" Duke finally spoke after Rakan left. He understood what Kisha was aiming for, but memories of the mutated rats, those bottomless maws that devoured everything in sight, made his skin crawl. Mutated creatures were never simple prey.

The only reason Sparrow and Vulture's captured beasts were manageable in the territory space was because the two had been lucky enough to knock them out cold. Mike had all the time he needed to tame them safely, without suffering those creatures' manic, vicious counterattacks.

But with what Rakan needed, and with the future Kisha envisioned, they wouldn't just need mutated livestock like cows or pigs anymore.

They would need mutated beasts with real potential for battle, creatures fierce and powerful enough to become battle companions for their warriors in the future.

And that meant greater danger for the hunters tasked with capturing them... and an even greater risk for young Mike, who would have to tame these ferocious creatures. A single mistake, a single moment of weakness, and a mutated beast could kill him in an instant.

"Don't worry. If we find suitable animals, we'll make our move ourselves. Did you see what I inscribed earlier?" Kisha grinned mischievously as she proudly held up the newly completed magic scroll.

It was her latest success, though she still needed to test its safety and effectiveness, but it was enough to spark her confidence.

This scroll proved that as long as they had a marked destination, they could teleport repeatedly using the Teleportation Scroll. And the more she mastered the craft, the farther her reach would become. One day, she might even be able to teleport across countries if she pushed her limits.

So as long as she could personally take action to capture mutated beasts, whether tigers, lions, or anything just as ferocious, Kisha was confident. With Duke at her side, they could easily overpower such creatures, suppress them, and force them into submission.

With their combined strength, they might not even need Mike for the initial taming; he would only need to handle the follow-up to ensure the beast stayed obedient afterward.

But Duke couldn't read her thoughts, so Kisha had to explain her plan step by step. She lifted the scroll in her hand and said slowly, "The scroll I completed earlier is the same Teleportation Scroll we used to arrive here instantly."

"It's still my first attempt, and there are limitations... but once my proficiency improves, I'll be able to create stronger scrolls, and more of them."

Her eyes gleamed with confidence as she continued, "When that time comes, whenever we find a suitable mutated animal, all we need to do is teleport directly to its location, subdue it on the spot, and bring it back to Mike so he can ensure it behaves properly afterward."

"Besides, I promised my brother I'd find him a heavenly tiger. That kind of creature probably doesn't exist in this world... but at the very least, I can find him a powerful white tiger to serve as his battle companion." Kisha murmured, her voice soft but resolute.

#### Chapter 955: Rental Feature

She had already checked the system shop. While she could technically buy a heavenly tiger egg, there was only one available, and it was locked behind the achievement shop. Heavenly beasts weren't something one could casually purchase from the regular system mall. The fact that she managed to buy Bell back then had simply been good fortune.

"Alright, I trust my wife. Whatever you want to do, I'll do it with you. Whatever you decide, I'll support you," Duke murmured as he wrapped Kisha in a gentle hug from behind, resting his cheek against hers.

His voice softened even more as he added, "You've been working so hard lately. This new teleportation scroll is amazing, useful, and powerful, but don't forget to take care of yourself. I've seen you push yourself too hard to the point of putting yourself in danger more than once."

He tightened his embrace, his tone turning a little coaxing, almost coquettish, as if trying to coax her into easing up. "You have a husband now, someone who wants to share your burdens. You don't need to carry everything alone anymore. Let me help you, okay?"

Duke's heart ached knowing she always pushed herself for everyone else, and all he wanted was to take even a little of that weight off her shoulders.

But there were things Kisha couldn't bring herself to tell Duke. The real reason she was pushing herself so hard was because she knew far darker days were waiting ahead. She moved as if she were racing against time because, in truth, she was.

The second phase of "The Beginning of the End" has already started, and she could already sense that it would be nothing short of hell descending upon Earth.

Somewhere deep inside her, she felt that a Constellation was targeting her. She couldn't explain why; she had no evidence, only a chilling instinct. After all, the virus that sparked this zombie apocalypse had fallen to Earth billions of years ago.

How could a Constellation possibly predict when her soul would be born? Why would one even bother to fix their attention on her?

Yet the thought lingered. Every lifetime she had lived, every impossible mission she had been forced to complete, everything pointed to someone pulling strings from the shadows. And now, the weight of that unseen threat sat on her shoulders like a curse she couldn't speak aloud.

And although she had completed the first phase, who knew how many more waited for her, second, third, fourth... when would it ever end? Why was this Constellation doing this? For entertainment? For cruelty? Why did they want her dead so desperately?

008 never told her anything, but based on every mission she had completed, every death she had suffered in her countless reincarnations, Kisha could piece together the truth on her own: someone up there wanted her life to be nothing but misery.

Every time she reincarnated, she was forced to watch her family die, again and again, in countless horrific ways, and she herself always met a tragic end. It felt as if the Constellation wanted to remind her how small she truly was, how powerless, how easily she could be crushed no matter how hard she fought.

As if they wanted her to understand that no matter how fiercely she struggled, no matter how much she clawed her way through impossible missions, it would never be enough. She was meant to break.

But maybe it was simply because, after dying over and over in her past lives, Kisha had already developed a deep prejudice against the Constellations. They didn't act like gods who guided or protected humanity. They didn't offer hope. They didn't lift a finger when the world fell into chaos.

Instead, they were like distant spectators, cold, detached, watching silently from above as the world drowned in agony and destruction.

So now that she possessed the same power as the Constellations, she couldn't help but feel that maybe, just maybe, things would finally be different this time.

[The Goddess of Wisdom is watching you with keen interest.]

[The God of Shadow and Death grins at the darkening aura surrounding you and is welcoming you to his side.]

[The Goddess of Love observes your every move, her gaze lingering.]

Kisha saw the familiar notifications flicker before her eyes, that same suffocating feeling of being watched crawling up her spine. She refused to acknowledge it this time. Instead, she kept her gaze locked on Duke, pretending she didn't feel the Constellations breathing down her neck.

"Alright," she said calmly, "let's do that. For now, let's wrap things up here and head back to the base. I'll leave this place under Sparrow and Vulture's command."

Without waiting for another notification to flash, Kisha grabbed Duke's hand and pulled him out of the room. They walked out to find Sparrow and Vulture, both standing as the acting captains of the group.

Since dusk had already settled and the air had grown colder, the patrol teams were being reassigned. Everyone had stopped working outside; it was too risky to keep wandering the area at night. The remaining clean-up would have to continue tomorrow.

The moment Sparrow and Vulture saw Kisha and Duke approaching, they quickly dismissed the others to continue their duties. Once the area was cleared, the two men jogged over and stopped in front of the couple.

"Master, Young Madam, is there anything we can assist you with?" Sparrow asked respectfully, slightly out of breath as he stood at attention.

"Yes," Kisha replied. "We came to inform you that we're heading back to the base. We still have work to finish, so we'll be leaving everything here under your care." Duke remained silent beside her, but his silence spoke for him; he shared her decision completely. His eyes followed Kisha with a soft, dotting smile as she spoke.

Vulture nodded, then asked, "What about your grandparents and brother, Young Madam?"

"Let them stay with your team for now. They need the experience," Kisha said. "Don't worry too much, only step in if it becomes truly necessary. As long as they can handle it, let them. They have to learn what it's like outside the base so their bodies and minds can toughen up."

She was anxious about her family. A part of her wanted to shield them from every danger. But she knew that overprotecting them would only cripple them in the long run. In all her previous lives, she and her family had been weak, always dying helplessly, no matter how hard she tried.

Not this time, though.

Now, she had points, her territory space, and all the resources she'd gathered, advantages she never had before. She believed things could finally change.

No, she would make sure they changed. This was her last chance, and she refused to waste it.

"We understand. Then... what about the heavy-duty machinery, the forklifts and trucks you brought?" Sparrow asked carefully. His gaze shifted to the STAUs who had temporarily stored the equipment in their spatial storage to prevent anyone from trying to steal them if they were left parked outside.

Hearing Sparrow's question, Kisha fell into deep thought. He had a point. At the pace they were going, it would take at least two more days to finish clearing the zombie corpses outside Maple Leaf Town's survivor shelter.

And once Sparrow's team was done, if she didn't retrieve the machinery herself, the STAU's would be forced to keep the forklifts and trucks inside their spatial storages.

That wouldn't normally be a problem, except that if they stumbled upon a supermarket with intact supplies on their way, it would be a waste not to collect everything they could. And with their storage already clogged by heavy machinery, gathering large amounts of resources would become nearly impossible.

Kisha chewed on the dilemma. She needed a feasible way to retrieve the equipment once Sparrow's group finished using it. But did that mean she'd have to teleport back to Maple Leaf Town just to pick it up? Or would Sparrow and the others have to return to the base before heading to Gale City?

Both options felt wasteful.

And if Gale City was facing the same crisis as Maple Leaf Town... then their situation might also be time-sensitive. They couldn't afford delays, not when every hour could determine who lived and who died.

"Host, if I remember correctly, after your territory space was upgraded to level 2, several new features were added, and one of them is the rental feature. You can actually rent out any equipment, machinery, or item, then set the rental duration on your end."

"Once that time expires, the item will automatically return to you no matter how far it is, because a retrieval spell is attached to every rented object to prevent anyone from running off with your things."

"This feature also applies to houses or any other structures within your territory that you might want to rent out," 008 suddenly reminded her.

Chapter 956: Rental Feature 2

"Wait, there's really a feature like that?" Kisha muttered, brows furrowing as she tried to recall everything she had seen during the territory space's recent upgrade. "I don't remember noticing anything like that when I checked the new functions..."

"Host, you really didn't notice it because you were too focused on the major upgrades, the integration of the Spiritual Crystal Gatherer with the territory, and the other big features grabbed all of your attention. There are still several functions you haven't explored yet."

"Among those overlooked additions is the rental feature. It's easy to miss unless you individually check each housing unit, machinery, or item in your territory. The option only appears when you click on the specific object itself, so if you didn't inspect everything one by one, it's completely normal that you didn't see it," 008 continued, watching Kisha sink deeper into her thoughts.

Now that she'd been enlightened, Kisha glanced outside and spotted one of the STAU members helping clean up the used tables after the meal. She walked over to him and said, "You stored the heavy machinery in your spatial space, right? Can you take out the smallest one? I want to test something."

Although the STAU was confused by her request, he still obeyed. Moments later, he placed a forklift in the small courtyard of the kindergarten. As soon as he did, Kisha opened her territory interface.

Since she had already granted Duke full access to it, he could see everything she was seeing. He quietly observed her with interest, curious about what she was planning to do.

Kisha walked over to the forklift, checking its item description, model number, serial number, and everything else she needed. Because both she and the machinery were currently outside her territory, and because she hadn't officially registered the forklift as one of her assets, she couldn't access the rental page yet.

Following 008's instructions, she manually registered the machine through her territory interface. She entered the serial number, model type, and number, and uploaded a 3D image of it.

Only after that did the interface finally recognize the forklift as one of her properties. The moment it was registered, the options she needed appeared when she tapped the item on the screen.

...

[Terrain Forklift — ERTF2800]

[Description: Everun began its wheel-loader export operations in 2007. With the support of its customers, Qingdao Everun Machinery Co., Ltd. was established in the scenic coastal city of Qingdao, known for its convenient transportation access.

Specification:(Load Center: 565 mm)(Rated Capacity: 2000 kg)(Net Weight: 4300 kg)

Technical Parameters: ...]

Beside the standard machine details, new options appeared:

[Locate Item]

[Modify Item]

[Rent Item]

[Exit]

And when she saw the [Rent Item] option, Kisha tapped it, and another window unfolded.

[Rent 'Terrain Forklifts—ERTF2800?']

[Please input the rental price.]

Kisha paused, considering the actual cost of keeping the machine running, the fuel it needed, the maintenance, the storage. Charging three level-1 crystal cores per day sounded reasonable, so she entered the amount.

[Are you sure you want to set the rental price of 'Terrain Forklifts—ERTF2800' to 3 crystal cores per day?]

[Yes] or [No]

Without hesitation, she selected Yes.

Another prompt appeared immediately:

[Please specify the number of rental days.]

[Are you sure you want to rent the item for 2 days?]

[Yes] or [No]

...

She clicked "Yes" again and thought about how extensive the rental process was. At first, it seemed cumbersome, but she realized that the detailed steps were actually helpful; if someone wanted to back out mid-process, they could stop before completion.

Deciding not to overthink it, she continued with the rental to get familiar with the feature. Once she mastered it, she could send the process to Aston and Tristan back at HOPE Base so they could apply it to all items.

This would be especially useful since Fred and the others had brought back so many off-road Hummers for renting or selling to outsiders. In this way, they could turn it into another business venture in the

apocalypse, earning more crystal cores to support their warriors without constantly putting them in danger.

...

[Rental successful.]

[Do you wish to set up auto-retrieval once the rental period is over?]

[Yes] or [No]

...

Now that she understood what 008 was explaining, Kisha nodded in satisfaction and set up the auto-retrieval for the item once the rental period ended. This way, they wouldn't have to worry about rented items being stolen or outsiders refusing to return them.

After all, in the apocalypse, such equipment was a hot commodity; once outsiders got their hands on it, their greed and darker impulses would likely take over. They might never return it and could even try to monopolize it. It was fortunate that this rental feature existed now; it was an immense help.

After all, everyone would want as much machinery and equipment as possible to develop and strengthen their bases. Having heavy-duty machinery was far more efficient than relying solely on manpower, as it saved time and effort.

Kisha was confident that once she allowed others to rent her equipment, many would be tempted. They would see spending three crystal cores a day as a steal, thinking that once the machinery was in their possession, it would be difficult for anyone to retrieve it.

After all, even before the apocalypse, people often delayed returning rented equipment like tractors or excavators, trying to avoid extra costs, but didn't want to return it. Now, with laws and rules largely meaningless and human greed running rampant, such behavior would only worsen.

But with this new rental feature, Kisha no longer had to worry about her equipment being stolen; she could let others use it without risking loss.

Sure, she had planned to sell and rent items in the future, carefully maintaining alliances and connections to keep others in line, hoping their greed and short-sightedness wouldn't ruin potential collaborations.

That had been her only leverage until now. With the new rental feature, she could finally sit back and relax. Even if someone tried to make it difficult for her people to retrieve the equipment, once the rental period ended, the items would automatically return to her territory and their designated storage.

Now, who would dare to cross her?

Duke, observing what Kisha was doing, quickly understood the situation. His eyes widened for a moment before he chuckled, clearly impressed by his wife's cunning. He nodded in approval as she worked through the process with precision.

The STAU standing beside them, however, had no idea what Kisha was up to. From his perspective, she seemed to be clicking at thin air and staring intently at nothing but the darkening sky and empty space. He remained silent, though, not daring to interrupt.

Once Kisha finished configuring the first piece of heavy machinery, she instructed the STAU to release the others one by one. Methodically, she set each item up, adjusting the rental price according to the model.

Even the first forklift she had set up was changed to 5 crystal cores a day, after all, if it broke down, maintenance would fall on the renter. She was determined to secure the best deal.

After finishing the setup, Kisha checked the forklift again, and the interface had changed. She could now see all items registered under her territory in the "Territory's Property" section.

Beneath it were various categories: "Housing," "Commercial Buildings," "Market Stalls," "Machinery," "Cars," and more. Most of these categories were still empty, as she had only registered the heavy machinery so far.

When she clicked on the "Machinery" category, all the registered items appeared like a catalog, complete with pictures. The specific options for each item would only appear once she clicked on its image.

...

[Check Item Description]

[Check Item Status]

[Locate Item]

[Perform Maintenance]

[Modify Item]

[Rent Item]

[Adjust Rental Pricing]

[Exit]

...

Under "Check Item Description," Kisha could see the same details she had observed earlier: the item's specifications, model, and other key information.

Under "Check Item Status," she could quickly determine if any part of the machinery required attention. For example:

Red: Part needs immediate maintenance (e.g., a flat tire).

Orange: Part is nearing wear and will need attention soon.

Yellow: Minor issue, but negligible for now.

Green: Everything is functioning normally.

The rest of the options were mostly self-explanatory, allowing her to manage, modify, or rent the item efficiently.

After learning about the rental feature in her territory interface, Kisha registered all the heavy-duty machinery she had brought from HOPE Base to Maple Leaf Town. She set everything up carefully and, since she was helping the Maple Leaf town and was currently building goodwill with the locals, she even paid the rental fees herself using her own crystal cores.

It wasn't much anyway. With that done, she no longer had to worry about retrieving the machinery manually. After all, spending a few crystal cores was far cheaper than buying a 20,000 system point Teleportation Scroll, meaning she had saved herself both trouble and valuable system points.

Besides, crystal cores could be gathered from the zombies wandering aimlessly outside. Killing them required some effort, but it was far more cost-effective than spending her system points.

#### Chapter 957: Returning With A Haul

Even though she had plenty of points now, she didn't know where she might need them in the future, and there were very few missions that could earn her more. Her Sales Channel was doing extremely well, but it was smarter to spend reasonably rather than recklessly.

She still needed system points to upgrade her equipment for inscribing and alchemy, so conserving them for essential uses made far more sense.

She also let 008 handle the remaining machinery registrations, as it was far faster than doing it manually herself, which would have taken at least an hour or so.

Although the STAU's were initially baffled by Kisha's instructions, having to move all the way from the kindergarten's courtyard to the road outside so they could take out the trucks from inside their spatial storage outside the road, they didn't question her. They trusted her completely and followed her lead.

Meanwhile, Duke watched with interest, unable to stop smiling at how practical and convenient his wife's territory interface was. Not only could they communicate through it without relying on satellites or phones, and monitor all their projects remotely, but now it could even handle rentals.

As long as the renter paid and the transaction was processed, Kisha's territory space could manage nearly the entire process automatically.

Once Kisha was done, Duke slipped his arm around her small waist and murmured into her ear, "Wifey, you really are amazing..." He pressed a soft kiss to her cheek, his admiration completely unhidden.

Kisha giggled like a girl in love. After all, who doesn't enjoy unexpected compliments? She simply basked in Duke's affection.

Not long after, the two of them turned back, and Kisha said her goodbyes to her grandparents and little brother. She handed them life-saving talismans to use in case their lives were ever in danger, and after repeating her reminders one last time, she and Duke floated back into the sky.

Those who saw them flying couldn't help but stare in awe, as if gazing upon gods and goddesses. In the process, Kisha inadvertently regained more Devotion points, which made her laugh uncontrollably as she and Duke ascended higher.

Then she took out a new set of teleportation scrolls, bought by 008 from the system mall, since she still needed to test the Teleportation scroll she had inscribed herself for safety. For now, she couldn't use them on herself or Duke.

Or if something went wrong with the teleportation scroll she inscribed, she and Duke could be shredded to pieces by the distortions of time and space. And if that happened... who would she cry to? That is, if she even survived long enough to cry at all.

That was why she was in such a hurry to return home, to test this new scroll before continuing to inscribe more. She needed to know if it worked, or if there were flaws, and if so, where exactly the problem lay, so she could adjust it for the next scroll.

It would be a process of trial and error since no one was there to teach or mentor her; she had to figure it out on her own, following sparks of inspiration when they struck.

It would be tedious and risky, but once she mastered the art of making teleportation scrolls, the payoff would be enormous. Not only could she sell them in her Sales Channel to earn more system points and boost 008's ranking, but she and her people could freely use teleportation to execute more dangerous plans, reshaping the apocalyptic world as they saw fit. Just thinking about it made her blood boil with excitement and her heart race.

Seeing her so giddy, Duke couldn't help but smile dotingly beside her. His right arm curled protectively around Kisha's small waist while his other hand rested casually in his pocket. He watched her shifting expressions with quiet adoration; no matter how long he looked at her, it never felt enough. There was always something new, something endlessly fascinating about her.

"Let's go back home, wifey..." Duke murmured as he gently pinched the soft flesh at Kisha's waist. The simple gesture made her heart feel warm and squishy, and a bright smile spread across her lips. She happily tore the Teleportation Scroll, and in the next instant, the familiar pull wrapped around them.

Their bodies felt as though they were being stretched and split apart, thrown through layers of time and space. The teleportation itself was quick, but the sensation made it feel as though they had spent an hour tumbling inside the currents of arcane force. It wasn't the most pleasant ride, but it was undeniably the fastest.

As the world blurred around them, Kisha's mind wandered. When she inscribed her own Teleportation Scrolls, she would have to add a few more spells to refine the arcane flow and smooth out the discomfort.

That way, anyone using her scrolls wouldn't have to endure this chaotic feeling. And once she perfected it, she could sell her Teleportation Scrolls at an even higher price.

After all, people were already beginning to recognize that everything she produced was leagues above what other shops offered. Her items were becoming a high-end brand of their own, rare, precise, and top-quality.

And this improvement would only cement that reputation now that her business had finally taken off with such a strong start.

Reading her thoughts, 008 felt a surge of excitement. After all, it would be the ultimate recipient of Kisha's accomplishments in the Sales Channel; every point she earned would be added to its total, raising its rank among the other systems. Just the thought of Kisha making her own plans to help it made 008 both happy and expectant.

After all, in all of Kisha's previous 99 lives, this was the first and only time they had managed to open a store in the Sales Channel, and even sell an item. It felt like an unprecedented achievement across all their reincarnated lifetimes, a milestone neither of them had ever reached before.

And so, after that, Kisha and Duke finally returned to the HOPE Base. No one even noticed their absence. After all, the two of them rarely appeared in public, and only their family knew that they spent most of their time inside Kisha's territory space.

As soon as they arrived, Kisha immediately sent Duke back inside the territory. He needed to help Hugo and the others, especially since the few hours they spent in Maple Leaf Town had already translated to several days inside the territory space.

By now, Hugo's team was probably deep into their work, and there might be questions waiting for Duke regarding the plan and the progress of the biogas project.

They also needed to coordinate with Engineer Steel and Dr. Shuveck's team to ensure the tubes were properly connected to the machine before Hugo's group started filling the compost bins with animal dung to begin the gas collection.

And knowing exactly what Kisha was thinking, Duke didn't try to linger by her side; he understood she had her own tasks to deal with as well.

After giving Kisha a goodbye kiss on the cheek, she thought Duke would finally leave, but he clearly wasn't done with her yet. Before she could even blink, he leaned down and captured her lips, kissing her deeply, hungrily, as if he wanted to devour her whole. A low growl rumbled from his chest, revealing just how reluctant he was to part from her.

Only when he realized Kisha was struggling to breathe did he finally release her, pulling back with a smug, satisfied smile before striding away with a spring in his step.

Kisha, on the other hand, was left standing there breathless and slightly disheveled, her lips swollen from the intensity of his kiss.

"A rogue! He's a rogue!" Kisha grumbled as she kicked a loose stone on the ground, her face burning crimson. Thank goodness no one had seen that kiss, because Duke had looked like a beast trying to devour her whole, as if he could never get enough of her. The mere thought made her blush even harder. The last thing she wanted was to be teased because of him.

Meanwhile, Duke, completely unfazed and far too pleased with himself, walked away with a spring in his step, humming under his breath. After stealing that kiss from his wife, he was in an exceptionally good mood as he strode toward the back of Villa #1 to return through the portal to the territory space.

Even though his head throbbed a little and a wave of dizziness hit him after the teleportation, Duke brushed it off easily. It was nothing compared to the warmth still lingering on his lips from kissing his wife.

That alone was enough to make the rest of his night feel perfect. All he had to do now was wait for Kisha to return to the territory space so they could finally rest together once they both finished their tasks.

Chapter 958: Interstellar Civilization And Zerg?

Meanwhile, inside the base, the streets were already buzzing with life. People who had just come back from work were done with dinner and were now lounging outside, chatting in clusters.

When Kisha passed by, they greeted her with warm smiles and reverence, and she returned their greetings with a polite nod before heading straight to the equipment storage.

The streets were now illuminated by the newly restored post lights, thanks to Engineer Steel and his team, who had rewired the poles and connected them to their power system. With the lights functioning again, the patrol teams no longer had to struggle to monitor the base after dark; if any resident suddenly turned into a zombie, they would be able to see and respond immediately.

The residents, too, depended on these streetlights as their only nightly illumination; no need to waste precious gasoline on lamps or risk starting a fire with candles.

Little by little, the base was improving, all because Kisha had given Engineer Steel and his team permission not to be too frugal with the electricity stored in the batteries they had charged using captured lightning.

Those batteries provided enough power to keep the base running for weeks. And according to Kisha's calculations, once Duke and the others completed the biogas project, hopefully in a week or so, they wouldn't have to worry about fuel or electricity at all. The lightning-charged batteries could then be shifted entirely into backup reserves.

There, she called for Aston and Tristan, who had also just finished their work and were about to head home when they received her message. Without delay, they came over and found Kisha crouched beside the newly delivered cars that Fred had brought back.

They immediately crouched down beside her, mirroring her position. When Kisha looked left, both of them looked left. When she glanced right, they followed her gaze like synchronized shadows.

Realizing what they were doing, Kisha felt a mix of exasperation and amusement. They looked absolutely ridiculous... but in a way that almost made her laugh.

"What are you doing?" Kisha asked, letting out a light chuckle.

“We... are checking out what you’re looking at, Young Madam,” Tristan replied, glancing from Kisha to the car she was inspecting, clearly looking a bit clueless.

“Oh? This,” Kisha said, “I actually wanted to show you a new feature in the system we use for internal messaging.” She opened the territory interface and began demonstrating the rental feature.

She explained how to register the car’s plate number if it had one, or leave it blank if it didn’t, then input the model and other specifications, take a photo, and set up the rental price per day, including gas and a separate maintenance fee.

Watching her, Aston and Tristan immediately recognized how practical the rental feature was; it would make their work much easier. At the same time, an idea suddenly sparked in both of their minds.

“Young Madam, I think it would be great if we could systemize our internal processes using your territory interface as a model,” Tristan suggested. “This way, many tasks around the base, like sales, communication, and treasury auditing, would be much easier since everything would be connected. At the same time, though, I’m concerned that centralizing everything could make it easier for hackers to access sensitive documents.”

He spoke thoughtfully, weighing both the pros and cons.

Keeping track of paper trails was cumbersome, especially for auditing, but a system like this could also simplify monitoring residents’ current work point balances when they transact in the Supply Center.

Tristan’s suggestion went further: they could release a communicator for residents. It wouldn’t just be a tool for communication; it would track work points, manage internal processes, help keep track of mission progress, and even share locations for emergency rescues.

They had learned the hard way with Sparrow’s previous disappearance, when they mistakenly thought he was dead, that sharing a location for emergency rescue was of utmost importance.

Additionally, the system could keep everyone updated on news and weather changes. Essentially, it would function like a pre-apocalypse cellphone, but it should be compact, portable, and designed to be usable even while residents were busy with daily tasks, fighting, or surviving outside the base.

“Hmmm, that’s actually a very good suggestion,” Kisha said thoughtfully. “Right now, we do have a way to communicate with our people, but it’s very limited and only accessible to combatants.”

“The rest of the residents have to track everything manually. Even when they spend their work points, they have to hold onto slips of paper and deduct or adjust them like physical currency. Such a system isn’t sustainable in the long run.”

“Although we’re starting to use Crystal Cores as an additional form of currency, we would still need a centralized system, just like you suggested.”

Kisha paused, considering all the possible uses and benefits the system could provide.

Then Kisha turned to 008. “008, could you find a blueprint for a compact portable communicator, something like a cellphone? But instead of a regular phone, it should be designed to be carried easily, even during combat, without the risk of dropping it or losing it outside.”

“Whenever we go out, it’s highly inconvenient to bring a phone; many of the Winters men don’t even bother, because fighting outside can easily tear pockets or make them lose items. A compact communicator would be extremely useful for sharing locations in emergencies, transmitting information about the vicinity, or coordinating scouting.”

“With the current system, the only thing we have is the walkie-talkie. It works, but it’s limited to communication and has a restricted range. That’s why it would be great if we could find a blueprint from a higher civilization. Could you help me with that?”

Kisha paused, realizing that Tristan hadn’t been mistaken; his idea made perfect sense.

“Host, based on your description, there is a device that perfectly matches the specifications and intended usage,” 008 began, voice tinged with excitement. “A few light-years away from Earth, which was basically located in a different realm, a higher interstellar civilization uses a communicator called a ‘Lightbrain’. It’s worn like a bracelet and can project a holographic screen, allowing the wearer to do everything they could on a cellphone.”

“Because of their interstellar environment, like fighting with Zergs, and being busy with their daily lives, they designed it to be carried anywhere. Its materials are incredibly sturdy, resistant to impact and pressure, so it won’t break or fall, no matter how rough the user’s movements are. And more than that, it also has an elemental resistance, so it wouldn’t easily be affected by extreme heat or cold. It also has solar charging, so it would never go out of battery.”

“And since it’s tied to the wrist, it can monitor vital signs like blood pressure and oxygen levels and automatically send an emergency signal if the wearer is in danger.”

“It also has identity theft protection: the device automatically registers the wearer’s biometrics and important information, so even if it’s stolen, no one can access it, as it would become a useless bracelet when in someone else’s hand.”

“For more immersive use, there’s an earpiece that connects to the Lightbrain, letting the wearer view a private holographic interface invisible to anyone else.”

“But...” 008’s voice suddenly dropped, the excitement replaced with concern, “the materials required to build it aren’t common like steel. Most are specialized aerospace alloys. Gathering them all would be extremely difficult and time-consuming. It would likely frustrate the host if we attempted to make it.”

Hearing this, Kisha felt her excitement shoot straight to the stars, only to crash instantly back to the ground. The corner of her mouth twitched, and for a moment, she genuinely wanted to kick 008 for raising her hopes only to drop them. But despite the frustration, the ‘Lightbrain’ sounded incredibly useful, far too promising for her to dismiss so easily.

So she took a breath and asked again, this time more seriously, weighing the possibilities.

“Then... if we use the blueprint to make this ‘Lightbrain,’ how are we supposed to connect it to our centralized system? Is that even possible? And what about its communication range? Can it reach farther than a walkie-talkie?”

“We need to stay in contact with people sent out on long-distance missions. If it can’t do that, then no matter how impressive the device is, it’ll still be useless...” Kisha murmured, carefully balancing the pros and cons in her mind.

“Host, the Lightbrain was originally designed to work hand-in-hand with a centralized system. In the interstellar civilizations that use it, it handles everything: marriage registration, banking, online shopping, sales, entertainment, and even military operations. Because of that, it must stay connected no matter which planet the user is on.”

“So once we build one, you won’t need to worry. If I remember correctly, the Winters family already has a satellite in orbit. We can use that as the Lightbrain’s signal source so that, anywhere in the country, or even in other parts of the world, the communicator will still connect.”

#### Chapter 959: Kisha’s Ideas

“And if the coverage still isn’t enough...” 008 paused, sounding a little too casual. “Then we can always hijack another nation’s satellite in orbit. Building a brand-new advanced satellite would be far more troublesome, not to mention far more resource-heavy, than using what’s already available.”

Kisha could practically picture 008 stroking an imaginary chin in deep thought as it laid out its ‘solutions.’

Kisha’s mind immediately drifted to the aerospace alloys and rare materials required for the communicator, resources that were notoriously difficult to obtain. Even if she bought the blueprint from the system mall, would they truly be able to manufacture it?

Did her base have the knowledge or the technical capability to bring such advanced technology to life?

But without trying, she’d never know. And if they succeeded, the communicator could become a valuable asset. She could even sell it to visiting groups during future resource exchanges.

By carefully filtering the information accessible through the device’s lightbrain, she could ensure that outsiders saw only what she allowed, keeping the base’s internal operations concealed.

With that control, she could manipulate the flow of information, shaping what others believed while gaining a clearer picture of the world beyond her borders. Communication with the outside world would become easier, more efficient, yet also more dangerous. Information was a double-edged sword; false reports and misleading data could just as easily slip into her base and sow trouble.

With all of that in mind, Kisha wondered: was the potential advantage worth the risks it carried?

Kisha sank deeper into thought before finally speaking to 008 again. "Alright. Check the price of the blueprint first, and see whether the materials required to build the lightbrain even exist here on Earth. If not, and we have to buy them from the system mall, calculate the cost per unit. Then tell me if it's affordable or even worth pursuing."

"Understood, Host. Please give me a moment. I'll gather all the data and report back shortly," 008 replied before going silent.

With that addressed for now, Kisha returned her attention to Tristan and Aston. She resumed explaining how the system's rental feature worked and told them she would consider how to integrate their suggestions into the current setup.

Then, as if suddenly remembering something, Kisha opened her inventory to check the materials. When she didn't see the Bredmon Leather and Four Season Fabric, she recalled that she had already sent them to her mother-in-law earlier to be made into uniforms for Fred and the others who helped save Maple Leaf Town.

However, the amount she sent wasn't nearly enough to make additional sets for herself, Duke, Mr. and Mrs. Winters, the patriarch, her grandparents, her little brother, Tristan, Aston, and the rest of the core members. She still needed more.

After a moment of thought, Kisha instructed 008 to purchase several more sets of Bredmon Leather and Four Season Fabric. She intended for all core members to have uniforms made from these fabrics, knowing the added layers would give them better protection.

Once the system delivered them, she stacked the newly purchased bundles onto Aston's arms until the pile rose like a small mountain, nearly hiding his face behind it. He didn't need to deliver them immediately; he could take them home for now and bring them to the workshop tomorrow before reporting to work.

After handing Aston the Bredmon Leather and Four Season Fabric, she instructed. "Bring these to Mrs. Winters' workshop first thing tomorrow morning. They're to be made into the warriors' uniforms. I've already informed my mother-in-law; she'll be the one receiving this batch."

But just a single glance told both Aston and Tristan that these fabrics were anything but ordinary. Their texture, weight, and aura alone were enough to reveal that they came from the same mysterious source all her other extraordinary items originated from.

They didn't ask questions; none of her trusted people ever did. Whether these materials came from somewhere beyond Earth or from a higher civilization, they simply trusted her. Everything she had ever provided only strengthened and protected them, never once placing them in harm's way.

"Alright, City Lord. Please leave this to me, I'll make sure Mrs. Winters gets it first thing in the morning," Aston said as he carefully adjusted the materials in his arms. In truth, he had been eager to head home early; ever since receiving the Awakening Fruit, he had been itching to use it tonight and finally discover what ability he might gain.

But when Kisha called him over, he set that plan aside, and now he was actually glad he did.

Finding out about the rental feature would drastically lighten his workload in the future, benefiting not just him but almost everyone. And now, holding the fabric and leather Kisha handed him, he could feel their unexpected weight. They were clearly no ordinary materials, and the realization only fueled his growing excitement.

"Alright, for now, that's everything. I'll leave the registration of the remaining items and equipment to the two of you since you handle most of them. We can disable the rental feature for all items meant for internal use, but if outsiders want to borrow anything, they'll have to go through the rental process, and they'll need to pay extra for any damages."

"Make sure everyone is aware of this. As for integrating our system into the process, I'm already working on it. I'll update you once I've got it in the bag," Kisha informed them.

This development was necessary. With electricity coming soon, it was only a matter of time before they began coding a system, especially since she once overheard her father-in-law discussing plans for the IT department to create a centralized system connecting every division.

That way, departments could easily forward documents that needed signatures or reviews without physically running around, speeding up processing and smoothing out inefficiencies.

And since a central system was inevitable, tying her setup into the lightbrain communicator and using her current system interface as a prototype wasn't a bad idea at all; in fact, it could help streamline the entire workflow even further.

"Actually, Host, I can help you transfer all the data and create a duplicate of the territory interface for your centralized system, then connect it directly to the Lightbrain. That way, your IT department won't need to build everything from scratch; they'll only have to monitor the system and keep it running smoothly."

"In fact, I can also integrate it with my own system, giving you absolute control over all operations within the base. You'll be able to set user levels, permissions, and restrictions freely. With full authority over the system, monitoring everyone's activities will become significantly easier..." 008 explained as it busied itself on the other end, searching for the lightbrain's blueprint.

Hearing this, Kisha's eyes lit up. Not only would this save her a tremendous amount of time, it would also give her another powerful advantage.

If she integrated the system this way, she would be able to monitor anyone who used a Lightbrain communicator unit. That meant that as long as outsiders purchased the device from her base, she would automatically gain access to their location and track their movements outside her territory. She could even listen in if they attempted to plot anything against her.

In other words, in her hands, the lightbrain wouldn't just be a tool; it would serve as both a surveillance device and a locator for anyone beyond her domain. Even if someone tried to spread false information through the network, lure others into trouble, or conspire in secret, she would know immediately. She would be able to check the backend, trace communication logs, and uncover anything they tried to hide.

So not only would she profit enormously from selling the Lightbrain communicator units, but she would also gain a wide-ranging information-gathering network in the process.

Kisha suddenly burst into laughter, startling both Tristan and Aston. A chill crawled up their spines at the sound; it felt as though she was quietly brewing some sinister plan. They quickly swallowed their questions and lowered their heads, not wanting to draw her attention to themselves.

Kisha, overly excited, continued laughing as idea after idea bloomed in her mind. On the other end, 008 almost wanted to roll its eyes; after all, it could read every one of Kisha's increasingly sinister plans.

It wasn't sure whether to consider this a good thing or a bad thing, especially since Kisha clearly wasn't thinking about anyone's privacy. Still... she wasn't exactly wrong either.

Because of that, Kisha no longer saw the 'Lightbrain' communicator as a questionable project. Now, she was convinced she had to make it, no matter the cost. Besides, she had plenty of system points to burn, and her 'Sales Channel' was doing well enough to replenish whatever she used.

As long as she kept selling more items, she wouldn't have to feel as nervous as she had back when she was practically bankrupt in system points.

#### Chapter 960: Prove Myself

Now that 008 had picked up on Kisha's determination to buy the blueprint at any cost, it felt a surge of energy. After all, a cut in sales meant points would be added to its ranking, and the more it sold, the higher its score climbed. Thrilled by the prospect, it immediately set to work hunting down the blueprint. Both Kisha and 008 were buzzing with excitement.

"Don't worry, Host! I'll find that blueprint!" 008 declared, invigorated and redoubling its efforts to locate the elusive Lightbrain blueprint. Before long, it succeeded.

"Host... it seems... since this comes from a higher civilization, a higher realm, the price isn't exactly cheap..." 008 said, hesitating slightly.

"How much is the blueprint?" Kisha asked, a flicker of nervousness creeping into her voice. Earlier, she had sounded confident, but that was before she considered the reality: many things from beyond Earth were bound to be costly, and if it came from a higher realm, the price could be astronomical.

How expensive could it really be? She didn't know. Her billions of points might not even be enough. After all, in the lower realm, things could be affordable, but that also made her like a frog in a well, unable to fully grasp what the higher realm offered or how it operated.

"Host... just the blueprint alone... it costs 500,000,000 system points..." 008's voice dropped to a meek whisper. Even with billions of points at their disposal, who could predict the cost of other items from the higher realm?

One or two purchases like this, and their points could vanish in an instant. After spending so much time without system points, 008 felt the same fear as Kisha, the dread of being flat broke all over again. While buying it would boost its ranking and score, the joy might be fleeting, a brief happiness before hardship inevitably returned.

"But Host, look on the brighter side," 008 said, eager to justify the purchase. "Not all items from the higher realm are this expensive. The reason the Lightbrain blueprint costs so much is because it's the newest model of its kind, one of humanity's greatest and most useful creations."

"On top of that, it's a closely guarded secret of the Federation of the higher civilization, which makes it extremely hard to obtain. That's why the price is astronomical. Once we get it, though, we can make the absolute best use of it."

008 carefully laid out its reasoning. With the current state of communications in the apocalypse and the dangers lurking around them, acquiring this blueprint wasn't just a luxury; it was essential for Kisha's success and for their future operations.

The 500,000,000 system points felt like a wound in Kisha's heart, one that kept bleeding no matter how she tried to ignore it. But it also ignited a determination in her, she needed to earn more system points.

To do that, she decided to raise the prices in her Sale's Channel store. Her items weren't just top quality; many were rare and hard to find elsewhere. That exclusivity gave her a little room to adjust the prices, enough to increase her earnings without angering her customers. This strategy would allow her to steadily accumulate more system points, giving her heart some measure of relief.

"Alright... buy it..." Kisha's voice caught in her throat. Part of her wanted to back out, she couldn't bear to watch her system points plummet so drastically.

"Alright... Host."

[Do you wish to purchase the Lightbrain Blueprint for 500,000,000 system points?]

[Yes] or [No]

Kisha's finger trembled as she hovered over the [Yes] button. She closed her eyes, trying to tell herself, 'out of sight, out of mind.' Yet even so, her heart fluttered with anxiety. After spending such an enormous amount, she felt a pang of guilt for a few moments, but gradually, the feeling eased. There was no turning back; no refunds. She forced herself to accept it.

Soon after, the blueprint appeared in her inventory. She immediately opened it and was met with a staggering array of detailed rolls. Each page was packed with intricate mechanical diagrams, technical jargon, and advanced knowledge so complex that even she struggled to comprehend what was written.

There were so many layers in the blueprint, each detailing how every part was built, even the smallest components. Since it was a bracelet, it was incredibly intricate, with multiple layers packed inside.

Kisha couldn't help but wonder how all those components could possibly fit together. But she didn't understand the technical details, so she decided to leave it to Engineer Steel to figure out; hopefully, they could decipher it, or else she'd have spent a fortune for nothing.

She returned the blueprint to her inventory and told Aston and Tristan to head back home and rest for the night. For now, she had given them their task, and Aston needed time alone to prepare for his awakening.

After one last look around the Base, Kisha returned to the Villa. It was quiet as everyone was already asleep, but she didn't linger. She went straight to her territory space, where Duke and Hugo's team were still busy.

They had already rested for eight hours and eaten their meals, and Duke had changed into fresh clothes after taking a bath by the lake.

As Kisha appeared in the space, Duke seemed to sense her presence. He looked up, and their eyes met.

The moment Duke saw Kisha appear in the territory space, his normally indifferent gaze softened, and a gentle smile spread across his face. "Wifey, have you eaten? Are you tired? Want to rest for a bit?" he asked, while jogging over to her like an excited puppy.

Seeing him like this, Kisha's weariness melted away, and she felt like she could dissolve into his arms. Without thinking, she leapt into him, hugging him tightly to recharge a little.

"Um... how about you come with me and let's sleep for a bit? Otherwise, we might just pass out again..." Kisha said, half-teasingly.

At once, Duke's mind flashed back to the time they were in the middle of... well, intimacy, and he'd fallen asleep halfway through. The tip of his ears turned red.

"Stop teasing me, wifey, or I might just have to prove myself to you... hmm?" he teased back, pushing aside his embarrassment with a sly grin.

"You sly fox..." Kisha said, bumping his sturdy chest, making Duke chuckle heartily. He loved how effortlessly she could lift his mood. For a moment, he had the urge to trick her into being intimate again, but with so much to do, he knew he couldn't act on it. Instead, he contented himself with teasing his wife, enjoying the many expressions that danced across her face.

Sometimes, she could be cold, unflinching even in the face of death, whether it was someone else's or when she was the one who struck the final blow. Yet other times, her girlish side would surface, innocent and endearing, like a breath of fresh air.

There were even more facets to her, each intriguing and making him fall for her more. She never hid her true self from him and trusted him completely, unafraid of letting him see all of her.

After everything she had endured in her past life, it was natural that Kisha's mind carried scars and contradictions. That she could show so many sides of herself was a testament to the emotions she had suppressed for so long, and to the trust she placed in him.

For Duke, it was Kisha's genuine, unguarded side that drew him to her. "Alright, let's sleep for a bit. I'll stay with you, okay?" he said coaxingly.

He then led her down to the foot of the mountain, and only then did Kisha notice that the plans they had discussed earlier, about setting up a villa and dormitory buildings for the workers, had already begun.

A simple, standalone cabin now stood there, clearly built for temporary use. She realized Duke must have asked someone to construct it while engineers worked on the blueprints for the villa and the workers' dormitory.

The cabin was also a surprise.

When Duke opened the door for her, it was as if he were unveiling a gift. He stood back, watching her every expression, eager for her reaction. Inside, the space was small but thoughtfully arranged.

A cozy sofa and coffee table sat on the left side after entering the door, and on the right side was a round dining table with four chairs. The kitchenette had a stove powered by LPG, a small potted plant brightened the counter, and a knitted cover added warmth.

A rug softened the sofa area, and farther inside, a small shower room and a queen-size bed completed the space. It was compact, yet inviting, cozy, and comfortable in a way that made Kisha smile with delight.

"You built this?" Kisha gasped, turning to look at Duke.

"Not all of it," he admitted, "but I helped cut the wood on the mountain and added a few decorations... Do you like it?" His voice carried a hint of nervousness, though he tried to hide it, eager for her reaction.