

THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME

Chapter 4 - First System Rewards

Even in his previous lifetime, Zachary, as a general rule, hid his emotions. He figured they were intel he should not hand over, and so at all times, his face was blank. But today was different. Zachary had just received the first mission rewards from the system, and excitement poured out of him like sunshine through fine white linen; he glowed from the inside out.

It felt like every fiber of his being was vibrating with anticipation when he looked at the virtual screen before him. He first rubbed his palms together and sat down on his bed before tapping on the system-shop tab that was still blinking red.

*SYSTEM SHOP

->Gift Packs (temporarily-unlocked) (1 msg)

->Purchase Skills (locked)

->Purchase Elixirs (locked)

->Lottery Coupons (locked)

->Inventory (temporarily-unlocked) (1 msg)

The Gift-Pack tab was blinking red, and Zachary right away extended his right forefinger and tapped on it. For the first time, he noticed that the screen felt tangible against his touch but did not give much attention to it.

"DING"

#1 new messages

CONGRATULATIONS

You have received a System Gift: B-grade vitality enhancing elixir.

Please select the gift card in the inventory to retrieve the elixir.

NB: The user must consume the elixir within five seconds after removal from the system shop.

Remarks: Hold tight; you are in for a rough ride.

The message was brief, but it was what Zachary was expecting. He clicked on the inventory tab and then selected the only card with the image of an apple in it. And voila, the fruit, the size of a lollipop, popped out of the translucent blue screen.

Although Zachary had read several system-tagged web novels, he was still amazed by the spectacle before him. It was simply magic.

But he was not the kind to concern himself with the inner workings and processes of the system, and thus, he just picked up the small apple and swallowed it right away.

He had less than 5 seconds to act.

As soon as the small apple entered his mouth, it dissolved like ice cream and melted on his tongue.

[Quite sweet. Different from what I imagined!] He thought. He swallowed the melted liquid from the elixir in one gulp.

But shortly, a tingling sensation similar to low voltage electric shocks passed through every part of his body. Before Zachary could adapt, a sharp pain lanced through his head and then spread out to the rest of his body. His muscles and bones ached when he made any slight movements.

Slowly he tried to ignore the pain by thinking about something else but quickly realized how futile it was when he had to bite his lip to keep from crying out. But like a real man, he suppressed his agony and persisted through the ordeal. He would never allow himself to alarm his grandma because of some pains in his body.

Minutes later, the mind-numbing soreness receded like a tide. His body tensed up and relaxed before tensing up once again as it filled up with vitality and energy.

His limbs, especially his left foot, were the most sensitive at that juncture. A mysterious force seemed to wrap around his foot and gradually started mending the torn ligaments and dislocated bones like a tailor stitching up a torn cloth.

Zachary then felt searing fiery bursts pulsating around the injured foot, intensifying with each passing second, jarring and brutal.

But his mind was not in agony but brimming with joy and expectation.

He understood that his injured foot was being healed and could thus choose to ignore the pain. As long as he could become fully fit again, all the suffering would be worth it. So, he endured.

Shortly, the pain disappeared and left his foot numb.

[Was it healed?] Zachary wondered.

He stood up from the bed and sensed that his limbs were stiff and seemingly paralyzed at that moment. He awkwardly ambled around his room while stretching, and soon, the feeling in his legs and arms returned.

Zachary then felt his body permeating with unbounded strength and stamina, the likes he had never experienced even at his peak in his previous lifetime. At that very moment, he felt like a carp leaping over the legendary dragon's gate. So, he opened the system User-Interface and then tapped on the user-stats tab to check out the changes in his body.

*USER STATS

->Physical Fitness: B -

->Soccer Technique: B -

->Game Intelligence: C +

->Mental Ability and Mindset: D +

->X-Factors: F

->G.O.A.T Skills: None

Zachary could hardly contain his happiness. His physical-fitness, soccer-technique, and mental-ability stats had all improved and pushed his talent-assessment grade from D to C.

He was surprised that his physical-fitness had leaped over two gradings from D + to B -. So, he clicked on its tab to understand its changes.

->Physical Fitness (Av. Rating: B -)

Balance and Coordination: C+

Agility: D +

Strength: B -

Stamina: A -

Endurance Points: 3500/ 5500 (A -)

"I have got to find a way to improve my agility before the trials," Zachary mumbled as if to himself. He was happy with the improvements in his stats except for his 'agility' that was still below average.

In Zachary's short professional soccer career in his previous lifetime, he had suffered on the pitch due to his slow speed and less agile movements. He was always quickly closed down by opponents and often lost the ball more times than he passed it. In due time, he had lost the trust of the coaching staff at TP - Mazembe before they terminated his professional contract.

Zachary understood that a player had to have perfected his body-control before trying to improve his agility. Long strides, correct running form, and a low center of gravity were indications of a high level of body control possessed by professional soccer players. It was under the category of technique rather than physical fitness. Thus, Zachary could perfect it by improving the correctness of form through training.

But this was not something that he could achieve with just a few weeks of training.

He only had about a month to the trials in Lubumbashi. He had to have improved all his abilities by then to stand a chance of gaining the attention of scouts by performing splendidly in the soccer-trials.

[What can I do?] He mused as he sat down on his bed.

But then he remembered that he still had the random 'G.O.A.T-skill reward' from the system. He hurriedly closed the physical-fitness tab and selected the system-lottery.

Right away, three smaller virtual pages filled up the screen from the left to the right side. A big-spin-lottery wheel filled up the page at the center. The contents of the other two virtual pages remained blurry with the word 'locked' inscribed below them.

So, Zachary pivoted his attention to the stationery lottery-wheel that was just too huge and disappeared off into the edges of the screen at the center page. It consisted of small square sections arranged from top to bottom with small images of famous soccer players. In the middle, two purple arms were pointing to a picture of N'Golo Kanté in a tackling posture. Beside the wheel was a red button with the phrases 'spin and win', '*3 chances', and 'confirm lottery' inscribed below it.

Zachary did not waste time on pointless deliberation. He just tapped on the red button, and voila, the wheel spun at a fast speed before stopping with the pointers locked on to the image of Iker Casillas - a Spanish goalkeeper saving the ball.

"Why is the system offering me goalkeeping skills?" Zachary mumbled inaudibly, voice tense. He was growing anxious after the first spin since he didn't acquire his desired result from the lottery. The source of this content

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Although he was a defending midfielder in the short soccer career of his previous lifetime, he inwardly preferred the attacking positions. He would always opt to score goals like the likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovich and Cristiano Ronaldo rather than defending like Rio Ferdinand. Attackers had a certain flair to them that could gain them a status much higher than defenders in the eyes

of the public. Thus, Zachary neither wanted to be a goalkeeper nor a defender.

He tapped on the red button again, and the wheel spun for a few seconds before stopping at a square with Leonardo Bonucci - the Italian defender shielding the ball. He didn't even bother to take a second glance and used up his last chance to spin the wheel.

This time the wheel spun for a little longer. And after what seemed like years to Zachary, it stopped with its pointers locked on an image of Zinedine Zidane - the famous French Footballer. He was standing with the ball at his feet but looking out into the distance.

"Thank God," Zachary mumbled while letting out a long relaxed breath of pent-up air. He was of the view that no skill from the famous Zizou could be anything but magical. Zizou could score goals and dribble like any of the world-famous number nines despite not being a forward. Thus, Zachary was looking forward to which skill he would receive from the system. It could be his ticket to becoming a pro-soccer player.

So, he tapped on the confirm-lottery button to approve the result.

"DING"

The familiar system notification sounded as the square with the glittering image of Zinedine popped out of the wheel a few seconds later. In a burst of visual colors, it turned into a card that hovered in the front of everything else on the virtual screen.

Zachary strained his eyes to read the words below Zinedine's image.

#1 new message

CONGRATULATIONS

->You have won the lottery and gained one G.O.A.T-skill:

'ZINEDINE VISUAL JUJU'

Tap on the skill-card to learn the G.O.A.T technique.

NB: The user must use the skill-card within a minute. System lottery to be locked after a minute.