

# Unholy Player

## #Chapter 21: News about the game - Read Unholy Player

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When Adyr took off the game helmet, the soft glow of candlelight filled his vision. A quick glance at the clock confirmed it was already 8 PM.

He plugged the helmet in to charge, waiting for the power to return, then went through his usual workout routine and headed downstairs.

The scene was familiar. In the softly lit living room, Marielle had returned from work and was resting on the couch, clearly exhausted. Niva sat at the table, buried in her books, quietly studying.

Noticing her brother, Niva looked up and asked with a curious, slightly surprised tone, "You're still playing the game, brother?"

"Yes," Adyr replied as he slowly took a seat.

Her blue eyes widened, visibly lighting up. "Wow, you're so close to being famous then."

Adyr chuckled. He knew what she meant. She'd probably been reading forums and posts about the game—about how low the survival rate was, and how few players were still active.

Not wanting the conversation to go any deeper, he casually picked up one of the open books in front of her and began helping with her work.

While the two siblings studied together, Marielle quietly approached. Placing a gentle hand on Niva's head, she asked with a warm smile, "How's it going, hmm?"

The fatigue in Marielle's eyes was obvious—she clearly needed rest. But it was just as clear that she wanted to spend at least a little of her time with her children.

Still, Adyr noticed something else. A subtle shift in her tone, a faint tension in her movements—signs of something more on her mind. He didn't press her, though. If she wanted to talk, she would.

After a bit of light family conversation, Marielle finally said what had been weighing on her. "I'll be away for a few days. A week at most."

Niva immediately turned her head, eyes wide with concern. "Why?" She asked, worry plain in her voice.

Seeing her daughter's reaction, Marielle gently stroked her head again, trying to soothe her. "There's a village about a day outside the city walls. An informer told us there are children there in poor condition. We're going to check the situation—and if possible, bring those in need back to the city orphanage."

A heavy silence settled over the room.

Everyone knew what it meant to leave the city. The moment you stepped beyond the walls, the world changed.

Unlike the structured safety of city life, what waited outside was chaos, filled with people who had nothing to lose, and nothing they wouldn't do to survive.

Noticing the shift in mood, Marielle gave a quick smile, trying to ease the tension. "Come on now, no need to worry. It's not my first expedition—you know that."

"But the longest you've been gone was two days," Niva said immediately, her voice rising as her eyes began to well up. "And you never went this far."

"I know, I know. But really—don't worry," Marielle said, her tone gentle. "Besides, STF will be escorting us. They'll make sure nothing goes wrong."

It was clear she trusted them. After all, the STF(Superhuman Task Force) was the city's most capable and well-equipped force.

"Still," Niva said, clearly unconvinced. Her eyes shifted to her brother, hoping he'd say something.

But Adyr remained silent.

He knew that no matter what he said, it wouldn't change anything. Marielle's sense of duty and her instinct to protect children ran too deep.

Only one sentence felt right in that moment. "Just make sure you're careful."

"Haha, I will—don't worry," Marielle said with a laugh as she pulled her son into a hug. She'd always known Adyr carried a quiet wisdom beyond his years—and once again, he understood her without the need for many words.

Her gaze shifted to Niva—her sweet, worried daughter—and she gently reached out to her as well, holding them both close.

"There are so many children out there... not as fortunate as we are. Just waiting for a single adult to reach out and change everything," Marielle said softly, her tone tinged with sadness, especially for Niva's sake.

Niva glanced at Adyr, almost instinctively. He had once been one of those children. And every day, she was grateful he was now her brother. That was why she couldn't bring herself to argue anymore.

All that remained was a simple, heartfelt request. "Just make sure they're safe... and you too."

After lifting the weight off her shoulders and receiving her children's quiet support, Marielle stayed with them a little longer. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company for hours. Eventually, as the night wore on, everyone retreated to their rooms.

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"STF, huh..." Adyr murmured as he lay in bed.

Victor's offer echoed in his mind. If he joined this new division and gained an identity like the STF, the potential advantages were clear. He weighed the possibilities in silence and eventually drifted off to sleep, those thoughts still circling in his head.

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When morning came, Adyr got up and followed his usual routine. He watched the sunrise for a few quiet minutes, did some light exercise, spent a bit of time in the bathroom, then went downstairs to prepare breakfast for his family. He brewed tea for them, made himself a bitter coffee, and returned to his room.

Opening his laptop, he browsed through social media and forums to check for any new information about the game. Although the game was still trending and riding the hype, there wasn't much he could use. No one had mentioned anything about genetic mutations either. For a moment, Adyr found himself wondering if the government was actively suppressing that information.

The only notable update he came across was that production and sales of game helmets had been halted. Apparently, helmets of players who died in-game had also ceased functioning entirely, and refunds were being offered to those who requested them.

There was even an official statement from the City Manager, openly apologizing for the technical issues and admitting they had failed to meet the public's expectations.

*They're trying to kill the hype,* Adyr speculated.

The Twelve City government, which had once played a major role in promoting the game's success, now appeared determined to declare it a failure and shut it down completely.

## **Chapter 22 - Something UNHOLY**

After shutting his laptop and changing clothes, Adyr headed downstairs and found Marielle and Niva already at the breakfast table. He wished Marielle a safe trip and stepped out of the house.

The world was still the same, as bleak as ever.

Sickly yellow clouds hung heavy in the sky, dimming the sun before it could properly reach the ground. The air was thick, dry, and oppressive. Compared to the clean, peaceful atmosphere of the game world, this reality felt dull and drained.

And yet, in its own way, it had a certain beauty. One shaped by decay and survival.

After improving his [Physique] stat, Adyr no longer needed a mask or goggles to endure the air. But he still wore them—less out of necessity, more to avoid questions he didn't feel like answering.

As the shuttle pulled in beside the curb, he stepped aboard without a word.

All the usual faces were there—except one. Eren was missing. Adyr simply smiled at the absence and completed the ride in silence.

The university zone was noticeably more crowded than the day before. Clearly, after their brief dive into the game, students were beginning to return to their regular routines. Not all of them, though—Victor was nowhere to be seen.

He was probably already neck-deep in his father's latest project.

Still, there were familiar faces in the crowd. As Adyr walked down the corridor toward his first class, he spotted a familiar figure—Cole, the school's notorious bully, and the same guy who'd busted his lip just a few days ago.

But something about him was... off.

Flanked by his usual cronies, Cole walked right past Adyr without a word. No snide remark. Not even a glance. One of his arms was in a full cast, and his lip looked freshly split.

Adyr didn't say anything either. Ever since he started playing the game, that constant itch for violence, the bloodlust, had dulled. He wasn't chasing conflict anymore.

Then, just ahead of the classroom, he saw her.

Her hair, a deep shade of midnight purple, spilled down to her waist, smooth and velvety, like twilight suspended between day and night. Her eyes matched it perfectly: soft, distant, and far too quiet. Puppy eyes, but heavy—like they'd seen more than they should have.

Her pale face held no expression, as if lost in thoughts too far away to reach. And yet, there was something in that silence—an unspoken fragility—that stirred an instinct deep in your bones.

The kind of face that made you want to shield her. Without a word. Without a reason.

Selina White.

She stood just a bit taller than him, her black-and-white uniform fitting as if tailored precisely for her. Every line and fold seemed to mirror her poise. She remained still, yet carried an effortless grace.

Students passing by stole glances. Some even turned their heads, forgetting to watch their step, tripping in the process just for a second look at the most admired girl on campus.

As Adyr approached, Selina glanced up—and for a fleeting moment, a small smile curved her lips. Rare, but unmistakably genuine.

"Selina," Adyr greeted, offering his own subtle smile. "Didn't expect to see you here."

They rarely had classes together. Normally, around this time, she was supposed to be across the campus.

"I'm waiting for the teacher," she said, avoiding his gaze as her fingers instinctively reached for her hair—a familiar nervous habit.

A brief silence followed. When it became clear Adyr wasn't going to speak again, she glanced back at him and asked, "Did you get the gift I sent?"

"Yeah. Thanks," Adyr said. "The cake, especially. My sister loved it."

Selina's smile stayed, but something in her tone shifted. "I see."

Adyr's eyes drifted to her right hand. The knuckles were slightly bruised and red. His thoughts immediately returned to Cole—how strangely quiet he'd been, how wrecked his face had looked.

He sighed inwardly but kept his face unreadable. He said nothing.

Selina lingered, as if she had something more to say but couldn't quite bring herself to voice it. As the silence stretched too long, turning faintly awkward, she finally spoke.

"Um... I should get going," she murmured, barely meeting his eyes. "My class is starting." She hesitated for a second, then turned and walked away—quiet as ever, like she'd never been there at all.

After watching Selina's frame disappear down the hallway, Adyr finally stepped into the classroom.

Nothing on the schedule today particularly interested him. His mind was elsewhere, still tangled in thoughts of the game and the strange, unsettling implications it carried.

Especially the parallels between game stats and genetic mutation.

He could already estimate the capabilities of second-generation mutants to some extent. Most students at the university, especially those like Victor or Selina who had undergone advanced procedures, likely possessed bodies stronger than what his current [Physique] stat of 10 could offer.

As for STF operatives, they were on another level entirely.

Adyr had never seen one demonstrate their strength in person, but the occasional leaked footage online was enough. Judging by that, he figured it would take at least a [Physique] stat of 40—maybe more—to reach their baseline.

The first generation, though... he didn't even bother making comparisons.

Their mutations were raw, unpredictable. Some suffered from deformities and short lifespans due to unstable genetics. Others, however, were said to be stronger and more durable than any STF member—living weapons born from chaos.

And those were the ones that made the world outside the city walls truly dangerous.

There had been rumors—stories of first-gens launching devastating attacks on entire cities, acts of terrorism so severe even government forces couldn't bring them down. Entire task forces lost in operations that yielded nothing but body bags and classified reports.

*Let's hope Marielle doesn't run into one of them,* Adyr thought, and then let the professor's voice from the lecture platform seep in—just enough to scatter the rest.

Like anyone, Adyr's life had its ups and downs—but compared to his previous one, things were going well. Stable. Controlled.

And that control had a name: family.

He'd already lost one—so brutal, so scarring, it had breathed life into the monster he now kept locked inside. If even one more member of his family were taken from him, the balance would tip—and he wasn't sure there'd be anything left strong enough to hold it back.

And now, with mutation burning in his blood, if he ever lost control—truly lost it—he wouldn't wonder what he might become.

He already knew.

Something inhuman... Something **UNHOLY**.

### **Chapter 23 - He saw everything**

When Adyr got home, he noticed the table was already set. Dinner was waiting, fresh and warm, and unlike most days, there were two plates instead of one. Niva sat quietly, hands in her lap, as if she had been waiting for a while.

Normally, she would've eaten by now and gone back to her routine before the nightly blackout. The change caught him off guard.

"Niva?" He said, slipping off his shoes. "What's going on?"

His sister looked more distant than usual, her eyes quieter, her posture more withdrawn. "Today... I wanted to have dinner with you," she said, forcing a small smile.

It was obvious something was weighing on her. Her mother was heading out on a dangerous mission—it was only natural she'd be uneasy.

Adyr gave her a soft, understanding smile. "Alright. Just let me wash up and change," he said, then went upstairs. He didn't take long. He didn't want to keep her waiting.

The two ate in silence. It was too quiet, too heavy. Even Adyr couldn't think of anything to say to lift her mood. It was something she needed to work through on her own.

Eventually, Niva broke the silence. "What if something happens to her?" She asked, her voice trembling, eyes beginning to redden.

Adyr sighed, lowering the fork halfway to his mouth. He reached across the table, gently taking her slightly shaking hand.

"Nothing will happen," he said calmly. "She said she'd be with the STF, remember? I'm sure they won't let anything touch her."

"But..." Niva opened her mouth again, then closed it, afraid of her own thoughts. After a pause, she finally whispered, "I've read some really scary things on the forums. What if they run into something even they can't handle?"

*Ahh, that damned internet.*

Adyr gave a small, reassuring smile.

"If something like that happens," he said, "then I'll go there myself—and even if I have to burn the entire place to the ground, I'll make sure she comes back safe."

Hearing the words, Niva raised her head and looked her brother in the eyes. She knew he was saying it to lift her mood, that he couldn't possibly be serious—yet for some reason, she found it comforting.

She let out a small laugh. "No, you can't burn the whole place down—there are still innocent people, remember? Just kicking a few bad guys' asses should be enough," she said, half-joking, half-trying to boost the pride of a brother who wasn't even a mutant.

Adyr chuckled and gave a slight nod, turning back to his food. "Noted. I'll keep your advice in mind."

Though still in a low mood, Niva looked noticeably better as they kept talking through dinner. Afterwards, they did the dishes and finished up the rest of the chores together, side by side—something neither of them mentioned, but both quietly appreciated.

Once everything was done, Adyr headed to his room.

It was time to check how things were going inside the game.

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When he came to his senses, the first thing he noticed was the lingering scent of stew—the same hearty mix of meat and vegetables he'd cooked the day before. His eyes opened slowly, instinctively searching for Vesha, but the carriage was empty. No trace of her. No sign of the Dawn Raven either.

Frowning, he stepped outside. It was night, but not completely dark. That strange moon still hung in the sky, resembling a sun, yet glowing in shifting shades of black and white, casting just enough light to see by.

He looked around, and not far ahead, a glint of gold caught his eye—Vesha's long, flowing hair glowing faintly under the strange sky. She was crouched in front of a tree, her small frame still, eyes locked on something.



Adyr approached, and when he saw what she was staring at, he couldn't help but laugh quietly.

There, tied to the tree by its wings and its beak bound shut, was the Dawn Raven. Its feathers shimmered in the ghostlight, almost radiant—yet none of that brilliance could hide how pitiful it looked.

Vesha stared at it. The raven stared back. The two of them looked like they were locked in a silent staring contest.

Adyr stepped closer, voice low and casual. "You seem better today."

At the sudden voice behind her, Vesha flinched like a startled cat, quickly turning around. But the moment she saw it was Adyr, the fear and tension in her eyes melted away.

"Yes, thanks to you," she said quickly, genuinely.

Then she noticed Adyr glancing at the Dawn Raven and quickly explained, "It looked kind of suspicious, so I took it outside and tied it up here."

Clearly, she'd been worried it might try something while Adyr was asleep, and decided it was safer to keep it under watch out here.

Adyr appreciated it silently. Not only had she been brave enough to deal with a creature terrifying enough to haunt her nightmares, she was also out here, forcing her fragile body to endure the cold.

"Thanks for keeping an eye on it," he said gently. "But I'm awake now—go back inside and get some rest. It's cold out here."

He could clearly see the exhaustion in her eyes—she had just returned from death's door, and was already naive enough to knock on it again.

"Yes," she said obediently, and headed back into the carriage. Right before stepping inside, a faint blush crept onto her pale face. She almost turned around to ask if he'd been the one to change her clothes—even her underwear—but stopped herself. The answer was obvious.

After Vesha stepped inside and pulled the canvas flap shut behind her, Adyr walked over to the Dawn Raven. He crouched down, met its gaze, and ran a hand over its head.

"Doesn't matter the world... people always fear what they don't understand, huh?" Then he unfastened the rope from the tree, picked up the raven, and made his way back to the carriage.

After returning, Adyr set the raven down in a corner and walked over to Vesha. He reached out and touched her forehead.

She flinched at the sudden gesture—but didn't pull away.

"Your fever's there, but mild. That's good," he murmured, eyes scanning the deep flush across her face. "Blood flow's stabilizing. Time to change your bandages."

Vesha flinched at his words. For a moment, unsure how to address him—and haunted by flickers of memory—she spoke with a strained voice. "Um... maybe I can do it myself."

Adyr glanced at her, then at the bandages wrapped around her chest, his expression shifting at the unexpected request. He understood her concern.

"I'll shut my eyes and do my best not to touch anything I shouldn't," he said with a faint smile. It was the only reassurance he could offer.

*Good sir, you've probably already seen everything you shouldn't, anyway...* Vesha thought with quiet helplessness.

## **Chapter 24 - Experimenting with the stats**

After helping Vesha change her bandages, she collapsed onto the bedding and slipped into sleep almost instantly. Clearly, the process had drained more of her mental energy than physical.

Adyr let her rest. He had questions for her, but none were urgent, and he had other things to take care of first.

He stepped outside, rekindled the fire, and used what little he had to prepare something that might ease her digestion. Then, he took a quick survey of the area, scanning the forest's edge.

The surroundings were quiet, remote, and rarely traveled, by the look of it. Still, he wanted to be sure it was safe. Only after he was satisfied did he return to the carriage.

He picked up the Dawn Raven, gave Vesha one last glance to confirm she was still sleeping, and headed for the cave. There were still plenty of skeletons inside, and each one held a purple crystal—not something he was willing to leave behind.

As he made his way deeper into the cave, he decided to test his stats. He still had five unused stat points, and he would spend them for this experiment.

**[Name]:** Adyr

**[Race]:** Human

**[Path]:** Primora

**[Evolution Step]:** 0

**[Physique]:** 10

**[Will]:** 3

**[Resilience]:** 3

**[Sense]:** 2

**[Energy]:**

0.3 / 18

**[Registered Talents]:** 3/5

**[Sparks]:** Complete your first evolution to unlock.

**[Sanctuary]:** Complete your first evolution to unlock.

**[Free Stat Points]:** 5

He first assigned one stat point to **[Resilience]** and waited, trying to feel its effects. But unlike the times he had increased **[Physique]**, there wasn't much to notice—just a faint tingling across his body.

He then recalled something he'd read on the forums: every player was granted only one stat tied to the path they chose. According to those players, **[Resilience]** was linked to the Nether path, a path said to embody both destruction and rebirth.

Also, from the name alone, he assumed it was a defense-oriented stat, but without more firsthand experience, it was still too early to draw any definitive conclusions.

Next, he moved on to **[Will]** and assigned a point to it. Unlike before, the effect was immediate.

His body warmed up in an instant, and it felt as if something was coursing through him at incredible speed. It was like his entire system had been asleep until now—and had just woken up, ready to move.

But the change wasn't limited to his body. His mind, too, felt sharper, more focused. As he continued walking, he began to notice subtle movements—minor shifts in his posture and balance that he would've normally overlooked.

With each step, it felt like his body was learning, adjusting, refining itself. Almost as if he were rewriting his own programming in real time.

**[Will]** was tied to the Ignis path, which he recalled was said to represent all forms of movement.

Now, that made perfect sense. The stat increase hadn't just activated his body—it had also sharpened his perception of motion itself.

Adyr thought for a moment, and if this were a traditional game, he figured **[Will]** would likely cover what most systems split into agility and dexterity stats.

Next—and last—he increased his **[Sense]**

stat, the one tied to the Aether path, said to represent all things spiritual.

As the point settled, Adyr came to an abrupt halt inside the cave.

He heard.

It was as if the world around him had erupted into noise.

He could hear the faint rustling of air flowing through narrow cracks in the stone, the soft drip of water echoing from deep within, and the low, steady beat of his own heart... even the silence itself.

Suddenly, the silence wasn't so silent anymore.

But that was only the beginning.

He saw.

It dawned on him—until now, he had only been looking. Now, he was truly seeing.

A man who had always prided himself on observing the smallest details, drawing meaning from the subtlest signs, now felt as if those very details were stepping forward, offering up their stories without being asked.

His eyes dropped to the damp black soil beneath his feet. He studied the footprints pressed into the mud until they shifted.

In his mind's eye, they morphed into skeletal figures, marching across the cave floor.

Dozens, then hundreds.

It struck him—he was no longer the one extracting stories from the traces. The traces were telling the stories themselves.

It was intoxicating. Overwhelming.

But not as overwhelming as what came next.

And then, he felt.

Something cold brushed against his spine—not wind, but instinct. He turned sharply, staring into the dark behind him.

Nothing there.

Still, his muscles tightened. That suffocating sense of being watched wrapped around him like a second skin.

If he had ever known what fear felt like, his body might have started to tremble right then. So much input—so many signals—more than any sane mind should be able to handle.

He took a few steady breaths, letting his body adjust to the new sensations before continuing forward.

Realizing that each stat brought its own unique, almost miraculous transformation had only fueled his curiosity—and sharpened his focus.

He was ready now. Ready to crush the skulls of those skeletal husks and claim the precious energy crystals hidden within.

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Author note: If anyone wants to go back to Chapter 5 to reread the path descriptions, no need. I'm pasting them here.

### **[Astra]**

- One of the four main Paths, created by the *God Astrael*.
- He shaped the first solid form from the chaos, giving structure to the formless.
- It represents everything physical.

### **[Aether]**

- One of the four main Paths, created by the *Goddess Aetheris*.
- She gave inner depth to all that exists, shaping the unseen essence within the seen.
- It represents everything spiritual.

### **[Ignis]**

- One of the four main Paths, created by the *God Ignivar*.
- He sparked the first motion within creation, awakening both flesh and soul.
- It represents every movement.

### **[Nether]**

- One of the four main Paths, created by the *Goddess Nethera*.
- As the counterforce to creation, she began the cycle of decay — undoing form so that renewal may begin.
- It represents every destruction and rebirth.

### **[Primora]**

- The One.
- They longed to exist, and I let them be.

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And since you're here, thanks a lot for sticking around this far. Really means a lot to me. Any kind of support helps more than you think. You know the deal.

## **Chapter 25 - Killing the clouds**

Dawn Raven in one hand, broken spear in the other, Adyr finally reached the skeleton chamber. He hadn't seen a single one on the way; it seemed they had all gathered here. With no master left to serve, they stood in eerie stillness, waiting without purpose.

But the moment they saw Adyr and the master they once served held in his hands, they stirred. Their jaws snapped in uneven rhythm, bone clacking against bone with sharp, erratic clicks.

*Click. Clack. Click. Clack.*

The silence broke, replaced by the unsettling chorus of chattering skulls. But they didn't advance. They just stood there. And that was exactly how Adyr preferred it.

He stepped toward the nearest skeleton and, without hesitation, drove the rusted tip of his spear straight through its skull. The bone cracked with a dry snap, and the skeleton collapsed without resistance.

None of the others reacted. They simply kept clattering their jaws, empty and mechanical, completely mindless.

But unlike them, something did react. The Dawn Raven suddenly began to stir, restless and twitching in his hand.

"Oh... they're your friends?" Adyr asked, genuinely curious. "Sorry," he added, driving the spear through another skull, "but they're far too vulnerable to be friends."

He wasn't in the mood to empathize with the raven. It was, after all, the one responsible for turning them into mindless skeletons in the first place.

Tuning out its protests, he focused on the task at hand. One precise strike after another, he crushed each skull with minimal effort, conserving both time and stamina.

After an hour and a half of relentless grinding, he finally stopped and looked around. The chamber was a bone-littered graveyard, filled with collapsed skeletons and shattered skulls. The energy crystals were already harvested.

He had counted 163 in total. He consumed 153 of them and pocketed the remaining 10, thinking they might serve another purpose later. The ones he used gave him a neat 15.3 boost to his energy.

He then opened his status panel to check the final state.

**[Physique]: 10**

**[Will]: 4**

**[Resilience]: 4**

**[Sense]: 3**

**[Energy]: 15.6 / 21**

**[Free Stat Points]: 2**

"It's enough to register another level 2 talent, but not nearly enough for an evolution," Adyr assessed.

The energy he had gained in such a short time wasn't small, but it wasn't sufficient either, especially with other concerns weighing on him. For one, were energy crystals always this easy to find?

This skeleton chamber might be a rare farming spot. And since he still lacked a proper understanding of this world, he had to consider the possibility that opportunities like this wouldn't come often.

Now that there were no threats left, he took a moment to look around. The cave had clearly been used in the past. There might have been hidden passages or forgotten valuables. With no reason to rush, it was worth checking.

Using his recently improved **[Sense]** stat, he began a careful search. Most of what he found was worthless: bone dust, rust, and broken debris.

Eventually, he came across a few swords, shields, and pieces of armor. Judging by their make, they likely belonged to the Vesha's guards. None of it suited his fighting style. He had little experience with swords, and the armor pieces were too small to wear.

Still, not wanting to leave empty-handed, he gathered what he could carry. Even if he couldn't use them, they might be worth something later.

And just like that, he left the cave behind. A strange sense of closure settled in, marking the end of the first arc of his journey in this world. It left him with a quiet, satisfying calm.

It was still midnight outside. The monochrome sun cast its dim, unnatural glow across the land, bathing the world in an eerie, almost enchanting light.

He returned to the carriage. Vesha was still asleep. Without waking her, he quietly stowed the items he had collected into a corner and stepped back outside.

Not far from the carriage, he spotted the two horses. They hadn't wandered off, still grazing silently in the distance.

Up close, their beauty caught him off guard once again. He couldn't help but stare, momentarily mesmerized. Their deep midnight-blue coats shimmered under the dark light, marked with pale patterns that looked like scattered stars. In the stillness of the night, they looked like living verses from a forgotten poem.

He approached slowly, careful not to startle them. Their behavior might differ from horses he knew, so he kept his movements controlled. Once close enough, he didn't reach out immediately. Instead, he picked up a bit of grass and offered it, building trust first.



One of them quickly noticed, its gaze shifting to him and the offering in his hand. Adyr raised his hand and gently stroked its mane, which felt like strands of black silk. Surprisingly social, they responded better than expected. It was almost laughable how easily he had earned their trust.

*I wonder if they have energy crystals in their skulls,*

he thought for a moment. Not that he intended to check. He needed them alive to pull the carriage.

After checking their harnesses and reins to make sure everything was in working order, he felt the hunger creeping in. He picked at the meal he had left warming over the dying fire, ate just enough to take the edge off, then climbed into the carriage and logged out.

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Adyr, as always, left the game helmet plugged in and ready. He picked up the candle from the table and stepped out of his room.

Downstairs, the living room was pitch dark. Niva was nowhere to be seen. He went back upstairs to check her room and found her asleep, alone, in the large bed she normally shared with their mother.

The way she curled into herself, her stillness—it looked like the weight on her mind was dragging her into something deeper than sleep.

Quietly, he closed the door. Right now, sleep was the best thing for her. A break from reality. A way to escape whatever was gnawing at her mind.

He headed back downstairs, put on his shoes, and stepped outside. After each session in the game, he had a habit of doing a short workout to keep his strength in check. This time, he decided to do it outside.

He wasn't wearing goggles or a mask. He took a deep breath of the contaminated air.

Normally, even with his **[Physique]** stat at 10, the air left a harsh sting in his throat and lungs. But now, he felt nothing. The first explanation that came to mind was the influence of his **[Resilience]** stat.

The streets were completely silent. Not a soul in sight.

The sky above was buried beneath thick clouds, sealing away the moonlight before it could reach the ground.

Adyr stood there for a while, his dark eyes fixed on the sky. The darkness above seemed to be in a silent standoff with the darkness inside.

*Killing the clouds—how satisfying would that be?* He thought.

A murder, carried out to release the moonlight from its prison.

But did he have the power to do that?

"Not now.... " He said.

Not yet.