

Unholy Player #Chapter 31: All for a game - Read Unholy Player Chapter 31: All for a game

Chapter 31 - All for a game

As Adyr waited and watched how the situation would develop, three men in suits entered quickly through the back door and headed straight for the reception desk.

"Take them away." Said the short, slightly overweight one with a firm, controlled voice.

Adyr wasn't surprised. They were likely internal security, the type that watched the lobby 24/7. If they had been monitoring from the start, they would have seen everything up to the final moment.

"Mr. Adyr, correct?" The short man asked, walking over as he dabbed sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief.

"That's me," Adyr said with a calm smile, looking as if he had no idea what had just happened.

"Apologies for the disturbance. I'll escort you to Mr. Victor," the man offered politely.

But there was something off. He looked more nervous than he should have been.

"Is she your girlfriend?" Adyr asked casually.

"Excuse me?" The man blinked.

"No? Oh, right. You're married," Adyr said, noticing the ring on his finger, then glanced toward the reception desk where the addicted receptionist had been standing just minutes ago. "So that would make her your mistress."

"Mr. Adyr, I'm not sure what you're suggesting. Please, follow me. Mr. Victor is waiting," the man said, his tone quickening along with the sweat forming again on his brow as he turned toward the elevator.

Adyr followed, slow and steady, and kept speaking. "Aren't you the head of security? The one responsible for screening all hires?" He raised a brow. "Am I wrong?"

The scene was already clear in his mind. The woman collapsing. Security entering at just the right moment. This man giving orders as soon as he showed up, like he was trying to clean up the mess.

It didn't take effort to piece it together.

"I..." The man froze.

He had probably watched the whole thing on a screen, then rushed down hoping to control the damage. But now, in front of Adyr, he realized he couldn't bury it.

"Please..." he whispered. He could feel the eyes of nearby guards on him. But they weren't the real threat.

He might've had the authority to shut this down. But if Adyr said one word to Victor or anyone higher, it would all fall apart.

Adyr chuckled and stepped into the elevator. "Relax. Don't look at me like I'm the bad guy."

Then he turned to the man, still frozen by the door. "Well? Weren't you going to show me the way? Come on."

The man stared at the elevator. For a moment, it looked like the door to hell. And Adyr, standing inside and smiling, might as well have been the devil.

—

With a soft chime, the elevator doors opened slowly. Adyr and the security chief stepped out with steady, unhurried steps.

Adyr's expression was the same as always—blank and calm. The security chief, on the other hand, still looked pale, occasionally wiping sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. Still, he seemed more composed than before.

Whatever had been said in the elevator had apparently calmed him.

Adyr scanned the new floor.

It looked even larger than the reception area. The ground was a mix of soft black mats and solid black granite tiles. Various training equipment surrounded them—some familiar, some not.

"Is this the training area?" Adyr asked calmly without turning around.

"Yes, Mr. Adyr. There are three areas in total. Physical, mental, and skill training. This entire floor is dedicated to physical training," the security chief replied quickly.

For a moment, he looked more like Adyr's personal assistant than head of security.

"Three, huh? Impressive," Adyr muttered. His expression didn't match the compliment.

After walking a bit and glancing around, he spotted Victor talking animatedly with a small group.

"Sir, would you like me to let him know you've arrived?" The security chief asked in a softer tone.

Adyr shook his head. "No need. He's almost done."

And just as he said, Victor wrapped up his conversation. After a quick handshake, he turned and walked toward Adyr.

Without a word, they bumped shoulders in greeting.

"Where've you been? I've been waiting," Victor said with a faint scowl.

"Yeah, yeah, sorry. I got a little lost, but thanks to this gentleman, I found my way," Adyr replied, smiling.

"Ah, I should've come down myself," Victor said, then turned to the security chief. He placed a hand on his shoulder. "Thanks for the assist, Gregor. You're a good man."

Gregor stiffened at the sudden touch but kept his composure. He smiled lightly and responded with a steady tone, "It's my pleasure, Mr. Victor."

"Yeah, he's a good one. Makes me feel safer knowing someone like him runs security." Adyr added, giving Gregor a slight nod. "Thanks for the help. Sorry for taking your time."

Gregor wiped the sweat from his forehead and said, "Please, Mr. Adyr. Anyone would've done the same, haha." Then he added, "If you'll excuse me, I need to return to my station."

"Alright. Take care," Victor said.

Gregor held his gaze on Adyr a moment longer, as if waiting for approval. When Adyr gave a slight nod, Gregor turned and quickly walked away.

It almost looked like he was running.

"He works hard," Victor said, clearly impressed by the urgency in Gregor's steps.

Then he turned to Adyr. "Ready to be impressed? I bet once you've seen the place, you'll accept the invitation on the spot."

"Surprise me," Adyr replied.

Taking the opportunity, Victor began with the three main training zones, introducing each of the facility's floors in order.

For once, Adyr was genuinely impressed by what he saw.

The skill training area, in particular, spared no expense. It looked like a team of top-tier professionals had been brought in to design it.

According to Victor, the area was built to support the in-game stat system. Since players gained stats by registering their talents, they had created a simulation space where one could train in anything—from swordsmanship to firearms, from dancing to cooking.

And it didn't stop there. For almost every possible skill, they had hired top experts in the field. While exploring, Adyr even recognized a few professors from the university who had apparently been recruited to work here.

Even he had to admit this place could help him refine many of the talents he had acquired in his previous life.

Beyond the training floors, there were fully equipped residential levels for players and staff. An entire floor was dedicated to entertainment and relaxation. Another hosted a restaurant operated by some of the best chefs in the region—and more.

But it wasn't all built for players.

Several research floors were outfitted with advanced laboratories and high-end computer systems. Even Victor didn't have full clearance for those sections, so Adyr couldn't see everything, but it was enough to realize how seriously they took their R&D.

And the most striking part—this was all for a game.

For a brief moment, Adyr wondered if the whole facility was actually an intelligence center, training players to become skilled operatives, preparing them to explore and control the new world.

Chapter 32 - Joining the Division

After touring all the other floors, Victor finally brought him to the one Adyr had been most curious about: the floor where the game devices were kept.

The equipment here was nothing like the game helmet Adyr had been using. In fact, these were not helmets at all. They were full game pods.

The entire floor was lined with rows of large pods, each one identical in size and shape, looking almost like coffins.

Victor approached one of them and began introducing.

"As you can see, these are completely different from the usual game helmets. And to be honest, they're not designed to enhance the gameplay experience. Though you've probably already noticed, the game feels real enough as it is."

He chuckled and continued. "The real purpose here is to maximize uninterrupted play time. With these pods, you can stay connected to the game for a full 24 hours straight.

Each pod monitors your vital functions. While you're logged in, a medical researcher and a doctor will be assigned to track your condition in real time. That way, you can play as long as you want without worrying about a thing."

"So they're really eager for us to play the game, huh?" Adyr said, raising an eyebrow.

Victor let out a sigh. "Yeah. As far as I understand, what they want from us is simple. Play the game, and collect whatever information we can for them."

"Are these active now?" Adyr asked.

"Yes, but you'll need to connect your own game helmet first. Once it's linked to a pod, it'll be fully configured for your use," he replied.

Victor noticed the hint of disappointment in Adyr's expression. He could tell he wanted to try one immediately, but chose not to address it directly and shifted the conversation instead.

"There's also a merit system. If you join, you'll receive a monthly salary and some privileges, but the real value comes from the merits you earn."

He stopped again, making sure he had Adyr's full attention before continuing.

"Everything you've seen in this facility is accessible to players, but not exactly free. All services are paid for with the merits you earn through the system."

"So they don't want freeloaders," Adyr said, nodding slowly.

It was clear that a massive amount of effort and resources had gone into building this facility, and they expected the same level of effort from the players using it. Those who worked more would earn more. No special treatment. Adyr found that perfectly reasonable.

"Also, the giant screens you saw in the player lounge and restaurant display the merit rankings," Victor added with a grin.

"I see. A smart way to push effort and competition," Adyr said, visualizing it in his mind.

After thinking it over, he decided he had no issue with the merit system. He had never been fond of following rules, but he also knew that any functioning society needed structure. If he wanted to be part of it, all he had to do was play along.

Of course, occasionally slipping in a few of his own rules when necessary.

"How many players will be here?" Adyr asked with curiosity. He was wondering how many people were still actively playing the game.

"We've got 132 confirmed so far," Victor said after a brief pause. "The research team is still reaching out to a few more, but I don't think the number will grow. If anything, it might drop in the next few days. I don't know exactly how things look in the other shelter cities, but I'd assume they're in a similar situation."

"The facility officially opens tomorrow," he added. "Everyone who's been selected is expected to arrive in the morning. We'll have a clearer number then."

"Tomorrow?" Adyr was surprised. The game had only been out for a few days, yet they had managed to prepare the entire building and set everything up in such a short time.

Maybe the preparations had started long before the game's release. He couldn't help but wonder.

"What should I do with my school?" Adyr asked casually.

Victor grinned widely when he heard that and gave Adyr a light slap on the arm. "I knew you wouldn't pass up this chance." Then he added cheerfully, "Don't worry about school. You won't have to go anymore, but you'll still keep all your student rights, even your scholarship. The state might even grant you early graduation."

He paused briefly before adding, "As long as you stay a player, of course."

So as long as I don't die inside the game. Adyr understood the message behind Victor's words and let out a quiet laugh.

He checked the time on his wristwatch and said, "Time to go home. Is there any paperwork I need to fill out?"

It was almost dinnertime, and he didn't want Niva to worry.

"No need. Just leave it to me," Victor said, then walked with Adyr down to the main lobby.

"I'll call my driver to take you home. He'll also pick you up tomorrow morning," Victor said. "Later on, the facility will assign you a private vehicle and driver."

He paused for a moment, smiling before he added, "Of course, that's only until you earn your status and start using your own license and car."

Adyr smiled and said, "That sounds good."

After saying goodbye, he got into the car with the same driver who had brought him earlier and headed home.

When he got home, he had dinner with Niva and helped her with some chores around the house. He didn't mention the new job. Not yet. He wanted to wait until things about the game became clearer.

Later, he went to his room, put on the fully charged game helmet, and logged in.

Everything in the game seemed stable. Vesha's condition was steadily improving. After checking on her, changing her bandages, and preparing enough food, he spent the remaining three hours talking with her, asking questions. Once the battery ran out, he logged off.

There wasn't much for him to do today anyway, and not many options were available. He decided to wait until tomorrow before leaving the area and heading toward Vesha's kingdom.

If everything went smoothly, tomorrow he would finally get to try out the new game pods.

A/N: If everything goes as planned, starting tomorrow, there will be 2 Chapters daily, and I'll be launching a new event.

Bonus Chapter Rewards:

Every 200 Power Stones = 1 bonus Chapter

Every 100 Golden Tickets = 1 bonus Chapter

Magic Castle gift or higher = 2 bonus Chapters

Thank you all for the continued support.

Chapter 33 - The future

When morning came, Adyr left the house in his usual uniform. If he didn't want Niva asking questions about school or his new job, he had to act like nothing had changed.

He didn't forget the game helmet either. He would need it to connect to the new device.

Outside, a large black SUV was already waiting. The same driver from before stood beside it, patient and silent. His expression wasn't as disdainful as it had been yesterday. Or maybe he had just learned to hide it better.

The headquarters was a bit farther from the university district, but thanks to the private car and not having to pick up anyone else on the way, the ride was quick.

When they arrived, the area wasn't as quiet as it had been the day before. Vehicles of all types came and went. People of various ages stepped out, walked across the sidewalk, and entered the building. There were no banners or balloons, but for a moment, Adyr was reminded of mall openings back in his old world.

As he followed the crowd toward the large doors, a man in a black suit stepped in front of him and blocked his path.

"Excuse me, sir. This is a private area. May I confirm your identity?" The man had a firm build, but his tone was surprisingly reasonable.

The only issue was that, out of everyone entering the building, he had stopped only Adyr. Clearly, something about his appearance had raised suspicion.

"Sure. It's Adyr," he replied calmly.

The man hesitated for a moment, then checked the tablet in his hand. "Apologies for the interruption, sir. You may proceed. Inside, stop by the reception to collect your temporary ID. You'll also need to hand them your game helmet."

Adyr gave a short nod and moved on. It seemed there would be no repeat of yesterday's scene. The staff had clearly been better briefed this time.

The place was crowded. Along with the many guards disguised in civilian clothing and others clearly marked by their black suits, Adyr estimated that more than a hundred players were present.

As he scanned the room, he noted the wide range in age—some looked as young as fourteen or fifteen, while others appeared to be in their sixties, with graying hair and tired eyes.

He even spotted a few familiar faces from university. Most notably, Cole, Adyr's favorite bully, was there. His arm had healed, the cast was gone, and his face showed no remaining injuries. With mutant genetics, even a broken bone could heal in days. It wasn't surprising.

In the crowd, Adyr also noticed Eren, towering above the others with his massive frame.

Victor and Selina were nowhere to be seen, which led him to assume that people of their status and rank were already waiting elsewhere, likely in a more exclusive room.

After a quick scan of the area—and mentally pinning dozens of faces into his memory palace, in the "faces" section—he walked up to the reception desk.

Three beautiful women stood at the reception desk, each one familiar to Adyr from the day before. One of them was the addict whose nights he had likely filled with nightmares.

After speaking with the security chief, Gregor, in the elevator the day before, Adyr had made a deal with him. He would forget the entire incident and even help cover it up if necessary.

And in return? Adyr hadn't asked for anything.

Of course, that didn't mean he wouldn't in the future.

As he approached, the receptionists spotted him, and all three straightened up. Their bodies tensed, and the color drained from their faces.

He stepped directly toward the one in the middle—black hair, brown eyes, trembling hands.

"S-Sir," she greeted, her voice and posture shaky.

"Hello," Adyr said with a smile. "They told me I should pick up an ID here. Can you help me with that?"

He placed the game helmet on the desk for her to take.

"Yes, yes, of course. Mr. Adyr, right? I'll find it right away," she said, writing a number on the helmet before turning to her screen and starting the process.

After a quick check and a few clicks, the woman printed the ID card and handed it to him with both hands. "You'll find your game helmet connected to the new game device later," she added.

Adyr took the card with a nod. It was plastic and plain.

When he looked at it, he saw his photo, full name, and a six-digit ID number assigned to him.

"You can see all player ID information on your screen, right?" He asked, raising his eyes from the card.

The woman didn't understand the purpose of the question at first, but replied politely with a hint of tension. "Yes, Mr. Adyr. Every player is registered in the system."

Adyr smiled. "Can you let me see it for a moment?"

She froze.

Of course, that wasn't allowed. Only authorized staff were permitted to access and display that data. Showing it to someone else could be considered a security breach.

"I can't?" Adyr asked, his tone calm but laced with disappointment as he noticed her hesitation.

That only made her more nervous. Yesterday's events were still fresh in her mind.

She glanced at the other two receptionists, but both avoided her gaze, silently signaling that they wanted no part of it.

With a pale face and a forced smile, she gave in. "Sure. Of course you can," she whispered, barely loud enough for him to hear.

She tilted the screen just enough to show him. All she wanted was for him to take a quick look and move on without drawing attention.

And that's exactly what he did. Adyr studied the screen for a few seconds, then said, "Thank you," and turned away.

The woman exhaled quietly, relieved. For a moment, she'd thought she was in trouble again.

He hadn't done anything. Just looked. And since it was brief, it was easy to believe it was nothing more than curiosity. In the end, if anyone ever found out he had accessed that kind of information, it wouldn't be taken lightly.

What she didn't know was that a few seconds were more than enough for Adyr.

Looks like there are only 134 players, he thought as he searched the lobby for a place to sit.

In his mind, every single face, name, surname, and ID number was already in place, clear and perfectly memorized.

While Adyr sat patiently, watching everyone grow more restless by the minute, something finally happened.

A young, well-dressed woman stepped in front of the reception desk and spoke into a microphone.

"First of all, thank you to all our guests for your patience. As of now, all registration and ID processing have been completed.

Please make your way to the 13th-floor conference room using the elevators. There, you will receive further information and a presentation that will answer most of your questions. Thank you."

With that announcement, the entire lobby came to life. People moved quickly, eager to reach the elevators and secure a spot in the first group.

Adyr didn't rush. He stayed seated and waited until the second round of elevators arrived before finally getting up and stepping into one.

The excitement and tension on everyone's faces were impossible to miss.

For the first time, they would begin to understand what kind of game they had truly entered—what they had survived so far and what the future might hold.

Chapter 34 - Unanswered

When the elevator doors opened, a staff member was already waiting for the group. "Please follow me," she said politely, giving a slight bow.

Adyr and the others followed her through a wide hallway. At the end, they entered a large room through a pair of double doors.

It was a spacious conference hall, with seats arranged in rows descending toward a central stage. The stage was still empty, but several people were already seated, quietly waiting for the presentation, chatting among themselves, or watching the new arrivals with interest.

As the group entered, many eyes naturally shifted to Adyr—and stayed on him. His appearance made it clear he wasn't from the same background as most of them, and that alone seemed to draw attention.

"Hey, over here," someone called out. Near the front row, a man with tied-back blond hair was waving at him.

It was Victor.

Adyr moved toward him without a word. As he walked past, the stares from the front row sharpened. No one even tried to hide it anymore.

This area was clearly reserved for higher-status players, and most of them looked less than pleased.

"I see you're still a trendsetter," Victor joked, grinning as he glanced at Adyr's uniform.

"I didn't know there was a dress code," Adyr replied with a small laugh.

The others nearby watched the two of them, clearly close friends. Many of them felt tempted to remind Adyr to mind his manners, but with Victor present, they chose to remain silent.

"Come on, take a seat. The show's about to start," Victor said as he sat down, gesturing to the empty seat beside him.

Adyr sat down and turned to his right, where a girl with purple hair was seated. She wore a simple black dress with a hint of gothic style. Despite its modest design, she looked like she carried the entire beauty of the hall on her shoulders. Her fair, flawless skin created a sharp contrast against the dark fabric.

"Hey, Selina," Adyr said.

She turned toward him as if just noticing, her eyes lighting up with a warm smile. "Adyr. What a nice surprise."

Victor leaned in and whispered into his ear, his voice low and amused. "Dude, when she found out I saved this seat for you, she made the guy on your other side get up just so she could sit next to you. You've really caught the attention of the right kind of trouble."

Adyr didn't respond. Instead, he simply pushed Victor's face away with his hand, just enough to reclaim his personal space.

At that moment, the bright lights in the conference hall dimmed, and the spotlight over the stage grew stronger. It was clear that the presentation was starting.

As a man stepped onto the stage, the last whispers in the room faded into silence. All eyes turned forward.

The only sound echoing through the hall was the steady rhythm of his footsteps as he approached the podium—a middle-aged man in a sharp suit, composed and charismatic.

His light brown eyes swept across the audience briefly. He adjusted the microphone, then began to speak in a deep, commanding voice.

"Good morning. Many of you may already know who I am, but for those who don't, allow me to introduce myself."

He paused, letting the weight of his presence settle. "My name is Henry Bates. I serve as the city's Minister of Defense."

No one in the hall reacted. There was no need. From the moment he stepped onto the stage, they all knew who he was. What surprised them wasn't his identity—it was that someone like him had come in person to address them directly.

"Understand this. While I speak here, the same address is being delivered across the other shelter cities by their own Defense Ministers. Each City Manager is listening from their respective city, including ours. Once this concludes, you'll have a chance to ask the questions on your mind.

Until then, hold them."

Henry paused—deliberately. He gave them a moment to grasp the weight of what was happening.

"You're here by choice, ready to join the city's new division. And I trust you understand—this is nothing like the STF. This is a new structure, built around a new generation. Third-generation mutants. And it won't just shape this city, but all twelve. The future starts here."

Adyr frowned. He'd already guessed how the speech would end.

Nothing...

And after thirty minutes of talking, that's exactly what Henry delivered.

More importantly, not a single word about the game's origin.

He touched briefly on its impact on genetics, mentioned mutation once or twice, but it was all vague. No depth. No answers.

Adyr couldn't tell if they were hiding something or if Victor was right—and even the top brass knew nothing.

He glanced at Victor. His eyes were closed, lightly dozing. That alone was enough to make him chuckle.

Selina wasn't much better. She kept her gaze forward, pretending to listen, but the disappointment in her eyes was hard to miss.

It was clear. Neither of them knew anything.

After Henry Bates delivered his final words, he stepped down from the stage without another glance. The room sat in silence until another man in a suit stepped forward and announced he would take questions.

The silence broke.

Voices rose from every part of the hall. These were educated, well-mannered people. At least on paper. But in this moment, none of them had the composure to hold back.

Questions came from every direction. Some were reasonable; others were not. Some could be answered; most couldn't. But the responses were always the same—vague, indirect, and uninformative.

As the minutes passed, the questions faded into quiet chatter. One by one, they realized the answers they were looking for wouldn't come. Their interest waned.

"If everyone's satisfied, we'll end the presentation and move on to the next step," the man said, as if joking.

No one laughed. No one responded. They just wanted it over with. They wanted to enter the game and find the truth on their own.

Seeing that no one had anything else to ask, the man continued. "You may now check your rooms on the 28th floor. Each room is assigned based on the number printed on your ID card. Inside, you'll find a wrist device that will replace your temporary ID. Once you enter the room, the system will register you and transfer your data to the band. From that point, you won't need the card anymore.

After registration, you may go up to the 29th floor to inspect the game pods. If you wish, you can begin testing immediately."

These were the final words everyone had been waiting for. Especially Adyr. He could finally do what he came here for.

Chapter 35 - J.T.Ripper

"Here's my room," Victor said, glancing at Adyr.

"Looks like mine's a bit further down," Adyr replied, checking the ID numbers on the doors. The rooms were lined up in order, clearly marked.

"Then I'll be in the playroom once I'm done here. See you there?" Victor said as he unlocked the door with his card.

Despite Victor's privileged background, he was here under the same conditions as Adyr. That was one of the core principles of this newly formed division—every player would

start equal. The only things that would set them apart were effort, talent, and the merit they earned through it.

"Sure," Adyr said, then kept walking.

The floor was massive, with 140 rooms—more than the total number of players. After following the signs through the maze-like corridors, he eventually found his room. The ID number matched the one on his card.

He held the card to the digital scanner beside the door. A beep followed, and the door unlocked automatically.

The first thing he noticed was the absence of windows. Still, the room was lit in a way that mimicked natural daylight, without the sterile feel of artificial light.

It was spacious. Bigger than the private study rooms at the university library. Immediately to the right of the entrance was the bathroom, complete with toilet, sink, and bathtub. He gave it a quick glance without stepping in. Everything a person might need seemed to be there, from toothbrushes to shower gel.

He turned his attention to the main room. A large double bed sat against the wall. Across from it, a big TV was mounted above a wide desk. A built-in computer was embedded into the desk surface. In one corner, two leather armchairs and a low table were clearly meant for guests.

The place reminded him of the five-star hotels from his previous life.

After scanning the room, his eyes landed on a wrist device sitting on the desk.

It was metallic, about two centimeters wide, and looked ordinary at first glance. But the moment he strapped it onto his wrist, it came to life.

Though it looked metallic, the material flexed slightly against his skin. A screen lit up with a soft glow.

[Synchronizing...]

Seconds later, it displayed:

[Welcome, Adyr]

The screen changed again, this time revealing an interface that resembled a smartphone.

"A smartwatch?" Adyr muttered, raising an eyebrow.

It was touch-responsive. The icons were simple—calls, alarms, calendar, and a few unnamed apps.

After tapping through a few menus, he found a profile section. It showed his merit points, currently sitting at zero, his ranking among other players, and a power scale whose function he could only guess.

He also found a new bank account opened in his name, with 1,000 credits already deposited as a monthly salary. It was more than the 600 Marielle earned working as an assistant manager at the orphanage.

Suddenly, he went from a broke student with barely a hundred credits to someone living on a middle-class salary. He wasn't rich, but it was a clear step up.

Overall, the device was practical and sat on his wrist without discomfort.

He thought *I should get one for Marielle and Niva*, smirking slightly. Niva, especially, would be obsessed with it.

After finishing with the wrist device, Adyr turned his attention to the computer. Like the watch, it greeted him with a simple message:

[Welcome, Adyr]

At first glance, the system looked no different from a standard computer. But one icon stood out—Player Forum.

He clicked it.

A basic registration screen appeared, asking only for a username. Below it, a note explained that choosing a name wasn't mandatory. It was simply an option for those who preferred to stay anonymous to other players.

Adyr chose to use it. It would be useful later, especially when dealing with others. Without hesitation, he typed in the alias he had used frequently in his previous life.

Then the screen flashed with a message:

[This username violates community guidelines and cannot be accepted. Please choose a different username.]

"What the hell?" Adyr muttered, frowning.

That name had been given to him by the media and the public in his past life, when he was still a serial killer. He hadn't expected it to violate forum rules. Not until now. Especially not in this world.

Guess I'll go with someone less famous, he thought, then typed it in.

[The username "*J.T.Ripper*" has been registered successfully.]

After logging in, a clean and functional page filled with various icons opened in front of him.

At the top were general sections like forum rules, shared space guidelines, merit guide, and event schedules. Just below, a large icon labeled [Trade] stood out.

When he clicked it, the page was still empty, but it appeared to be a system where players could trade information or possibly even items with one another using their personal merits.

That idea alone made Adyr pause. Could objects from the game be transferred into this world? Considering what the game had already shown so far, it didn't seem impossible.

There was also a section where players could create public threads and engage in live chat.

A few users had already started chatting:

TheKing: Hey, can anyone hear me?

LittleBunny: Nope. Try again, man.

TheKing: How about now?

LittleBunny: Still nothing, bro.

EducatedTeacher: She's messing with you, King. Don't mind her.

MasterBates: LittleBunny... are you a girl?

"Master Bates?" Adyr chuckled as he realized who it was.

If you're going to use your real surname, what's the point of hiding behind an alias? Then again, it was obvious Victor was just in it for the fun.

As he continued watching the chat, more users started joining the conversation. What caught his attention, though, was that not everyone was from Shelter City 9. Which meant the network wasn't local.

So Henry Bates had been telling the truth. Other shelter cities had also formed their own divisions, gathering surviving players under the same structure and offering them the same advantages.

After browsing the site a little longer, Adyr made a decision. He opened a new forum thread.

Have you heard of Latin?

In the post, he briefly mentioned encountering a native race in the game that spoke the language. Without going into too much detail, he also shared a few basic facts about it.

His primary goal was to earn merit by sharing information, since merit also functioned as a kind of currency. If someone else reported the language before he did, its value would drop—and so would the reward.

He also wanted to find out if anyone else recognized the language.

The question of whether this world, or the game world, had any connection to his old one still lingered in his mind. Even the smallest clue could help him make sense of it.

Chapter 36 - Experimenting with the new device

After finishing up in his room, Adyr found a clean white set of pajamas and a pair of crocs in the wardrobe, along with a note that read, *Wear me before heading to the playroom*. He put them on and stepped outside.

The corridors weren't completely empty—some of the other players seemed to have left their rooms as well, heading toward the playroom.

When he reached the elevator, he saw that they were busy due to the increased traffic. Fortunately, there were four of them, and they moved quickly. He didn't have to wait long before getting in with a few others and heading up one floor.

The playroom was even more crowded. Besides the players, there were several people in suits, nurse uniforms, and medical coats moving around the area.

Things looked different from yesterday. The construction crew had clearly finished the final touches. When Adyr first saw the room, the game pods were lined up like coffins. Now, the entire space resembled a row of office rooms, each separated by transparent glass. Inside every room, there was a game pod and a few medical devices. It felt more like a hospital wing, though not quite as sterile or uncomfortable.

Walking alongside the small group from the elevator, Adyr moved through the corridor until he found the room with his ID displayed on the glass.

Inside were two people waiting—a middle-aged man in a lab coat and a young woman in a nurse's uniform. They both stood up as he entered.

"Mr. Adyr, we've been expecting you," the man said with a smile, offering a handshake.

Adyr shook his hand. "Hello."

"I'm Eliot Vance, and this is my assistant, Nina. We've been assigned to monitor your health during your game activities," the doctor said politely, keeping a professional tone.

Adyr didn't sense anything off about them. They seemed to be genuinely there to help. Still, something about being monitored like this made him uneasy.

He didn't let it show. "It's nice to meet you. I'll be in your care, then," he replied.

For now, he decided to accept the care and oversight provided. Later, if needed, he could look into more private options.

After all, the possibilities with merit seemed almost limitless. If he earned enough, he could even request to have the game pod moved into his personal room.

"The game pod is already synced with the helmet you delivered. It's ready for use," the doctor said, jotting down a few notes as Nurse Nina stepped forward to give a briefing.

"Before starting your session, and with your permission, we'd like to run a few tests to check your general health and vitals," she said politely, waiting patiently for his response.

Adyr met her gaze and gave a slight nod. It was clearly a standard procedure—not worth making a fuss over.

Besides, he had nothing to hide. On the contrary, the more they told him about the changes happening to his body, the more he could learn about the game itself. In the end, it was a win-win situation.

Nina moved quickly and efficiently. She drew a blood sample, collected a saliva swab, and took a small tissue sample through a non-invasive skin cell collection device. She also checked his blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen saturation, and pupil response. After a brief physical examination, a few questions for cognitive and psychological evaluation, and a full-body scan, she was done.

The entire process felt more like a clinical health screening than anything invasive. Adyr remained silent throughout, observing everything without comment.

"It's done. Thank you for your patience and cooperation," Nina said with a smile.

The doctor spoke calmly as he glanced over his final notes. "Mr. Adyr, the results will take about two hours. You can wait and review them first to make sure everything's normal, or start right away if you're feeling fine—it's entirely up to you."

"I feel fine. I want to use the device now," Adyr replied calmly.

Since his arrival, he had already lost about an hour. With less than ten hours left before he had to return home for dinner, he intended to use the remaining time to begin his journey from his current location in-game toward the kingdom where Vesha lived.

The doctor smiled. "Okay then. We'll be here during your session, so you don't need to worry about anything."

Nina activated the game pod and walked him through its basic use. She helped him settle into its soft, cushioned interior, then closed the transparent, glass-like lid over him.

For a few moments, Adyr didn't feel anything. The pod was absurdly comfortable, possibly the most relaxing place he had ever laid in, and the air inside had a soothing quality to it. But then, just like with the helmet, his vision suddenly went black. Neon green numbers appeared in front of his eyes, counting down.

3...

2...

1...

When he opened his eyes again, he was inside the game.

Wow. That was smooth, Adyr thought, glancing around.

Unlike the helmet, which always gave him a jarring sense of being pulled out of his body, this time it felt effortless. As if the world itself had shifted beneath his feet instead of dragging him into it.

The first thing he noticed was that Vesha was nowhere to be seen, and the Dawn Raven stood silently in a corner.

Something about the Dawn Raven seemed off. It looked frail, more drained than before. Its feathers had lost their luster, and its frame appeared thinner, bordering on malnourished.

Adyr stepped closer and gently stroked its feathers. "Hey buddy, what's wrong with you?" He asked softly.

Is it starving? He wondered.

According to the system description, the creature fed on flesh. Since capturing it, he hadn't given it anything to eat. For a moment, he considered what he could feed it—and when the answer formed in his mind, *human flesh*, he realized he might be facing a new problem.

Leaving the Dawn Raven to rest for now, he pulled back the cover of the carriage and stepped outside to look for Vesha.

It was daytime. The sky blazed with sunlight, and the sun seemed to pour its energy onto the earth. Trees, grass, flowers—everything shimmered with life.

This was his first time experiencing daytime in the game, and the scenery felt like a flawlessly painted portrait.

As he felt the warmth of the sun on his skin, his gaze shifted to Vesha, who stood quietly beside a pot boiling over the fire.

The light seemed to breathe life into her, too. Her waist-length blonde hair gleamed brilliantly, and her icy blue eyes mirrored the calm, clear skies.

Yet, there was a faint sadness in them. A quiet sorrow, perfectly blended into the landscape, adding depth rather than imbalance. In Adyr's eyes, she stood there like the missing piece of the portrait he hadn't known was incomplete.

As he got closer and saw what she was cooking, his steps halted, frozen by the sight and smell rising from the pot.

Chapter 37 - Another Spark?

"Vesha?" Adyr called out, his voice tight, lips twitching slightly.

"Huh?" Vesha flinched, snapping out of her distant thoughts. She looked at him with surprise, then smiled warmly. "You're awake?"

It genuinely caught her off guard to see him up at this hour. Until now, he had only stirred briefly at night and slept through all day.

"Yeah," Adyr replied, his eyes shifting to the pot, where something strange bubbled and fumed. "What are you cooking?"

The question seemed to pull her back to reality. "Ah, this..." She glanced at the concoction, her voice dipping into guilt. "The raven looked weak and hungry, so I wanted to make it something to eat."

She hesitated, then added, "I think I overestimated my cooking skills. It turned into... something like poison, didn't it?" She looked genuinely troubled.

As a noble girl, she had never cooked before. She had only watched Adyr do it a few times and occasionally helped, which gave her the false confidence that she could manage it on her own. The result, however, was an absolute disaster.

Girl, it's not something like poison. It is poison, Adyr thought, faintly amused.

"I don't think it can eat a cooked meal. It only feeds on the life force of fresh meat." Adyr explained.

"Is that so?" Vesha replied with a pout, though she looked somewhat relieved. But then, as the thought of what the creature might actually need to eat crossed her mind, her expression shifted. The color drained from her face.

"Can it feed on wild animals, by any chance?"

"I don't know," Adyr said, thinking aloud. "But it's possible. They carry life energy too."

Vesha looked visibly relieved, and when Adyr mentioned they could start moving toward her kingdom, her mood shifted instantly. Energy returned to her voice and movements—she hadn't been home in a long time, and the thought of returning lit a spark in her.

While Adyr gathered their supplies and found the horses to hitch to the carriage, Vesha helped him. In a short time, everything was ready, and they prepared to depart.

According to Vesha, the kingdom was about a journey away, of about half a day. Considering Adyr's limited in-game time, it would take him two sessions to reach it. He'd need to find a safe spot to camp once they reached the halfway point.

With that in mind, they wasted no time and set off.

Not too fast, not too slow, the carriage moved steadily along the dirt road. On either side stretched endless forests, dotted with the occasional glimmer of small lakes. Birds flew overhead, chirping as if accompanying their journey.

As Adyr watched a pair of squirrel-like creatures nesting in a tree—clearly in the middle of their mating season—he noticed a figure stumbling across the road ahead.

As the figure drew closer, its details sharpened. It was small, even shorter than Vesha. The bloodstains on its torn, ragged clothes grew more visible with each step. The slight point to his ears marked him unmistakably as one of Vesha's kind.

"He's a villager!" Vesha called out as the boy came into focus. She recognized him as someone from one of the nearby settlements.

She turned to Adyr, panic and concern in her eyes, but she didn't need to say a word. The carriage had already begun to slow. As it came to a stop, she jumped down and ran toward the boy.

"Hey, are you alright? What happened to you?" She asked urgently, but the boy looked exhausted beyond words. His legs gave out, and he collapsed.

"He's been walking a long time without water," Adyr said, approaching with a flask in hand.

That's not his blood, he thought as he knelt beside the boy. *It belongs to the one who tried to protect him. Gave their last breath so the child could escape.*

In Adyr's mind, the scene played out with stark clarity—the panic in the boy's eyes, the terror of being hunted, and the dying figure who had shielded him until the end.

After giving the boy a few sips from his flask, Adyr asked, "Kid, what's your name?"

The water seemed to bring him back slightly. "I-I'm Jorvan," the boy said with effort, tears welling up in his eyes as he spoke.

Gripping Vesha's outstretched arm tightly, he pleaded, "Help... please help my father. They will... they will..."

He couldn't finish. The words dissolved into sobs.

"It's okay. Calm down," Vesha said gently, trying to steady him. "Tell me properly—where is your father?"

Between choked breaths, the boy managed, "In the village... wolves... a lot of wolves... help my fa...ther."

And with that final strain, overwhelmed by exhaustion and fear, Jorvan lost consciousness and collapsed.

As Vesha cradled the boy's head in her arms, she looked up at Adyr, eyes heavy with unspoken worry.

"His father is already dead," Adyr said quietly, exhaling.

Vesha's lips trembled at the words. She didn't ask how he knew.

"Still..." she whispered, looking down at the boy. "He said his village was attacked by a wolf pack."

Adyr paused for a moment, then asked, "Is that normal around here?"

Vesha shook her head slowly.

"Could it be the work of another Spark?" He asked, curiosity sharpening in his tone.

They had spent hours talking during quiet moments, and much of what Adyr had learned about this world came from her, especially about Sparks.

Sparks could appear anywhere, in countless forms. Some were harmless curiosities, but others, like the Dawn Raven or the rank 4 Spark that had devastated her kingdom, were extremely dangerous.

That was why Vesha had entered the cave in the first place. She had heard of missing villagers from nearby settlements and suspected a Spark was behind it. Her goal was to find the source before more lives were lost.

Of course, facing a Spark as an ordinary person was suicidal. She had lost six guards and nearly her own life in the attempt. But there had been no other option. The few remaining practitioners in the kingdom were focused on preparing for the rank 4 Spark's next attack and had no choice but to ignore the smaller threats.

Adyr silently lifted the boy's small body into his arms. "Let's go," he said.

Vesha looked at him, eyes filled with hope, about to ask *where*—but he answered before she could speak.

"But prepare yourself. There may be no one left to save."

Chapter 38 - The Massacre

The carriage rattled gently along the rocky path as the sun above cast its warm, soothing light over the landscape. But inside the carriage, the atmosphere was anything but calm.

Vesha sat in the back, tending to Jorvan, waiting for him to wake, hoping to draw even a fragment of information from the boy.

After the rank 4 Spark that had devastated her kingdom and then the Dawn Raven, this latest incident settled over her like a dark cloud. Her homeland was facing threat after threat, crumbling a little more each day—and it felt like there was nothing she could do.

Or was there?

Her eyes drifted forward to Adyr. He sat tall at the front, reins in hand, gaze fixed ahead, steady as if the world behind him didn't exist.

The worn, mismatched pajamas clinging to him were dusty and impractical, but they couldn't hide the natural grace in his posture. There was no tension in the way he held himself—only balance, stillness, and a calm authority that felt earned rather than performed.

His short, jet-black hair stirred faintly in the wind, lending a subtle elegance to a presence that asked for nothing, yet felt strangely central to everything around him.

Are all practitioners like him? Vesha wondered.

She had grown up hearing their stories, even though she'd only seen them a few times from afar, always finding comfort in simply knowing they existed. But spending time beside someone like him, observing how he moved, how he thought, and how he stayed composed in every moment, was something else entirely.

And now, with him so close, she couldn't help but feel that all her worries were nothing more than small details.

Maybe defeating a rank 4 Spark was beyond him right now, but it didn't feel like something he would fail at forever.

While Vesha was lost in her thoughts and drifting between hopes and possibilities, the carriage began to slow. Moments later, she heard Adyr's voice.

"We're here."

She took one last look at Jorvan. Seeing that he was safe and sleeping peacefully, she moved forward and joined Adyr, her eyes turning toward the village.

"No..." It was the only word she could manage as tears slipped down her cheeks.

The village was hauntingly silent, not even the sound of a bird.

No one was in sight. At least, no one was whole.

The ground was soaked in crimson. Scattered across the streets were torn limbs—feet, hands, arms, and heads. Everywhere she looked, there was only blood and pieces of what had once been people.

For Vesha, it was a cruel, nightmarish scene—like stepping into the pages of a grim, dark-themed novel.

But for Adyr...

The crimson blood looked like paint, spilled by something primal. The severed limbs were brushstrokes, each placed with care, forming a violent, deliberate masterpiece.

"There might still be survivors," Adyr said as he stepped down from the carriage.

"Are you sure?" Vesha asked, wiping her tears, a flicker of light in her voice.

Adyr nodded. "All the bodies are men. No women, no children."

He could see the story beneath the horror—the desperate stand. The men had fought with whatever they could find: rakes, shovels, farming tools. They had tried to hold the line, to buy time, to protect those they cared about.

"Then we have to find them," Vesha said, moving to climb down after him, but Adyr stopped her with a raised hand.

"Stay with the boy," he said. Then, quieter, "If he wakes up and sees this... it'll be a kind of trauma he'll never recover from."

Vesha looked at him silently. She didn't want to stay behind, but she accepted it without protest.

Adyr moved quietly through the carnage, calm and focused, eyes scanning everything, reading the scene like a story written in blood.

But something felt off. Something was missing.

He needed more.

Without hesitation, he opened his character panel and added one point to [Sense], leaving himself with only a single free stat point.

[Name]: Adyr

[Race]: Human

[Path]: Primora

[Evolution Step]: 0

[Physique]: 10

[Will]: 4

[Resilience]: 4

[Sense]: 4

[Energy]: 15.6 / 22

[Registered Talents]: 3/5

[Sparks]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Sanctuary]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Free Stat Points]: 1

And in that moment, something clicked. A faint clarity settled over him, like the missing piece had finally fallen into place.

In his mind's eye, time began to rewind.

The torn limbs reattached, shredded flesh knitted back together, and blood returned to the bodies it had spilled from. Screams faded into silence. What had been a massacre slowly unraveled.

Then came the wolves.

Twelve of them. Enormous—each at least twice the size of a normal wolf. In real time, they had torn through the villagers without mercy. But in Adyr's reversed vision playing in his mind, they now retreated. Muscles drawn tight, jaws still wet with blood, they pulled back from the people they had just slaughtered.

His eyes shifted from the beasts to one man in the crowd. He stood with a pickaxe gripped tightly in both hands. A massive wolf leapt away from him, its claws retreating from the man's chest in a blur of reversed motion.

The man didn't flinch. He couldn't.

Adyr saw why.

Just behind him stood a small boy. Jorvan.

"So this is what happened," Adyr muttered, his brow lowering.

Just as he had suspected, Jorvan's father had died shielding him. And in that final act, he had bought his son the time he needed to flee.

[Talent Recognition: "Observer (Lv3)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on further demonstrated behavior.
- Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?
- Cost: 100 Energy
- Reward: 20 Free Stat Points

The green messages appeared before him once again, acknowledging his talent for observation. Adyr gave it a brief glance and ignored it for now. The energy it required was far too much for him in his current state.

He shifted his focus to the other hurried footprints. They traced a path through the village, leading toward an old mill, then stopped just before the entrance.

His eyes narrowed, shifting toward a dense patch of overgrown brush nearby. He moved closer.

Hidden beneath the thick foliage, he found a heavy wooden hatch. A shelter. Likely where the women and children had taken refuge.

He reached for the hatch but paused. His hand stopped midair, then slowly pulled back. Without a word, he turned and walked away, back toward the carriage where Vesha waited.

"Did you find them?" She asked the moment she saw him return. Jorvan was awake now, silently crying in her arms.

"Yes," Adyr said as he sat down and took the reins. Moments later, they arrived near the old mill.

"Where are they?" Vesha asked, stepping down from the carriage with Jorvan. Thankfully, this part of the village had seen no combat. There were no bodies here, only silence.

"They're inside," Adyr said, pointing toward the concealed hatch buried in the brush.

Vesha hesitated. For a brief moment, she wondered why he hadn't opened it already, why he had come to fetch her instead of bringing the survivors out himself. The answer came before she could ask.

"They're inside... and in a state of panic. They don't know that every man who stood to protect them has already fallen."

He paused, watching her expression shift—grief giving way to quiet understanding.

"They'll need someone to guide them. To give them comfort. And as a noble of this kingdom, as the daughter of a lord, they are your people. You should be the one to greet them."

He let the words settle for a moment, then added, "Are you ready for that?"

Chapter 39 - I will kill

Vesha stayed silent, the weight of responsibility coiling in her chest. She had already been trying to help her people, already reaching out to the struggling villages. But facing a Spark was one thing. Standing before grieving families and offering comfort was something else entirely.

Still, she understood what Adyr meant. This was her place. This was hers to do. And she would.

Without a word, she stepped forward, Jorvan clinging quietly to her side, tears still running down his cheeks.

Reaching the hatch, she called through the doors of the shelter. "Is there anyone who can hear me?" Her voice was steady enough, though it wavered at the edges.

For a few seconds, there was only silence. Then, finally, an aged voice replied, wary and tense. "Who are you?"

Vesha glanced briefly at Adyr. He remained still, waiting. That steadiness gave her just enough space to find her own.

"My name is Vesha Draven. I'm the daughter of Lord Orven Draven. I've come from the capital... to help." She said, her voice growing stronger with every word.

"We found a boy on the road—his name is Jorvan. He's with us now." She added, keeping her tone calm and practical.

And just as she had expected—or maybe only hoped—new voices began to rise from within the shelter.

"Jorvan? Did you say Jorvan? My son? He's alive?" A panicked voice grew louder, closer. "Open it! Please—I need to see my child!"

After a brief commotion, the heavy wooden hatch creaked open, slow and reluctant.

The first to emerge was a woman only slightly taller than Vesha, sturdy in build, the kind who had spent her life doing hard labor. But her trembling eyes and hunched posture gave her a fragile look. Without a second's hesitation, she rushed forward.

"Oh gods, my boy..." She dropped to her knees and pulled him close, holding him like she'd never let go again.

More women began to climb out of the shelter, cautious and hesitant, their eyes scanning the area with quiet fear.

Among them, one stood out. The oldest of the group, her hair streaked with gray, moved slowly with the help of a cane. Her eyes, clouded with grief, turned to Vesha.

"Did you kill them?" She asked quietly. "The wolves?"

Vesha stepped forward and gently reached for her arm, offering support as she shook her head. "No. By the time we got here... they were already gone."

A heavy silence settled over the space like a suffocating weight.

The elder woman's frail body seemed to shudder at those words. She was wise, and she understood the truth even without hearing it. But still, her voice cracked as she asked, "Then... what happened to our sons? Our husbands?"

Vesha's throat tightened. She almost looked away. A part of her wanted to say nothing, to let the silence answer for her.

But instead, she took a breath and met the woman's eyes. "I'm sorry," she said. "They fought to protect you. And they gave everything they had."

Suddenly, the silence shattered.

The women began to weep and wail, mourning loudly—some for sons, some for husbands. Grief spilled from them in waves. Cries filled the air, names were called into the void, and sorrow took shape in sound.

The old woman, overtaken by the weight of it all, lost strength in her legs and stumbled. Vesha caught her before she could fall, helping her stay on her feet.

"Can we see them?" The woman asked, her voice trembling but composed, now steady enough to stand.

"Yes," Vesha replied. "But prepare your hearts for what you'll see."

She couldn't deny them this, and she knew it. All she could do was walk beside them and bear witness.

The elder woman gave a slow nod. Then, glancing over the group, she quietly named a few whose hearts were too soft to face what lay ahead. She gently asked them to return inside and look after the children.

With the rest, she walked toward the place where the village's heroes had fallen—to see them one last time and to lay them to rest.

—

"They didn't deserve this."

The elder's voice cracked. She stood before the scene, shaken to the core. But no tears came. What filled her now was something deeper—regret and a grief too heavy to cry out.

Around her, the other women reacted with raw pain. Some fainted, unable to bear it. Others screamed or collapsed in sobs, their cries echoing across the ruined village.

Vesha and Adyr said nothing. There was nothing to say. They stood in silence, sharing the burden of grief simply by being present.

The elder stepped forward, her movements slow and trembling. She knelt beside a bloodstained patch of earth and touched it with her fingers.

"What happens now?" She asked, her voice barely audible. The question hung in the air—not just for herself, but for Vesha as well.

Vesha didn't respond immediately. She turned her gaze to Adyr.

"I need to sleep," he said quietly. There wasn't much time left until dinner, and he planned to be home at his usual hour so Niva wouldn't worry.

Vesha nodded. It was a miracle he had stayed awake this long. The curse inside him was still draining his strength, and that was clear to anyone watching. Of course, that was exactly what Adyr wanted Vesha to see.

Then, almost hesitantly, she asked, "Will you fight?"

She needed to hear it. She needed to believe he would stand with them. And what she received in return was more than she had hoped for.

"I will kill," Adyr said with a faint smile. There was something smoldering in his eyes. Not rage, but something colder.

Vesha smiled too. She turned back to the elder and helped her rise. Meeting her gaze, she spoke with quiet resolve.

"I promise," she said. "When the sun rises tomorrow, your revenge will be carried out."

She didn't try to convince the woman with more words. She didn't need to. She believed it herself, and that was enough.

Vesha hadn't seen Adyr fight with her own eyes. But she knew what he had done, how he had wiped out the same skeletal horde that had easily overpowered her six trained guards, and how he had claimed the Dawn Raven with the same effortless precision.

Even if another Spark was behind this... She believed, somehow, he would win.

A/N: Yo guys you can now send golden tickets to support the novel. Thanks.

Chapter 40 - Henry Bates

The group composed themselves to fulfill one final duty for the dead. Battling the nausea in their stomachs and the weight pressing down on their minds, they began collecting what was left of their loved ones.

With Adyr's help, they dug a single grave—a place that, in time, might be called home to their memories. Torn bodies, like their grief, were brought together and laid to rest in one shared pit.

As they stood before the mass grave, the pain inside them only deepened. The deaths had been too sudden, too brutal. Their loved ones didn't even have the dignity of a grave to call their own.

After a moment of quiet mourning, the group returned to the underground shelter, following Adyr's suggestion.

There wasn't much time left until the logout. He didn't fully understand the wolves' behavior or what had driven them to attack the village, and he couldn't be certain they wouldn't return. The shelter was the only place secure enough to leave his body behind.

The space was surprisingly large, likely designed as a food cellar, but it was clear it had been built with emergencies in mind. It could easily house the entire village if needed.

After exchanging a few quiet words with Vesha, he settled onto the makeshift bed the villagers had prepared for him. A layer of dry grass softened the cold earth beneath, and a thick blanket was laid over it. Without hesitation, he lay down and disconnected.

—

When Adyr came to his senses and opened his eyes, the glass lid of the game pod slowly lifted. He sat up slightly, taking in his surroundings, then paused.

Aside from the familiar doctor who had been there when he entered the game, there were new faces in the room.

Three figures in lab coats stood nearby, more like researchers than physicians. Their posture and composure left no doubt—they outranked the doctor who had been overseeing Adyr.

Standing beside them was a man in a tailored suit, with neatly trimmed black hair and sharp, commanding light-brown eyes. Henry Bates watched Adyr with interest.

The glass front door had turned opaque, shutting the room off from prying eyes—whatever they wanted to discuss, they didn't intend for anyone else to hear it.

"You're finally back, boy," Henry said with a warm smile.

"Mr. Bates. That's a welcome I didn't see coming," Adyr replied, stepping out of the pod with a grin.

"It's been a while since I last saw you. Thought I'd drop by and check in," Henry said, giving him a light pat on the shoulder. Despite his authoritative appearance, there was something fatherly in his tone.

Ever since that day ten years ago, when Victor was kidnapped by armed men and Adyr, only eight years old at the time, stumbled upon him by pure chance and, almost miraculously, managed to save his life with quick thinking, Henry had been visiting him regularly.

He had initially offered the family several rewards for what Adyr had done, but both Marielle and Adyr refused them, saying they already had everything they needed. In the end, Henry chose a different way to show his gratitude by simply staying in touch.

What began as a way to repay a debt slowly changed. As Adyr grew older, Henry came to admire his calm mind and quick wit. Eventually, he began to see him not just as a savior, but almost as a son.

"I doubt that's the only reason, Mr. Bates," Adyr said with a smirk, glancing at the others in the room.

"Well, I won't lie. There is a more important reason I'm here," Henry said, then added with a chuckle, "I'll have to get my revenge for our last chess match another time."

"Whenever you feel like losing," Adyr replied, then fell silent, waiting patiently for Henry to speak.

"You see, Adyr," Henry began, taking a tablet handed to him by one of the men. "The doctor overseeing your physical checkup, along with these gentlemen here, told me something rather interesting."

He glanced down at the tablet, scanning the data.

"According to this, your genes mutated in a way that's almost miraculous. But that's not what caught me off guard. What surprised me is that it's not just your physical development. Your brain activity, your body's resistance to toxins and harmful substances, even your cellular responses—none of it looks like a normal mutation."

He paused, eyes still on the screen, then glanced up at Adyr and gave a chuckle. "It's almost like you didn't just boost your physique stat... but will, resilience, and sense as well."

Henry looked at him directly now.

"What I want to know is this, boy—did you choose all four Paths in the game?"

Adyr tilted his head slightly. "Would that make me special?" It was finally time to ask one of the questions that had been quietly troubling him.

"Special?" Henry let out a hearty laugh and clapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, boy. It makes you more than special."

"There are players in your group with two chosen Paths. Some in other cities have even managed three. But you? Four Paths, all four stats unlocked and accessible? Of course you're special." He looked genuinely pleased, almost proud.

"So I'm the only one who managed to choose all four Paths?" Adyr asked, a flicker of curiosity in his eyes. He didn't mention the fifth. He had no intention of doing that—this was just to gauge Henry's reaction.

"Exactly. I was starting to feel disappointed that we didn't even have anyone with three," Henry said with a laugh. "But with you in the ranks, our shelter city 9 is already ahead of the rest."

And with that, Adyr got the answer he was looking for. Clearly, they had no idea about the existence of a fifth Path—or at least, Henry didn't.

"I'm glad you've finally got a card to play against the other cities," Adyr said, his tone laced with quiet sarcasm. "Which is me."

Henry's laughter stopped at once. "I never said that. Can't you let me be proud for once?" He replied, ruffling Adyr's hair with a half-smile.

In that moment, Adyr was reminded of just how much Henry and Victor resembled each other. For all his authority and control, Henry could be just as absent-minded as his son.

"Since you're already here and clearly making good use of me for your own interests, there's something I want to ask," Adyr said. When he saw Henry paying close attention, he continued.

"Can you tell me the origin of the game?"

It was time for him to collect the interest on everything he had invested so far.

