

Cricket 127

Chapter 127

After the thrilling conclusion of the ODI series against Australia, we returned to the hotel, exhausted yet satisfied with our performance. As soon as I entered my room, I let out a deep sigh of relief and collapsed onto the plush bed. My body, though still adjusting to the intensity of international cricket, felt lighter with the adrenaline still lingering from the match. But there was something else on my mind—the system rewards.

Curious and excited, I summoned the system.

Ding! Congratulations, Host! You have performed exceptionally well in the ODI series. Based on your performance, the following rewards have been granted:

Less Fatigue Mode Activated – Your body will now experience significantly reduced fatigue. Even during the most grueling Test matches, you will be able to bat and bowl without feeling excessive pressure or exhaustion.

Pro-Gamer Mode Unlocked – Your gaming skills have now reached a professional level, allowing you to excel in competitive gaming effortlessly.

Maximum Cooking & Language Proficiency – Your cooking skills and language abilities have been enhanced to their peak levels, enabling you to cook gourmet dishes and communicate fluently in multiple languages.

I stared at the rewards in disbelief. This was beyond anything I had imagined. The fatigue reduction alone was a game-changer! No more struggling to recover after matches, no more worrying about stamina depletion—I could now focus entirely on my game without the limitations of physical strain. The Pro-Gamer ability was a pleasant surprise; I had always enjoyed gaming, but now I had the skills to compete at a professional level. And the cooking and language proficiency? That was just the icing on the cake!

I checked my status screen, and to my delight, both Dale Steyn's and KL Rahul's templates had been maxed out, reaching 80% of their full potential. With every match, every training session, I was inching towards absolute dominance.

Before the T20I series, we had a well-earned break of four days. It was the perfect time to relax, recuperate, and enjoy some time away from the cricket field.

Feeling elated, I jumped into the shower, letting the warm water wash away the exhaustion of the day. The sound of water cascading down soothed my mind, and I couldn't help but reflect on how much my life had changed since my debut. Just a few months ago, I was an emerging cricketer, striving to prove myself. Now, I was making a mark on the international stage, gaining recognition from legends and fans alike.

After freshening up, I decided to head down to the hotel lounge to grab something refreshing. As I entered, the cool, air-conditioned breeze hit my face, and I spotted a familiar sight—players scattered around, some chatting, some immersed in their phones, and a few playing board games.

I walked up to the counter and ordered a Splice—a frozen drink made from a combination of fruit juice and creamy ice, often served in a popsicle form. As I took a sip, the tangy sweetness exploded on my taste buds, sending a refreshing chill down my throat. It was the perfect way to unwind.

Just as I was about to find a quiet corner to sit in, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"Aarav! There you are!" It was Rohit Sharma, smiling as he walked toward me. "Celebrating the series win with a fancy drink, huh?"

I chuckled. "Something like that, Rohit bhai. Just trying to enjoy the break."

He nodded and pulled up a chair next to me. "You did great out there, champ. That six-wicket haul was insane! I think the Aussies are going to have nightmares about you for a while."

I grinned. "Thanks, bhai. It still feels surreal. I just want to keep improving."

As everyone finished talking and started heading to their rooms, I decided to grab a bubble tea and take it up to the terrace to enjoy it in peace. The terrace was completely empty, just the way I liked it. It had a beautifully maintained garden, known as the terrace garden, with neatly arranged plants, some wooden benches, and a small fountain in the center. The cool breeze hit my face as I took a deep breath and sipped my tea, letting the calmness settle over me.

After a few minutes of enjoying the solitude, I took out my phone and called Shubman Gill and Prithvi Shaw. They were going to join me and the team soon for the ODI series in New Zealand, and I was excited to talk to them. Ever since U19 world cup, we had dreamed of playing together for India, and now, that dream was becoming a reality.

Gill picked up first.

"Aarav! Bhai, what's up? Enjoying your bubble tea alone, huh?" he teased.

I chuckled. "How do you know, man? Are you spying on me?"

"Hah! I just know you too well. Every time you get some free time, you find a quiet place and a drink to enjoy. Classic Aarav style."

Prithvi joined the call just then. "Oye, what's going on? Why am I getting calls at this time? Aarav, don't tell me you're having a deep life moment on the terrace again!"

"You both know me too well," I admitted with a laugh. "But yeah, I just wanted to talk. We're finally going to play together for Team India! Man, can you believe it?"

"Honestly, it still feels unreal," Gill said. "We spent all those years in the under-19 circuit and now India A, dreaming about this. And now, it's actually happening. Playing for India in an ODI series in New Zealand—it doesn't get better than this."

"I swear, bro!" Prithvi exclaimed. "I still remember those days at the NCA, grinding, pushing each other to be better. And now look at us. Aarav, you're already making waves in international cricket. Gill, you're becoming India's top-order rock. And me, well... I'm still hitting them hard and hoping they clear the boundary!"

We all laughed. "You and your aggressive batting, Prithvi. You'll never change," I said.

"Never! You know I live for those big shots. But honestly, watching you play in the Australia series was something else, Aarav. The way you handled the pressure, your bowling, your fearless batting—it was insane!"

"Yeah," Gill agreed. "Six wickets in the last match, restricting Australia to under 200. And before that, match-winning partnerships with Virat bhaiya. You're already a crucial part of the team, bro."

I felt a wave of gratitude wash over me. "Thanks, guys. But trust me, it's all about learning. Playing with everyone like Rohit bhai, Virat bhaiya, and the others teaches you so much. And now, we get to do it together!"

"Absolutely," Gill said. "And New Zealand won't be easy. The conditions are tricky, the pitches offer movement, and the wind factor makes it even tougher. We'll have to be at our best."

"Yeah," Prithvi added. "But imagine this—we win the series, perform well, and establish ourselves in the team. The future of Indian cricket, right here on this call!"

"Haha! That's the spirit," I said. "Alright, I just wanted to catch up and feel the excitement with you guys. Rest up, because once we land in New Zealand, it's game time!"

"For sure, bro! See you soon!" Gill said.

"Yeah, and don't finish all the bubble tea before I get there!" Prithvi joked.

We ended the call, and I leaned back on the swing, looking up at the sky. The journey had just begun, and the best part was that I wasn't alone in it. I had my brothers, my teammates, and a dream that we were all chasing together.

As I settled onto the terrace garden, enjoying the cool breeze of the evening, I sipped on my bubble tea, savoring the sweet taste. The terrace was quiet, offering a perfect place for relaxation. After a long and tiring ODI series, this moment of peace was much needed. The distant city lights flickered against the night sky, and I let myself soak in the serenity of the moment. It had been a physically demanding few weeks, and this brief pause felt like a gift.

Just as I was about to close my eyes and enjoy the moment, I decided to call Shraddha. It had been a while since we had a proper conversation, and I knew she had just finished her exams. I dialed her number, and within a few rings, she picked up.

"Hey, man! Finally remembered me, huh?" Shraddha's playful voice came through the phone.

I chuckled. "Oh, come on, Shraddha! You know I've been busy with the matches. How were your exams? Cracked them as usual?"

She sighed dramatically. "Yeah, yeah. Just finished them today. I think I did well, but you never know. Results are always unpredictable. Anyway, I'm just glad they're over! Now I can focus on my college project."

"Oh, right! What's your project about?" I asked, genuinely curious.

"It's about cell division in Human Body. It's pretty interesting but also super challenging. I have to research about human cell, and present innovative ideas on the topic. My team and I are working really hard on it."

"That sounds amazing! You're really diving deep into this stuff, huh? I have no doubt your project will be a huge success."

"Thanks, Aarav! That means a lot," she said warmly. "By the way, don't you dare forget to bring me Australian chocolates! I've been waiting for them since you left."

I laughed. "Of course, how could I forget? I already bought some of the best ones! Any specific flavors you want?"

"Surprise me! But make sure you get those hazelnut truffles. They are my absolute favorite!"

"Noted, madam!" I said with a salute, even though she couldn't see me.

"Oh, oh! I also have something cool to tell you. I recently bought these amazing glasses called Astra Glass. They are next-level!"

"Astra Glass? Never heard of them. What's so special about them?" I asked, like I don't know anything about it.

"Oh my God, Aarav, these are insane! First of all, they have an identity feature. As I asked it while pointing to an apple, asking what it is, it identified it as an apple. It's a bit slow, but still manageable. And guess what? They have built-in Google Maps! I don't even have to look at my phone anymore when I'm walking somewhere new."

"That actually sounds pretty cool," I admitted. "What else?"

"The best part is the integrated TWS! You don't need separate earbuds; the audio comes right from the glasses. The sound quality is amazing, and they even have special workout features that track your gym exercises. It's like wearing a futuristic gadget!"

"Damn, Shraddha! You're turning into a tech geek now! Next, you'll be hacking into satellites or something."

She burst into laughter. "Oh please, I just like cool gadgets. But enough about me! How's life in Australia treating you?"

I leaned back on the swing and grinned. "Oh, you won't believe this! I bought a lottery ticket here for just 10 dollars."

She gasped. "Wait, what?! You never told me! Did you win? How much?"

I decided to tease her. "Well... it's a crazy story. You might freak out."

"Aarav, don't keep me in suspense! Tell me already!" she demanded impatiently.

I paused for effect. "I won..."

"OH MY GOD! HOW MUCH?" she practically screamed.

"A whopping..." I dragged the suspense. "Two dollars!"

For a moment, there was silence. Then, she burst into uncontrollable laughter. "ARE YOU SERIOUS?! Aarav, you made it sound like you won millions! You got me so excited for nothing!"

I laughed along with her. "Hey, a win is a win, no matter how small! I made a 20% profit on my ticket. That's a solid investment if you ask me."

"Oh, shut up!" she said between laughs. "Only you could turn two dollars into a success story."

We both laughed for a good minute before she finally calmed down. "Honestly, Aarav, talking to you is always so much fun. I really miss these conversations."

"Same here, Shraddha. It's been too long since we had a proper chat. But hey, once I'm back, we're hanging out. I'll bring the chocolates, and you can show me those cool Astra Glasses in action."

"Deal!" she said excitedly. "Alright, I gotta go work on my project now, but take care, okay? And don't overexert yourself in those matches!"

"I'll try," I said with a grin. "You take care too, Shraddha. Talk soon!"

As I ended the call, I couldn't help but smile. Conversations like these reminded me of the importance of friendships beyond cricket. It was nice to have people who cared about me beyond just my performance on the field. With that thought, I finished my bubble tea and gazed at the city lights, feeling grateful for everything in my life.

Feeling refreshed after the call, I took a deep breath and looked around the terrace garden once more. The flowers swayed gently in the night breeze, their scent blending with the cool air. I stretched my arms, letting the moment sink in. These peaceful moments, away from the stadium lights and roaring crowds, were rare but precious. Cricket was my life, but it was conversations like these that kept me grounded, reminding me that there was more to life than just victories and statistics.

With a satisfied sigh, I stood up and made my way back inside. Tomorrow would bring new challenges, new matches, and new battles to fight on the field. But tonight? Tonight was about unwinding, cherishing friendships, and embracing the small joys that made life beautiful.