

Cricket 141

Chapter 141

The morning after the Naman Awards felt surreal. The weight of the trophy I had received the previous night still lingered in my hands as I stirred awake. The golden rays of the sun filtered through my massive glass windows, casting a warm glow over my sleek, modern bedroom. I stretched, feeling a sense of accomplishment, but my mind quickly shifted to something else—my laptop screen.

As I sat up and rubbed the sleep from my eyes, I noticed the screen of my System was still on. A bright blue screen displayed a message:

"System Updating... 57% Complete."

I frowned.

Last night, right after receiving the Best International Debut (Men) Award, a notification had popped up on the system, indicating that my system had initiated an unexpected update. It was frustrating, but I had been too exhausted to deal with it then. Now, it was still ongoing.

"Must be some new features incoming," I thought, shrugging it off.

I left the system to complete its update and went to freshen up. After a quick shower and a simple breakfast—scrambled eggs, toast, and a protein shake—I dressed in a crisp grey business suit. Today wasn't about cricket. Astra was my sole focus now.

The drive to Astra's main office was smooth, my black Range-Rover gliding through the streets effortlessly. The moment I stepped into the ultra-modern Astra Tower, a sense of responsibility washed over me. This was my empire, and today, there was no cricket.

The main hall of Astra HQ was buzzing with energy. Employees, executives, and tech engineers moved around, busy with their tasks. As I walked in, my assistant Neha approached.

Neha: "Good morning, Sir! Your 9 AM strategy meeting is ready in the boardroom."

Me: "Thank you, Neha. Have the investment reports been compiled?"

Neha: "Yes, they're ready for review."

Nodding, I made my way to the executive boardroom, a sleek space with a 40-foot-long glass conference table, state-of-the-art presentation screens, and automated climate control. The top executives were already seated, awaiting my arrival.

I took my seat at the head of the table, and the meeting began.

CFO: "Sir, we have seen a steady increase in demand for Astra Cloud Services for our meet and glasses. Our current data centers are operating at 62% capacity."

Me: "That's concerning. We need more capacity before we hit critical thresholds. What's the estimated cost of expansion?"

CTO: "A 40% expansion will cost approximately ₹150 crores, but if we scale aggressively—say, a 80% expansion—it would require around ₹310 crores."

I leaned back, considering the numbers. Astra Cloud Services was growing exponentially, and I knew that in the future, remote work and digital operations would surge due to the upcoming pandemic.

Me: "Increase the expansion budget to ₹400 crores. Prioritize AI-enhanced server cooling and security enhancements. We need Astra Cloud to be future-proof."

The executives nodded in agreement, acknowledging the bold move.

Next on the agenda was Astra RayGlasses—our smart AR eyewear. Sales had been amazing, but production costs were high. I knew that COVID-19 and lockdowns were coming, which meant production needed a strategic slowdown.

Head of Hardware, Mr. Vikram: "Sir, we currently have 1.2 million units in stock. Our factories can produce another 500,000 units in the next quarter."

I shook my head.

Me: "Pause production for now. Focus on selling existing stock. The market will slow down soon, and I don't want to be left with surplus inventory."

A few executives exchanged puzzled looks, but I knew what was coming.

Me (continuing): "Instead, let's divert those resources into enhancing Astra Meet."

With global lockdowns approaching, virtual communication was going to become the most essential tool in the world.

Head of Software, Mr. Ramesh: "Astra Meet is performing well, and other players like Zoom and Microsoft Teams still are there as our competition in corporate market."

I leaned forward, locking eyes with him.

Me: "We have six months before the world shifts completely online. I want Astra Meet to be the most accessible, high-quality, and user-friendly platform by then."

I turned to the User Experience team.

Me: "Increase server efficiency. Improve UI. Make Astra Meet available on smart TVs, and even old system phones. Accessibility is key."

The team nodded, already taking notes.

Finally, the most exciting discussion of the day—Astra GPT.

This was my most ambitious project. In this timeline, there was no ChatGPT, no OpenAI, no other LLMs currently in the market. We were the first.

CTO: "Sir, Astra GPT's first model is nearly complete. We estimate a launch within 5-6 months."

I nodded, thrilled.

Me: "I want Astra GPT to be revolutionary. Focus on real-time data processing and emotional intelligence. Make sure it understands context and long-form memory better than any AI that could ever exist."

CTO: "Understood. We'll begin aggressive testing immediately but maximum features would be in version 2."

I smirked. In just a few months, Astra GPT would change the world.

The day flew by in a blur of meetings, strategy sessions, and system reviews. I personally oversaw security upgrades, marketing plans, and competitor analysis.

By evening, I finally took a break, standing by the massive floor-to-ceiling window in my office, gazing at the sunset over the city skyline.

I had done everything I could to prepare Astra for the future. The coming months would define the company's place in history.

As I stepped into my Range Rover, exhaustion washed over me. The day had been mentally draining but also exhilarating.

With cricket on pause, my focus shifted entirely to a new project—one that would ensure both my training and my family's comfort. Previously my father had purchased two massive farmhouses, standing side by side on the outskirts of the city, away from the chaos of urban life. It was a rare find, a sanctuary where we could retreat and enjoy the peace time and prepare for whatever the future held as soon the pandemic would hit the world, that would be our safe house!

As soon as I visited the properties, an idea sparked in my mind. Instead of treating these just as a luxurious retreat, I decided to transform one of them into the ultimate cricket training facility. The other? A fully equipped home where my family could live in comfort, unaffected by whatever might come in the future.

I called in top architects, designers, and engineers to bring my vision to life.

"Sir, do you want to follow a modern or classical style for the interiors?" one of the designers, Mr. Kapoor, asked as we stood in the vast, empty hall of the first farmhouse.

"Modern, but with an industrial twist," I replied. "This place isn't just a house; it's going to be a high-performance training center as well. I want proper nets installed, gym facilities, and a state-of-the-art bowling machine."

The transformation process was intense. Every single aspect of the first farmhouse was optimized for high-level cricket training.

A Full-Length Cricket Net Setup: I had two separate nets installed—one indoors and one outdoors. The outdoor one had turf similar to stadium pitches, while the indoor setup had automated ball-feeding machines that could simulate different deliveries.

Advanced Bowling Machine: The latest model, with AI-based customization, was placed at the center. It could mimic real-life bowling styles, adjusting speed, swing, and bounce.

Fully Equipped Gym: I spared no expense in setting up a gym, complete with high-end weightlifting equipment, recovery stations, ice baths, and even a personal sauna.

Smart Cameras & Analytics: Multiple high-resolution cameras were installed around the training areas. These cameras connected to a high-tech computer system I set up, which analyzed my batting stance, footwork, and shot execution in real time.

With the first farmhouse now a high-tech sports facility, I turned my attention to the second farmhouse. This was going to be our home for the foreseeable future, and I wanted to ensure we had everything we needed.

Over the next few weeks, I personally supervised the setup:

A fully stocked pantry: I made sure the kitchens had everything, from grains and spices to international delicacies. "We could last a year in here without stepping out!" my butler, Suresh, joked as we arranged supplies.

Entertainment & Relaxation: I stocked up on board games, books, movies, and even RC cars and drones. Anything to keep the family engaged.

Medical Supplies & Safety Measures: I consulted with our family doctor and ensured we had a fully equipped medical room, with everything from essential medicines to oxygen cylinders.

Backup Generators & Solar Panels: The last thing I wanted was power outages disrupting our peace. I got the latest backup systems installed.

"Aarav, are you planning for the end of the world?" Abhishek (Abhishek Sharma), teased as he walked into the storage room, where shelves upon shelves of supplies stood.

"Not the end of the world," I smirked. "Just making sure we're ahead of it.", I gave a cryptic reply to his question!

During this month of preparation, I made sure to keep up with my training under Sachin Tendulkar. Visiting his home felt as inspiring as ever.

"Aarav! You're looking sharper than ever," Sachin Sir greeted me as I entered his sprawling backyard, which had a private cricket net setup.

"Thank you, Sir! I've been working on refining my technique."

We trained for hours. Each session was intense, with Sachin Sir pointing out the smallest of details—adjustments in my grip, how I played short balls, even my head positioning while driving.

One of the unexpected but welcome developments of my visits to the Tendulkar household was the amount of time I spent with Shradha. At first, it was just casual interactions—passing conversations during breaks, sharing meals with the family. But over time, we grew closer.

One evening, after an intense training session, I found myself sitting in the garden with her.

"You spend so much time training, Aarav. Do you ever just... relax?" she asked, sipping on her iced coffee.

I chuckled. "This is my version of relaxing."

"Hah! You sound just like my dad. He never stops either."

There was a comfortable silence before she spoke again.

"I have to admit, though, it's nice having you around more. The house feels livelier."

I raised an eyebrow. "Are you saying I'm entertaining?"

"Maybe," she teased with a playful smirk.

Over time, everyone in the Tendulkar household got used to seeing me around.

"Aarav, beta, have dinner with us tonight," Sachin Sir's wife, Anjali Ma'am, insisted one evening.

"He practically lives here now!" Shradha joked.

It was a strange but heartwarming experience. For someone who had been so focused on career, on constant training and discipline, I had unexpectedly found a space where I could simply be myself.

As I drove back to the farmhouses that night, I couldn't help but reflect on everything that had changed over the past month. I had built a fortress of preparation, enhanced my training like never before, and formed new bonds that I hadn't expected.

The morning of March 17th began like any other. The golden rays of the sun streamed through my window, casting a warm glow across the room. I stretched, feeling the fatigue of yesterday's intense training still lingering in my muscles. Just as I was about to get up, a sharp ding! echoed in my ears, startling me.

A translucent screen materialized in front of me, filled with digital blue lines and an interface reminiscent of a high-tech AI system.

[SYSTEM UPDATE COMPLETE]

Before I could even process what was happening, a mechanical yet oddly enthusiastic voice spoke.

"Hello, boss! This is the System, and I am here to help you! The system update is complete."

My eyes widened in shock.

"Hey, System?" I asked. "What's in this update?"

"Ding! The update helps you get closer to the dream of becoming the best cricketer in the world!"

I sat up instantly, fully alert. "Alright, tell me about the new features!"

"Ding! The reward given after each match, combined with the entire series, is now removed!"

I frowned. "What do you mean by removed? Shouldn't updates add more features instead of taking them away?"

"Do not worry, Host! In exchange for removing match-based rewards, we have introduced the Template Shop!"

I blinked. "Template Shop?"

"Yes, as the name suggests, you can now buy skill templates from the system shop!"

A new menu appeared before me, displaying a list of legendary cricketers along with their skill templates and point costs. My jaw nearly dropped when I read the names.

Available Templates

Sachin Tendulkar (Skills + Aura) - 1,000,000 points

Sir Vivian Richards (Skills + Aura) - 899,999 points

Sir Donald Bradman (Skills) - 799,999 points

Sir Garfield Sobers (Skills) - 100,000 points

Kapil Dev - 198,400 points

Jacques Kallis - 50,000 points

Sanath Jayasuriya - 15,000 points

Lasith Malinga - 13,980 points

And Many More, to be revealed later!

My head spun at the sheer weight of what I was seeing. If I could unlock even a few of these, I would be unstoppable!

"How do I earn points?" I asked, my mind already racing with possibilities.

"You will receive 1,000 points every year on your birthday and an additional 1000 points for each century you score!"

I nodded slowly. It wasn't going to be easy, but with patience and dedication, it was possible.

"Update Reward:

AB de Villiers Template (Class + Unorthodox + Real 360-degree playstyle)

Jasprit Bumrah Template (Yorkers + Pitch Reading + Slower Deliveries)

A wave of excitement coursed through me. These two templates alone were game-changers! With AB de Villiers' adaptability and Bumrah's deadly bowling techniques, my cricketing prowess would reach new heights.

A separate section showed the templates I already owned:

KL Rahul (Batting Technique)

Dale Steyn (Pace & Swing Mastery)

Cheteshwar Pujara (Defensive Batting)

AB de Villiers (New!)

Jasprit Bumrah (New!)

Innings Template:

Virat Kohli 82 Against Pakistan!

Ben Stokes Test Match Win Against Australia

My arsenal was growing, and I was more motivated than ever.

I quickly dressed and rushed to my private training facility. My heart pounded with excitement as I activated my new templates.

"System, enable AB de Villiers' template."

A familiar warmth spread through my body. Suddenly, my grip on the bat felt more natural, my stance more fluid. I moved towards the net, ready to test this newfound power.

As the ball zipped toward me at 145 km/h, my body reacted on its own—a swift shuffle, a smooth wrist flick—and I ramped it over fine leg for six.

I continued batting, playing innovative shots that even I didn't know I was capable of. Reverse scoops, switch-hits, unorthodox flicks over the keeper's head—everything felt effortless.

After an hour of batting, I decided to switch to bowling.

"System, enable Jasprit Bumrah's template."

A wave of energy surged through my arm, making my fingers tingle. My grip on the ball felt incredibly precise. I positioned myself at the bowling crease, took a deep breath, and sprinted towards the wicket.

The ball shot out of my hand like a missile, swinging in at the last second and crashing into the base of the stumps.

That night, as I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, a sense of purpose filled me. This system update had given me a path to true greatness.

I wasn't just training to be good.

I was training to be the greatest.

To Be Continued...