

## The Crafts 341

### Chapter 341: Mason's Challenge

At the circuit, the drivers had already gone halfway into their race with the last five spaced across the first half of the sixth lap.

For the race at the Infinite Eight Circuit, the drivers needed to complete twelve laps around and within the four kilometres tall mountain. Although the mountain was four kilometres or so tall, the length of the circuit wasn't the same.

As the circuit occupied both the inside and outside of the mountain, extending even underground, it had a length of forty two kilometres—which was still child's play for a racing shuttle. The 'short distance' creates the scenario of multiple repetitions, resulting in the race being twelve laps around the circuit.

This type of race was known as a sprint in drift racing, as the length of the circuit wasn't much, and even the total distance needed to be covered by the drivers wasn't much either. However, the dangers in the Infinite Eight Circuit prevented drivers from going at it at full speed, with the average speed being somewhere around 270-320km/hr. This meant that the 504 kilometres long race would last between 96 minutes, or 1 hour and 36 minutes, to nearly 2 hours.

The first half of the race had gone safely without any driver experiencing any serious mishaps, although there were a few rough occasions.

This wasn't uncommon since for the first half, drivers drove more carefully to get used to the track first. It was only inexperienced drivers and the less skillful ones who focused on speed alone at the first lap. Such drivers were typically found in the lower tiered leagues, but not the second tier.

With the race now into the second half, drivers would begin to take risks to try and overtake each other.

Yovahn's Red Dog was currently in fourth place. The driver for the Blue Gate team was in first place while the brown beard man who had harassed Mason was in fourteenth place. Mason, on the other hand, was in fifteenth place.

This wasn't to say that Mason was underperforming, but he had purposely stuck to this position according to the informal 'rules'. Even though he had already experienced the Infinite Eight Circuit tens of times in the simulation room, he wanted to ascertain that the circuit remained the same; after all, change was constant and the circuit, as well as one's performance, could be affected by the weather and even wind speed.

Now that the race was in the second half, Mason was confident that he could do better.

"They're beginning to move into the underground layer." The announcer said.

The underground section of the circuit was the true dangerous zone. While the danger of the above ground half was driving off course and falling off the mountain, the course within and underneath the mountain was littered with special traps set up by the league. These traps varied from obstacles to electrical devices that could target one's thrusters or even the engine.

Although these traps weren't deadly and only affected the performance of these components, it was enough to make a driver fall behind if they failed to avoid them. In some cases, if the driver wasn't able to maintain control over the vehicle, they could end up in an accident and die.

To prevent drivers from getting used to it, the location of the traps was constantly changed for each lap completed. So, drivers couldn't depend on their recent experience from completing a lap to predict where the traps are.

'But that's fine.' Mason thought.

The simulated Infinite Eight Circuit he had practiced also had these traps. Although the positions could vary, after completing hundreds of laps, Mason was able to figure out a pattern. He also discovered the best way to manoeuvre through these traps even if he got caught in them.

The first lemniscate track of the second half of the circuit—which happened to be the fifth of eight lemniscates—was conquered with no problem by Mason. He had managed to avoid the traps on time. But he wasn't satisfied with that.

Going along with tradition, Mason accelerated the Viper shuttle, aiming to overtake the fourteenth place driver in front of him. By this time, the brown bearded man had already moved to thirteenth from fourteenth. He had achieved this by performing a risky overtake in the fifth infinity track.

As he closed in on the end of the sixth infinity track, Mason shortened the gap between him and fourteenth place. The Viper, which could be called version 3, had been revamped once again by Lucas and it was more powerful than the revamped model before it, version 2. Apart from that, Mason's skills were clearly better than the driver in front of him, so it was a given that he could overtake the man without a hassle.

However, when Mason came close to him, the driver suddenly steered his racing shuttle to block Mason's path, forcing him to slow down; otherwise he might risk an accident.

"That bastard!"

Someone on the On-site unit team cursed as he tightened his fists.

The On-site unit was one of the six departments in the Versoa team. They handled emergencies during a race, such as emergency repairs, thruster swapping, or sending over the backup racing shuttle if the main one had been damaged while racing. Because of their role, they were only active during a race and communicated with the driver.

The man who had cursed was the department head of the On-site unit.

The Nadire Underground League was an unofficial league which meant that it had less rules and was more risky compared to the official leagues. Blocking a driver who was clearly about to perform an overtake, an act termed as an offence in the official league, was allowed in unofficial drift racing leagues.

However, not many drivers performed this act as the driver they were blocking could grow impatient and crash into them, ending the race for the two parties. Hence, this immoral behaviour was rarely seen, even more so in the second tier and above leagues. This was why the department head had cursed out, as he never expected their opponent to pull out this move.

Mason tried to overtake from the side, but once again, the driver moved to block him forcing the latter to maintain a similar speed as he did.

'Keke. Blame yourself for inviting trouble, kiddo.' The man in the racing shuttle snickered as he briefly glanced at the radar screen in front of him.

Yovahn's tactic wasn't just to have only the brown bearded man to stop Mason. He had also prepared another obstacle in the form of this driver. In truth, Yovahn had tried to cut a deal with five drivers to prevent Mason from getting thirteenth place or above, but only three responded to him.

Yovahn, who was in the VIP viewing area along with Lucas and Vienna, smirked as he watched the scene on the screen. Vienna became slightly worried for Lucas, since if Mason failed to overtake his opponent, reaching the top ten would be an impossible dream. However, she wasn't too bothered as the race was only halfway through; anything could happen.

Lucas, on the other hand, was very calm. He looked as if the race had nothing to do with his future in Belfargos territory.

"Poor guy. He's probably only experiencing the harsh reality of the unofficial leagues today." Yovahn grinned.

He sneakily glanced at Lucas, hoping to see some sort of reaction, but the latter was still nonchalant.

'Let's see how long you can keep your demeanour when the race is over and you lose the bet.' Yovahn snorted.

Seeing the development in front of him, Mason didn't turn anxious, nor was he overcome with worry. In truth, the Racers (racing robots) during his training had employed a similar tactic after he got used to them and began overtaking them continuously. This was especially so for the racer that drove the Viper V2 after Lucas had completed upgrades on the V3.

At that time, Mason was competing against two racers: one driving a Viper equipped with the Destroyer engine while the other drove the backup Viper equipped with the version 2 upgrades. When Mason had gotten used to the track and was steadily suppressing the racers thanks to both his skills and the vehicle's specs, the Racers changed their tactic. They began to employ sneaky actions and moves allowed in unofficial leagues, to delay Mason from overtaking them. The move the fourteenth place driver had employed was even used by them.

"Cute."

Mason smirked before pushing a button on the racing shuttle.

A transparent blue shield coated the racing shuttle that was closely approaching the speed of sound. In the next second, Mason accelerated once again, not caring about the driver in front of him.

\*Wa\* \*Wa\* \*Wa\*

Alarms sounded in the shuttle of the driver as the sensors had detected an energy signal catching up towards the driver.

Usually, drift racers maintained a certain distance when behind the other to prevent an accidental crash. However, Mason had now tossed out this rule and was rapidly closing in on the former.

'Is this kid crazy?'

The driver thought, struggling with hesitation on whether to give way or not.