

The Fall 940

Chapter 940: Maiden Voyage

"Amazing," Ogras whispered.

Even Zac was moved as they looked up at the huge dark gray Cosmic Vessel floating in front of them. His Cosmic Vessel.

It was neither as big as some of the ships he'd seen in the Void Gate nor as awe-inspiring as the three models he had to pick from for his quest reward. But it was clearly of far superior make compared to the thing he'd flown in on his way to the Void Star, or even the Technocrat's Little Bean for that matter.

"A decent little skipper," Karunthel hummed with a satisfied nod. "Feels good to build items for adults, finally."

The vessel looked far more blocky and utilitarian than the Yphelion's sleek catamaran design, yet it emitted an undeniable aura of power and vigor. It was of the common squarish oblong shape, which widened slightly at the end to give room for the powerful array thrusters. Its front didn't end in a cockpit or a viewing deck, but with five nasty spikes arranged in a circle.

The longest one in the middle was almost fifty meters long, and Zac felt his heart shudder as he looked at the engravings covering it. This was one of the other benefits of upgrading his shipyard – weaponry. The old vessels Zac had access to before upgrading the shipyard barely had any weaponry to speak of, but these army vessels packed quite the punch.

"This is the main energy battery, with four more deployable across its bodice," Karunthel smiled as he followed Zac's gaze. "These models of yours are pretty good. We call the main cannon a Wave Signature Tower. On the surface, it looks like a common pure energy weapon that you'd see anywhere. But it has an interesting twist. It isn't just releasing raw energy at your enemy – it is encoded with thousands of hidden patterns."

"Patterns?" Ogras repeated with confusion.

"Following certain concepts on how energy works and reacts when under pressure," the spider golem explained. "Simply put, you can consider these patterns as array breakers. The Wave Signature Tower will blast an enemy's shield with a rapid burst of Array Breaking attempts and record the result.

"Then, it'll adjust all your energy weaponry based on the results. At worst, it will find a pattern that will cause more damage and drain the enemy's energy faster than the others. At best, it will find one that will directly destabilize the enemy's shielding and blast right through."

"That powerful?" Zac said with surprise.

"Well, most decent vessels have protective measures against this kind of brute-forcing attempts. But this is the frontier where Cosmic Vessels are essentially floating trashcans. I doubt too many have countermeasures against this kind of technique here," Karunthel grinned.

"Is the vessel equipped with single-use weaponry as well?" Ogras asked expectantly.

"Alas, no," Karunthel sighed. "Restrictions, and whatnot. So, no good old bombs. However--"

Ten smaller vessels floated out from chutes at the ship's midsection the next moment.

"The Starflash is not like the Wingstorm with its huge array of unmanned drones," Karunthel explained. "But it still carries 100 of these things. They all have simple energy cannons and are quite agile. More importantly, after you buy the ships, you're free to do any modifications to these little drones you want. Say, if you for some reason filled one of these guys with explosives, strengthened its propulsion, and ordered it to fly right into an enemy vessel..."

"Not bad," Zac laughed. "You could hide a bomb among the other drones until it's time to strike."

"And of course, we provide full service, including replacing broken drones. For a fee, of course," Karunthel grinned before throwing over a small sphere to Ogras. "This is the control node. Bind it, and you will become the captain and gain access to most features."

"Most?" Ogras said with confusion.

"Some technical features are blocked out," Karunthel shrugged. "You would just get yourself killed if you started to fiddle with the Spatial Arrays, for example. Those features will automatically unlock if you get a D-grade technician or Array Master to join the crew."

"Fair enough," Ogras nodded.

"Here, take this," Karunthel added and threw a golden cube at Zac.

The moment he grasped it, the thing melted and turned into a small tattoo on his left hand before that thing faded as well. However, Zac wasn't worried as he got a short burst of information.

"What's that?" Ogras asked curiously.

"Nothing," Zac smiled before nodding at Karunthel. "What else?"

"Well, standard operations are fueled by gathering arrays, and there is a small energy surplus that will be stored. That surplus can be used on shields, energy weaponry, or even on dimensional jumps," Karunthel explained. "But it isn't an endless font of power. If you push its engine for long durations or get caught in pitched battles, you'd have to supply it with High-tiered Nexus Crystals, or preferably Cosmic Crystals."

"Cosmic Crystals?" Zac grimaced. "Those cost a fortune."

"This is a machine of war, and to wage war is to burn money," Karunthel laughed.

"Now, the models you have access to take around two days to power down if you want to put them into your Spatial Rings, and the power-down feature comes with spatial compression. If you need to save space, this model can turn into a 20-meter cube instead of its current shape."

"Wait, two days?" Ogras frowned. "So, if we want to hide from pursuit, we'd have to create a two-day lead before stowing away the ship? Doesn't that make it useless?"

"Brat, what do you know?" the golem scoffed. "Most vessels you see in this Heaven-forsaken corner of the Multiverse can't even be powered down, and never be put in a spatial ring. Hell, many can't even

survive inside a proper atmosphere. In fact, you shouldn't even use the power down feature in public since it will expose that this vessel is of uncommon origin."

"Why can't people just store their ships?" Zac said with confusion, but he suddenly remembered how he'd seen thousands of vessels simply docked into Zenith Vigil. He hadn't reflected on that back then, but why hadn't the captains just stowed their ships?

"For the same reason that Spatial Rings can't be stowed inside other Spatial Treasures. Their arrays and energy fields will clash. The systems needed to push through the dimensional layers are incredibly complex. Usually, they are passively running like Spatial Rings, keeping the vessel in a constant state where it can travel without being ripped apart by the vacuum of space or dimensional skipping. Creating a vessel that can be safely turned on and off at will is far more difficult."

"So, how quickly will I be able to stow away the Yphelion?" Zac asked.

"Six hours, give or take ten minutes," Karunthel said.

Zac nodded thoughtfully before looking at the Creator with curiosity. "Do any of your top-tiered vessels allow for instantaneous power-down?"

"Yes and no," Karunthel said after some thought. "For vessels based on the Dao of Space, no. And believe me, we've tried. But there are Cosmic Vessels out there that are based on completely different principles, like the Dao of Light or the elemental Daos. Their systems do not clash with Spatial Treasures, so they can generally be stowed away at any time."

"So what's the catch?" Ogras asked from the side.

"Price. You wouldn't believe how expensive those things are. The Dao of Space is obviously the most convenient Dao for traversing space and jumping between dimensions. To create the same effect with other Daos... You'd be looking at a price tag at least 100 times higher at even lower performance points. For top-tier vessels, it's far worse."

Zac gulped for air as he glanced at the Cosmic Vessel in front of him. This thing had cost him enough money to bankrupt a normal Zecia D-grade Clan, yet an elemental variant would be over 100 times more expensive? Then what about higher-tiered vessels? Would the cost of a Peak D-grade elemental vessel even be counted in C-grade Nexus Coins?

"Well, never mind that," Ogras shrugged. "That sounds like some luxury toys for the rich bastards in the heartlands. Can we take this beauty out for a spin?"

"Of course," Karunthel nodded. "The command sphere should be able to answer any questions you have. Most systems are intuitive enough that even a fool can handle them. Of course, you need a good crew to take charge of the different features to bring the most out of the vessel."

"So, how do we get inside?" Zac asked.

"Just ask it," Karunthel said with a wave as he started to walk away. "Now, I have to finish the rest of the ships. Kid, work hard and get some contracts for us. A lot of the workers have been bored senseless for the past years. In fact, it might be in your interest as well."

"What do you mean?" Zac asked.

“Well, the next quest will unlock when you evolve, but you can already work toward its goal,” the golem said before he just disappeared.

“Perhaps you need to build enough ships to upgrade the shipyard? Or perhaps sell enough of them?” Ogras ventured when Zac shot him a look.

“Sounds like it,” Zac nodded. “But why would the System hide the exact details?”

“If you keep asking why the Ruthless Heavens does the things that it does, you’ll soon drive yourself crazy. Just roll with the punches and make the best of the situation. Now let’s see how-”

The next moment, the two were covered in a bronze light, and Zac felt a pulling sensation. He didn’t resist it, and the next moment the two found themselves inside the Cosmic Vessel.

“Not bad,” Ogras nodded as he looked around. “Teleportation, very fancy.”

“Maybe too fancy,” Zac hesitated, remembering Karunthel’s warnings about showcasing the Starflash’s high-tech features.

“Well, there is a proper hatch, but what fun is that?” Ogras laughed as he looked around.

The teleportation array didn’t take them into a cargo hold like the previous ship Zac entered, but rather into a large foyer with some desks, tables, and benches. The Starflash’s interiors were in the same dark grey metallic as the outside of the ship, giving it a somewhat similar feeling to the sterile environments of the Technocrat Memorysteel base.

“How dull,” Ogras muttered before looking down at the sphere in his hand.

The next moment, the surroundings started to change as the walls became a deep blue with some white details, while the floors changed color into a deep wooden brown. The pre-installed furniture turned white, and the lights shifted to give off a softer glow. Suddenly, the area looked less futuristic and more inviting. It almost felt like Zac was inside a hotel on Earth rather than a spaceship.

“That’s better,” Ogras nodded with satisfaction.

“You can even do stuff like that?” Zac muttered with amazement.

“Yep, even the exterior. Can’t reshape the metal, though,” Ogras said.

“Well, that makes sense,” Zac said as he looked around. “Still looks a bit austere. I guess we’ll have to bring our own furniture.”

“There are some fixed installations like these benches, but just the bare essentials,” Ogras nodded before turning to a pedestal not far away. “That thing should be a map.”

Zac had already suspected as much since the thing was very similar to the mappers he had seen inside the Void Star, and a holographic cutout of the Starflash appeared when he infused some Cosmic Energy into it.

There were no surprises with the interiors. The biggest of the ship was set aside as living quarters for the crew. They were arranged in sets of ten, which all shared a common area. It wasn’t much room per

person, but it was still quite generous for an army vessel. There were also five mess halls, several training rooms, a few lounges, and so on, allowing for a comfortable long-term stay.

After these areas came the storage areas, both for the drones and some things that were inconvenient to store inside Spatial Treasures. For example, there were complex spare components, and escape pods. There were also three smaller docking vessels, each one able to hold roughly ten people. They didn't possess any weapons though, so they would be useless in a fight.

"The bridge is that way," Ogras said as he pointed down a hallway.

The security doors soundlessly slid open as they approached, and Zac's heart beat an extra time with excitement when he found himself on a real-life science-fiction bridge. Those Old Earth showrunners had got things mostly right, except that the huge screen showing the exterior was just that – a screen. The bridge was hidden right at the heart of the vessel, protected by multiple layers of both physical and energy barriers.

Twelve seats were spread out in a half-circle in front of the screen, with the captain's chair taking the central spot. Each one had a console, but there were no buttons or levers as far as Zac could tell.

"Let's take her out for a spin," Ogras said as he sat down in the captain's chair.

The scene on the screen gradually changed as the vessel soundlessly slid out of the warehouse onto the enormous metal square outside.

"Do you already know how... to..." Zac said, his voice dying as the surroundings went from a panoramic vision of the Creator shipyard to deep space in a couple of seconds.

There had been no sense of acceleration or indications of engines humming to life. Yet they had pushed through the stratosphere and entered the vast beyond.

"Amazing," Ogras gasped. "That wasn't even its peak speed."

"I can't imagine that any but the fastest Hegemons would be able to catch up to this ship," Zac nodded with excitement.

"Even they wouldn't be able to keep up for too long," Ogras smiled. "The shields on this girl should be able to take a few hits. By that point, we'd leave them in the dust. Only Monarchs and powerful weaponry should pose a real threat."

"Don't get cocky," Zac laughed. "Besides, the environment in the Million Gates Territory is more dangerous and unpredictable than any D-grade cultivator could hope to be."

"I know," Ogras nodded. "For now, let's check out the neighborhood. See that seat over there? It is for the navigator."

Zac walked over, but he looked back at the demon with confusion. "What do I do?"

"Just sit down in the chair and place your hand on the console," Ogras said, anticipation evident on his face.

Zac shrugged and followed the instructions. A moment later, it felt like his mind had expanded to the size of the Solar System as a surge of data entered his mind. It wasn't quite like the burst you got when binding certain treasures. It was more like a steady stream of information fed straight into his mind.

"There are actually thirteen planets in our Solar System?" Zac muttered. "Our scanners back home only picked up eight. But what's that beyond? The scanners just cut straight off even if it isn't their range limit for a cursory scan."

"Should be the shroud," Ogras said. "We probably don't want to go through it with the vessel. Might not be able to get back in. Same goes for dimensional jumps, probably."

"I think you're right," Zac agreed. "Wow, look at this one."

The next moment, the holographic map focused on the tenth planet of the twinned-sun system appeared. It could just barely be considered a planet by Multiverse standards with its circumference, but that wasn't what was so interesting about it.

"Middle E-grade? Metal-attuned energy?" Ogras whistled. "Should be whole mountains of Spiritual Metals to mine. That's a floating fortune right there."

"It's a shame the System was so stingy with the type of Vessels I can buy," Zac sighed. "There are no resource extraction vessels."

"Maybe ask the golem if things like that can be added at the next upgrade?" Ogras said.

"I will. That planet alone might cover all our wartime needs for metal," Zac nodded as he kept going over the data of their stellar neighborhood. "Our neighboring planets both have life signatures as well. Only F-grade planets, though."

"Probably just beasts," Ogras shrugged. "Out of a 1000 planets, cultivators only have a claim on one or two. Of course, that's for E-grade planets."

"You think the planets are good for anything?" Zac asked.

"Not sure," Ogras said. "Your planet isn't exactly lacking space at the moment. For example, I can't see the use of setting up low-grade farms on those F-grade planets when you can get twice the harvest for half the effort back home."

"Well, it's not like I expected any real treasures to pop up in my backyard," Zac smiled. "The metal world alone is a pretty good get."

"So, where do you want to go?" Ogras asked. "Too early to sail back home."

"Can't travel to the other planets; it would take too much time without dimensional manipulation," Zac hummed. "Emerald Eye?"

"Emerald Eye," Ogras agreed with excitement, and the ship set off.