

I sat in the lounge, toying with my newest ring as I let my brain slowly recover from just over seven hours of continuous strain and focus. My usual Respite and Fast Heal had helped me get over the worst parts of the enchanting backlash, but it didn't wash away everything. Still, even with the long recovery time, the results were impressive. The mana storage, while still not massive, was close to triple what my first few attempts had been, a significant improvement. While my first few attempts barely had enough capacity for a single novice spell, my latest effort could hold an entire Adept spell.

The non-linear increase was very encouraging for what the future of my enchanting efforts could achieve. With the multi-stone enchantment method under my belt, my mental control and stamina were my only restraints, something I could work steadily on improving.

I slid the ring onto my finger and refilled the well it contained, having drained it to put the enchantment to the test. I couldn't help but smile, very pleased with my achievement. Julius was definitely first up for getting the first enchantment I made at this level since it probably would have taken a whole lot longer to work out without him.

As I sat there, slowly recovering, I contemplated what my next step would be. Obviously, equipping everyone was at the top of my to-do list. However, now that I had achieved this better level of enchanting, there was no way I would accept handing out anything lesser. Which meant every piece would take a minimum of seven or eight hours. With around six items potential items person, equipping everyone fully would take a long fucking time.

If I let it, enchanting would absolutely eat up all my time for learning new magic. I would need to strike a balance and take my time, despite the urge to immediately devote myself to outfitting everyone. After some thought, I came to the conclusion that my best option was to focus on making a single new piece of enchanted gear for everyone so that we always have the advantage. By that time, Pola would hopefully have started on our full beskar armor, which would be enough of an advantage that I could relax and take further enchantments much slower.

For now, I was pretty sure there was no way I would make it through another seven hours, which led back to me sitting in the lounge, recovering my magic and mental stamina.

The trip to Itander was two days plus some change, so I spent the rest of the first day working with everyone to do standard maintenance, including cleaning the blasters as well as going over the *Brick*, Arrow, and speeder bikes. Miru was busy working on the raindrops for most of the first day before going over the three damaged BXs. Unfortunately, she quickly realized that while she had the right tools to work on the droids, she lacked some of the parts, so she put it off until we picked up our deliveries when we landed.

Since she couldn't work on the BXs, she finally tackled something I had honestly forgotten about, the two droideka we had acquired oh so long ago in our first CIS raid.

"Honestly, they aren't nearly as scary to me as the BXs," Miru admitted as she plugged one of the large, collapsed droids into her workshop computer. "The BXs are full-on killing machines in just about any setting or environment. These Droidekas are impressive for sure, but if you deploy them wrong or if you shift the environment on them? Well, then, they are practically useless. I mean, you've taken them out a bunch!"

"I'm a bit of a special case, though, Miru," I pointed out, leaning on a workbench. "These things used to tear through clone troops, especially when they caught them unprepared. They even had a reputation as Jedi killers."

"Yeah, but if they are prepared, taking them out is simple," She pointed out. "Also, one word. *Stairs.*"

I couldn't help but chuckle at the young engineer's brutal but ultimately correct points about the droid. They were powerful and deadly when used correctly, but throw them into uncertain territory, and they would quickly be reduced to scrap. We would most likely be using them as ship defense should the B2s ever be overwhelmed.

The following day, not long after having breakfast with the crew, I made my way to the enchanting room. I sat down at the Arcane Enchanter, and after about ten minutes debating what I should be making Julus, I realized I was being an idiot and went out to find him. I only had to step down to the first deck to find him helping Miru as she lifted up one of the access panels along the mainline of the ship.

"Hey Boss, what's up?" He asked, passing Miru a scanner after she climbed down into a crawl space. "Miru is just working on the capacitors since we did a micro-jump the other day."

"Nothing much. I just wanted to know what you wanted your first proper enchanted item to be," I explained. "You helped me crack the final step so I figured you get first dibs."

"Oh! Um... What are my options?"

We spent about fifteen minutes going over what he could pick, including the options he had for something like a knife or a sword, occasionally stopping to help Miru as she moved around the innards of the *Chariot*. Eventually, he picked a ring of dexterity, partially because it was an all-around solid bet and because Muffle, his first choice, was better suited for his boots, which were due to be replaced by our new armor soon.

With his option chosen, I returned to the enchanting room, plopping down in the chair after gathering everything I needed. He had wanted the enchantment done into a ring, so I grabbed something simple from the crate and set it to work. While it was tempting to try and use more soul gems and force it through quickly, I couldn't bring myself to waste my soul gems. While my source of Kyber crystals was definitely not tapped, further damaging the Crystal Cave growths because I felt like rushing felt wrong. I knew that eventually, I would need to either

accept harvesting more from the caves or find a secondary source. For now, however, I was determined to get every bit of energy I could from these two soul gems, all while working the enchantment as slowly as possible.

When I finally stumbled out of the enchanting room, nine and a half hours had passed. I barely managed to tumble my way to Julius, who was sitting in the lounge. I clumsily handed him his ring like I was a drunkard deep in his drink before stumbling back to my room, where I promptly passed the fuck out.

I slept for a full ten hours, waking up mostly recovered from my first successful attempt at two soul gem enchantments at a slow, steady pace. Because I had gone to bed rather early compared to everyone else, when I left my room to find some food, the ship was early silent. Racer and the naval droids were the only ones moving around as I peeked into the bridge, the former whistling softly in greeting.

"How long until we arrive at Itander?" I asked, looking at the droid co-pilot.

"Another eight hours, Boss," It responded, not looking away from the console.

I nodded and left the bridge, looking through the kitchen for something to eat. Eventually, after finishing breakfast and taking a nap on the lounge couch, the rest of the crew woke up and ate their own meal. After that, we killed time around the ship, waiting for the drop out of hyperspace.

When the timer finally hit zero, we popped back into real space on the outskirts of the system. Rabben had long since confirmed that we had nothing to worry about landing both ships on Itander, but we had all agreed it was better safe than sorry. As we closed in on the planet, the *Chariot* flying behind and to the side of the *Intervention*, we got our first look at just how much things had changed. When we left, only a few security ships were flying over the planet, with no civilian ships to be seen, even on the surface. Now, the planet was buzzing with activity, with dozens of ships going to and coming from the planet's surface, with a half dozen ships flying around the planet.

"Really beefed up security," I commented, Calima nodding in agreement.

As we approached, our comms lit up, asking us to identify ourselves, our purpose, and our destination. The code and names that Rabben gave us must have carried some sort of weight, or they had been warned to look out for us, because they very graciously gave us our directions to the surface, directly down to Solinda, definitely cutting through any existing lines.

As we came down for a landing, we got our first look at Solinda. The town, which had once been only a few steps above a shanty, was now clean, well built, and organized. There was even a semi-concurrent theme going through the entire city, an array of similarly styled homes and buildings, all around a central structure that towered over the town, at least thirty

stories. It was far from the gleaming cities of Coruscant, but it was still massively impressive for how little time had actually passed since we were last on the planet. We could even see that the outskirts were still being expanded with construction bots and workers building more and more homes and buildings.

We finally landed in a large ship pad on the outskirts of the burgeoning city, the pad surrounded by walls that were just a hair shorter than the top of the *Intervention*. Not long after we touched down and the engines were switched off, Nal, Tatnia, and I all climbed down the *Chariot* boarding ramp out onto the duracrete pad. Rabben Corgug, the four-armed [Besalisk](#) in charge, was there to greet us by the time our boots hit the ground.

"Deacon! It's good to see ya again," He said, stepping out and shaking my hand while also shaking hands with Nal. "I like the new ship, yer clearly doing well fer yourselves."

"We're doing alright, but nowhere as good as you by the looks of things," I said back with a smirk. "The town looks incredible, well done."

"It had better look good with how much money we threw at it!" He responded with a chuckle.

We chatted as we walked, leaving the pad behind as the tall humanoid guided us to a speeder outside the landing pad walls. Once we were inside, the conversation shifted to just what was new on Itander.

"It's been a lot of good luck since you helped us out, Deacon," He admitted, the speeder taking off into the air. "We've already found two more sources of Varium and one Vonium. We are making money hand over fist, and our workload is a fraction of what it used to be. Lots of people owe you a whole lot of credits, my friend."

"I'm glad we could help Rabben. What the mining guild was trying was bullshit," I responded. "I don't want you to feel like we are calling in a favor..."

"Bah, ya hardly asked me for an arm," He pointed out with a smile. "I think I found something that fits what you're looking for. If not, then we can see about getting you a good deal for your credits."

I nodded in agreement, turning the topic back to Solinda and Itander. As we talked, the air speeder pulled in on a landing pad along the massive central structure that towered over the town. Once we landed, it was a quick walk inside, and a turbo lift ride to the top, before we stepped into a massive office. Here, the money the settlement had been earning was even more obvious, as the office would have easily fit in among the richest of companies on Coruscant.

Rather than head for the large desk, clearly built for someone of Rabben's size, he led us to a lounge space in one corner of the large room. He passed each of us a glass bottled drink, which Nal seemed particularly happy to receive.

"Good brand, haven't had any in years," He explained, taking a long sip.

"We have a guy who keeps us stocked, I'll send him down to your ship later," Rabben said, taking his own sip.

Eager to see what the fuss was about, I took a sip, humming in appreciation. It tasted like a more accessible Guinness with a strong coconut flavor and a distinct chocolate finish. All of us enjoyed the drink for a moment before Rabben leaned forward, putting his bottle on the coffee table.

"So, yer looking for platinum, vonium or varium," He finally said, leaning back in his chair. "A whole pile of it by what yer man here claimed. Kind of an odd request for a mercenary group. You need to pay a ransom or something?"

"Nothing like that," I assured him. "A project of ours requires precious metals. It's a bit hard to explain..."

"I don't need to know, I was mostly just curious to see if you stepped in some trouble." He explained, waving us off and shaking his head. "Nal said you're willing to step into a grey area. How do you feel about Kuat Drive Yards?"

"They make ships. Their biggest client right now is the Empire," I said with a shrug. "Their class system is kinda screwed up if I remember correctly."

"Hah! Yer not wrong at least. They also buy nearly sixty percent of what we mine," He explained, shaking his head. "They strong-arm other businesses out of the way and cut our prices with their Imperial approval. We make a lot of money off of them, don't get me wrong, but they don't got a lot of goodwill here."

The large, thick-skinned human took another sip of his drink before leaning back in his chair.

"They demand we deliver their materials to a separate location. We have to pay for transport and security for that transport too," He continued with a shrug. "When our transport gets there, we offload it, and their own security arrives and hauls it away. Usually, this is like clockwork. But recently, I had an interesting conversation with one of the transport ships captains. According to him, the site he was deliverin' to had a bit of a stock up."

"Why?" I asked, confusion evident on my face. "That's a massive security hazard..."

"Oh, it is, but yer underestimating the power of ah broken bureaucracy," Rabben explained. "Little delays, checks, permissions, work orders, all of that adds up. Trust me, I still have ta deal with this sort of crap."

"So, somewhere, there is a secure hand-off point that lets their goods sit for an indeterminate amount of time," I repeated. "How much metal are we talking about here? A couple dozen bars?"

"The man I talked to said the most he had seen was a half pallet of platinum, the same one he delivered two weeks prior, sitting in a secure facility," Rabben answered. "Claims it ranged between that and just a few stacks of other metals."

I shared a look with Tatnia, who could only shrug in response.

"Now, don't get me wrong. This hand-off facility is under heavy guard. We aren't talking about an empty warehouse here," Rabben continued, holding two hands out in a slow-down gesture. "You would have to work for this. But depending on what's sitting around in the stores, you could get all the precious metals you need, and maybe then some."

I sent another look to Tatnia, who nodded subtly. A similar look at Nal garnered the same result. With my oldest crew members in agreement, I leaned forward with a smirk.

"Tell me more."