

When we landed back at the *Chariot*, I was itching to get started with the Arcane Enchanter. We had filled just shy of seventeen soul gems in total, which was plenty to finish the enchanter and do a bit of experimenting. Of course, I would need some stuff to experiment on, which would have required me to go on a shopping trip if Julius hadn't volunteered on the way back. It seemed that my crew was just as excited about the prospect of enchanted equipment as I was.

We landed inside the empty hangar wing of the *Chariot* and quickly offloaded the BXs before Julius left to trinket shopping, this time riding the MVR since the *Arrow* was a bit bulky. As he left, I walked around to see how everyone was doing, finding that only Miru and Calima were on board. Everyone else was still out taking care of their tasks.

I quickly checked in on Miru, finding her diligently working on the Naval B1s. I thanked her for her work on the BXs and assured her that they were very helpful. When we were done chatting, I made my way directly to the enchanting room. I was nearly bubbling in excitement as I quickly opened my grimoire, paging through the guide and pulling out the necessary instructions. I then pulled eight filled soul gems from the satchel and, one by one, slotted them into their mounts. When they were all in place, I finally cast the last preparation spell, the entire table glowing for a long moment as I dumped my whole mana pool into it. When I was done, the glow slowly faded.

For a moment, I looked at the table, silently wondering if there was going to be some sort of signal that it was complete. After a full minute of nothing happening, I frowned. I paged through the grimoire, wondering if I had done something wrong before flipping through the pages before letting out a whoop of excitement as I realized its contents had expanded, revealing a long section about the process of enchanting.

I quickly picked up the book and left the enchanting room behind, happily finding a comfortable position on the lounge couch to finally start the long-awaited learning enchantment process.

In *Skyrim*, in the video game at least, the process of enchanting was basically about three things. The first was having the right materials, which boiled down to a soul gem and whatever you wanted to enchant. The second part was learning a particular enchantment, which you did by finding or buying something that already held that enchantment and essentially sacrificing it at the Arcane Enchanter. The third part was your skill level and perks, which directly affected how effective you were at enchanting, as well as offering a variety of bonuses or broad increases to potency or cost. At the end of the day, it was just about as gamified a system as you could get.

I had known for a while that however enchantment would work for me, there had been little to no chance that it would work anything like it had in the game. As I read through the enchanting section in the grimoire, my theory was proven correct. The system I would be using was very different and a bit of a double-edged sword.

On one hand, I wouldn't be restricted by what enchantments I had broken down and learned. Instead, every enchantment I could learn was laid out for me, with page after page of options. This was good because I wasn't sure how to find enchanted items in the Star Wars universe. I was pretty sure the Force could do something similar to enchantment, but Force artifacts were rare, and a lot of them were steeped in the dark side.

On the other hand, this new enchanting system was far from the plug and play, snap your fingers and now you blowing things up with fire better than I knew from the games. Instead, it was a mentally intensive process where I would create a spell matrix inside a sturdy piece of material and then shift it to fit the dimensions perfectly. I would then have to pull the life force of a soul gem through the matrix, essentially burning the energy into the material. How strong the enchantment was boiled down to how long I could hold the matrix steady, how much energy I could guide through it, and how precise the matrix was fit to the glove, ring, amulet, or weapon. Enchanting stuff was a difficult and lengthy process, and that was ignoring how expensive the materials could get.

On top of that, not only is it very likely I would never even get close to the sort of stuff I could make as a video game character, but the list of enchantments was considerably smaller. Instead of having a fortify enchantment for every aspect under the sun, there were only four, those being fortify strength, stamina, magicka and dexterity.

There were also five attunement enchantments, each for a different school of magic. On top of that, there were four protective enchantments: one for shock, fire, and frost, as well as one for general protection from damage. Finally, there was water breathing, muffle, and mana storage.

The list for weapon enchantments was even shorter, with three elemental effects, soul trap, enhanced edge, absorb or damage magicka, absorb or damage stamina, and finally... paralyze.

The greatest letdown I learned while reading was that while the games took a lot of liberties to gamify the enchanting process, one thing they did very little to was the restriction of how many enchanted items you could have on you at once, though in-game it was just an aspect of what exactly you could wear in general.

Apparently, while weapon enchantments needed to be charged manually with a soul gem, passive enchantments all drew power from ambient energy. While this meant you never had to worry about your armor or amulet running out of charge, it also meant that wearing five rings, four necklaces, an enchanted hood, and a circlet would essentially cause the enchantments to run out of energy. If that happened too many times, the enchantments would become damaged and potentially fizzle out.

As a result of the passive enchantments essentially starving each other if they were too close for too long, the most common enchanting configuration was a ring or glove on each hand, a head or neckpiece, the chest plate, the legs, and the boots. This was considered to be the safest layout, and considering even a low-end enchantment was worth hundreds of gold, almost everyone followed it. Some lords might be willing to push the envelope and risk ruining a ring or hood, but most people couldn't afford to be so nonchalant about that much money.

A skilled enchanter would occasionally imbue two enchantments on a chest piece, and a master could enchant some types of leg armor twice as well. Such pieces were rare in modern Skyrim, though, as it was rumored a safe, dual enchantment process was lost to time.

Still, while it was unfortunate that I wouldn't be able to engage in the fiddly and easily taken advantage of enchantment system that existed in the game, my options were still impressive. Visions of Julius running around people in a blur, decked out in dexterity and stamina enchantments, floated in my mind, as did the image of Vaz, clad in heavy armor enchanted with strength and damage protection, laying down heavy fire while blaster bolts bounced off of her. Six enchantments per person was a lot to work with.

Of course, while I knew the concept was eventually achievable, I also knew it wasn't going to be easy. There was going to be an incredible learning curve to this process, and even when I got past the skill issue, soul gems would very quickly become a bottleneck to the process. I would be okay with one, maybe two more visits to the Crystal Caves, but after that, I knew I would need to start looking for more sources of Kyber.

About the time I was done with my reading, people began to filter into the lounge for dinner, including Julius, who had returned from his shopping trip. Despite desperately wanting to crack open the box he had returned with and subsequently stashed in the enchanting room, I put away my grimoire and sat down to eat with Julius, Calima, and Miru. Vaz and Pola had already eaten on the *Intervention*, before crashing in their rooms from a long day of hauling and setting up a high-tech forge in what had once been the second largest storage bay in the *Intervention*, the one on the second deck.

"So... did you finish your altar thing, Boss?" Miru asked before I could swallow my first bite.

"I did, and yes, it finally unlocked more pages in the grimoire," I responded, answering what I was sure was the next question.

"Oh, uh... how long until you're ready to try enchanting something?" Julius asked eagerly

"I'm probably gonna have to put off trying until tomorrow, unfortunately. It's a very long process, and staying up that late is very unhealthy," I explained, giving Miru a look for the last chunk before looking back to Julius. "Sorry, I know you rushed off to get those trinkets and things..."

"Don't worry about it, Boss," Julius said, waving away my concern. "I would have just sat around, doing nothing until tomorrow anyway."

The conversation continued, and I explained the basics of enchanting, or at least what I knew so far. Eventually, the topic shifted from what I was working on to what Miru was working on.

"Racer should have the programming done by tomorrow," She explained, poking at her food. "All ten Naval droids are in pretty good condition. A few needed some small repairs, but with the parts we have, that won't be an issue."

"When they are ready... Perhaps we should take them on a test cruise?" Calima suggested softly. "I have worked with astromechs... before, but never droids like these."

"Not a bad idea," I said. "I want to test the gunner function that Racer found in the normal B1s as well."

"Racer and will get the droids done by tomorrow afternoon," Miru nodded excitedly. "Then-"

"Don't rush Miru, aim for the day after tomorrow. "I want to be there for the test, and Julius and I will be busy tomorrow. So take your time, get everything set, and we can go after that."

"Fine, fine. Racer and I will have everything ready for the day after tomorrow," Miru accepted reluctantly.

Not long after, we decided to go on the shakedown cruise, Tatnia and Nal returned from their interviews. They had gone through multiple pilot bars, combing through dozens of pilots and crew. Unfortunately, unlike Terr'skiar, which had been a trade hub and therefore full of pilots and other crew just looking for new work, this planet was much more out of the way. This meant that our options were a lot more sparse. We had been spoiled for choice when we found Calima, but now we were scraping the barrel, trying to find a diamond. After briefly describing three of the most promising but still subpar choices, I shook my head.

"I don't want you guys to settle for anything other than a great fit," I explained, both of them nodding in general agreement. "We still have plenty of time, so there is no reason to rush. Even if we don't find anyone in this city, then we can check the others. If that fails, we will go to other planets. I want a reliable captain who we can trust alone with the *Intervention*."

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," Miru said happily. "The B2s will figure out they are being stolen really quickly and work with the B1s to take the ship back. Unless you plan on hiring so many people that they could overpower the B2s... what?"

"They aren't going to get confused and think the *Intervention* is being stolen if it goes on a solo mission, will they?" I asked nervously.

"Oh! No, all of the droids are tied into their ship's communication and computer systems," She assured us. "They know what's going on."

"Huh... alright, well the idea still stands," I said, turning back to Nal and Tatnia. "Even if the selection isn't the best, I don't want to settle."

"Understood. Perhaps an ad in the local boards for pilots and captains will help," Nal suggested. "Though it might only attract more unqualified people."

Before long, it was getting late, and I was starting to feel the effects of trudging through the fields and woods around the farm, tracking down dorums for most of th day. I spent an hour on my Recovery meditations before finally going to sleep.

The next morning was spent mostly staying out of everyone's way, as Julus and I were putting off hunting for the morning so I could try enchanting something for the first time. That meant that as Nal, Tatnia, Vaz and Pola were rushing around, getting ready to start working on their projects, we were just waking up, and trying to help where we could. When Nal and Tatnia left, BXs riding on the back of their speeder bikes, I headed back to the enchanting room.

The first thing I did was open up the box Julus had gotten, going through what I had to work with. After a few minutes of sorting, I finally selected a ring, a basic band of two different metals worked together. Once the object was chosen, I fished through my satchel, eventually pulling out a decent-sized soul gem, tossing it into the air and catching it.

I had put a lot of thought into what enchantment I wanted to try first, both before I had any idea what I would have access to and more recently when I had read through the available enchantments. I was tempted to try something like enhancing my magic or one of the fortifying enchants. However, I quickly realized that with how difficult and intensive the process was, and how minor the enchantment was likely to be, picking something like fortify strength was likely to lead me to wonder if the process had worked. So, instead, I settled for the mana storage enchantment, which would allow me to store mana inside the object to pull out later. As far as I could tell, it was the real-world equivalent to fortify magicka, creating a pool I could store and pull mana from rather than just increasing my overall capacity.

With my ring chosen, the soul gem ready my grimoire opened, I finally started the process.

The first step was to create the enchantment matrix inside the object. Line by line, I pushed my magic through the ring, creating the basic matrix slowly but surely. After about forty minutes, I finally formed the entire matrix, meaning I could start part two, matrix adjustment. Just

like when I was customizing a spell matrix to better fit my own body, soul, and personal magic, an enchantment matrix needed to be shifted to the shape, materials, and imperfections of the object. Thankfully, this was easy to do compared to spell adjustment, as all of the issues were physical, meaning I could feel my magic struggling to pass through the shift between alloys, or the slightly less pure spot along the inner side of the ring.

Unlike the spell adjustment process, I was pretty sure a skilled enchanter could probably adjust as they went, completely removing this process from the equation. I was far, far, *far* away from that point, but it only took about fifteen minutes until I was done, so I wasn't too upset.

With the enchantment matrix adjusted, It was time for the real challenge, the addition of life force. Leaning over the table, I put my left hand over the soul gem, my right already over the ring. Slowly but surely, I wrapped the soul gem in a spiral strand of my magic, encircling it multiple times before slowly reaching the singular strand over to my right hand and the prepared ring under it. After a few minutes of concentrating, I took a deep breath and bridged the last inch.

My magic strand lit up, the white shimmering light it usually let off before replaced by a much brighter pale blue. I could feel the life energy crossing along my thread of magic and pushing into the ring, burning itself in. Just as the book said, I could slow or speed up the rate of transfer by constricting the circles around the soul gem. Slowly, I increased the rate of transfer, the thread glowing even brighter before it suddenly flashed bright enough to daze me for a moment. The sudden increase in light distracted me for just a split second, and a slight increase in temperature was my only warning before the enchantment matrix suddenly failed.

The ring exploded under my palm, sending a dozen metal shards whizzing off in every direction. Some of them sparked off the enchanted wood of the table, not even leaving a scratch, while a few others slammed into the walls and ceiling around me.

Quite a few of them stabbed into my hand, embedding themselves in my palm. One even punched through the other side, slicing my cheek before clicking off the wall behind me.

"Well.... Fuck."