

Not long after our crew meeting, we left Itander behind. I had a short meeting with Rabben, basically just shaking hands and saying goodbye, while the crew prepared to leave. It gave Nal a chance to do some food shopping for the next week, and it was only polite to say goodbye in person, especially after the opportunity that Rabben had presented us.

Once I returned, we promptly left, leaving Solinda behind.

Almost immediately after we jumped to lightspeed, I got to work. Originally, I had been imagining one enchantment per person. However, after taking a slightly better look at how much time I had, I decided to shoot for two. That left me with a minimum of 12 enchantments in total if I wanted to outfit everyone who was going with us on our next mission. That was eleven rings and one amulet since, apparently, Julius was already wearing a ring as well as wearing his fortify dexterity ring.

At the absolutely grueling pace of two enchantments a day, it would take six days to finish the project. Since I was pretty sure my brain would leak out of my ears if I followed such a crazy schedule, it would likely take a few days longer. Which meant I had no time to lose.

I immediately started working on an amulet for Julius. After discussing his options with him again, he decided that the best choice was to double down on his dexterity increase. He was impressed by the change in his speed, reflexes, and finesse that his first ring provided and was eager to see that increase even further.

Over the next two and a half days, I managed to finish not only Julius's amulet but two fortify strength rings for Vaz and a ring of dexterity for Calima. By then, we had arrived at our destination, a frozen tundra planet called [Takobo](#). Apparently, whoever was selling the YV-260 had picked it as their retirement planet, something I couldn't quite wrap my mind around, considering how cold and miserable the planet looked.

Calima left not long after we landed, with Tatnia and Nal in tow, to go take care of the purchase. As focused as I was on enchanting, I left the ship buying and preparing for the rest of the crew. I had a mental gauntlet to complete, and I trusted them to handle themselves. I reminded them to keep the ship as separate as possible from the rest of us, as well as the *Intervention* and *Talos Chariot*, before waving them off and returning to my work.

After nearly seven days of pushing myself mentally as I worked my way through my set target, I was finally done. In the end, Calima received another ring of fortify dexterity, while Allum, Tatnia and Nal received one dexterity and one strength each. I also made a ring of Destruction attunement and an amulet of fortify dexterity for myself.

While my brain was well and truly fried by the time I was done with everything, I was ecstatic with what I had achieved. Not only was I now consistently staying focused enough to successfully drain two jewels without losing control and failing, but I could also feel it getting

easier. I was hoping that, if I was lucky, by the time Pola and Vaz started producing beskar armor, I would be able to use three whole gems.

When I was finally done, I spent the second half of the day recovering. I essentially spent nearly eight hours staring at the ceiling in the *Chariots* lounge, drinking ale and trying to string words into sentences. The next morning, I was thankfully feeling a bit more human, so Miru insisted that I go visit our newly acquired ship. I agreed, mostly because I had already planned on it. Calima picked me up in a rented speeder, which the crew was using since the Arrow could be linked to our group, and flew me over. We even left the large landing pad on foot, Calima picking us up once we had put a few blocks between us and our most likely well-known ships.

"It certainly looks well maintained," I commented to Miru as we circled the YV-260 in the rented airspeeder. "Not a mark on her."

We landed nearby on the separate landing pad and quickly made our way inside. The interior was clean and just as well maintained as the outside. The ship was broken up into two sections, the fore and aft. The aft was basically just a large cargo space, surprisingly large due to the extra space built into the belly of the ship. It had nowhere near as much space as the *Chariot*, which was not surprising considering it was half the size, but it was exceptional for its class.

The fore end of the ship was slightly elevated above the floor of the aft area. It was there that the crew and passenger quarters were, as well as a small lounge and the bridge. The previous owner had clearly not been content to pick between form and function, instead opting to spend his credits upgrading his ship to have both. It might have cost me a lot more because of it, but as I was walking through the interior, it was hard to argue with the results. The ship was stylish, crisp, and clearly functional.

Originally, when we first conceived this aspect of the plan, I had assumed we would be buying a cheap, basically disposable ship. We would modify it, use it for the mission, and then offload it to some random spacer or the Rebellion. When Miru first showed me this ship, and now having inspected it myself, I couldn't help but agree that buying and ultimately keeping it was probably a better idea. I was already considering using one of my favors with General Syndulla to get a full smugglers or blockade runners kit installed, whatever that would entail. Having a ship on hand that can get in and out of restricted planets would be incredibly useful in the future.

Miru, who had finished the less-than-legal upgrades a day before I finished my enchantments, eagerly gave me a tour of the ship. Once the first tour was done, she went over all the secret compartments.

"So the first thing I did was start with the easy places," She explained. "Places that are too small to install life support systems but big enough to be useful, like for the commando droids."

The young genius reached behind one of the lounge's larger seats as she talked, and the back popped forward with a hiss of a breaking seal. She pulled the seat back further, revealing a compartment that was barely big enough for a commando droid. She pointed to a box built into the base of the compartment.

"This is a sealing unit. It was designed for museums to preserve sensitive exhibits, but it also does an excellent job making the compartment blend into the rest of the ship," She explained. "It controls temperature and pressure, purifies the air, and half a dozen other things. This..."

She said while reaching down and opening up the back of the compartment door, showing off an interior that was filled with wires and computer parts.

"Will scan as standard ship parts, so even if they start sniffing around the chair without access to the lock, it will just look like a normal chair covering ship internals. I did that in most of the compartments, though it wasn't necessary everywhere."

She pushed the compartment closed before we moved on to the rest of the ship. In total she managed to fit two dozen hidden compartments, ranging from the size of a large microwave to two massive ones big enough to hold two people in relative comfort. We would have plenty of room to bring everything we needed, all while being safely invisible to Imperial Customs. We even had enough room for five commando droids, way more than I had hoped to bring.

It was impressive work, not that I expected anything different from Miru and her team of repair droids at this point.

Once the tour was over, it was time for us to make the final preparations. The YV-260, now called the *Starcaller* as a deliberately forgettable name, was already stocked with enough provisions for the mission, but we had yet to load it with equipment. It took a while to transport our weapons and the BXs to the ship in a way that wasn't obvious, but we chipped away at it. In the end, it only took an extra day.

Once everything was ready, the team split up. Miru, Dazem, Vakim, and Pola all stayed with the *Chariot* and *Intervention*. They would hang around for a few more days, before taking off and leaving for Thila Command. The rest of us piled into the *Starcaller*, with Calima and Allum at the helm.

It was a tight fit, considering that the stock version of the ship only came with space for two pilots and two passengers. Luckily, the previous owner had taken the two passenger rooms, expanded them and turned them into double bunk rooms. That meant we had room for four passengers, meaning we were only down one bed. I was going to volunteer to sleep on the couch, but Julius and Allum agreed to switch off sleeping in one of the crew quarters before I could.

Even with the barely adequate sleeping space, we were forced to spend most of our time in the cargo hold, as there wasn't nearly enough room for all of us in the lounge. The rest of the crew passed the time by playing Sabbac, but I was determined to use the two days it would take for us to get into position, as well as the time we spent waiting for Rabben to give us the all-clear, learning new magic.

At this point in time, I was picking spells based on what could maybe, sort of, possibly be useful, having officially reached the end of the Adept spells that I absolutely needed to know. On the first day, I learned Heal Middling Trauma, a Restoration spell that I had been putting off for a while because my other Restoration options had been working fine so far. Where all other healing spells I knew simply infused the recipient with healing energies, repairing everything with only a minor ability to direct it, Heal Middling Trauma could be directed to a single wound or spot, ensuring that the target doesn't bleed out because an arterial injury while all the healing energy I used took care of some a surface burn or a concussion. It was also better at healing wounds that resulted in more missing body mass, though there was a hard limit to how much that worked.

On the second day and third day I focused on Conjuration, learning Conjure Fighter first and Conjure Ice Atronach second. Conjure Fighter was similar to Conjure Archer, in that it conjured up a non-elemental construct that fought for me, though this one was focused on melee fighting. I could summon it with a variety of weapons or shields, the latter of which cost extra mana but actually absorbed a decent amount of damage according to the grimoire. I was happy with how [it looked](#) as well.

The [Ice Atronach](#) was similar in most ways to the Flame Atronach, in that it was an elementally themed conjured construct, with access to its element and nothing else. I wasn't entirely sure why the Frost Atronach was so different from the Flame variant, but it undoubtedly was a much stronger spell. It had access to high levels of magic, lasted longer and was slightly tougher. The other side of that was that it was *much* more expensive, mana-wise.

On the fourth day, I was attempting to learn a destruction spell when a Hyperwave message came through. It was short, anonymous, and had the proper, pre-agreed password on it. It confirmed that a transport ship from Itander had just left Gizer, having offloaded their goods. It also confirmed that there was plenty of material for us to steal, including the platinum from this and the last delivery.

"Alright, everyone," I said, all of the present crew gathered up in the cargo space. "This will be the first time we are going into such a deeply imperial-controlled area. The good news is that, with such a heavily populated area the chances of our comms being tapped are slim to none. So, I want near constant communication. The plan, as it stands now, allows for a lot of flexibility, but there are limits. How we avoid those limits is by keeping everyone in the same loop so that we can react to issues quickly."

I looked around at everyone, getting clear faces and eager nods.

"Good. If no one has any questions, then Calima, you can lead us in. Everyone else, it's time to head to our luxury accommodations," I said, referring to our smugglers' compartments. "Remember to double-check your respirators before you seal yourself in."

Again, everyone nodded before we split up and went our separate ways, spreading out around the ship. While the ship was now covered in covert storage, only some of them were large enough for people. I made my way near the cockpit, following behind Calima for most of the way, only to stop just before the final doorway into the bridge. Calima gave me a nod before sitting down in the pilot's chair, getting to jump to lightspeed. One of our astromech droids was with her, now assigned permanently to the ship. Miru already had plans to upgrade it to something similar to Racer.

I watched our pilot working for a minute before reaching up around the top of the metal door frame that led into the bridge. I slid my hand along it until I reached a section just barely smoother than the rest. I held my finger there for a moment while a scanner did its job before a click resonated behind me. The floor had opened slightly, allowing me to pry the space open all the way, revealing a compartment just about three feet deep, the same length wide, and four feet long. I carefully lowered myself inside, grabbing the mask that was waiting for me inside and pulling it on securely. The mask was part of an EVA system, supplying air and sealing around the face, which would allow the compartment to be negatively pressurized without harming me. I took several long, deep breaths, confirming that the system was working, before reaching up and closing the hatch above me, sealing me inside.

I could feel the pressure in the sealed space shift slightly, enough to be noticeable and even just barely uncomfortable, but I knew that as long as I had the mask on and it was sealed, I would be fine.

I settled down as best I could, my back against the metal wall of the compartment. I could feel the hum of the hyperdrive kicking on as we made the final jump, which would only last about ten minutes. I could also feel the temperature inside the compartment slowly lowered, hiding the fact that I was inside. I knew from Miru's explanation that the metal surrounding me would hide my heat signature well, and the museum regulator would do the rest.

The box was pitch black, completely soundproof and built well enough that I knew it would take a lot of work, and judicious use of magic to break myself free. Even though I had never been claustrophobic, and I knew I could technically release the hatch from the inside if I needed to, I was still slightly ill at ease from the utter silence and darkness.

I took a long, slow breath and held it for a moment before slowly breathing out. Calima would let us out when we landed. All I had to do was wait.