

It didn't take long for us to confirm our payment and offload what we had gathered. The bounty information directed us to some sort of game warden office, and they had clearly worked with mercenary types before. The process was quick and simple, and we were soon on our way back to the *Chariot*. When we arrived, the rest of the crew was waiting for us in the lounge, our dinners already warm and waiting for us. Julius and I quickly sat down, eager to hear how everyone's days had gone.

"Our workshop is set up," Pola explained happily. "We have everything we need to start experimenting with beskar."

"Is it going to just be trail and error or...?" I asked, trailing off when Pola shook his head.

"Beskar might be a rare metal, but there is some documentation on how to work with it," He explained. "It's just a matter of finding it. I'm pretty sure we could have figured it out on our own, but we managed to find a few papers and books about forging it," He explained. "Save one account that insisted that only the Mandalorians knew how to forge it properly, most of the other books agreed on most of the information."

"The information is basic but still puts us ahead of schedule," Vaz explained. "We have melting points, useful alloys, even tempering temperatures."

"That's fantastic," I said happily, leaning forward in my seat. "How close are you to giving it a try?"

Instead of answering, Pola looked at Vaz, and she nodded. He reached down and pulled out a single [ingot](#), passing it to me across the table. It was dark gray, with wavy lines of lighter, silvery gray running horizontally through it. It was heavier than it looked, but beyond that, it felt like a completely normal ingot of metal.

"That is nearly pure beskar," Pola explained with a smile. "We melted down a few of the lesser quality plates of armor, mostly to experiment with purification and test our equipment."

"That is impressive. Pola, Vaz, both of you, good work," I said, examining the ingot before passing it back. "Tell me about how much we have, and how much we need."

"Well, we could probably make twenty of these ingots if we melted everything down," Pola estimated. "Which would be enough to make armor for everyone if we were keeping it basic and only covering vitals."

"That's good, but what about full armor?" I asked.

"We would require a significantly larger amount of beskar for that," Vaz explained. "What we have now is enough for two, maybe three full sets of armor, depending on which alloy we settle on."

"What about pure beskar?"

"A single full set, and maybe enough to protect the vitals for a second," Vaz responded.

"Wait, why do you have so little?" Miru asked. "Didn't you salvage the metal from a few suits?"

"Beskar is so expensive that not even Mandalorians cover themselves completely," Vaz explained. "It is also heavy, so it is mixed with other, lighter metals. I don't believe pure Beskar is worth the weight."

"But we will lose a lot of its protection strength if you alloy it, won't you?" I asked, a bit confused. "I assumed the closer to pure it was, the better."

"It's a balance between weight, flexibility, and protection," Pola explained. "Too much beskar and the armor weighs too much. Not enough, and you'll lose out on its toughness. The information we read says that any plate around two or three millimeters thick, with a sixty-five percent beskar ratio will still stop three or four blaster bolts from most rifles. However, it will most certainly need repairs and re-tempering afterward."

"Okay... If I'm honest, some of this is going over my head, and I've got enough stuff I need to worry about understanding to try and learn another. I'm going to trust you guys to figure out the best options for us," I said, both Vaz and Pola nodding in understanding. "We just need to figure out the best way to make more Besker. We need a *lot* of material to convert, and it's going to get expensive fast."

"Boss... what about Rabben?" Miru asked. "They dealt in platinum and... what was the new ones we found?"

"Vonium and varium," Nal answered. "All three are valuable, especially the platinum and vonium."

"... Okay. Nal, get in contact with Rabben. Ask if there is any way we could purchase or earn a large portion of metal. It's... well, we can't ask him to put himself in danger, but we probably need a lot more than we can afford, so make sure he understands we are willing to venture into grey areas as long as civilians aren't hurt.

"Will do boss," The Duros confirmed with a nod.

"Pola, Vaz, keep experimenting with the beskar we have, maybe start planning what the final product will look like," I said. "It's probably going to be a few weeks before we can get out there. Maybe make a few chest plates as temporary protection in the meantime."

"Alright, we'll do our best," Pola said, sounding determined and eager to prove himself.

Dinner continued for a while longer before, eventually, we went our separate ways. I made my way to the enchanting room, spending my evening on a second magicka storage ring. I wanted to experiment a bit and try to improve past my first successful attempt while it was still fresh in my mind.

I worked for a while, completing each step normally until I reached the final process, guiding the life energy through the ring. Instead of letting it flow at the normal speed, as I had before, or speeding it up like I did on my first failed attempt, I slowed the flow of life energy down as much as I could at my skill level. Where the previous enchantment had taken about two hours, I was determined to at least pass three.

Slowly but surely, I drained the soul gem, the energy passing through the ring. At three and a half hours, my concentration slipped, and I lost control of the thread. Thankfully, instead of feeding too much life force into the ring and breaking it, the thread simply broke and faded, the shock causing me to lose the matrix as well.

I took a moment to wipe the sweat off my face, feeling a bit shaken, my brain slow and foggy. I had been focusing non-stop for nearly four hours, and the effect it had on me rushed to the foreground all at once. It was like pausing in the middle of a long run, only to realize your legs refuse to start again when you try and continue. I quickly cast Fast Heal and Respite on myself, which helped take the edge off but did not get rid of the feeling completely.

I shook my head and looked down, finding that the soul gem looked to be about two-thirds drained, the glow having faded significantly and the crystal mostly opaque. I dropped it down into my partially spent box and pulled on the ring, quickly feeling it out with my magic, only to tilt my head in confusion.

The ring, despite only being charged with two-thirds of the soul gem, felt just as potent, maybe even a hair more than my first successful attempt. That meant that if I had managed to hold on for longer, the enchantment would have been significantly more potent.

"Then what's the point of increasing the flow?" I asked myself, idly playing with the ring on my finger.

I shook my head and pulled off my face shield, putting it on the table, my mind still trying to puzzle out the dynamics of enchanting. Eventually, as I got ready for bed, I settled on the fact that the only way to figure it out was to experiment and find out.

The next morning, I woke up later than usual, having stayed up late knowing we would be doing the shakedown cruise. I got dressed quickly, though, stepping out into the hall to see what everyone was up to. I took one step out of my room, only to jump back as a B1 sprinted by, quickly followed by a second and third, all three of them heading straight for the aft tail.

"Go, go, go, go, YES!" Julius shouted, standing by the entryway into the engine maintenance hallway, pumping his fist as the first droid ran by him, slowing down once it did.

"Did I win?" It asked in its iconic robotic voice, Julius slapping it on its shoulder.

"That's right, now Miru owes me five credits!" Julius said happily before turning. He clearly didn't expect me because he tensed and froze. "Oh... uh...morning Boss."

"Boss!" Both of the droids said at once, going rigid and offering a salute.

"Good morning," I responded. "What's going on-"

Before I could finish any question, Miru practically leaped out of the stairs to the first deck, now between Julius and I.

"Did I win?" She asked excitedly before turning to see me. "Oh... Morning Boss. We were just testing the droid's stabilizers."

"By having them race through the ship?" I asked with a raised eyebrow. "It's not a playground, guys. You could have at least done it outside."

Miru apologized again, motioning for the three droids to drop their salutes, before explaining that they were *actually* testing the droids, though the stabilizers were just an excuse. Instead, Miru wanted to know how quickly and efficiently they could move through the ship so she would know where to put the charging bays. I chuckled and shook my head.

"That's easy, as close as possible. Hell, I'd build it into the chairs if they didn't need to work for people still," I answered. "These guys are hilariously unsteady, especially when shit goes sideways."

"Sideways? Did the gravity go out?" One of the droids asked, which I pointedly ignored.

"Okay... I think I can fit the Naval B1s in the cockpit... Maybe two gunners can stay in the lounge..."

The genius Twi'lek trailed off, mumbling to herself as we moved to the fore of the ship. I took a peek inside the bridge to see two Naval B1's, identifiable by the blue markings on their shoulders and Calima. One of the droids was sitting down at the copilot's station, and the second at the sensors and comms station. Calima was standing over them, watching them work, when she spotted me.

"Boss... Good morning," She said with a nod. "I see you found my gunners."

"Apparently, they needed one more calibration test," I said, the Tholothian chuckling as Miru kicked the floor. "I think she owes Julius some credits."

Miru ignored us and directed the two normal B1s to sit at the gunner seat, sending the third one to the gunner controls in the far aft of the first deck. For a while, Calima and Miru worked to test the droids, asking them to do certain things, perform some checks, even asking for vague information to see how well they could problem-solve. Eventually, they were satisfied and asked permission to lift off the landing pad for the shakedown cruise.

"Get in contact with everyone and make sure they know we are leaving for a few hours," I said, getting a nod from Calima as she claimed her spot in the pilot's seat. "If you have a specific destination in mind, let them know just in case."

A few quick messages later, all done by the comms droid, and we were lifting off the planet, heading upwards and out of the atmosphere. When we were past any interfering traffic and the gravity well of the planet we jumped into deep space. The second we reverted to real-space, Calima started barking out orders, demanding sensor information, asking about energy levels, and talking to the droids on the gunner stations for updates on available targets. All of it was done at a speed and energy that surprised me, especially coming from the usually calm and quiet Tholothian.

As she worked, I leaned over to Miru and whispered.

"Hey... how low can we scale the power on the *Chariot's* guns?"

"Uh... pretty low... like until they are just a light show," She responded just as quietly. "Why?"

"Well, we have the raindrops... might be a good idea to give these guys a real target?" I suggested, Miru's eyes going wide as she picked up what I was laying out.

"That's a good idea... I can adjust the power output from here... and adjust the raindrops..."

After about twenty minutes of putting the B1s and the *Chariot* through their paces, Calima finally let up. While we talked, Miru started the process of setting up the mock battle, including setting a simulated combat protocol with the raindrops.

"How did they do?" I asked Calima, leaning against the doorway into the bridge.

"They were adequate," She said bluntly. "With a real pilot... at the helm, there aren't any real issues, as long as they...do as I say and don't mess up the simple commands. I'd hate to see one in control of... a ship, but with me in control, they should do fine."

"That's good. Being able to reduce the number of people needed to run the ships is a huge boon," I admitted, scratching my chin. "And not just because it's cheaper."

"Well considering... I could fly the ship pretty well by myself, what we learn here isn't necessarily going to translate directly over to how it works on the *Intervention*." She pointed out. "We won't... know until we try it."

I nodded in agreement and watched as Miru finished organizing our mock battle. All six of the raindrops disengaged from their docking locks, subtle clunks reverberating through the ship as they did. The *Chariot* pulled ahead of them, as if they were chasing us. After everything was set up, Miru counted down a fifteen-second head start before the droid in the sensor station gave the half squadron the green light.

I watched from the middle of the bridge, in what little space there was between the five stations around me, as the sensor readings showed the small, speedy raindrops rapidly caught up to us. The sensor droid quickly called out that they were approaching, before we could feel the rear cannon open up. I turned to watch the rear turret's point of view on a computer screen above the other gunner station, blasts of red energy firing through space.

Almost instantly, they were on us, swirling and whipping around the ship even as Calima started a dive, making the *Chariot* as difficult a target as possible.

When the raindrops started firing on the ship, our gunners quickly returned fire, our hidden weapon emplacements deploying and filling the dark void of space with a criss-cross of red energy. For a full ten seconds, the raindrops avoided any damage, lowering our shield by fourteen percent, or at least a simulated fourteen percent.

Finally, the droids scored a hit, "taking out" one of the "enemy" ships. From there, the mock battle was much more even, with Calima continuing to be as evasive as possible as the sensors called out the raindrop movements and the gunners laid down more comprehensive layers of fire.

When the last raindrop was "destroyed," they docked back up with the *Chariot*, and we reviewed how everything went.

"I still prefer real.... people with guns. Nothing will ever beat the pattern recognition of a sentient... brain," Calima said, shaking her head. "But the droids are an acceptable replacement... when no one else is available."

"What about the Naval B1s," I asked. "They good enough?"

"They seem to be. I'm impressed with.... how well they respond to vague questions, and they seem to know their way around the controls," The pilot admitted. "They work well enough for me."

"That's great!" Miru said happily. "I'll get their docking stations up and running so they will always be on hand to help!"