

I made it past the first hurdle in the first few minutes, willing my grimoire into my hands after a bit of trial and error. It was a strange sensation, like I was getting lighter, but not in a way that affected my actual weight. I opened the book, or as quickly as possible with my wrists connected with the binders, a word for the manacles that came to my mind fluidly but that I didn't actually remember knowing.

My own memory of Star Wars was spotty, at best, and a lot of the more minor details had long since faded. I had read plenty of the books while I was younger, from what was now called Legends, and I had seen all three trilogies, original, prequels, and sequels. But it had been ages since I read the books, and I didn't have nearly enough time or energy to see all the side movies, HBO series, and cartoons, even though I had heard some of them were really good. So while I did know some things, there were a lot of holes in that knowledge.

And that didn't even get into the fact that the entity had called this a "variant universe," a combination of the books and the newer stuff, which would have typically had a lot of overlap. I idly wondered which origin story one of my favorite characters, Wedge Antilles, would have in this universe. I was more familiar with the version from the legends, with dead parents as his catalyst to become one of the greatest starfighter pilots in the galaxy, but I couldn't actually wish that on someone.

I took a deep breath to focus myself and opened the book, revealing thick, sturdy paper that looked crude and rough, like it was handmade. Covering that thick paper was simple, straightforward, printed English words. I spent some time reading and skimming the book, making notes on interesting things to read in more detail later.

As far as I understood, this book was broken into six sections. First were the five magic schools available to the player in Skyrim: alteration, conjuration, destruction, illusion, and restoration. The final section was about enchanting, which was extremely interesting, but considering that the first page immediately mentioned that setting up an enchanting altar was "a precise art that required stable ground and proper materials," I skipped it for now.

I also noticed that conjuration was missing any mention of the necromancy spells I expected there to be, nor was there anything about Deadra summoning. Restoration was also different, missing anything to do with repelling the undead. I wanted to investigate further, but I had more important things to do.

I flipped back to the beginning of the grimoire, which started with a few pages about how to access your magic, something that needed to be done before you could even begin to practice magic.

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I would like to say that during the several hours I spent reading, I had mastered all of the novice spells and was simply waiting for my opportunity to strike. Unfortunately, it seemed like this would not be that type of adventure. Learning magic was not the simple process of reading the book and suddenly knowing exactly how to perform the spell, like the gamified magic of Skyrim pretended.

Instead, learning to cast a spell, or rather, spells in general, required precise control over magicka, or as the rest of the fantasy genre called it, mana. According to the grimoire, this is why more people in Skyrim didn't know magic. It seems not everyone could manipulate their mana well enough to work through even novice spells, and the ability to do it beyond novice spells was actually relatively rare. Luckily the entity seemed to have blessed me with some skill. As the book described, the process of learning to manipulate and control your mana for the first time usually took an intense two or three days of long meditation sessions to get in touch with my inner magic. I was able to work through the process in five or six hours. It was still impressive, at least by real-world standards, but I wouldn't become an Archmage overnight.

The description of how to access and manipulate my mana was frustratingly vague in most parts, leading me to fill in the gaps as best I could. According to the book, the process of drawing mana from your aetherial core was one that was unique to each individual, using visualization, focusing techniques, and even chants to draw the power from within. I tried visualizing it in several different ways, eventually settling on the image of my core being molten metal, which I pulled and drew in long, still-molten strands.

I spent so long visualizing it, my eyes closed and the grimoire in my lap, that at the end, I swore I could feel the heat in my arms, slowly being drawn, hammered, and pulled out to my palms. When I finally succeed, I open my eyes to find mana, a pure white cloud of energy that shimmered and put off a fair amount of light pouring from my palms. I stared at the glowing cloud for a few seconds before cutting it off when I realized I could feel my mana reserve slowly emptying. It was a hollow feeling, not painful but definitely not pleasant either.

As I released my mana, I could feel the pool slowly starting to refill. While I didn't exactly have a stopwatch on hand, I could immediately tell that running out of mana in a fight would mean that I was basically out until the fight was over. For prolonged battles, I could take a breather and let my reserves refill, but for any dispute that was constant action, it took way too long to refill for me to wait.

I could only hope that would change over time or with the help of enchanted items. I doubted I could get any of the infinite mana tricks working with this enchanting variation. Still, even a few small increases to the amount and speed of regen would be incredible.

Once I figured out how to pull out my mana, I moved on to actually learning my first spell. Like learning to pull my mana from my core, there was a certain level of personalization, mostly in how I controlled and manipulated my mana once it was in my palms. But unlike the entirely personal process of drawing out my mana, casting spells had specific actions that the mana

must go through before and after leaving my palm. Rotations, twists, splits, mergings, geometric shapes, and a variety of different pathways all needed to happen before the magic was forced out of your body. Even how the energy left your body changed depending on what kind of spell you were casting, be it targeted, a spray, on yourself, fired from your hands, and several other spell casting types.

The problem was that all of that needed to be done, but how exactly it needed to be done was heavily influenced by your own metrics. Everything from your natural essence to the alignment of your soul influenced this process. This meant that while you knew the sparks spell started with a spiral matrix so that your final expulsion could travel through its eye, forcing the charged energy to rotate and follow a tighter pathway, how tight or loose your spiral needed to be was dependent on several personal factors.

The bottom line was that there were two stages to the learning process, starting with memorizing the spell matrix and ending with a long tuning process that included an incredible amount of practice and experimentation. The grimoire assured me at several points that the natural aspect of the magic and spell matrix would ingrain itself over many uses, meaning that eventually, after reaching a certain proficiency with the spell and naturalizing its use, the matrix will get easier and easier to create. This will result in me needing less mana to use it, as well as eventually making casting it as simple as willing the matrix into my palm.

But considering that around four hours after I figured out how to pull mana to my palms, I had only cast the sparks spell a handful of times, twice by random accident tweaking the distance between the pathways of the first spiral and the rest amid a handful of tries trying to dial in the ejection magnitude, it was going to be a long, long process to get to that point.

In the end, the constant working with my magic left me feeling tired, as if I had just spent the entire day at work rather than sitting down, doing absolutely nothing physical. I willed my grimoire away, practiced sparks a few more times, adding a few more scorch spots on the cell wall in the process before leaning my head back and closing my eyes.

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I woke up to the sensation of someone kicking me in the ribs and shouting at me.

“Five more minutes,” I said, yawning and ignoring them, leaning my head against the corner of the room

“Get up, human!” A voice shouted at me, prompting me to look up at them. “Get up!”

Standing in the doorway, one hand on a blaster and the other on some sort of metal cylinder with a red button, was a short, hairy, non-human creature. It had entirely black eyes and a large mouth with a sharp row of teeth behind thin lips. I didn't recognize the species, nor did my newly implanted memories, which was not surprising considering just how many species of

creatures existed in Star Wars. When I didn't immediately jump up to obey him, he pointed the metal wand in his off hand at me and pressed the red button.

A zap of some sort of energy sent a spike of pain up my arms, causing me to curse and my arms to tense up. The pain, which was clearly coming from my binders, continued to stab into my arms until the alien stopped holding down the button.

"Alright! Jesus, alright!" I said, standing up by sliding my back up the wall. "No reason to get pissy."

The alien didn't say anything, it just stepped back out of the doorway and around the corner, disappearing from sight. I could see a hallway through the doorway, and another cell door that was already opened, a male Twi'lek with green skin stepping out. He was also in binders and was not looking happy about it. I stepped out into the hall, looking back and forth.

A dozen or so people were stepping out of cells, including various aliens and a few humans as well. I spotted a Wookiee, two more Twi'leks, three humans, a Duros and two more species I didn't recognize. All of them were wearing binders. Their expressions ranged from angry and defiant to terrified.

"Oh fuck." I said before getting the blue Twi'lek's attention. "Hey, this is a slave ship, isn't it?"

He looked at me in confusion for a moment before nodding slowly.

"Fuck, I really did piss them off," I mumbled.

I kept looking around, this time ignoring my fellow captives and focusing on our captors. I could see four of them, two at each end of the hall. All of them were armed, blasters in hand and ready to use should we step out of line. Two were species I didn't recognize, but the other two were Weeqay. A fifth human, the only one with his weapon in its holster, stood at the far end of the hallway.

"Alright, the quicker you are off my ship, the quicker I can get paid," He said, taking a step forward and motioning toward us. "Get moving!"

Two of the guards started shoving the closest prisoners, forcing the group to move forward to avoid getting knocked down. We were led down an empty corridor and then down a ramp that led out of the ship.

As we exited the slave ship, I could see that it was sitting in the center of a decent-sized landing pad that was old but clearly functional. The air was a little on the warm and humid side and stank of pollution. I didn't have much time to pause and examine the scenery before the prisoner behind me pushed me forward.

The guards led us across the landing pad to a waiting speeder, a large transport model that looked heavily modified to transport unwilling cargo. There was a driver in the front end, as well as two more guards. All three of them looked bored, a tempting target, but I could feel how many people were watching me at once.

“Alright, you karking wastes of space, get in!” One of the guards, the one that had woken me up, shouted.

I smirked and climbed in, everyone else following behind. When all of us were piled into the relatively cramped space, the door was sealed behind us. The modifications to the transport were even more apparent inside, as the interior was reinforced with metal plates. I looked around at my fellow prisoners, a few of them looking at me strangely because of my smirk.

“So... does anyone know where we are?” I asked, everyone swaying slightly as the speeder began to move.

“Nar Shaddaa” One of the humans, the only other male, said after a long pause. “They said they were taking us to Nar Shaddaa.”

“Gotcha, alright... So... Who wants to escape?”

I ignored the strange looks that the people who had heard were giving me as I focused on my binders. As I was practicing my magic and realized just how much time and effort would be needed to learn different spells, I spent a good while thinking through just which spell I wanted to learn first. Granted, at the time, I still overestimated how much I would get done, but I had purposely chosen spark because it was an offensive spell *and* it was a possible way to escape.

I focused on my magic for a moment, going through the motions of internally creating the spell matrix for sparks, this time in both hands at once. It destabilized once, but on the second try, I got it right. I curled my hands around at a painfully tight angle and unleashed the spell. Sparks of electricity fired across the short gap between my palms and the binder cuffs, sparking off and frying the internal electronics.

Of course, the electricity also sparked *through* the binders and into my arms, shocking and burning me. It wasn't as bad as getting the sparks spell fired directly into me, but I still let out a pained groan and clenched my jaw. After a full two seconds of firing the spell, I stopped and tested the now smoking binder, yanking my arms apart. On the second pull, the binders popped open and fell off my arms, falling to the ground.

I looked up, rubbing my slightly burned wrists, to find everyone was staring at me.

“So... Who's next?”

