

Chapter 20 (2,055 words)

As Sal walked into the private room, he saw Upgrade look at him with a raised eyebrow. An unspoken question on how the session with Sergeant Head went.

She stood up and cast a glance over in Blathnaid's direction before gesturing to the area outside of the doorway. "Let's have a quick catch-up."

Sal just nodded and retreated a few steps until he was outside.

When Upgrade joined him, she gave him a quizzical look. "You don't look traumatised, so that's a positive. How did it go?"

Sal gave her an earnest smile. "It was really good. Honestly." With a glance in at the simulation orb, Sal felt his internal resolve strengthen. He just needed to be smart with his time and everything would slot into place. Turning his attention back to Upgrade, he exhaled and gave her a shrug. "He helped me realise that I'm trying to do too many things at once, and that I was putting unnecessary pressure on myself. I just need to prioritise what's really important and build on that."

Upgrade nodded slowly. "Are you sure you went to see, Sergeant Head? Normally we have people coming back crying after they meet him." A smile started tugging at her lips. "Then again, most of those people aren't ready to hear that they're not a Hero. I'm glad it went well."

Sal laughed as he spread his hands wide. "It's honestly a relief. When he broke down how many years it would take me to unknot the top rankers, or craft equipment for them... it was a sobering exercise. It really put things into perspective."

Upgrade gestured for Sal to head back into the private room. "Well, its good that you took some value out of it. I'd encourage you to keep up the sessions for the next few months until the Resilience Class starts up for real. Keeping your psyche in healthy condition is very important."

"I will." Sal agreed as he entered their little domain. The simulation orb was hovering and ready to be activated. He didn't want to overpromise and under deliver, but he felt like it was the right time to tell Upgrade about the plans that were in his head. He didn't mind if Blathnaid overheard him, as it would effect her too in the long-term. "I realised what it is that I want to do for myself, by the way."

"Oh?" Upgrade asked as she leaned against her workbench.

"I'm going to start a Guild. It might not be right now, and it doesn't have anything to do with Vanessa or the Reavers. This is something I want to do, so that I can work on projects that will help people... I'll be able to earn good money, and I'll be able to unknot powers, and craft equipment for the teams in the Guild." Sal admitted as he looked at Upgrade, trying to get a read on her reaction. He guessed that after his nervous energy last night that she might be a little concerned with this sudden change in motivation and direction. To his surprise, she just smiled and gave him a nod.

"I think that's a great idea, Sal." Upgrade admitted as she crossed her arms. "As long as you don't get ahead of yourself and you keep an eye on your health, I don't see why it wouldn't be a possibility."

Sal grinned as he waved his hand around in a circular motion. "Obviously, I'd need competent crafting staff... so you might as well tell me what it would take to get you onboard with my future Guild."

Upgrade's smile didn't falter in the slightest. "What did I just say about getting ahead of yourself? Keep showing me that you've got the maturity to lead a Guild and I'll consider it when the time comes. Until then, I'm paid to teach you and the other crafters. So, get to it." She jutted her chin in the direction of the simulation orb before sitting back at her workstation, the smile not leaving her face the whole time.

Sal took off his jacket and slung it over the stool he had been using the previous day. Rolling up his sleeves, he approached the simulation orb with a smile. On the way to the workshop, he had thought about the best path forward and that was going to be passing Quest's test. Using the profiles that were on the database, like Fabi Maccles, he'd be able to potentially improve the lives of real people. There was far more value in doing that than creating new weaves like Mythcrafter. He'd still get to them, but they weren't a priority. Sal went up to the terminal and started going through the database, which was still sorted to the Support Classes. Removing the filter, he instead sorted by the lowest grade scores amongst the students. There was an additional filter that allowed him to sort it further based on the amount of essence gates they had access to. It would give him a list of people that had a high chance of synchronising to a stronger weave.

"You look like you're about to reinvent the wheel." Upgrade remarked from her bench. She was looking at him with a raised eyebrow.

Sal just shook his head as he sent the first profile to the humanoid torso. "Not today." The lights sprung through the artificial threads, bathing the room in light before dying down to a steady glow. "Today we're going back to the basics."

A flash of green light emanated around the room, highlighting Sal's form as he moved back to the terminal to queue up the next weave on the list. It had been about four hours since he had started, and he was storming through the weaves. Everything he had learned from Fabi's profile was applicable to the profiles he was working on and it sped up his progress massively. He wasn't keeping count of the weaves he was working through and instead looked at each of them as their own challenge that deserved his full attention. So many little mistakes had become apparent as he worked through them, and Sal had created some processes that sped things up even further. Almost like a ruleset that he was unconsciously adhering to, and it was working out.

[Skill Profile: Kane Brigadir]

[Weave Stability: 94%]

[Category: Energy Manipulation]

[Name: Resonance]

[Grade:12]

Sal blinked as he paused in his work, looking up at the orb. He had just gone with the profiles that the terminal had suggested, but he hadn't anticipated that it would produce someone he knew. Was Kane Brigadir the same Kane he had met in the elevator with Hannah? He didn't know Kane's surname, but maybe it was him. Sal pushed the thought out of his head and resumed his work. If he could disable the sound for the terminal, that would have been ideal, but he needed to hear the success rate of his weave alterations as well as the grades. He wasn't able to instinctively see which grade the weaves would end up at, but it was enough to know that he was fixing them with a high success rate.

The profile that was loaded up into the humanoid was by far the most complex that Sal had worked on yet, and it filled him with excitement knowing that this was a representation of a real person. It just meant that his work would potentially add a lot of value to the person, and he wanted to do his best to get it right. The weave itself was fully functional, but there was a huge disparity between the available essence gates and the condition of the weave itself. It was one of those occasions where Sal wondered what the right call would be. He could clean up the existing weave, or push it to the next stage of the evolution to see how the synchronisation would handle it. Since he had spent so much time going through the basics with the other profiles, he wanted to test himself with this one and started remapping the weave to incorporate the important gates. The Grand Design elixir had given him an epiphany of sorts towards the end of its duration, where he made a small breakthrough in understanding the weaves of everyone he looked at. A pattern existed with each of them, and became the basis for his first ruleset. It was a simple design that formed the foundation of the weave, allowing for future evolutionary growth. When Sal had done it for Fabi, he incorporated every single gate available, where this didn't put that sort of strain on the foundation. It wasn't stretched thin, and instead allowed for more efficiency.

Sal couldn't really explain it, but it felt like everything moved faster in the tighter array he constructed. The later parts of the weave would be able to incorporate the other gates, and Sal wondered if it would boost the person's growth rate. Faster weaves didn't really have any sort of indicator with the terminal or simulation device, so he didn't know if his new mapping method actually offered any benefits. It just felt right and Sal was content with that for now. The fact that there hadn't been any red lights lately showed him that he was definitely on the right path.

The weave in front of him eventually revealed its secrets and Sal built it up as much as possible, moving it to the next stage of evolution and wiring the threads to the available gates. It was a very strange feeling knowing that it was going to work. The indecision and doubts that he had been so scared of where nowhere to be found, and it was simply from having so much practice with the other profiles that came before this. Everything he wanted to test had no repercussions, and it was letting him run wild with his theories. He'd open the door to the wild experiments when he wasn't working on a profile for a person. There was no need to take risks when the solutions were straightforward. After about forty-five minutes of toiling away on the profile, Sal stepped back and looked at his work with a smile. It was definitely an upgrade on the weave, and his foundation looked very healthy too. It was hard to say by looking at it what the result would be, but he knew that he had opened the door for more progression on whoever owned the weave.

A green flash lit up the room, causing Sal's smile to grow wider. He was halfway to the terminal to load up the next profile when the results came through. His mouth dropped when he heard the first words.

[Skill Profile: Anna Sakura]

[Weave Stability: 98%]

[Category: Energy Manipulation]

[Name: Void]

[Grade:22]

"Void?" Sal repeated aloud. Wasn't her ability to cancel the powers of others? Void didn't really make any sense, as the only connotation he had with that term were the Demonic Voiders that teleported behind their opponents. Did the weave improvement actually make her ability worse? Going from a cancellation ability to a teleportation one didn't seem like much of an improvement when he thought about it. Well, as an Assassin Class, she would likely have a lot of usage out of a teleportation ability, but it definitely didn't have the destructive power of being able to kill demons with a single touch.

Sal frowned as he thought about reverting the changes or somehow putting a note on the terminal to revisit that particular profile. His goal wasn't just the outcome, but instead to improve the weaves. The last thing he wanted was for Anna Sakura to hunt him down because he made

her weave unstable. She was already a part of the Saviour Class for the Third-Year students, which meant that she'd almost certainly qualify for a Skill Implant or an Imprint of this altered weave.

[Description: Allows user to create a large area of effect that nullifies movement and essence capabilities of any target within the area. User is not bound by these restrictions and can teleport freely within the area of effect.]

"Fuck." Sal breathed as he heard the description. On the bright side, it definitely didn't sound like a downgrade anymore.