

Chapter 12 (2,033 words)

Sal really didn't know what to expect from this or if it would even work the same way it did with his own weave. When he had completed the Skills Registration a few months ago, he had tried to hold onto the best versions of Upgrade, Appraisal and Restoration at the same time. Three independent weaves were far too much for his body, especially when all of them had their own complexities and took up an enormous amount of thread. He instinctively combined them in such a way that they would work together, which had resulted in the creation of the Mythcrafter ability.

The first three threads that were in front of him were the ones that had the highest synergy to the Mythcrafter ability. Construct, Concept and Refine. He chose it because he was most familiar with Invention and Replication category types. None of them were in good enough shape to work with, so Sal set about correcting them first before doing anything else. He idly wondered if his own profile was loaded into the system and if he'd be able to experiment with his own essence gates in relative safety? It wasn't important just yet as he approached the first of the abilities.

Concept was Captain Chatfield's ability. It allowed him to inspect a piece of equipment and then use essence to recreate a version of it that he could wear. Temporary equipment didn't feel all that safe to Sal, but it had apparently served Chatfield well in his rise to fame. Being able to outfit an entire team with equipment made of essence did sound like a great ability, but just not something that Sal was particularly interested in. Maybe when he had the new coat equipped and a much larger pool of available essence, but until then, it wasn't as appealing as Construct.

Construct was Blathnaid's ability. It allowed her to use essence to shape materials into whatever she was visualising. Sal had been able to do elements of that when he was refining materials and upgrading things using essence, but to craft an entire project using just essence? It was a little intimidating to think that it was even possible, but he had seen what Restoration was capable of. Also, if he was being honest with himself, the Customize ability, or even Fabricate that Fabi Maccles had was on par with Construct. He wondered how much essence it would take for the complete restoration of one of the ruined buildings out in the reclaimed zones. Sal twisted his head back and forth as he thought about it. Construct was the strongest contender so far for him as a straight-up ability, but there was no need to double-up when Blathnaid already had access to it.

Refine was a new consideration completely. Sal looked at the weave carefully but didn't see any sort of clues of how it operated from the pattern alone. He walked back to the terminal and had a look at the description for the Refine ability, wondering what it did specifically.

[Refine: Allows user to elevate a random stat of crafted equipment in terms of composition, quality, grade, attributes, outputs and effects.]

Sal stared at it for a few moments in shock as he looked down at Upgrade who was busy designing. He wanted to ask her if she had come across the Refine ability much in crafting circles, but decided against it as he saw the look of concentration on her face. His plan of combining the three skills into one was pushed to one side as he focused his full attention on the Refine ability. It was the first one that actually sparked some sense of excitement in him as he thought about how powerful it might become with the right corrections. He looked at the weave they had on record for a frame of reference before getting started.

[Skill Registration: Known]

[Weave Stability: 64%]

[Category: Invention]

[Name: Refine]

[Grade:3]

Sal nodded his head as he approached the weave. He rolled his shoulders and pulled them back in a stretch before moving his fingers toward the thread. "Time to show me your secrets." He muttered to himself as he inspected the pattern carefully. Rather than jumping straight into making changes to it, he wanted to see if he could determine the foundations like with the previous abilities. Quest didn't assign him this task just to get results, he was there to learn, and that's what Sal intended to do with his time. It was a slower process, sure, but Sal didn't mind as he paced around the weave, following threads with his fingers to visualise their purpose. There weren't many similarities that he'd be able to chalk down as principles for Invention category weaves, but that was fine. It would have been nice to build out some sort of rule set with the weaves, but a part of him was more excited by the fact that all of them were wildly different.

When he started correcting the weave based on his instincts, Sal managed to enter an almost flow-like state as one improvement followed another. It didn't take long for him to understand the foundations and he reinforced them unconsciously before moving onto the other areas that were flawed. While he could have tried to find the previous iterations of the ability or the future evolutions of its family within the Invention category, Sal was more interested in what a top grade would look like with the Refine ability. He wasn't even sure if every ability had evolutionary paths, or if the ones he had looked at were the only ones. It was food for thought and he became curious if Appraisal and Restoration had similar groupings. It was only when he was going through the weave and building it up to be the best it could be, that he realised he had never tried to iterate on the skills of his parents. He only ever accepted them as they were and how they could be made more efficient.

All of the ultimate abilities he had showcased were only at the stage of the user he was replicating from. Was that the reason he hadn't burned himself out and destroyed his own

internal network of gates? What would have happened if he had tried to activate the ultimate weaves of the top abilities at grade twenty-five? It wasn't worth dwelling on, but it did cause an involuntary shudder to run down Sal's spine as he continued his work. It did mean two things though, that he had been playing with a very dangerous ability and his his parents had been right to caution him against using it recklessly. The other factor was that he wasn't utilising his replication ability to its full potential. Would the coat be able to handle the essence required for the heavy-hitting abilities?

Sal shook his head as he tried to discard the torrent of questions that pierced through his skull. He wanted answers to his questions, but was worried that there wasn't likely going to be any sort of authorities on the subject. Skill Research was apparently manned by Replicators like him, but the results they had to show for it was a database of half-broken weaves and an Implant machine that he knew very little about. There were all sorts of cautionary tales when it came to skill weaves and how they should be nurtured, but there were far too many opinions and not enough facts available as general knowledge. Even the likes of Brophy having a secret breathing technique to increase the amount of internal gates was mind-blowing. Sal grew up knowing he had an internal core of essence, but wouldn't have been able to realise that it was made up of a network of smaller gates. Those were only things he learned upon entering the Academy.

A flash of green light washed over the room, causing both Upgrade and Blathnaid to look up in curiosity. Sal followed their gaze to the orb as it calculated the results of his freshly completed weave. It wasn't as intricate as the others, so Sal guessed that it was still an early stage ability. If it topped out at anything lower than grade fifteen, he'd push it to the next stage to see what sort of improvements it could make. The random element of the skill was the only thing that bothered him about Refine. To make it a real contender for his implant, he wanted it to be something he could control with his will, allowing him to increase the efficiency of the important parts of his crafting.

[Skill Registration: Successful]

[Weave Stability: 100%]

[Category: Invention]

[Name: Refine]

[Grade:16]

Sal waited a few moments as he stared at the orb, but the description didn't change at all. With a glance over to Upgrade who was still looking at the orb, he decided to ask her for her opinion. "Does the simulation only make deductions based off the name and category of the skill, or does it factor in the grade when it's making descriptions?"

Upgrade's left eye squinted slightly as she looked off to the right as though trying to remember. "I don't think that was really a priority for us when we were putting it together. The grades were mostly below the fifth level, so there wasn't a huge incentive to factor it in. The vast majority of

processing power is focused on weave stability and identification." Her brow furrowed as she got to her feet and moved closer to the terminal. "We could maybe get it to run simulations overnight, but it would require a new script. What's the bottleneck?"

Sal gestured at the weave he had just improved without looking at it. "It's gone from three to sixteen, but there's no difference in the report it gives us. It would be nice to know the scope of the grades so we know what we're working with. Like, at grade three can I only refine an ingot of void metal? Would sixteen let us improve the Legendary Sniper Rifle? I don't have any frame of reference."

Upgrade nodded in understanding. "There's no real rush on that sort of functionality for the minute other than to sate your curiosity." She looked at Sal with a smile. "You've a Tower to prepare for and the licensing exams. Visualising yourself as a Saviour and planning ahead on what ability you're looking for is smart, but you should focus on getting permission to use Skill-Master." She tapped him on the shoulder reassuringly before moving back to her desk. "Correct some profiles, or play around with combinations. We'll record all the data and then do a full-dive diagnostics on power scales when we're closer to the finish line. Sound good?"

Sal looked at the thread for refine and nodded slowly. "I'm going to work on a few more weaves before getting back to the profiles. Are you sure there's nothing you or Blathnaid need help with?" He tried to keep the hopeful tone out of his voice, but Upgrade caught it.

"Patience, Sal. We're going to be doing this right." She answered with a laugh. "I'm genuinely surprised that you're not trying to create the Mastery skill, or whatever it was that you needed for Gallant. Wouldn't you just be able to test loads of weaves together to see if you can make the skill you need?"

Sal froze at those words as he stared at the orb in shock. She was completely right. This was the best opportunity to find a weave that could work for Gallant. Even if it wasn't a solution for Brophy's personal weave, Sal could replicate whatever weave he came up with and use it in his crafting. It was the perfect workaround and would reduce the reliance on others. The only issue is that he had absolutely no idea how to build towards a completely unknown ability. He didn't even know where to start, but it was an exciting prospect. The missing piece of the puzzle was something he could create with Skill-Master. Sal looked at the simulation orb and grinned. He had everything he needed.