

---

## Not Just a Footnote

*Numerous events following the Flash have significantly shaped the evolution of our society and the world we inhabit today. While many of these events were pivotal, some stood out more than others.*

*The individuals behind these monumental feats have left an indelible mark on history. I am both privileged and humbled to count myself among them. Witnessing the achievements of my contemporaries over nearly two centuries has been a profound experience.*

*In this work, I endeavor to chronicle the confluence of events and innovations that have forged our present. Although most of my esteemed peers and those trailblazers are no longer with us, their enduring legacy is reflected in each of you.*

*To those who are still out there, thank you for all that you have and continue to give us.*

*Foreword: A History of Mana. 184 SA*

The cold wind of early winter whipped through the marketplace, causing the hanging banners to flutter and the stall owners to pull their cloaks tighter around themselves. Sloane stood before the town's guard captain, her posture straight but her expression apologetic. The captain, a tall sun elf with a stern face and greying hair looked at her with a mix of respect and exasperation.

"Thank you again for your help," Sloane began, her voice sincere. "And... I apologize for the scare my retainer gave that family."

The captain nodded, his eyes briefly darting to the scene of the commotion. "Of course, milady. I understand mistakes happen. However, I must stress that your attendant should exercise more caution in the future. Accosting innocent citizens can lead to unnecessary panic."

Sloane's eyes softened, and she reached into her purse, pulling out a few coins. She handed them to the captain. "For the damages," she said, her voice tinged with regret.

The captain accepted the coins with a nod. "Thank you, milady. We'll ensure everything is set right."

Turning on her heel, Sloane made her way to where Nemura and Mariel stood a short distance away. The teenager looked like she was on the verge of tears, her head hung low. Nemura, with her arms crossed and Tiberius on her shoulder, had been whispering something to Mariel, her expression stern yet concerned.

Sloane approached them. "Are you two ready?" she asked, her voice gentle.

A sniffing Mariel looked up, her eyes red-rimmed and glistening. "I'm so sorry, Sloane. I truly believed it was her."

Sloane offered a comforting smile, placing a hand on Mariel's shoulder. "Mistakes happen. Why don't I tell you about the time I rushed after a girl I thought was Gwyn and ended up getting my ass kicked in an alleyway? Or another time I led the knights on a merry hunt for another girl I thought was her that ended up with us fighting through a castle and uncovering a slaver ring? Or..."

Nemura interrupted as she glanced around the market. "Sloane, we should leave. We've drawn enough attention."

Sloane sighed, her gaze following Nemura's to the crowd before drifting to the chaos Mariel had inadvertently caused. Overturned stalls, fruits scattered across the cobblestones, and broken crates littered the area. Chickens roamed freely, pecking at the ground, their owner frantically trying to corral them back into cages.

She whistled sharply, and Vesper, her sleek feline golem, bounded over, its mechanical eyes gleaming. "Time to go," she said, her tone firm.

As they approached the waiting carriage, Sloane gestured for Mariel to climb in first. Once the girl was settled, she turned to Nemura, an eyebrow raised in question. "You driving?"

Nemura shot her a pointed look. "After the last incident? You're banned."

Tiberius chirped as if to reinforce the point.

*Traitor.*

Sloane feigned shock. "One broken axle and suddenly I'm not trusted with the reins?"

"Sloane," Nemura said warningly, "let's leave before we cause any more commotion."

With a resigned sigh, Sloane took one last look at the chaotic market scene. *Mariel had been so certain this time. But nope, just another telv girl.*

The last girl Mariel had mistaken for Gwyn had been a genuine terran. She *was* a teenager, albeit sixteen, and accompanied by her protective older sister. It had been an awkward encounter, but neither of them had been Gwyn. Nor had they shown any inclination to join Sloane's group. Sloane respected their decision; she wouldn't force anyone against their will.

*When did I become so accustomed to disappointment?*

This was their seventh stop in a series of visits since establishing the Reinhart Center and their new estate. Usually, it was just Sloane, Mariel, and Vesper who made these trips. But this time, Nemura had joined them, given that they were visiting a town rather than a village.

The other six locations were just villages in the area. After they returned, Sloane's lead guard would be going back to take on more work which led her to fight monsters.

Nemura had been making good use of her time, honing her skills in combat and monster hunting. According to the latest prototype of the excerpt reader that Aila and Sloane had been working on, Nemura was quickly accumulating steps. Stefan, meanwhile, was back at the estate, busy with hiring and other logistical matters.

In between all of their traveling around the local area, Sloane had delved into her work.

She glanced down at the Caster Mk. III in her thigh holster and smiled. This version had an actual cylinder—like a revolver—and it had quickly become her primary choice of weapon. No more would she have to use it sparingly because of having to load only one round at a time.

Then she'd worked on her build, letting her excess spells go dormant that she had recreated with her various gadgets. It left her 'space' in her mind to create several new ones and others that she could use in a pinch. Not to mention the two new spells she'd made that specifically supported her golems.

That was the build she was going for if her memory served. A type of support build that relied on golems for firepower. If she was limited in how many spells she could manage at once, then she would figure out ways around it.

Even if she had to build an army of golems.

Sloane had even worked with the others on how to accomplish the same feat. Aila had unsurprisingly taken to it quite easily, and after figuring out a parallel with physical abilities, Stefan had learned as well.

Nemura was having a bit of trouble, but insisted that she'd get it before she needed it; having had only five active abilities currently.

She was hoping the newest prototype of the reader would be ready by the time she returned so that she could test it on herself and maybe see how many steps she'd gained. She suspected she was close to sixty.

*Things are moving, but not fast enough. We still haven't heard from Marketbol. But at least the situation with the war seems to be stabilizing.*

That was what the latest news said at least. She'd believe it when she saw it.

Sloane's thoughts were interrupted as Nemura climbed onto the driver's bench, snapping the reins to signal the horses.

Sloane settled into the plush seat of the carriage, the door closing behind her with a muted thud that seemed to echo the heaviness of the day. Her eyes met Mariel's, who sat across from her, her expression a mix of embarrassment and lingering hope.

The carriage jolted forward, and Sloane refocused her attention on Mariel.

“Don't worry, Mar,” Sloane began, trying to keep her voice soft. “And don't stop trying to help. Today was a bit rough, but that's only because of the confusion. To be fair, she did sort of look like Gwyn, even in the face.”

Mariel looked up, her eyes glassy with unshed tears. “I just... I was hoping...” She sighed, her shoulders slumping. “It's been so long, hasn't it? Winter has begun, and we're returning to Nornport for the season. That means it's been almost two and a half years since you last saw her. I've grown a lot since then, and she probably has too, especially since she was so young then. How do you know what she looks like now?”

Sloane's heart tightened. It was something she struggled with, but every detail of Gwyn's face was etched into her memory.

*Every freckle. Every expression. The tiny scar below her bottom lip from where she fell on her face and bit through it when she was four. The way her blue eyes light up when she smiles with that dark ring around a bright center. The way she tried to raise her eyebrow and call it the mom brow. I'd know her anywhere.*

A mother always would.

Sloane would give anything for that day to come sooner. To know if she was okay.

*I can feel it. We're getting close, Gwyn. I know you're out there. I know I'm going to find you. Just hang on. I'll keep you safe.*

“She's my daughter,” Sloane finally said, her voice tinged with a quiet intensity. “I'd recognize her no matter how long had passed.”

Mariel nodded, then hesitated. “Do you think...” Her voice trailed off, and Sloane heard the soft sound of sniffing.

“What's wrong?” Sloane asked, starting to feel concerned.

“Do you think my mother would know me if she saw me? I was just a baby when she gave me to the Church. I wish I had someone who looked for me like you do for Gwyn.”

Sloane felt as if her heart would burst. She moved quickly to Mariel's side, squeezing between her and the metal cat before pulling the young girl into a warm, enveloping hug. “It's okay, Mariel. You have us. We're going to be there for you, no matter what.”

Mariel's voice was barely above a whisper when she asked, “Promise?”

## Oxylus

Sloane gently stroked Mariel's hair, her arms tightening around her. "Promise. No matter what you decide, we will support you."

*And that's a promise I intend to keep,* Sloane thought, her eyes misty but resolute. *For Mariel, for Gwyn, for all of us.*



Sloane looked out of the window as the carriage entered the courtyard of the Reinhart Center of Nornport. Unlike the sprawling campus in Marketbol, this center was a more compact affair, yet it held a certain gravitas. Nestled in the bustling Tradehaven district, the center was a small complex of strategically placed buildings. The heart of it all was a large, multi-story building next to which was the path to the inner courtyard, a sanctuary amidst the urban sprawl.

The courtyard was surrounded by other buildings of the complex. To its side stood a warehouse, which was in the final stages of being converted into what would be a small factory space. This would be their production hub, where future workers, runescribes, and artificers would assemble their products before distributing them in partnership with House Estos. Adjacent to it was another building that faced outward to the main road, a former merchant business of good standing that went through hard times and had to sell its property within the city. The structure was now destined to serve as their showroom and client meeting space.

*First things first, we need a product. And not just any product—a reproducible one, especially once I'm not here to oversee things,* Sloane thought, her mind already ticking through possibilities and logistical challenges.

"I bet Aila is going to drag you away as soon as we pull up," Mariel said, her eyes twinkling with a mix of mischief and genuine curiosity.

Sloane let out a resigned sigh, her lips curling into a half-smile. "I suspect as much, as well. But it's good. Because then we can finally see our excerpts again. I'm especially excited to see your progress."

Mariel smiled. "I'm really starting to get the hang of it. I have some more things I want to practice."

Sloane nodded. "That's good. I can't wait to see what you come up with."

As the carriage rolled to a stop in the courtyard, one of the guards, dressed in the House's colors of the same grey-blue as the Knights of Haven's Hope, briskly stepped forward. With practiced ease, he took hold of the horses' reins, steadying them as Nemura descended from the driver's bench.

Sloane unlatched the carriage door and swung it open, extending her hand to assist Mariel. The young girl took it, her grip firm yet hesitant, as she stepped down onto the gravel. Sloane couldn't help but notice how Mariel's eyes darted around the courtyard, taking in the surroundings as if trying to memorize every detail.

*She's still getting used to all of this. We all are. But we're laying the groundwork for something significant here,* Sloane thought, her eyes meeting Nemura's as she joined them.

Vesper plodded down after and moved toward the building before sitting down at the base of the stairs to the entrance.

Nemura gave her a nod, a silent acknowledgment that they were indeed on the cusp of something big.

*Or I'm projecting again. She's probably just doing the cool head nod thing she does. Fucking Superwoman over here trying to act all coy.*

Sloane got an idea and smirked.

First, though, she took a moment to look at the buildings around her, her gaze finally settling on the large main structure. *This is just the beginning, and we have a lot of work ahead of us.*

The main building's door swung open with a creak, revealing the unmistakable figure of Aila. Her attire was a mix of traditional robes, some gloves, a satchel filled with notebooks, and a pair of goggles on her head that Sloane had made.

In creating the goggles, she, with the help of one of the researchers with illusion magic, created a runic spell that allowed the woman to 'see' the schematic of her devices as she was working on them.

One thing she'd learned during the process was that when she used [**Artificer's Insight**] along with [**Runic Knowledge**], Sloane was capable of learning the rune of any spell or ability she observed in use a few times; the more complex it was, the more she was required to observe it in action.

The project was a complete success and Aila had immediately loved them.

*I don't think she's taken them off since.*

It also gave Sloane ideas of which enchants she wanted to include with her own goggles.

The plan was to use Aila's [**Examination**] and [**Overlay Schematic**] along with something new that she wanted to integrate.

Nemura had been helping her with an ability. While Sloane had long since learned that as a magically aligned person, she wasn't able to use abilities, she *was* able to learn the rune for them. At least some of the time.

She still wasn't sure what mechanism determined if a spell or ability was capable of being used through an item in runic form.

The ability the former fist had learned, however, gave her a way to mark a target so that she wouldn't lose track of them. However, it was *very* difficult to see it in action. If Sloane could figure it out, she could then enchant the goggles to have an overlay of a target right on the **|Strengthen|**ed glass. That would be a game changer. Something that would provide a massive advantage in combat, especially if she could then create a pair for each of her retainers and then connect them all together.

So, that was priority number two after finishing the excerpt reader. With luck, she'd try her hand at making those this week.

Priority number three was something she was actually almost done with, it had just taken a bit more time while waiting for something.

Comms.

She'd managed to find some crazy small cores from a pair of hunters, literally the size of a marble. Sloane had purchased their entire batch immediately. There should be enough to practice with.

The comms themselves were a stainless steel earbud that had a small mana crystal inside, along with some small gems and enchants inside the bud itself that would generate sound along with sending someone's voice to other connected ones.

The reason it was taking so long was because she wanted to connect them to the excerpt readers and offset some of the processing to that.

The small *blue* cores would help with that, and due to their size, she would be able to use them with the excerpt reader that was meant to be worn like a bracer.

She needed to figure out a long-term solution to the issue of requiring cores. Sloane wasn't necessarily against harvesting animals, but such industrial farming had become something she *didn't* care for back on Earth.

Eventually, after finding Gwyn, she'd need to delve more into the whole thing. Perhaps there was a way to create a synthetic core, even if not as efficient. Such a thing would have greater sustainability as a resource and was obviously more humane.

One exciting discovery was made by Mariel.

When they were in the port one day, she'd found some tiny pearls that were being sold for cheap because of defects. Mariel had figured out that they were highly susceptible to mana. Which then had Sloane trying to ascertain their properties.

That allowed her to figure out that the pearls, when fed with mana, created a link between another one. Which, when she figured out how to establish said link, enabled the buds to sync their sound.

She sighed and put away her thoughts as the director of the Nornport Center approached.

“Sloane! You’re back!” Aila exclaimed, her voice echoing in the courtyard. “Any luck this time?”

Sloane’s gaze shifted to Mariel, who visibly winced at the reminder of their fruitless journey. “No, Aila. No leads, no sightings. But we’re not giving up.” She paused, her eyes narrowing slightly. “How about you? Made any breakthroughs while I was away?”

Aila’s eyes sparkled with excitement. “Yes! Oh, you have to see this. But first,” she wrapped her arms around herself, shivering dramatically, “why is it so damn cold?”

Sloane raised an eyebrow, her lips curling into a smirk. “Aila, it’s winter. You know this.”

“What?” Aila feigned surprise, her eyes wide.

Mariel couldn’t help but giggle, covering her mouth with her hand to stifle the sound.

“Don’t play games with me,” Sloane chided playfully. “I know you’ve gone outside since we left.”

Aila’s smirk returned, her eyes twinkling with mischief. “Well, it was worth a shot. Otherwise, you’d nag me about trivial things like eating or sleeping.”

Sloane sighed, shaking her head. “As someone should... but I’ll be with you in a moment.” Aila nodded and took a step back as Sloane turned to Nemura, her expression turning more serious. “What’s your plan?”

Nemura shrugged, her eyes scanning the courtyard. “I was thinking of grabbing a drink. Or, I can go see how Stefan’s doing if you want me to wait for you..?”

Mariel nudged Sloane. “I’ll go with her and hang out at the manor. I want to work on something. It’s a surprise.”

Sloane nodded, her lips pressed into a thin line. “Alright, sounds like a plan.”

Mariel’s eyes sparkled with mischief as she beckoned Sloane closer. “You should grab a drink with Nemura. She’s been itching to spend time with you.”

Sloane’s eyes widened slightly, but she whispered back, “Okay.”

Straightening up, Sloane met Nemura’s gaze. “Sure, if you don’t mind waiting, I’ll meet up with you and we can grab a drink. I just have to see what Aila needs and then I want to do one thing for the prototype. I have to make sure it’s good enough for you after all. Gotta make sure my best girl has



the best gear.” She lowered her tone until it sounded just as predatory as she wanted it to be. “I want to make sure you’re well-equipped to do whatever I need.”

She winked.

Nemura blushed a bright red. “Great. I’ll uh... See you at the manor. Yeah, okay? Right.” She paused, her eyes narrowing. “Damn you. This is for the boob incident isn’t it?”

“It definitely is.”

Nemura’s chuckle was tinged with a hint of nervousness, her fingers brushing through her vibrant copper hair in a gesture that Sloane had come to recognize as her ‘I’m slightly flustered’ move. “Alright, alright, I get it. I had that coming. But, uh, drinks still on the table?”

Sloane’s eyes twinkled mischievously, her wink slow and exaggerated. “Consider it a date.”

Nemura’s eyes, already wide, seemed to grow to the size of saucers. She sputtered, “Hold on, Sloane, I didn’t mean it like—”

Sloane raised her hands in mock surrender, her voice dripping with feigned innocence. “Oh, come on! Just two gal pals, out for drinks, catching up on life. Perfectly normal. Why, what did you think I meant?”

Nemura groaned, her face a delightful shade of crimson. “You are absolutely the worst noble I’ve ever met.”

Sloane’s laughter rang out, pure and infectious. “Oh, the look on your face! That was worth it. Ah, yup. Priceless.”

Nemura, still trying to regain her composure, shot a playful glare at Sloane. Then, with a resigned sigh, she turned to Mariel, her voice filled with mock exasperation. “Alright, boney, let’s get a move on before she comes up with more ways to torment me.”

Her head guard whistled. A second later, a screech filled the courtyard as Tiberius took off from the carriage, flew to the woman, and landed on her shoulder.

Mariel rushed over to hug and say goodbye to Sloane before turning and running to catch back up with Nemura. Immediately, the small raithe who was completely undeterred by the imposing woman next to her started joking with her.

Sloane watched as Nemura and Mariel’s figures receded, their banter fading into the distance. Aila, with her characteristic disheveled hair and a look of bemusement, approached Sloane.

“Why do you always tease her like that?” Aila asked, a hint of reproach in her voice.

Sloane's gaze remained fixed on the retreating duo for a moment before she turned to face Aila, her eyes narrowing defensively. "She's forever trying to catch me off guard and embarrass me. It's only fair I get my jabs in when I can."

Aila let out a sigh, rolling her eyes in a manner that suggested she'd heard this argument one too many times. "I've known you two for weeks now. You're like two teenagers..." She then motioned for Sloane to follow her, changing the subject. "While you were gone I managed to find time and install the cores. I just need you to review the runes I've drafted before we finalize the inscriptions and test it."

Sloane blinked in surprise. "Wait, you did? I thought I was going to handle that. What about the other—"

Aila waved her off, her stride purposeful. "It's good practice for when you leave for Calling and then Avira. Plus, the team working on the heating element has been making good time and pitched in. They were quite efficient."

That was surprising as well. When Aila had approached her old subordinates from when they were at their peak, almost everyone had joined on without question. It was clear that they were looking forward to being at the pinnacle of research again. It seemed they really did only leave because the funding had dried up. Sloane only had to mention her title and any hesitation melted away.

It was good, and it meant that when they'd looked for others to hire, they'd already had twenty personnel to start with.

Sloane raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Well, alright then. Lead the way. Let's see what you've got."

The two made their way inside with a silent Vesper following along, past a few people talking and going over notes. Sloane smiled as she saw how busy everything was and so soon. Now, House Reinhart in Nornport had forty-six members with more being added every week.

One of the reasons she had to return when she did and not in two weeks before the first snow usually appeared, was because Stefan had set up a few appointments for her with a few knights.

That had surprised her, as she thought all knights were already pledged to a liege or order and she would have to elevate someone herself. Apparently, there were knights who gained their titles in various ways from a high placed noble or even from royalty. Some were from other nations who were simply looking for a new life.

But there were indeed some within the city that were not a part of any House, nor did they own any land themselves.

From the notes Stefan had given her, one came from a family of a long line of knights, and had been knighted after an honorable tour with the royal army as a matter of course. One was from the

Sovereign Cities and had been living a life of errantry while searching for a new place to call home. And the last was the winner of a tournament.

She had to admit that she was interested in seeing if any would fit in with what she was attempting to do.

Sloane's thoughts continued through all of the things she still needed to accomplish before leaving as she followed Aila through the center and into their shared workshop, situated on the top floor of the building. Though, in truth, it was more Aila's private sanctuary of invention than a shared space. Sloane had plans to break that news to her when the time came to leave Nornport, but for now, the illusion of shared ownership sufficed.

The workshop was a tinkerer's paradise, cluttered with an array of gadgets, tools, and magical components. Sloane's own workbench was meticulously organized. A wooden organizer held an assortment of gems and other mana-conducting materials, sorted by type, size, and quality. Below the bench, a chest contained various cores, and shelves along the wall were lined with other magical paraphernalia.

On the table itself, two chests sat side by side. One was filled with ready-to-use grenades—both **[Arcane Explosion]** and **[Flashbangs]**—while the other contained spell cartridges for her newest Caster. *I need to make sure I have enough of these for the road. Stefan and Nemura should also be well-stocked.*

Laid out neatly on the other side of the table were the components she'd need for her goggles, along with a small chest containing the incomplete communication pods.

Aila, however, led her past all this to her own workbench, where the disassembled pieces of their latest excerpt reader prototype were spread out. This was the eighteenth iteration, each version a step closer to perfection than the last.

*We've come a long way in a season,* Sloane thought. They had initially managed to recreate the scalene triangle stat distribution that her magical watch had.

Over time, Sloane realized that her watch wasn't just a stat tracker; it was something far more potent. It was connected directly to her core—in a way that she wasn't capable of reproducing—and enabled the watch to power spells that were far more effective than any runic spell.

One day, on a whim, she had decided to compare the spells. The **[Shield Buckler]** spell from her watch was significantly more powerful than one generated by a device, even if that device had a core. *My watch isn't just a piece of tech; it's an extension of me, drawing directly from my core as if I were casting the spell myself.*

Aila broke into her thoughts, her voice tinged with unmistakable pride. "Alright, so it's ready for the last runic chains for the cores and the display."

Sloane looked at the disassembled device, then back at Aila. *This could be the breakthrough we've been waiting for.* "Let's do it," she said, her own voice matching Aila's enthusiasm.

Sloane leaned over the workbench, her eyes scanning the intricate runic chains Aila had meticulously penned down in a notebook. With her **[Runic Knowledge]** and **[Artificer's Insight]**, she meticulously combed through each rune, making minor corrections here and there. She then reached for her latest version of the enchanting pen, its tip glowing faintly, and began the delicate process of inscribing the runes onto the device's cores, logic board, and display. The runes on the display were particularly intricate, designed to act as interactive menu buttons, guiding the user through the excerpt reader's various functions.

*Something's off. I can feel it.*

She paused, her senses tingling with unease. Drawing deeply on her mana, she felt it surge, illuminating her thoughts. With her skills combined, it was as if the entire device was laid bare before her, each component highlighted and demanding her attention. She **[Inspected]** every part, searching for the anomaly.

And then she saw it.

The connection between the opal and the blue cores was unstable, almost as if it were flashing a warning.

Without hesitation, she inscribed an additional rune, one that would allow the user to encode the device to their unique mana signature. This would not only ensure a secure connection but also enhance the device's accuracy, allowing it to attune itself to the user's specific needs.

Yet, something still nagged at her.

She pushed her **[Runic Knowledge]** further, seeking the missing link. An idea formed, and she forced it to help her create a rune where none existed.

Using the new knowledge, she crafted a chain that would allow the device to interface directly with Mana's Intent, bridging the gap between the user and the overarching system. This would enable the device to communicate with the system, drawing insights directly from it.

Then with a bit of insight, she created a series of runic chains that would work as a tamper seal. Something to ensure those who obtained the device wouldn't be able to steal their work. If anyone opened the device that wasn't them, these runes would flare and *alter* the inside, damaging all of the runes and conduits irreparably. A method to bypass the seal in case of repairs or whatnot would be keyed to specific people's mana signatures, like hers and Aila's to start with.

She smiled. *Gotta have my monopoly. Plus, I doubt the Church would like having too much competition. Win-win.*

With the inscriptions complete, Sloane began assembling the bracer. She carefully slotted in the mana crystals, each one shaped and etched for a specific purpose. Using her *Alteration*, she melded the components together, ensuring a seamless fit.

When she finally looked up, she found Aila sitting beside her, eyes wide with anticipation. Sloane grinned, her excitement palpable. “You ready?”

Aila's eyes sparkled. “Yes! Yes! Try it!”

Taking a deep breath, Sloane slid the bracer onto her wrist, adjusting it for a snug fit. As she felt the device's initial pull towards her core, she placed her opposite hand over it, closed her eyes, and allowed mana to flow through her and into the newly crafted device.

The screen flickered to life, its soft glow illuminating Sloane's face. The symbol they had designed for Reinhart Manatech Devices briefly appeared on the center of the screen before fading away.

She smiled, her finger hovering over the rune she intended to activate.

But before she could tap it, an unexpected rush coursed through her, making her gasp.

Then, before she could do anything else, what felt like a tidal wave of mana connected directly to her core. The device vibrated briefly under her touch, and then words began to scroll across the screen in the Ikiosi Common Alphabet.

*What the hell?*

She inhaled sharply, her eyes darting across the screen as she processed the information.

**[Conditions Met: Trait – Inspect obtained!]**

**[Conditions Met: Trait – Master Tinkerer obtained!]**

**[Conditions Met: Runic Knowledge – Proficiency advanced!]**

**[Path Milestone – First True Manatech Device crafted!]**

**[Conditions Met: Trait – Innovator's Archive obtained!]**

**[Artificer – Step 60 attained!]**

She exhaled slowly, her gaze fixed on the screen. Then, with a clarity only her [**Artificer's Insight**] could provide, she channeled her blue mana into the device, pushing her intent to access past notifications.

The screen was immediately flooded with a cascade of notifications.

Her eyes widened in astonishment as she realized she had leveled up three times in one go by finishing the excerpt reader. The last significant jump was when she completed another path milestone that seemed to coincide with completing Vesper, earning her the [**Golem Mastery**] trait.

“Wow,” she murmured, still processing the information.

Aila, who had been peering over Sloane's shoulder, blinked in amazement. She pointed at the reader and asked, “Can you pull up your excerpt?”

Sloane nodded, her mind still reeling from the flood of information. She pressed the rune corresponding to her excerpt, and the screen displayed a detailed account of her achievements and progress over the past year, with a particular emphasis on the last three Earth months. The culmination of her relentless dedication and hard work was laid out before her.

She smiled.

**Sloane Reinhart**

*“The Artificer”*

**Terran**

**Path:** Artificer (Innovator)

**Steps:** 60

**Core Quality:** Exceptional

**Affinity:** Artifice, Alteration, Evocation

**Attunement:** Blue, Red, Yellow

**Alignment:** Magical

**Primary Attribute:** Control

**Secondary Attribute:** Capability

**Traits:** Artificer's Insight, Mana Sense, Runic Knowledge, Telekinesis, Golem Mastery, Arcanomancy, Shadwtender, Inspect, Master Tinkerer, Innovator's Archive

**Passive Spells:** Mana Sight, Meditation, Temporary Enchantment, Share Sense (Golem)

**Active Spells:** Mana Bolt, Arcane Barrage, Starburst, Surge, Emergency Repair (Mechanical)

There was a lot to process. The first was the change in her title, then whatever the hell **[Shadowtender]** was. *When the hell did I get that, and why?*

Her brows furrowed in thought.

*Wait, Mariel has shadow magic... ah... shit, even the system... This isn't good.*

But before she could delve deeper, Aila's laughter rang out, a sound of pure joy and disbelief. "You... you actually did it!"

Sloane met her gaze, her own eyes shining with pride and gratitude as her excitement surged to the forefront of her thoughts. With a swift motion, she pulled Aila into a tight embrace, the warmth of their shared accomplishment enveloping them. "No, Aila. *We* did it. This wasn't just me. Without your genius and your dedication, this would have remained a dream. You're incredible, and I have no doubt Aredd would be beaming with pride right now."

Aila's eyes shimmered with unshed tears, her voice choked with emotion. "Thank you, Sloane."

"Aila?"

"Yes, Sloane?"

"This is going to change the world."

The high elf nodded. "I can't wait."

In that shared moment, amidst the clutter of their workshop, the weight of their achievement settled upon them. While the Church would remain an important part of the daily lives of the people, Aila and Sloane had taken the first true step in putting everyone's paths in their own hands. A way to see *in real time* what mana was doing to them.

It wasn't just a new device that they crafted; they had pioneered a new frontier. And in doing so, they knew that nothing would be the same.

They had just created history.

The names Aila Iliric and Sloane Reinhart wouldn't just be a footnote in the history of mana.