

Making Money Moves

While many debate the exact moment that the early Contemporary Era began, it is an accepted fact that the arrival of terrans was the impetus that brought it about. What seemed like fanciful concepts and ideas at the time began a drastic change within all facets of civilization. The early attempts to marry terran technological knowledge with magic and mana were wrought with trials and tribulations. Several individuals stand out during this period as the most instrumental in bringing change; for gain or naught.

- *Mana and Industry: The Early Contemporary Era. 522 SA*

Elodie led the way into the Banking Guild with Sloane in tow and Stefan trailing slightly behind. The three of them walked straight toward the stairs and as they reached the central counter, Elodie called out to the telv man Sloane had met before. "Aimon! Is he in?"

The telv glanced between Sloane and the other woman then quickly flipped through a few papers he had next to him and scanned one. He looked back up and nodded. "He's available for the next thirty-five minutes, Ms. Elodie."

"Perfect! We're heading up."

"I'll annotate your appointment to ensure no one disturbs you."

"You're the best, Aimon," Elodie replied.

She's much more comfortable here. Sloane snorted. *Way to go Captain Obvious.*

Stefan stepped to the side and sat in a chair as the two women walked up the stairs. They made their way to the Guildmaster's office that sat at the end of a hallway. The guard standing outside noticed them as they came and knocked then peeked inside before opening the door wide and stepping inside.

The orkun smiled at them as they stepped through the threshold. “Ms. Elodie, Lady Reinhart,” He greeted them with a respectful nod.

Guildmaster Romaris stood up as they entered and walked around his desk to greet them. He gave Elodie a hug and a kiss on each cheek. “Welcome, Elodie. Lady Sloane. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?”

Sloane and Elodie had discussed the plan extensively and she had gotten the high elf woman fully on board. The woman also knew the best way to implement her ideas, so she would take the lead primarily in the discussion.

Elodie gestured to the chairs, and a couch set up to the side. “Please, uncle. Let’s sit. Shall I get us a drink?”

The man shook his head as he guided them to the seating area. “It’s a bit early for a drink, don’t you think?” He said as they sat.

Sloane chuckled. “You’re not wrong. However, I think we’ll let you be the judge of that when we’re done.”

He lifted a brow. “You have another idea for the Banking Guild?”

With a quick shake of her head, she explained, “Overall, yes. Except, I believe this one should interest you first.”

“Oh?”

Elodie glanced at her and she nodded in return. The woman took the reins. “Yes. Lady Sloane has a twofold proposition. One that will benefit... everyone, and one that will benefit the Guilds, and you by being the first to take advantage. She has given me notes on how to make a revolutionary new metal alloy made from steel. One that is much better for many applications. Also, one that is evidently the result of over four hundred years of technological advancement beyond our own civilization’s current progression.” She quickly looked at Sloane for confirmation.

Sloane nodded back and added in. “Your civilization is roughly equivalent to a period of development that occurred around our year fourteen hundred. My world developed this type of

steel over time, starting in our early eighteen hundreds. For reference, it was the year two-thousand twenty-four when we were transported here”

The man’s eyes widened. “I had not been aware of that fact.” He shook his head and mumbled under his breath. He froze. “Wait...” Shuffling through some papers, he grabbed one and started reading it.

She watched his lips move as he quickly scanned over it before looking up with a frown. “Baron Bolton. The terran toadstool that the count has. I have a report from my people that states he is from the year eighteen hundred and nine.”

Sloane shrugged. “There’s no way. The man is either having some type of traumatic response to leaving everything he knew or is crazy.”

Lanthil tilted his head. “*Is it crazy? Some magical event brought you here. By your admission, our civilization is centuries behind yours. Is it so hard to imagine it ripped him away from his own time?*”

Sloane squinted her eyes. She was ready to deny it; it was just *too* fantasy. However, she found herself unable to refute it completely. The Guildmaster was correct. She couldn’t discount the possibility. The only point of contention was that he thought the colonials lost the American War of Independence. Napoleon was still doing his whole conquer Europe thing, but apparently the French either didn’t help the colonials as much as they had in her world or they simply lost to a stronger British presence. *Does that mean the multiverse exists? Fuck. I swear if a strange doctor pops up, I’m gonna just give up.*

She took a deep breath. “Fine. I can’t deny the possibility that the man is actually from where he states. That brings up a lot of potential issues and complications that I am not sure I am prepared to handle or discuss at the moment, however.”

He nodded. “Very well. We will look into the matter further. Including the report that Stefan provided that indicates that the count has another terran held prisoner for experiments. Now, I apologize for the distraction. Please. Continue.”

Elodie went into detail about their ideas. Speaking about research centers and all they entailed, and their benefits. She explained her idea of setting up one such center in Marketbol under a partnership of Houses Reinhart and Romaris. She spoke of research into materials

science that Sloane could at least give a decent start for. They also spoke of potential alchemical research that could be explored and her intention to meet the runic ink alchemists. Unlike the last time they had met, Guildmaster Romaris looked very interested. They spoke of details and procedures that had the man asking many questions for at least a solid hour. He had already delayed his next meeting and was about to push into another before his guard, Reji, stuck his head in.

“Boss, Aimon sent a message. Your next appointment is here and waiting. He already rescheduled the previous one.”

The elf groaned. “Fine. Sorry, ladies. As much as I think this meeting deserves that drink, I will have to pass for now.” He scribbled a note on a piece of paper and handed it to Elodie. “Here, give this to Aimon. He will give you what you need for the Smith’s Guild. They will work with you after my request.”

Elodie smiled. “Thank you, uncle.”

Sloane nodded. “Thank you for your time, Guildmaster Romaris.”

The man looked between the two of them and then focused on Elodie. “Hire a guild sanctioned esquire for your House. Draft up the paperwork. I’ll approve it. I want in on this, especially the center in Marketbol.”

It was Sloane’s turn to smile. “Perfect. I am happy to hear that.” She reached a hand out to the man. “I look forward to a profitable partnership. I suspect that this is enough for my previous request for a recommendation?”

Lanthil laughed. “Of course! I will draft it up and have a messenger deliver it to Elodie. Now, please excuse me.”

The two were smiling when they retrieved Stefan from downstairs and met with Aimon. The man quickly drafted up the documents they would take to the smiths for her project. As they walked out of the Banking Guild, Sloane smirked. The next step toward her future economic victory was complete.

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The Smith's Guild was a much more quaint location. It was a small office within the merchant district adjacent to the central noble area. As they walked in, there was a single moon elf woman at a desk that was situated to be the first thing seen when entering. She looked around and saw three other desks situated around the room and an open door to what looked like an office in the back and a closed door next to it, likely leading to storage or rooms in the back.

The moon elf smiled as they entered. "Welcome to the Smith's Guild! What brings you in here today?" She asked informally, in a jovial tone.

Elodie stepped forward. "Good morning, ma'am. I am Elodie Romaris, and this is Lady Sloane of House Reinhart. I have a request here with authorization from Guildmaster Romaris about a project for the Smith's Guild to undertake for Lady Sloane and our House."

"Oh my. May I?" she asked as she reached out her hand.

Elodie nodded and retrieved the documentation and handed it to the woman. As she was reading, a man emerged from the office. "Imala, what do we have here?"

The moon elf turned her head toward the approaching raithe. "Romaris—" She quickly looked at Elodie. "I mean, Guildmaster Romaris."

Elodie chuckled. "It's quite alright, Ms. Imala. My uncle isn't hung up on formalities. Guildmaster Darius, a pleasure."

Sloane raised a brow. That didn't sound like the man she'd met.

Guildmaster Darius smiled. "What are you up to this time, Elodie? Auditing us again?"

"Not this time, Guildmaster. We have a project that will be quite profitable to the Smith's Guild."

The man raised a brow and grabbed the order from Imala. He read it over, then read it again before looking at Sloane. "You want us to create a new type of steel for you?"

Sloane nodded. "Yes, an alloy, to be precise. The Smith's Guild will license the process and composition and any derivative compositions created from my knowledge. Additionally, two smiths of your choice will be taught the specific metals and their percentages. This will be a

Guild secret. My House will hire one of the two smiths to join me on my trip to Marketbol, where they will work to create other new materials for use. I will also receive a small portion of the alloy for my own use.”

The man drew in a sharp breath of air as the extent of what she was requesting, and what Guildmaster Romaris had authorized, came out. “You can’t just force one of the smiths to leave their home!”

Sloane raised a hand to forestall any further disagreement. “I’m not forcing anyone, Guildmaster. Clearly, I’d only want a volunteer. Someone who wants to see the future of material science and technology.”

Darius slowly nodded as he digested what she said. “So, what exactly do you plan?”

“Guildmaster, would you like to take a seat? We have a lot to go over,” Elodie nudged.

The group all sat down around one of the desks, and Imala took notes as Elodie and Sloane explained their plans and the metal they wished to make. As Sloane continued to expound upon the benefits, Darius became increasingly more excited. During the conversation, Elodie got up and gathered some tea for the group.

Sloane sipped at her tea as Elodie and the Guildmaster discussed licensing percentages. “You want fifteen percent of every sale using this stainless steel that the Guild brokers? Plus, a monthly fee of five gold from any smith who uses it. That’s excessive. One percent of every sale will still net you a very healthy sum. We could simply roll the monthly licensing fee for each smith into their guild fees. I think a two point five percent increase on guild fees that we would then pass onto you is more than fair.”

Sloane raised a brow. It *was* fair, however, Elodie went high for a reason. She and Sloane had already discussed their minimum. Especially since this contract would not necessarily hold up throughout the entire Smith’s Guild. Elodie would use what they finalized today to employ an esquire that would negotiate with the headquarters of the smiths after they had set up their research center and proved the viability of their product. This contract would hold up under the entire area that Guildmaster Romaris was responsible for, however, and that was a decent chunk of land. Elodie wanted to have this particular agreement higher than what they would eventually settle for with the overall Guild.

Her financial advisor smiled. "That *would* be fair, if this was simply another method of making carbon steel, Guildmaster. However, House Reinhart is providing a product that has centuries of research behind it. Your amount is simply too low for that difference. We will go with twelve percent on Guild brokerage. We *would* accept a different option for guild fees. Increase them by five percent and pass that onto our House then you have a deal."

"That is still fairly excessive for very little work on your part. We're doing all of the work, which includes all of the effort it will take to make something you say is that much more advanced."

Elodie smiled. "Absolutely fair sentiment. If you do not think the smiths in Thirdghyll are capable, we will table this deal until we reach Marketbol. We will simply work with the one smith who agrees to join us."

Darius' eyes widened. "Now, let's not be hasty. This would have massive benefits for our city. *Your* city as well, I'd like to remind you."

Clearly not a man good with deals. Elodie has him right where she wants him.

"Absolutely, Guildmaster. Which is why we've come to you first and are willing to lower the amount to what I stated before. That is, unfortunately, the lowest we can go. Can we make a deal?"

The guildmaster looked up, then down at his fingers, hopefully considering what they'd proposed.

Five percent would net them about two and a half gold a month from every smith. Not a lot, but every bit added up. Sloane didn't want to *rob* the smiths. Brokerage sales over metal were not as common as one would expect. Sloane did suspect that would change in the future and wanted to ensure that the option was there before the Guild realized what it had walked into.

Finally, Darius frowned, then turned and faced his moon elf employee. "Imala, write up the contract. I think we have an arrangement."

Elodie smiled. "No need, Guildmaster. I have the contract right here. Please allow me to fill in the amounts discussed... and there. We are ready."

The Guildmaster laughed. “You are definitely a Romaris. Alright! Lady Sloane, I will set you up with the two smiths. They should be able to get you your requested amounts quickly.” He looked back down at the materials requirements Imala had taken note of. “We have all of this on hand within the city. If this works out as you suggest, the first batch of this new steel should be ready within the week.”

They all stood up and Sloane shook the Guildmaster’s hand. “I look forward to it, Guildmaster Darius. Thank you for your business today.”

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Two bells—or about two hours—later, Elodie and Sloane were lost. They had been searching for the shop of the alchemists they had been told about. Sloane and the elf stood to the side while Stefan spoke to some people who lived in the area they currently were. The directions she had been given were either absolutely terrible, or the stationery shop owner did not want her to find his suppliers. *I suppose that’s understandable, but it’s a dick move.*

Stefan thanked the elf he had been speaking with and rejoined the women. “So, they’re just a few blocks over. There’s an alley, and it leads to their shop.”

Sloane nodded. “Thanks, Stefan.”

Stefan took the point position and led them through the narrow streets and alleys until they reached a particularly run-down and trashed street. There was graffiti on the stone walls of the buildings and Sloane got to see her first penis art since arriving in the world. *Not impressed, elves. Not impressed.* There was an entrance and a cobbled path that had a building above it, which was why Sloane initially dismissed it. Yet, when they got closer, she saw that it was an alleyway that opened up slightly after going under the building in front of them.

They walked through the entrance and walked down a winding alley that had graffiti all along the buildings on either side of them. The windows she saw were all boarded up and there wasn’t a single door on the road that didn’t have wrought iron bars in front of them. Frankly, it was a creepy as hell place to be, and Sloane was thankful she had magic. *And Stefan, I guess. He*

can be a distraction. She looked around again, hearing what sounded like crows cawing in the area. *Yeah. A distraction while I run away from this place.*

The alleyway finally opened up and split off into two different paths. In between them sat a small wooden building with a single door centered on the split. The sign above said ‘Kemmy’s Mixers and Elixirs.’

Stefan snorted. “That’s a unique name.”

She laughed. “Yeah, for sure. Alright, let’s—”

The front of the store exploded. Stefan cursed as he turned and dove against Elodie, knocking her to the ground and covering her with his body. The elf cried out in surprise and fear as she fell. Sloane instantly ducked down, barely holding in her own scream. It only took a moment and just like that, everything was calm again. Sloane was a bit in shock at the suddenness of it all. *What the heck was that?!*

Sloane peered at the shop as she stood up. The front of the shop was in shambles. The explosion had completely blown out the glass and as she looked, the front door fell in a crash as the last hinge gave out. There were some bits of fire here and there on the debris, but the building itself didn’t actually seem in danger of burning down. However, the biggest danger was the smoke that billowed out of the openings created by the lack of windows and a door. *And part of the wall.* Elodie cried out again as the sign suddenly crashed to the ground, taking part of the entryway roof with it.

Sloane was completely shocked. She drew upon mana and readied herself for anything, but then nothing happened. She stepped forward and helped Stefan and Elodie up.

“What the hell happened?” She asked them.

Stefan was scanning their surroundings and looking for any threats while Elodie just stood stunned and transfixed by the building. Not getting a response, Sloane stepped toward the building and called out. “Hello? Anyone in there?”

As she got closer, Sloane noticed that there was nothing but smoke inside and no sign of anyone. She felt something in the air, almost like... she looked down at her watch and saw a swirling of white and blue mist on the screen in the building’s direction. Sloane called out again

but still didn't get a response. She shrugged and turned to look at Stefan. "I think I'm going to go in. Do you have any cloth I can tie around my face?"

"You shouldn't go in, Lady Sloane. It's too dangerous." He replied hesitantly.

"Someone needs to, there may be—"

Choking and coughing coming from behind interrupted her. "You should listen to your man."

Sloane jumped in surprise and jerked her head around and saw two women, a raithe and orkun, helping each other out of the building.

Sloane rushed over toward them. "Here, let me help you!" She slid under the small orkun woman's arm and wrapped it around her neck. Stefan ran forward and assisted the taller of the two women. If the situation wasn't so serious, Sloane would have laughed at the shorter man helping the tall woman. They moved the two away from the damaged building and out of the way of the smoke that was still coming from inside.

The orkun woman groaned as Sloane slowly lowered her to the ground. "Oh, that hurts. Ah. Damn it."

The raithe woman shrugged away from Stefan's help and squatted in front of the other woman. "Rel? You okay, my love?" She started looking all over the woman, searching for the orkun's injuries.

The woman groaned again but slapped away the raithe's hands from their poking and prodding. "I'm fine! I told you that elixir was too potent!"

It was the raithe's turn to groan, and she flopped down hard onto her rear and threw her hands up. "Oh, come on! How was I supposed to know it would try to channel that much arcane!"

"Maybe, and hear me out, because I *told* you it would! Clearly, you put too much silden extract into it!" The woman replied, exasperated.

"If you hadn't used as much of *your* arcane energy, it would have been fine! You know you're only supposed to push a small smidgen to activate the elixir!"

Wait, a second. “Hold on, are you two talking about magic and mana?”

The orkun and raithe women seemed to remember they weren't alone, because both pairs of eyes shot wide open and the raithe covered her mouth with her hand.

“We–We were just speaking in alchemy talk. It's just shop terms.” Rel, the orkun woman, stammered.

Sloane smirked as she raised her hand and channeled a small orb of mana above it. Both women gasped. “It's okay. We're friends. Please, are you okay? Do you need anything?” Sloane reassured and asked.

“Unless you can fix our shop, I don't think so. That shop had our entire livelihood in it.” The raithe explained.

“Maybe we can introduce ourselves? I'm Sloane. These are members of my House: Elodie the shocked, shy one, and Stefan, my guard. We actually came to talk to you.”

The orkun shifted and started to stand up, but then grunted, sitting back down. “I'm Rel. My partner here is Kemmy.” She lifted a hand toward Sloane, who accepted it with a shake.

“Nice to meet you both.”

Kemmy sighed. “Well, I apologize that you've found us in this state, but unfortunately I don't think we'll be able to assist with whatever you wished to meet us for.”

Sloane smiled. “Let's see if anything is salvageable, then we can see what I can do for you.”

Rel quirked an eyebrow at that. “Why do you want to help us?”

“I purchased some of your products recently, and let's just say I would like to invest in your future.”

Kemmy looked between their ruined shop and Sloane, then down at Rel. After a moment, they seemed to come to an unspoken agreement. “Alright. Let's see what we can do. Rel? You stay here a second, going to check the shop before we leave.”

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It was nightfall when they finally made it back to the inn. Rel and Kemmy had joined them and Sloane had paid for a room that they could use. Maud and Deryk had helped them up to their room and once they were in a more private setting, the Knight-Medic used her magic. It was no surprise that the two women were shocked at the healing spell.

Sloane could tell they wanted to ask many questions and discuss magic, but Maud insisted they get some rest.

She would need to speak to them about the elixir they spoke of and the potential reactions with mana. That could wait, however. First, the two women needed help. Sloane would assist them, just as the knights had helped her. The business discussions could come later, preferably when the two women didn't feel beholden to her. *I know how that can feel. I won't take advantage of them.* If they didn't want to make a deal with her, she wouldn't press.

Sloane sighed as she looked back down at her bird and her notebook. She had nearly finished everything that she could without the steel that she would use for the joints and external covering. She focused on the chest area and slowly slotted the core into the cradle she had mounted. As soon as she settled the core into place, it started to glow brighter, the blue mist swirling around just under the surface.

She grabbed the head and looked into the two onyx eyes she had made. Everything was coming together and her tools had really started taking shape. She picked up her inscribing tool—and paused.

Huh. That's some strange déjà vu.

Sloane shook her head and went back to inscribing runes into the bird. *It's probably nothing.*

She thought of the way forward. Sloane just needed to focus on avoiding the count and then meet with the spy organization within the city. She narrowed her eyes. It wouldn't be much longer, then she could move on and continue her search for Gwyn.

