

Grudges and Hand Grenades

Sloane was back at the workbench an hour later with Gisele sitting next to her. Maud had gone back to the others when they returned. This part of the process didn't hold her interest.

Sloane had selected a quill that she would use trace ink into the runes she engraved. She would then try and dry the ink with magic. This time, she had one of the steel balls that she wanted to put inside the grenade's casing. She grabbed some chalk and marked out where the runework would go. There would be a place where the button would trigger the functions with a prominent place on the side where the **[Storage]** rune would be.

"So, how does this all work? Can you explain as you do it?" Gisele asked.

Sloane nodded as she started engraving. "Sure thing. Right now, I am engraving the various runic chains that go into the overall runework of the grenade. Each one performs a separate function that tells the Intent what I want to happen." She finished the **[Trigger]** rune and moved to the next.

"The runic language functions like an extremely basic programming language my people used back home. It's not too robust, but that could just be me. Perhaps, I could even learn enough to create my own runic language in the future. But that is a long way away. I am barely scratching the surface as it is. One thing I have learned is that runes will *not* function if you just etch one out. You have to have the Artifice Domain for the runes even to work, as that type of magic is what will properly imbue the runes with Intent. This is a good thing, as it means that only other Artificers can copy a design. I'll need to work with the Merchant Guild or some other one to work out a way to ensure my designs are my own and aren't stolen."

"I understand. Perhaps, when the field gets large enough, you could help create an Artificer's Guild." Gisele helpfully offered.

"That's a great idea, Gisele. I will have to pick your brain at it later." Sloane finished the same **[Storage]** runic chain that she had designed previously.

"What is the difference between runes and runic chains or the like?" Gisele asked.

“Too bad Ernard isn’t here. He’d love this part. So, the runework is made up of runes. Each rune has a function attached to it. Like this one,” Sloane started etching the spell chain. “is the rune for **[Detect]**. Its function is to detect *something*. Normally, it won’t do anything on its own. So we have to add an operator with it or something that tells it what to do. We’re going to use a colon for this particular one because we want it to **[Detect]** when the **[Trigger]** rune is activated, which is done when the rune on the button of the casing contacts the rune I placed on the top there. So, this one comes out to **[Detect: Trigger]**.”

“Next we want it to *wait* so we use a ‘*’* followed by what we want it to wait for. For this, we want the grenade to wait for some **[Time]** which, I think three seconds is enough which we will use with the **[Intent]** rune. I think this is the key part of why an Artificer is important. I’m unsure if anyone else can push their intent into runes. For this rune, we’re going to push in the Intent of three seconds.

“Finally, we want to *then*, two dashes or a long dash, **[Use]** the **[Spell]** that was **[Store]**’d *and* we want to **[Amplify]** it. I got that idea after the poor showing earlier. So, the final runic chain comes out to: **[Detect: Trigger] › [Time: <3 Seconds>] – [Use: (Spell: Store)] - [Amplify]**.”

Gisele watched intently the entire way through. “The **Flashbang** spell seemed to come out from the runes earlier. If you put this ball inside of the casing you had designed, won’t it just flash inside?”

Sloane shrugged. “Honestly? I have no idea. I’m hoping it will see the casing as part of the overall design, if not, I will probably need to use the **[Separate]** rune somehow.”

“If you don’t mind my saying. I think... logically, you should go ahead and try it. Based on what we saw earlier, I don’t think your spell will work as you intend it to. You have that one rune that waits for a trigger. Maybe just copy that but instead of triggering the spell, it triggers the **[Separate]** rune.”

Sloane tapped her etching tool against her notebook. Thinking. It wouldn’t *hurt* to do it that way. If anything, it would just potentially make her grenades slightly more expendable. Which was the reason she didn’t already do it. *I think I am making enough to*

*commission a decent number of them. Four or five should be enough for each knight?
Right?*

She looked back up from her notebook at Gisele. “Okay. Let’s give it a shot.”

Sloane got to work finishing everything up, etching the added runic chain, and then using the new ink in the runes and pushing her mana to help it set. When she was finally done, she slowly channeled **Flashbang** into the storage rune, then her Intent into the timer. Sloane observed as the silver all started glowing, then it seemed to sit well. After five minutes, it still hadn’t dimmed or anything.

“So, think we’re good?”

With a smile, the knight nodded. “It’s go time.”

Sloane snorted. “Alright. Let’s put it all together then test it.”

She placed the steel ball into its slot in the bottom casing, then carefully set up the trigger she had fabricated with the spring and slightly rounded base to it where she had already put a rune. She carefully inserted the pin that would keep the trigger from accidentally... *triggering* the grenade. She tightened the top half of the casing onto the bottom and smiled.

“I think we’re ready.”

“Okay, let’s go try it!”

The two gathered up all of their things and made their way to the training courtyard. When they walked it, Sloane noticed Cristole and Ernald were already present. Sloane instinctively rubbed the back of her head as she saw them. They were both sitting on the *evil* bench and talking. Gisele noticed and Sloane ignored her light chuckles.

“Alright, we’re here. Should we tell them?” Sloane asked.

Gisele smirked. “They’ll figure it out quick enough.”

Sloane reached the grenade out toward the knight. “Do the honors?”

The woman smiled. “Gladly. I just pull the pin, press the button until it makes contact then toss it?”

“Yup!” Sloane was getting excited.

She watched as Gisele smirked, turned slightly, and pulled the pin. She took a deep breath, then pressed the button and tossed it. *Right* onto the half of the courtyard where the two were sitting.

Sloane’s eyes went wide. “Wait!”

Shit. Well... moment of truth!

The grenade bounced several times before it settled and Sloane mentally counted in her head. She misjudged the time because right before she hit three, the grenade separated with both halves flying apart. The steel ball inside glowed blue then the **Flashbang** went off with a large crack of sound and blinding light.

It didn’t affect Sloane as before, but she saw Gisele instantly react by shielding her eyes. The other two were not as lucky. The men both screamed and instantly grabbed at each other as they toppled over the bench onto the ground.

After a moment, Sloane saw Cristole’s head peek up over their legs that were draped over the fallen bench. “What?!” The elf’s eyes caught sight of Gisele and narrowed. “Gisele? What did you do?!”

Ernald rolled over, groaning and rubbing his head. “Why?...”

Gisele smirked. “That, you two, is for what you both did in Parholm.”

Cristole’s eyes widened, but he cried out. “That was *two* years ago! We apologized!”

“And now we are even. I told you I would get you back one day.”

Sloane looked between the two men stumbling to their feet and the woman with an overly satisfied expression on her face. “What happened in Parholm?”

“They ran off with my clothes from the bathhouse. I *ran around that city with barely a towel* after those two for a whole bell.”

Sloane snorted. “So, you used a flashbang on them, because they made you *flash* the entire town? I can respect it.”

Sloane heard Ernard groan as she gathered up all the pieces of the grenade. Everything was seemingly in decent shape.

Gisele smiled. “Well, at least we know your grenades work.”

“Luckily these aren’t nearly as debilitating as they are back in my world. I will need to work on that. Well, and you tossed it sufficiently far away from them. Next, I’m going to work on some that will explode,” Sloane added.

Cristole’s brows shot up. “Not near us you won’t!”

Gisele’s grin grew predatory. “See you two back at the inn. Sloane, shall we?”

Sloane laughed. “Let’s go.”

She called back over her shoulder. “Don’t take too long gentlemen. I have to teach you all how to use these!”

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Sloane had thought she was done for the day after her tests, but Maud and Ismeld instantly dragged her out to go shopping for the ball that was happening in two days. Sloane had grabbed Elodie to come along as well, which meant that Stefan had also joined. It turned the entire thing into some big ordeal that she was luckily able to finish quickly.

Her outfit and other accoutrement were sitting in her room and she was now sitting at a large corner table with the knights, Elodie, and Stefan. *Inns have really become our go-to spot, not that there are a plethora of other options around here.* She was definitely

going to find a nice spot to settle with Gwyn. Maybe Avira, if it was as nice as the knights suggested. *Speaking of.*

“Elodie, have you ever been to Avira?” Sloane asked the young high elf woman sitting a couple of seats down at the end of the table.

The elf looked up from where she was awkwardly observing her hands. “Me? No, I haven’t been that far. I’ve been as far as Laudenwych in the central plains. I’ve been to Marketbol many times though. So I can certainly help us navigate the city when we arrive. It’s a much nicer city than Thirdghyll.”

Ernald seemed interested in the conversation and chimed in, “I’ve heard good things about Marketbol, besides the fact that its name is a travesty. Leave it to the Guilds to have no sense of flair. That said, it’s undoubtedly the crowning jewel of the guild system as a whole.”

Elodie nodded. “It is indeed a key location. It is also home to the main offices of numerous minor guilds, in addition to the headquarters of the Banking Guild. I was born there, and would much prefer to live there. However, with Uncle Lanthil setting up here, the family relocated to be of assistance.”

“If you have questions about any of the other Sovereign Cities, I have been to many of them. Including the Empire and Rosale,” Stefan offered.

“The Kingdom of Rosale will probably be a key stop along the way to Avira, Sloane,” Gisele helpfully added.

Sloane nodded, making a mental note for the future.

She had a thought. “Sorry to switch topics, but what about the ball? It’s in two days. Are we ready? Stefan, are *you* ready? What can you tell me since we last spoke about it?”

Ismeld lifted a hand and gestured between herself and the rest of the knights. “We’re ready. I believe you are as well. I too would like to know what we’re getting ourselves into with you, Stefan. We need a plan to exfiltrate the area if the worst happens and whatever they tasked you to accomplish is discovered.”

Stefan looked around between everyone before responding, "I have learned that there is another terran noble working with the Count. His name is Baron William Bolton, and he apparently comes from the land of England?"

"He's British? Interesting. I didn't realize they still had barons there, but I'm not up-to-date on their nobility. Do you have any other information about there being other uh... terrans?" Sloane asked.

Stefan shook his head. "No. That's still the primary goal of what I am to figure out. I have found out that terrans have been seen entering his estate. Beyond that, nothing. I simply need you to keep the count occupied long enough for me to slip around. If you can create a distraction of some type, that would be even more ideal."

Gisele narrowed her eyes. "There will be no distraction."

Stefan sighed. "Fine. I'll figure it out, but Lady Sloane," She looked up at him as he addressed her, "I will need you to hold Count Kayser's attention at least a little while." She nodded to which he responded by pulling out a map and laying it on the table. "Here are the grounds of the count's estate. Here is the hall where the ball will be held," he said as he pointed out the location. The raithe circled several more key points. "And these are exits."

Deryk and Cristole leaned forward, the former asking, "Where are the guards typically stationed? What is their response time when alerted?"

"How are they alerted and from where?" Deryk asked.

Sloane swapped seats with Ismeld next to the finance elf and then watched as the rest of the group discussed the specifics of their attendance and exit if anything negative were to happen. Stefan would attend as her direct guard, while the knights would attend as part of their order. Elodie would join as Sloane's assistant.

"Lady Reinhart?" Elodie whispered from next to her.

Sloane looked over at the woman who looked as if she'd just won an internal war with herself about whether to speak or not. *She looks worried.*

She didn't want to cause any undue stress to the elf, so she leaned in closer to her. "Is everything alright, Elodie?"

"I'm sorry. I thought we would have time to talk before retiring for the evening," she said without explaining anything at all.

"Go on..." Sloane pushed.

"I know what my uncle wants you to do to get his recommendation, but I have to say... I'm worried about going up against the count," she explained. "He's not one to be underestimated."

Sloane rested her hands on top of each other and tapped her finger. "I understand, Elodie. However, I need to do this." She paused, considering. "Elodie, I need all the help I can get if I'm going to find my daughter. If things get bad, your uncle *should* be there. Get to him. I have a feeling he can protect you. The knights and I? We'll be fine."

"I sure hope so."

"Me too, Elodie."

The discussion wound down, and Sloane found herself back in her room. She looked over everything, trying to determine what she would bring to the ball. *I won't have much.* She would need to spend the day preparing. A few flashbangs to give to the knights would go a long way toward arming them for any potential outcomes.

Sloane placed her knife next to her dress. That was something she couldn't forget. Her options were limited, but at least she'd chosen a dress that would be a bit easier to maneuver in.

She sat on her bed cross-legged, thinking about what else she could do to ensure everything went well. *There is one thing I can bring with me that others can't.* Sloane focused inward and, with a smirk, felt mana coursing through her as she drew on it.