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Chapter 107. The Mad King

Gorsazo gave a nod while looking into the distance. After a while, he said, "There is indeed a good reason behind that, but it's not something that most people know much about, not these days anyway." He continued, "This concerns the founding of the Reslinor kingdom."

Now Kivamus was really curious about this, so he gestured to him to keep going.

Gorsazo explained, "These divisions of measurements were made by a previous king - the first king of the Reslinor Kingdom, Kreslinus Vorlarken, better known as 'Kreslinus The Mad'. He was the one who conquered those regions of Cilaria which we currently know as the Reslinor Kingdom, more than a hundred years ago. The name of the kingdom is derived from his name as well, as you can easily guess. Since then, the Vorlarken Dynasty has been ruling the kingdom continuously for more than a century now. The current king of the Reslinor Kingdom, as old as he is by now, is a direct descendant from the same line."

He added, "In fact, even though you might not remember this now, your name is also derived from the name of the first king of the kingdom. You were physically very weak when you were born, and people were saying that such a frail baby might not survive more than a few days. But your mother wanted you to become as strong as the founder of the kingdom, so she gave you the name Kivamus, somehow you did survive despite everything pointing to the opposite."

Thinking about the mother of the original Kivamus, Kivamus could only remember very hazy memories of her, since she had died when he was just two years old while giving birth to his sister Astela. He wasn't sure whether to feel good that his name was based on someone who was called Kreslinus The Mad, but he could certainly understand the sentiments of a mother who thought her child wouldn't survive a week in this world.

Gorsazo continued, "I haven't yet seen even fifty winters yet, so it was obviously long before my time, but there are annals of the exploits of Kreslinus The Mad which tell a lot about his life. I had read quite a bit about him in the past, so I do remember many things about him, even though most people would just know the name of the founder of the kingdom."

Kivamus raised his eyebrows in curiosity, and asked, "But why was he even called by that name? Was he really insane?"

Gorsazo laughed. "Not at all. He was not even close to being mad, but he was certainly very ruthless when conquering his enemies. So his enemies had given him that title, since he didn't give any quarter to his enemies who didn't surrender at the first notice when he went out from the city of Dorastiz to conquer other kingdoms."

He explained, "Before that, the western part of Cilaria had always been divided into many smaller realms, and while many previous northern rulers had tried to conquer the south as well as the vice versa, Kreslinus The Mad was the first one to siege and conquer all of the north and the south - including the capital of the former southern Kingdom of Ulriga - which was one of the best defended fortresses at the time."

He continued, "So when King Kreslinus was out conquering the region which would later become the Reslinor kingdom, he had given orders to his armies not to leave anyone alive in the cities and towns of his enemies if they didn't surrender at the first notice. Of course, he couldn't slaughter every person in the huge cities like Plumron and Ulriga or there wouldn't be anyone left in the kingdom for him to rule over, but it still happened often enough that with time, that name stuck to him, and eventually, he even started calling himself by that title."

As Kivamus thought about it, the first king's actions sounded similar to Genghis Khan, even though the Mongols had conquered a lot more land. He continued listening as his mentor explained further.

"Now coming back to the topic of discussion," Gorsazo said, "before the time of Kreslinus The Mad, people did use a different measurement, but the kingdom was still very divided in the years after he conquered most of the western part of Cilaria, and there were frequent skirmishes between different regions of the kingdom."

Gorsazo continued, "So to change that and unify the people of the kingdom, King Kreslinus decided to change something fundamental which people use every day, so that people would remember about his name many times in a day - including his ruthlessness - so that they wouldn't even think of trying to revolt against his rule. So he decided to make new measurements of weights and lengths, such as how many inches would be in a foot and a yard, based on the date of his birth, the eleventh month and the twenty-ninth day of that month."

"And since then," Gorsazo added, "one yard contains twenty-nine inches, and one foot contains eleven inches. In other words, one yard became equal to a length of two feet and seven inches after that. It is the same for weights as well. One bilan of weight contains twenty-nine stones."

"Wow..." Kivamus voiced with raised eyebrows.

Gorsazo nodded. "I wasn't alive during that time, but I can imagine that it would have caused a lot of commotion and resistance against the forced order to start using such difficult divisions. But that was the whole point," he remarked. "King Kreslinus made a proclamation that anybody who still used the previous measurements would be executed immediately after being found out. And that certainly did the trick, since instead of trying to depose the mad king, people scrambled to adapt to those absurd measurements."

Gorsazo snorted, "Of course, many people would have used that chance to get rid of their competitors and enemies by claiming that they were still using the old measurements to get them executed. Regardless, since then these measurements have been used throughout the kingdom, and nobody even dared to use the old measurements - which had made a lot more sense, but nobody wanted to fall afoul of the mad king and be executed."

Kivamus nodded slowly. "Well that explains why such weird divisions would be used here. And of course, people will adjust to most things given enough time. However, now I am worried that telling people to use a different measurement would cause much more problems than I had thought of at that time..."

Gorsazo shrugged. "I wouldn't say that it's going to be easy, but a lot of time has passed since the time 'Kreslinus the mad' ruled this kingdom. And by now, I know for a fact that some people do use different measurements in many places, especially the merchants who like to use simpler length and weight divisions which make more sense, even though they use the official measurements when interacting with any nobles."

He continued after a moment, "So, while nobody will come to execute you for this in today's era - or I would have stopped you immediately that day, but I don't think any nearby nobles who learn of it will be pleased by this, especially after they learn that you have already proclaimed your barony to be free of slavery."

Gorsazo added after Kivamus' nod, "It's a different fact that the southern nobles have never been fond of the ruling dynasty anyway, and they have never liked the fact that a northern king had forced them to change something so fundamental within their own kingdoms - although none of them would even think of trying to secede from the kingdom these days in light of Kingdom of Binpaaz's frequent raids into Reslinor after huge sources of iron ore were found in Tolasi Hills a few decades ago."

"Tolasi Hills..." Kivamus muttered. "I remember you telling me about them when we were coming to Tiranat. Anyway, other nobles are hardly in a position to criticize me if they allow merchants within their own domains to use different measurements. Such a thing couldn't have gone without the notice of nobles."

Gorsazo gave another shrug. "That's true enough. But it wouldn't stop the nobles from crying foul if another noble himself goes against the established conventions. Most likely, they will use this as another chance to complain about you to the Count of Cinran, or even the Duke of Ulriga - which means one of your brothers in reality."

Kivamus snorted. "I don't think I'm going to get any favors from any of them, even without going against their rules. But what about the king himself?"

"That's a different matter altogether, since that proclamation came from the capital Dorastiz and not from Cinran or Ulriga." Gorsazo continued, "But then again, we are in the far south of the kingdom, so it's not like the king will care much about what a small no-name baron is doing so far from the capital. Times are already changing from the dark days of the mad king, and like I have mentioned in the past, there are already a few nobles in the north who don't keep any slaves, even though they might not have prohibited slavery outright like you have."

He added, "The king is already very old, and nobody knows how long he's going to live. So in the capital city of Dorastiz, people are going to be more worried about how the succession of power will play out in the coming years once the king passes away, instead of getting bothered about what a small baron is doing at the frontier of the kingdom."

"That's good to hear," Kivamus said with relief.

"Even so," Gorsazo remarked, "while the people in the capital wouldn't be concerned about these changes, any nearby nobles - maybe even the count of Cinran - will certainly grab any chance to diminish the power of another noble - which will be you in this case. Especially since they will already know that you have basically been banished by the Duke of Ulriga."

Kivamus snorted and shook his head. "That is true enough, but it's not like they wouldn't be doing this anyway even if I was dancing completely to their tune. At least a few of them are already trying to kill me, so even if I follow the absurd rules made by a mad king more than a century ago, they still aren't going to like me anyway."

He continued, "You already know by now that I have a lot of knowledge in my head - things which those nobles couldn't even dream of - and for me to secure the safety of the village and myself, I have to make the village a lot stronger and much more prosperous than it is right now. And for any of that to happen, I simply cannot continue to use those absurd divisions and their orthodox rules of keeping humans as slaves! I know I am going to face a lot of resistance in a lot of things, but I have to push through it, or we will remain a small and poor village - where a simple raid by just a dozen bandits can bring the whole village to starvation. I cannot let that happen again."

Gorsazo nodded. "I am completely with you on that, my lord. Even though I have no idea how you have the memories of two people, I know that you are doing your best to protect the village and the common people, so you have my full support in everything you do - even if it goes against the established norms."

Kivamus smiled. "I'm really glad for that."

He continued, "We also don't know who was behind the ambush of the previous baron, but the nearby nobles certainly must have a hand in it, since that would allow them to get access to the coal mines here - because for now, that's the only thing worth a damn in this barony anyway. And it hasn't even been a month since I've arrived here, but they are already trying to kill me as well, and that situation is not going to change without me transforming everything here fundamentally and making the village a lot stronger and richer."

Kivamus shrugged. "And of course, those nobles would have even more of a reason after that to try to seize or conquer our village. So I have to keep pushing through, even at the risk that such changes wouldn't be liked by any nearby nobles. Because these villagers are my people now and they depend on me. So I will do everything in my power and knowledge to prevent such a thing from happening ever again. I will protect them from the greed of those nobles and keep them safe, no matter what!"

After a while, when Duvass and Hudan had returned to the manor hall, a servant announced the arrival of Pydaso.

The merchant entered inside, and after a quick bow to the baron, he took an empty armchair near the fireplace. After putting his hands close to the fire, he exclaimed, "Goddess! It's cold outside!"

"That it certainly is, especially with the constant wind these days," Kivamus said. "I also found out that it has already started snowing on the road to Cinran."

Pydaso nodded. "It began when we were returning from Cinran. It won't be more than a few days before that road gets enough snow to make travel impossible through it."

Duvas remarked, "Looking at the weather in Tiranat today, it looks like that snowfall is not far away here as well."

"It does seem so," Pydaso said, "although you all should still be glad that Tiranat is not located as close to the Arakin mountains as that road is, or the village would get buried within several feet of snow in the winter." He added, "Anyway, I will return back towards my home near Ulriga early tomorrow morning. We nearly lost one of the wagons yesterday because of the damn snow, and it will keep piling up on that road in the coming days. And I don't want to take any risk of getting stuck there."

"That's alright," Kivamus said with a nod. "So tell me what you have brought this time, and then we will finalize your payments."