

## Londoner 201

### Chapter 201 A Cleaner Replacement

"I couldn't have done it without your designs," Darora replied with a shrug, "but I'll take your praise." He grinned before adding, "I have worked hard for this, after all."

Hudan glared at the young carpenter, but Kivamus just snorted at that reply and raised a hand to prevent the guard captain from scolding Darora for his cheeky response. Just a month ago the carpenter was someone who was scared of his life after continuously living between the bandits for so long, and yet he was confident enough in his skills by now to easily make such a joke to him. That just went to show that he had settled well into his new life in the village.

Everyone kept watching the water falling down with a splash over the hill sides for a while, before the two labourers who had been tasked with climbing on the cleats called upon the other labourers.

"Switch with us, someone!" One of them shouted. "We want to see the flowing water too!"

Tesyb immediately left with another two workers to replace them, while discussing a new work schedule for them from tomorrow, since there was barely an hour left before it would get dark, so there was no point in making them work for too long today. Darora followed them as well for some reason.

Hudan looked at him. "I still had my doubts earlier if such a clunky contraption was going to be anything more than decoration, but it really does work, milord." He shook his head with a smile. "By now I really should learn not to question your extraordinary ideas."

Kivamus laughed at that. "It's nothing special. Everyone has worked hard for this, so it's one more victory for the whole of Tiranat." He gazed towards the entrance of the mineshaft for a moment. "Well, we should think of returning soon, I don't want to make the same mistake as the last time when we left too late." Hudan nodded and jogged inside to call up everyone.

Soon he saw Darora walking towards him with all his tools already back in his satchel. The carpenter began, "I'd gone back inside to make an estimate of how much water the wheel is transferring into the trough. I think it will take around a day and a half for all the water inside this shaft to be emptied. There will still be some small potholes and craters inside which will have some water remaining, but it will barely take an hour for workers to remove them with a few buckets."

"That timeline matches with what I had estimated, more or less," Kivamus remarked. "That means you will have enough time from tomorrow to start working on the second crossbow once again. Although I think you should visit this shaft the day after tomorrow in the afternoon to guide the workers about how to disassemble the whole water wheel system without damaging it."

"Of course," Darora nodded. "I was already thinking of the same. I'd hate to see all my hard work go to waste just because a worker didn't know how to do it. I think it will take a few hours to disassemble it, and another few hours to move it to the next mineshaft which needs to be cleared of water. The labourers have already seen it get assembled once, so it will only take them a couple of hours to assemble it the next time, but I'll still go with them for the first shifting of the waterwheel. I'm sure they can do it without supervision after that."

"Good, good." Kivamus grinned. "That means in 15 to 20 days all the mineshafts should be free of any standing water." Thinking about something else, he began, "While we can start sending a few dozen workers to this particular mineshaft after a few days, we really need everyone to keep working in the South to clear more land for farming. So I was thinking of getting you to build a simple wood press machine to deal with the coal shortage."

"What do you mean, milord?" Darora asked with confusion.

"In your workshop, as well as in that of Taniok, there must be a lot of sawdust and wood shavings spread around, aren't there?"

The carpenter nodded. "Of course, it can't be helped when working with wood."

"What do you do with it?" Kivamus asked.

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Darora shrugged. "We just sweep it aside and dump it somewhere else near the forest."

Kivamus nodded. "That's what I expected. However, that is still made of good quality wood, which can also become a good source of heat if burned in place of coal - basically, as its cleaner replacement. While we are using coal for heating in most places, it's not really good for humans to breathe in its

fumes, while these waste materials - which only consist of wood and aren't of any other use anyway - could become a much cleaner source of heat. An added benefit is that the coal which we won't be burning in its place can be sold to the merchants to add to the village's income."

"I guess that makes sense," Darora muttered. "But it's still a real hassle to move all that sawdust around. It takes a lot of space too, so even if you wanted to burn it in a fireplace, someone would need to keep replenishing the fire again and again."

"That's why I was thinking of making a wood press machine." Kivamus added, "With the amount of construction going on in the village, the amount of sawdust and wood shavings that we waste is only going to increase in the future. Even outside of the workshop of you two, anywhere there is some construction going on, whether it is for building a longhouse, a barn, the walls or even the gates we are going to build, there will always be a lot of wood shavings and sawdust which is just wasted for now. So here's what I was thinking..."

He started to walk outside the mineshaft with the carpenter, knowing that if they were successful in making this wooden press - and they really should be, since it wasn't anything too difficult to make - he could think of a much better and more profitable use of such a machine in the future. Of course that would need a lot of paper too, although he was already thinking of a better solution than the costly parchment he had been using until now.

Leaving that thought for the future, he began explaining, "This isn't anything too complicated. You will need to find an empty place, perhaps in the South, since these days that's where most of the wood cutting is going on and you will need to take a sturdy piece of a big and wide stump from an already felled tree. Then you should make the top of the stump smooth and flat, which will form the base of the machine."

He continued, "After that, you will need a frame, kind of similar to the one you have made for the water wheel. While it won't be nearly that high, it will need to be just as sturdy. Then there will be another sturdy plank which will become the top part of the machine, and that is what's going to compress the wood shavings into a... briquette - which is just a small block of that compressed material."

"I think I get what you are saying..." Darora muttered while they walked down on the small hill. "But how will the top plank put pressure on the wood shavings under it? Do you mean to make a man stand on top of it?"

Kivamus chuckled. "That isn't a bad idea, but it won't be that efficient. This is why I mentioned the frame. A screw crafted from a wooden branch will be attached to that frame at its top end, while the bottom end of the screw will be fixed to that plank. Finally, there will be a strong handle - which will be pulled by a labourer to the side to move it horizontally - which will turn the screw slowly. As it moves downwards, it will press the plank with a lot of force. That force will be what will compress the wood shavings and sawdust which would be already kept between the stump and the plank. You will also make small indents in the stump in a cuboidal shape, and that's the shape the wood shavings will take after they are compressed."

Darora seemed to be frowning while thinking about it.

"Don't worry, I'll sketch it up tomorrow morning, and you can use that as a guide to build it by evening, since you aren't needed at the mineshaft for tomorrow."

Kivamus knew that while the sketch of this simple machine should only take a few hours at most, he could easily think of a more complicated method to do the same thing where they could control exactly how much pressure the screw will put on the plank. However, they did not need that accuracy - which was required for printing books and such - because all they needed to do was to compress some wood shavings and sawdust. So the design only needed to be good enough to do the simple task without taking too much time of the carpenter.

Darora nodded. "That will help me a lot, but that would postpone me working on the second crossbow by another day..."

Kivamus sighed. "Don't I know it... The moment I think that one problem is solved, there is another problem starting to rear its head immediately. Even so, we can spare one more day for this, since it will help us a lot in the coming months to save on some coal."

"That is certainly true," the carpenter agreed.

Before long, Hudan and the other guards and labourers began walking downwards towards them. Kivamus looked at the sun which was already close to setting in the west for a moment. Hopefully there wasn't another pack of adzees lurking around near the hills.

"It won't take long for the workers to load up anything they didn't use today on the wagons," the guard captain reported, "and then we can leave."

"Alright," Kivamus nodded. "Let's not waste any more time then."

#### Chapter 202 Winter Competition

It was the early afternoon of a new day, and Kivamus had already finished explaining the design of the wood press to Darora, which he had finished earlier in the morning. The carpenter had been skeptical at first, especially about making the threads of the screw which was usually a very intricate work, before he realised that with the screw being so thick and made from a whole branch, it wouldn't be that difficult to craft it.

Eventually, after asking a lot of questions about the rest of the design, he had agreed that it wasn't that complicated and had assured Kivamus that it should only take him a single day to finish it. They had planned to install it in a temporary shed outside the village walls in the South, since that's where most of the trees were being cut these days.

Back in the present, Kivamus walked back towards one of the armchairs near the fireplace, and looked at Duvas who had just returned from the outside after allotting the workers for the day. Gorsazo had finished today's tutoring of Syryne, who had now returned back to her laboratory in the inner room for now.

Snow had started falling once again, and the weather remained just as cold as expected. He looked at the majordomo. "If Darora is able to build the wood press machine today, we can start making sawdust briquettes from tomorrow. There isn't going to be any shortage of raw material for the wood press, since anywhere a tree is cut or a log is being shaped to better fit a wall or a building, there will always be some wood shavings and sawdust."

He continued, "I think only two labourers should be enough to work the machine - one of them to load the sawdust and wood shavings into the mold for the briquettes, and the other to turn the screw. They can even alternate their tasks when one of them gets tired after working with the screw. That should start giving us a regular amount of sawdust briquettes from tomorrow, which we can use as a fuel in any closed places like inside the buildings for heating. It's also helpful that it's a much cleaner source of heat compared to coal - being just a processed version of wood."

He added, "Since we certainly aren't going to get enough briquettes to completely replace coal, we can keep burning coal in any open places like in the braziers outside, which should prevent their fumes from

gathering inside a building, despite all the care we have taken for ensuring proper ventilation in the longhouse blocks."

"I had never even thought of using sawdust like that," Gorsazo commented.

"It wasn't really an option for us in the past," Duvas said with a shrug, "since we never even had that much sawdust, because we never worked with wood on such a large scale in the past." He added, "I agree that any coal which we don't burn can be used to sell to merchants after the winter, which would be a welcome relief to our dwindling treasury. However, just two workers wouldn't be enough for this. We will also need to allocate a few people to gather up all the sawdust and wood shavings from all around the village and to bring it to that wood press."

"That's true enough..." Kivamus muttered, "but we can hardly afford to spare any workers for that. We need all of them to continue logging in the South."

Gorsazo looked at both of them. "Why don't we use children for this? We can also use this as an opportunity to keep the attendance high in my classes."

Kivamus frowned. "What do you mean?"

"In my classes in the longhouse blocks," Gorsazo explained, "I've seen that there are at least a few dozen children, or kids in the village who are too young to do manual labour, but are still old enough that they are allowed to roam around the village unsupervised, unlike the toddlers which are kept inside the blocks so an elderly can watch over them. With the weather being so cold for now, none of those kids mind sitting in my classes, but I have no doubt that once it turns into spring, I would barely get half the current attendance, if that. So I was thinking that we could put these children to work by sending them to gather any sawdust and wood shavings in small baskets - which is safe for them and easy enough that they will do it enthusiastically in return for some treats which we can make in our kitchens."

"I get what you mean by incentivising them with treats since they are certainly not going to do it without any reward," Duvas said, "but what does that have to do with their attendance in your classes?"

"It's simple enough," Gorsazo said with a smile. "The reason they aren't interested in the classes - apart from some exceptions like Maisy and Clarisa - is that they see no tangible benefit by sitting in these

classes. Despite all my efforts to keep the classes interesting, most of them simply get bored there, just like Lucem. So I was thinking that we could turn it into a competition."

He continued, "Every evening, whoever has gathered the most number of baskets of sawdust, or maybe even the top three or five kids, would be the ones to get more treats than the others. Of course, the total count will need to be confirmed by the laborers working at the wood press, but the children will be told to keep track of their basket counts themselves. As you can guess - kids being kids - they will become competitive very fast, and they all will be keeping track of not just their own baskets, but also of their friends and competitors. As it stands now, most of them have to start once again once they reach above a count of ten, since they can't use their fingers for counting anymore, but this will give them a reason to learn counting better in the classes."

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Kivamus slowly nodded his head. That was something he might not have thought of by himself, but as a long time teacher Gorsazo had immediately thought of a way to use this competition to incentivise kids to learn more. "I think that's a very good idea. In fact, let's fix a wooden board on the ground next to the wood press, where those children will have to write their own names as well as their daily tally of basket counts, for which they will also need to focus on learning the alphabet."

Gorsazo grinned. "That will be helpful as well! I will make the announcement about this competition in today's classes in the evening. I'm sure that we will get a good participation in this."

"Certainly," Kivamus continued, "but those kids can easily get fiercely competitive, and they might start going to places which would be too risky for them, just to do better than their friends. For example, when they see that a branch of a tree is going to fall soon, or maybe a tree itself is going to crash to the ground in a few moments, they might try to get as close to it as possible to be the ones to get any small pieces of wood before their friends could, but that can easily lead to accidents. Also, it is not a good idea for kids that young to be running around in the snow for that long. They can easily forget in their excitement that they are feeling too cold, which can lead to hypothermia... that is, they can get a bad cold or worse."

He added while trying to imagine that scenario, "I am already not comfortable with the idea of making children work - although it might be fine if it's done only for a short while without risking their safety in any way, otherwise it can easily be claimed that we are exploiting them for our own gains. In fact, I don't want to use child labour if at all possible. Ideally, children should be learning in schools at that age, not

doing any work..." He shook his head. "Of course, our situation is not good enough to afford that yet, but the point stands."

"Then why not limit this competition just to the lunch hour?" Duvas suggested. "The temple bells are audible everywhere in the village, including the nearby areas where any work is going on, so every day when the clock strikes twelve in the noon, all the workers take a break for nearly an hour. That can be a safe time for the children to gather what they need to."

"Hmm..." Kivamus nodded. "That can work, but that will only give enough material for the wood press workers to use in the afternoon." He thought about it for a moment, and suggested, "Let's do this then. The workers gather for work at around eight bells, right?"

Once Duvas gave a nod, he continued, "In that case, the children can leave the longhouses at the same time as their parents and other adults. It takes a while for the labourers to gather up their tools and sharpen them, or to do whatever other preparation they need to do for that day's task, and that is a safe enough time for the children to gather up the sawdust from the previous day. On the days when it has already snowed over it, it's better for them to not go out at all anyway, and the wood press workers can just use any leftover wood shavings from the previous day. Otherwise, the children can take their full baskets to the wood press machine after the labourers are ready to start their day's work, which will give the wood press workers enough material to work with until it's lunchtime."

He continued, "The children can do the gathering again during the lunch hour break of labourers, which will give more raw material to the wood press workers and will keep them busy until the evening. Of course, in the evenings, the children will be learning in their classes with Gorsazo. That will give them a regular schedule of doing some work, then a few hours to rest and play, then repeating the same in the afternoon, and then finally classes in the evening."

For a moment, he wondered if he was already training the children to become corporate drones in the future, before he remembered that this poor medieval village could hardly be compared to 21st century London, and any cost savings by using the sawdust briquettes in place of coal would already be used for the betterment and safety of the village, while also allowing them to breathe in cleaner air inside the longhouse blocks. That had to be a good enough reason to basically allow child labour... or at least he hoped it was.

He looked at his former teacher. "You can tell the children to publicly speak about how many baskets they gathered in your classes, so that the best performers can be cheered by the rest of the class. That is when you can give them the treats which can be made by Madam Helga here."

"That's a good suggestion," Gorsazo agreed. "I'll talk with Madam Helga about what she can make which is cheap and yet tasty for the kids."

Kivamus suddenly got an inspiration. "That sawdust is also going to act as a good insulator, isn't it? Of course it will be!" He gave the answer himself without waiting for any reply. "If we can just find some old cloth or fabric to fill that sawdust in, we can easily make some blankets for the villagers!"

Duvas shook his head. "We just don't have any spare clothes for that. We have already been reusing what the previous baron had allowed us to buy a few years ago. As for the villagers, they already know that sawdust can keep them warm, which is why many of them have already gathered some of it to use as a poor man's mattress above the bunks they sleep on."

"Oh... I should have expected that..." Kivamus sighed. "We'll have to see if we can do anything about this after the winter."

After a while, he asked, "When will it turn into a new year? There was a calendar in the Ulriga palace, but I haven't seen such a thing here."

#### Chapter 203 Shortages

"Oh, that reminds me," Duvas suddenly exclaimed, "this is exactly what I was going to remind you about yesterday, but I forgot in all the hustle and bustle of your visit to the coal mines. Yes, we do rely on the temple of the Goddess for this. I visited it yesterday to see the calendar which is maintained by father Edric, and I saw that New Year's Eve is in just two days from today."

"From what I remember, the Kingdom of Reslinor uses a solar calendar, right?"

Gorsazo gave the answer this time. "Yeah, and it was quite controversial when Kreslinus Vorlarken, the mad king, had introduced it more than a century ago. The other countries in Cilaria still use the lunar calendar, and it is the same for most of the countries outside Cilaria as well from what I have heard from a friend who knew an ocean-going sailor."

Kivamus nodded. Along with the changes that the first king of the kingdom had made in the measurement and weighing systems, this change of the type of calendar used in Reslinor meant that it was a lot of changes to have been made by just a single person - kind of like him, in fact. He frowned at that thought. Although it was more than a century ago, the mad king couldn't be someone else who had

transmigrated from earth just like him, could he? If he was, what if there were other people who had been reincarnated into a new life on this planet Eranityn? What if there were people from London as well? What if it was someone he knew?

No! He had to stop thinking about it! It just couldn't be! He shook his head to clear it of thoughts like that. There was no point in daydreaming about such things... Him being transmigrated to this place was something that was already done, and there wasn't anything he could do about it by thinking more about Earth, apart from making himself morose again. While he still didn't have any idea of why or how he had been transported to this world, it still couldn't be a common occurrence, or one of those people from Earth would have made a slip and the locals would have noticed that that person wasn't from their own world.

He nodded to himself. It had to be just a coincidence that Kreslinus Vorlarken had made those changes. He wasn't called the mad king without a good reason, after all. The haphazard measurement system he had implemented to enforce his new rule could be called nonsensical at best, which attested to the possibility that he really was mad. However, thinking of earth had made him feel reminiscent of his past life there once again, which threatened to derail his good mood from the morning. He tried to change his mood by asking, "Do you know why he changed the calendar system from lunar to solar?"

Gorsazo shrugged. "I can only guess as to what the real reasons were, but from what I think the reason was the same as that for changing the measurement system. He just wanted his new kingdom and dynasty to use something which was completely different from what was used everywhere else. This way, whenever the local priest of the goddess in any village or town would tell his people about the change of a season or a year, people would remember the mad king once again - along with his cruel punishments to anyone who thought of rebelling against his rule. Of course, it's just a guess on my part."

Kivamus nodded. It was more or less what he expected. He looked at the majordomo. "So what do you do on New Year's eve?" he asked curiously. "There were big celebrations and a feast in the Ulriga palace. From what I remember, there were even some travelling acrobats who gave a performance there on such occasions."

Duvas shrugged. "Tiranat can hardly be compared to the Ulriga Palace, so there isn't anything special done here to celebrate it. By this time in the previous years - that is after more than a month of the start of winter - most of the villagers would have started to get short on coin because the coal mines were always kept closed in the winter, since we couldn't sell any coal in these months with the northern road blocked for the season."

He continued, "Of course, it also resulted in a serious loss of income for the manor. That would usually mean that by this time everyone in Tiranat would be counting their pennies - including us at the manor - with everyone waiting for the snow to start melting so we could resume our normal lives again. So it wasn't like anybody really wanted to celebrate going through such a difficult time." He added, "Although this year, the savings which you brought from Ulriga has done a lot to tide us over in the last few months, which is why the conditions are much better in the manor this winter."

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"I guess that's true enough," Kivamus muttered. "Without that it might have become really difficult for us."

Gorsazo shook his head. "That was a large sum at the beginning for sure, but after keeping aside the amount we need to pay the taxes after the winter, most likely we have already spent all of it which we could have safely spent."

Kivamus nodded. "That's probably right. We are still not sure exactly how much the tax demands will be, and we might still need to buy some wheat to use as seeds after the winter. It's true that these sawdust briquettes will help to save some coal which we can sell after the winter to gain some extra money, but that's not going to be much, especially since we need to keep the forest clearing in the South continued as long as we can before we start to send workers to the coal mines. That means after the winter we are not going to have a big enough stock of coal to earn a lot of revenue to supplement our limited amount of gold in the treasury."

"Yeah, that's why it worries me if we will even have enough funds to buy more seeds to complete the targeted area for sowing," Duvas muttered. "While there is no news incoming in the winter from the north, it's not hard to guess that the grain prices must have kept increasing in the winter, and by the time we can send a caravan to buy wheat from Cinran, the cost might just remain prohibitive until we start selling coal again."

"I remember that we needed sixty-six sacks of wheat for sowing in the spring," Gorsazo remarked, "but we were already ten sacks short before the start of winter, since we only had fifty-six spare sacks of wheat which we could keep as seeds."

"You are forgetting that we have also taken in twenty-six stonecutters a month ago," Kivamus added with a grimace. "With a single sack of grain containing around a hundred and twenty five kilos of wheat, they are going to consume a full sack every ten days or so. In other words, that's nearly six sacks we

need to keep aside to feed them over the two months of winter, which means we are going to be at least sixteen sacks short for sowing." He shook his head once again. "And it's not just that. Taking them in has also increased the required amount of land we need to sow, which will also increase the amount of seeds we need."

"At a rough estimate," he continued after doing a mental calculation, "that means we will need another four sacks of seeds to sow to feed them for the next year, which takes our total grain shortage to twenty sacks. That's nearly a hundred gold at the going rates before the winter, and it's only going to be higher in the spring. It might very well go as high as a hundred and fifty for all we know. I don't think we are capable of paying that much after paying for the taxes. It might still be doable, but it's certainly going to be close."

"However, there is also the fact that we are not consuming as much wheat as we were thinking before the winter," Gorsazo commented, "because the four hunting groups are bringing in a good amount of meat these days. That has meant a better diet for the villagers - especially those living in the manor - but more importantly, it means we are not using the wheat which we might have been using in the absence of that meat. The hunters have also brought nearly a dozen rabbits by now which we can use to reduce the wheat consumption further, although I believe it's a better idea to keep them alive for now so we can start breeding more of them in the future. A dozen rabbits wouldn't nearly be enough to feed the village even a single day anyway."

After a moment of thinking, Gorsazo continued, "I was talking about this with Madam Helga earlier in the day, and she estimated that with the amount of meat we are feeding those in the manor and giving as weekly ration to the other villagers, we are going to save at least ten sacks of wheat over the winter. Although that will still leave us short of another ten sacks which we will have to buy." Find the source of this chapter at

Duvas stared at the teacher. "You do spend a lot of time talking with Madam Helga these days..." Then he looked back at Kivamus and added with a wince, "Anyway, that will still cost us too much gold, which we might not be able to spare before starting to sell coal regularly. We need to save as much as we can to pay the taxes, of course, but... also for some other stuff that I will explain another time, since it is a difficult topic."

Kivamus frowned at that, but didn't call him out on it for now, while thinking about their current problem. Was there anything else they could do to reduce the consumption of wheat even more? It didn't even need to be a long-term solution. As long as they could save enough wheat to complete the sowing in spring, they should be just fine from the next winter with the amount of grain they would be reaping.

Suddenly, he remembered the fish he had eaten from the eastern stream a few days ago. "What about eating more fish instead?"

#### Chapter 204 Problems

Duvas frowned. "You already know by now that the eastern stream doesn't have nearly enough fish to feed all the villagers. It's just not possible."

"No, that's not what I'm saying." Kivamus added with a grin, "But first, tell me, we still have nearly a barn full of coal, right?" Once Duvas nodded, he continued, "How much would you say it is? Actually, why did the previous baron build just two barns of coal in the manor anyway? We might have had more coal in storage otherwise."

The majordomo explained, "Apart from the manor house as his own residence as well as the servant's hall - both of which are two story buildings, he had built four barns inside the manor, the first two to store coal, another one to store grain for the manor residents, and the last one to store cattle feed for the few cows in the cattle shed and the horses in the stable. As for your earlier question, those two barns were enough to store around a month and a half of our monthly coal output, which stands at around forty wagon loads every month, apart from the winter when the coal mines were kept closed."

"So each barn stores around thirty wagon loads of coal..." Kivamus muttered. "Then we should still have something around twenty-five wagon loads of coal remaining in the second barn, right?"

"It's hard to give an exact amount," Duvas frowned, "since all that coal is piled up together in heaps, but that sounds about right."

Kivamus nodded. "How much coal are we consuming every month these days?"

"Because of your over generous distribution of coal," the majordomo answered with a shake of his head, "I can give you an estimate that we burnt at least fifteen wagon loads of coal last month, and probably closer to twenty wagon loads."

"That is a lot!" Gorsazo exclaimed. "If the monthly output of the coal mines here was only around forty wagon loads, then even if the mines were active, there would hardly be anything left to sell when we are spending half of it right here in the village!"

"Of course, but it's much lower in the summer months than in the winter," Duvas explained. "In those days we barely spent a single wagon load of coal every month, and at most two. As for the previous winters, it was still under five wagon loads every month, since the previous baron didn't provide any coal to the villagers."

"Not for free anyway," Kivamus muttered, "which basically means the same thing as hoarding all the coal for himself."

Duvas grimaced before he added, "There were also strict restrictions for coal usage even inside the manor, which kept our consumption low enough that the two barns of coal we could store in the manor were more than enough for our consumption over the winter, while still leaving a lot of coal to sell after it. As for the present, after we started burning the stumps and small branches in place of coal where possible, that has already reduced our monthly consumption by a few wagon loads, and if your sawdust briquettes can be made in a good enough quantity, that will reduce our consumption further."

Kivamus nodded. "Good. That means we have at least a month and a half of coal in storage even without mining any more coal. My estimate is that all the coal mines will be cleared of any stagnant water in fifteen to twenty days, but I still want to keep the villagers working in the South as long as we can. This month and a half of coal in storage will still be enough to fulfill our heating needs for this winter."

"We won't have any coal left to sell after the winter in that case," Duvas remarked, "which might have been very helpful in case we remain short on the amount of tax we need to pay." He shrugged, "But perhaps you are right that we can postpone mining any more coal for at least a month. But why did you ask about how much coal we have left?"

"Because I want to try to sell some of that coal," Kivamus answered, "this time to Kirnos."

Duvas frowned. "I can accept that despite my earlier calculations that we might need to start coal mining soon, we still probably have enough for our own needs after the measures we are taking to reduce our coal consumption. But if we start selling it, it might not be true anymore..." C-he@ck for the latest upd^ate\*s\* on My Vi-rt#ua&I Li-b!rary Empi.re@ (^M-V^L.-E\$M\$P-Y\*R!).\*

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"We don't even know for certain if we can even sell that coal," Kivamus replied. "Even if we do try it, it's unlikely that we will be able to sell more than a few wagon loads, and we can take that much loss in our inventory. My point is that while it may be fine for us not to have any coal in storage to sell after the winter, since we can just mine more of it after a month, it would be very costly for us to buy any wheat at the expected astronomical prices after the winter, especially before we start earning a regular revenue by selling coal."

He added, "Even at the lower end, it is going to be fifty gold for ten more sacks at the going prices before the winter, but it can easily be seventy-five gold or even more. That is only in case buying just ten more sacks are sufficient to complete the sowing. The real requirement - which we will find out only after the winter - can be even higher. That's why I want to try our best to prevent spending any coin on it before restarting coal mining at full scale, if at all possible."

"Hmm..." Duvas muttered. "I guess that makes sense."

"So here is what we will do," Kivamus continued while gesturing towards the west. "I want to send a small caravan of two wagons filled with coal to Kirnos. They might not have a high demand for coal, since it doesn't snow that much at the coast, but we might be able to sell that much in return for some..." He was going to say salted fish before he remembered how costly salt was in this region, so he added after a moment of pause, "in return of some smoked fish. If this goes successfully, we should be able to reduce our wheat consumption even more."

Duvas seemed to be thinking about it. "Now that we have five wagons in the manor including the two we got from the quarry, we can certainly spare a couple of them since we aren't mining any coal now, despite their uses in the construction places. Although we will still need to send at least one guard per wagon to protect the caravan."

"That simply won't be enough protection - since that means it'll only be a total of two guards," Gorsazo commented, "unlike when we had sent a caravan to the north with sixteen of them which was a successful deterrent. Also, Kirnos is a place close to the territory of Torhan's group of bandits - which is much bigger and stronger than Nokozal's group. So we need to be extra careful when sending people in that direction."

"It won't be easy even if we have twenty-five guards now," Duvas remarked, "not including the ten female guards as well as Hudan and Feroy - who only work in supervisory roles instead of pulling a

watch duty themselves. However, with only a single crossbow in the manor for now, it means we can't use all the female guards effectively yet, apart from Hyola."

"Hmm..." Kivamus muttered. "We had already planned to bar and close the southeastern gate of the village semi-permanently until we get more guards in the future. Until Taniok completes that gate, we can just lock the northern gate instead for most of the day - apart from when the northern workers leave in the morning and return in evening. This will mean we will need to guard only two gates instead of three, just as we planned earlier."

He continued, "Although even if we just keep two guards in each shift at the two open village gates, that still means twelve guards will need to be posted there in three shifts daily - and that doesn't even include the guards which need to be posted at the two gates of the manor. The hunting groups who return every few days to the village can be used as a backup in case of any emergency, but there are still at least twelve to sixteen of them out at any time in two or three groups - most of which are our own guards. It just won't work this way..."

Suddenly he remembered something. "Wait a minute. Hudan had said that he was going to post women at the manor gates too in the future, but the village wall wasn't completed at that time so we had postponed it for the future. He has already done it with some of them as a trial for watch duty, so if we tell him to do this from now on, it might just work! Since there is a boundary wall around the village now - even if two gates are still under construction - that means the manor gates only need to be lightly protected from any theft from the villagers. Any serious wild beast attacks or bandit raids will need to be dealt with right at the village gates. That should allow us to post the female guards at the manor gates immediately."

"I'll talk with Hudan about it later to get his opinion," Kivamus added, "but let's assume for now that he agrees that it's feasible. That will mean we can send enough guards to protect the caravan, even though it would be stretching us thin. This way we should be able to send at least four and preferably five or even six guards with the two wagons."

Duvas gave a slow nod. "That should hopefully be enough for now, since nobody expects us to send a caravan to Kirnos, especially in the middle of winter. Even Torhan's group would have no reason to scout the eastern road from Kirnos or to plan an ambush."

Kivamus nodded. "Exactly." Then he realised that there was another problem. "We will also need someone trustworthy to negotiate with the merchants there. Gorsazo is busy with the classes and I don't want to stop our villagers' education to send him with the caravan, and you have way too many responsibilities anyway. So it will have to be someone outside the three of us."

## Chapter 205. Finances - Part I

"What about Feroy?" Gorsazo suggested. "He had already gone with Pydaso to Cinran so he does know about the current prices of various things, and it's not easy for someone to fool him anyway."

"I was thinking about him as well," Kivamus agreed, "but I wanted to keep both him and Hudan at the manor, so that at least one of them would be here to organise our defence even if the other one was out. But in this case Hudan would have to stay back at the manor even if I wanted to go to visit coal mines again. Is there any other guard who can be trusted with this?"

Duvas thought for a moment. "Kerel is the only other guard with enough experience to lead the caravan, but he is a warrior through and through. He simply wouldn't know how to negotiate with a merchant, but he can certainly be trusted to organise the defence in case you want to take Hudan with you to the coal mines again."

"This should work." Kivamus nodded. "We can fully trust Feroy, and he might very well be able to extract a better price for us than any other guard anyway." He gazed at the windows for a moment. "It's already late afternoon today, but let's plan to send him tomorrow morning."

"I will talk with the servants to load up two wagons with coal today," Duvas replied, "and with Madam Nerida to make some extra bread and hard tack for them. Although it won't be a very long trip, with it needing nearly a day and a half of journey on one side, that still means they would reach Kirnos the day after tomorrow in the evening. Give them two or three days to negotiate, especially if the Baron of Kirnos asks for too high of custom duties or border taxes. That will mean they will need nearly another two days to return, for a total of a week."

Kivamus nodded. "It's better for them to pack for a ten day journey, just in case it takes longer. Unlike Cinran, we don't have a regular trade relationship with Kirnos, so it's not going to be easy to do this." He was thinking that this much preparation should be enough for a successful trip, but remembering the recently constructed smokehouse in the village, he asked, "Would Kirnos even have enough smoked fish there to sell to us? Do they even have a smokehouse there?"

"Of course," Duvas explained, "being located on the coast, they do have a smokehouse to sell some smoked fish to any visiting merchant ships. Although I don't think they would have enough ready for us to fill two wagons. Not at a reasonable price anyway."

"Let's just ask Feroy to buy the most he can on the first trip," Kivamus suggested. "If it goes well, we can send him on more trips in the future - assuming there is enough of a demand for coal in Kirnos. Otherwise we just can't afford it until we start selling coal after winter."

Once Duvas gave a nod in acceptance, Kivamus asked curiously, "How much tax do we need to pay in the spring, anyway?" He added after a moment of thought, "That reminds me, how much revenue did you earn from selling coal in the usual months?"

"It's good that you asked, I wanted to talk about this with you at some point. Give me a moment," the majordomo requested before he stood up and walked to an inner door, and exited the hall for a few minutes. Soon, he came back with what could only be termed as a ledger. Surprisingly, this was made of paper, instead of the parchment they normally used.

Noticing his gaze, Duvas explained, "The previous baron was very careful that his finances were kept well - that was the main reason he hired me in the first place - so we had bought a thick paper ledger from Cinran for this, despite its cost. Anyway, back to the topic." The majordomo took his seat again and tilted the ledger towards the light from the fireplace, and turned its pages one by one, until he seemingly reached where we wanted.

He began after looking through it for a moment, "I can give you our revenue and expense report from a summer month - before the untimely demise of the previous baron - when we were selling coal as usual, since after he was murdered by mercenaries, merchants stopped coming here and all my calculations became irrelevant."

"That's okay," Kivamus nodded. "Just tell me about the numbers from an average month."

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The majordomo gave a nod and while moving a wrinkled finger over a column of numbers on the ledger, he began, "For this particular month in late summer, which was the seventh month of the year, we got around 491 gold as revenue."

Duvas gazed at him for a moment. "I am rounding up the numbers here, since you probably don't want to hear the exact number of silver and copper pieces we get for something." Once Kivamus gave a nod, he continued, "Obviously, most of it was from selling coal to the visiting merchants. Hmm..." He trailed a

finger over the ledger again, until he seemed to find what he was looking for. "It was 468 gold for this month, to be exact, which we had gained from selling 39 wagon loads of coal, which was a little lower than our usual sale of 40 wagon loads per month. The remaining 23 gold came from the custom duties the previous baron imposed on any merchants coming or going from Tiranat."

"Alright, so just under 500 gold was the average monthly revenue," Kivamus repeated. "What about the manor's expenses in those months?"

"As you can guess," Duvas replied, "our biggest expense was paying the wages for the coal miners. At the previous baron's order, I used to pay 8 to 10 coppers a day to each male miner - depending on their daily output - and a few coppers lower to any women or children helping out there, since they did a lesser amount of physical work than the men." Sourced directly from MV6LEMP6YR.

Kivamus didn't disturb him despite whatever expletives he wanted to say to the previous baron for so, so many things. Gorsazo also seemed to be listening silently to the report.

Duvas continued, "On average, each miner got around 25 days of work every month and after doing all the calculations, it had totalled out to around 221 gold as their wages for this month. Then there were the wages we paid to the manor servants, our maids, the grooms and the guards. That ranged from 8 coppers to 14 coppers a day depending on a person's duties. However, we do provide food and lodging to all of them, so after deducting the share of that, we had paid 59 gold as their wages for this month."

He added, while scratching his small white beard with one hand, "Apart from that, there were the much higher wages of up to 30 coppers a day for the previous guard captain, the head cook for the baron, Madam Nerida - who is the head maid, as well as myself, which totalled out to around 30 gold for this month, after deducting the expenses of food and lodging."

"Alright," Kivamus nodded. "So it was 221 gold for the miners' wages, 59 gold for the servants, and 30 for the supervisors. That's a total of... 310 gold. Anything else to add in it?"

Duvas nodded. "For the forty people who lived in the manor at that time, we needed around six sacks of grain to feed all of us every month, which totalled to around 25 gold for this particular month, at the former rate of 4 gold and 2 silvers for each sack of wheat. Another 5 gold was used to buy other miscellaneous things like salt, tools, clothing etc, while we also paid around 5 gold to the carpenter and the blacksmith for any specialised repairing we needed them to do."

Kivamus nodded, recalling that the previous baron used to import all the grain and nearly every tool from Cinran so he could extract more custom duties from the merchants - supposedly to keep his costs low for buying new tools - as much of a circular logic as it was. "So that's another 35 gold you spent for living expenses of the manor residents. So that's a total of 345 gold as the usual monthly expenses."

"That's accurate," the majordomo agreed. "That only leaves the yearly taxes, which we have to give in a lump sum every autumn. In the last few years Count Cinran took 20% of the revenue generated by each baron under his domain as the taxes. It used to be lower in the past, but after a small raid on Cinran from some Binpaazi knights a couple of years ago, he raised it to the current rate."

Gorsazo spoke from his past knowledge, "Of course, a share of those taxes is passed upwards to the Duke of Ulriga - your father - who would be passing a smaller share of it further upwards to our old king in the capital Dorastiz. However, you know very well that these days your brothers are taking care of all the revenue and expenditure in the duchy instead of your father."

Kivamus snorted. "I am quite sure that my brothers aren't using any of that revenue for the well-being of the local people in Ulriga, that's for certain." He added, "By the way, why did you say the tax collector will come to Tiranat himself, when the previous baron always had to go to Cinran to pay the taxes there."

Duvas shook his head. "The previous baron certainly didn't have to go there. The Count always sends his tax collector to every baron under him - he is gaining a lot of gold from it after all - but our previous baron preferred spending more time in Cinran than he did here. So he took it as a good opportunity to travel to Cinran every autumn."

"That makes sense," Kivamus muttered. Suddenly, his mind clicked at the implications of that huge percentage, and he exclaimed, "Wait, that means we have to pay around 100 gold per month as the taxes?"

Chapter 206 Finances - Part II

"Indeed," Duvas said with a grimace. "98 gold for this particular month, to be exact. For the full year's taxes, it was around..." he muttered while turning pages on his ledger. "Where was it... I know I had calculated it already..." Then he pointed at something, "Oh, here it is. 937 gold is still due as the taxes for the previous year."

"937 gold...!" Kivamus exclaimed. "That's a lot more than what I was expecting..."

Duvas gave a reluctant nod. "At least it's not a full 1200 gold for the year, since the Count knows that we can't sell any coal in the winter months with the road to Cinran blocked every year. Still, we had already saved that much by autumn, but on that unfortunate trip when the previous baron was going to give these very same taxes to the Count is when he was murdered. Usually I went along with him to handle all the formalities and to get our ledger verified with the Count's tax collector, while the baron... met with his... acquaintances there, but as you know I had fallen sick at that time, which turned out to be a blessing from the goddess since it saved my life. However, the result remains the same that the mercenaries stole all our savings, and Count Cinran would still consider our taxes to be long overdue."

The majordomo added, "Usually he would have still sent his tax collector to Tiranat if he hadn't gotten the taxes by the eighth month, but the road to Tiranat was considered too dangerous at the time, especially when carrying such a large amount of gold, so he seemed to have postponed it until after the winter."

Kivamus frowned. "We can only guess if he didn't send the tax collector because the road was dangerous at that time, or because he was also working in collaboration with that bastard Zoricus. In that case he would have to pretend that the roads were dangerous to make it seem like the previous baron had died because of an ambush from some bandits on these wildly dangerous roads, instead of making people wonder if it was a power struggle between nobles."

Duvas looked flabbergasted. "The Count collaborating with Baron Zoricus...? That's not..." Then he trailed off. "Actually, I don't think I can really say that he was fully innocent without knowing more. Even just a few months ago I wouldn't even have expected that Baron Zoricus could have planned something like an assassination of another baron, even though all we have as a proof is our suspicions." The majordomo shook his head. "But at this point, with my previous master of nearly two decades killed so brutally... I just don't know anymore..."

Kivamus nodded. "Whether he was complicit in this or not, the assassination was also meant to include you, since you were expected to accompany the previous baron to Cinran. That's exactly why we have to be on our toes when dealing with any other nobles, including the Count." He continued after a moment, "Anyway, there isn't anything we can do about the past, other than to take a lesson from it to be very cautious of the greedy and blood thirsty nobles in this kingdom."

"I do understand that now," Duvas said reluctantly. "But no matter what The Count may have done to the previous baron, we do have to pay the whole 937 gold to him in the spring."

"That would be in the second month of the coming year..." Gorsazo muttered, "but we will only have just six months to gather a similar amount to pay the next year's taxes for the trailing 12 months, starting from the previous autumn."

Kivamus gave a loud exhale to calm his mind. Just how much money would they have to generate here only to pay taxes... "Isn't there a way for us to get a rebate or something? Or perhaps we can try to tell the tax collector that it's not our fault that the mercenaries stole the savings we were going to pay as taxes..."

"Of course, I plan to try for sure," the majordomo agreed, "but it's not very likely that he is going to listen."

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Gorsazo looked at them. "Even if we can't get a full write off - which would be unrealistic anyway - just getting a discount on that amount would be a Goddess-sent blessing."

"We are going to find that out soon enough," Kivamus muttered. He asked while dreading the answer, "How much do we still have left in the strong box?"

Duvas turned around the pages of the ledger for a while, before he winced. "As of today, we have a total of just 943 gold left, not counting the small change in silvers and coppers. Apart from some small expenses, we still have to pay the wages of the specialised craftsmen, including Taniok, Darora and Cedoron every day, which will eat up our treasury until the time we need to pay the taxes. Of course, the rest of the guards and the servants are already grumbling about not getting any coins, but I think it shouldn't be a big problem for now."

Kivamus grimaced. After paying the wages of the craftsmen until then, most likely they wouldn't have enough gold left to pay the taxes... That didn't leave any scope for buying wheat in time to use as seeds. Of course, they certainly needed to buy a lot more wheat to feed the village in the summer months until they could harvest what they hadn't even sown yet, but that should be doable once the merchants started coming and they were able to sell coal regularly.

"It seems it's a good idea to send Feroy to Kirnos after all," Gorsazo commented, "since any fish we can get from there will help to preserve more wheat and will save our limited gold."

Kivamus nodded. "Earlier I was thinking of giving another feast to the villagers to celebrate the New Year's Eve to mark it as a new beginning for Tiranat, but I don't think it will be feasible this year..."

"I agree with that," Duvas nodded. "Giving that single feast a month ago had already used up more food than we can afford to give for free. We have to minimize our expenses however we can in the coming month."

Kivamus agreed with the sentiment but he still wanted to do at least something to celebrate the evening, even if for no other reason than just to take everyone's mind off from the worries of how they would pay the tax while still having some gold left to buy enough seeds. It just wouldn't feel like a New Year otherwise. Of course, it should also help to calm down the grumbling of the guards and the servants who hadn't been paid for months in cash.

"We still have some of that smoked adzee meat stored up, don't we?" Although Kivamus remembered the sinewy texture of that meat, which was quite chewy and a little hard to swallow, which meant he hadn't liked it at all - just like the people he had asked about it - but for most locals it was the uniquely dangerous source of the meat and the bragging rights which came with it which mattered a lot more than its taste. This content is presented by M4VLEMPYR.

Once the majordomo gave a nod, he continued, "So let's give a small feast just to the manor residents using that meat on new year's eve. That meat is unique enough that it will still mark the day as a special occasion. Madam Nerida can create some other good dishes for the evening, and we can distribute a small amount of the ale we have stored here." He looked at the majordomo. "Before you ask me for this anyway, I'll add a small speech too, to motivate everyone."

Duvas snorted at that, and seemed to think about the proposal for a while. "This smaller feast... should be doable. We are feeding everyone in the manor anyway, so it would barely add any extra load on our food stores. I'll talk with the others to arrange it."

"Feroy would miss the adzee meat this time though," Gorsazo said with a snort.

Kivamus chuckled at that. "That's true, but he can instead have some smoked fish at the coast while he is in Kirnos. Fish is still a unique enough meal for us that it might just be enough to mollify him."

Duvas smirked at that, while Gorsazo joined in his laughter at the ex-mercenary's penchant for eating tasty food.

Kivamus gazed towards the windows in the western wall of the manor hall which were always closed these days. Cinran was still a known entity for trading their coal for grain and they knew what to expect there, especially with the help of the seasoned merchant Pydaso. However, Kirnos was a completely different beast with the local baron's well-known greed of extorting as much as he could from any visiting merchants.

Feroy did have very good instincts, and it was difficult for anyone to fool him, but he was still no veteran merchant. Only time would tell if he would be able to trade profitably in the domain of that greedy baron and help Tiranat save as much wheat and gold as they could. They were certainly going to need it once this harsh winter ended.

#### Chapter 207 A Winter Walk

It was early morning of the next day, and Kivamus was standing near the gates of the manor along with Duvas and Hudan in the continuously falling snow. There was just enough light to see clearly, but the sun had yet to rise above the Arakin mountains in the east. He rubbed his hands together in a futile attempt to warm them, but it barely did anything. The weather was bitterly cold in the open, and even the fur coat he was wearing as well as the continuously burning brazier kept next to the gates where he was standing didn't do much to stave off the cold. He couldn't wait until he returned inside the manor hall again with its brightly burning fireplace.

The small caravan of two wagons was ready for the new journey, where Feroy and three guards - each wearing a fur coat - were making the final checks on everything. The wagons had been fully loaded with coal yesterday, so the guards only had to check on their provisions for the journey in the morning, which is why they were ready to leave so early. Each of the wagons had been hitched to a pair of horses, their breaths puffing out in small frosty clouds.

The two guards on duty at the manor gates seemed to be watching curiously as well. One of them was Savomi - one of the two twin sisters who were the first women to be hired as guards in Tiranat. Hudan had agreed with his suggestion to employ women guards at the gates of the manor, and that was the only reason Feroy had three other guards to accompany him on his journey west towards Kirnos.

Soon, the ex-mercenary walked towards him while blowing on his hands. "We are ready to leave, milord." Then he gestured outside the gates where the snow had already covered the huts on the other side of the empty area outside the gates under a thick white layer. "This snow is going to make it difficult to see too far or to spot an ambush, but it's unlikely in this weather anyway."

Kivamus nodded. "I certainly hope you are successful on this trip, but the village's situation is not as desperate as it was when you had gone with Pydaso's caravan to Cinran. Being able to buy smoked fish from Kirnos would certainly help us a lot, but we aren't at risk of anyone starving in the winter anymore. That's why I want you to protect yourself and the guards even more than the cargo in case of an ambush - especially if it looks like you won't be able to kill any bandits who attack you. We can always mine more coal, but we can't replace your lives." He added, "I wouldn't be saying this if we were able to provide enough guards to protect the caravan, but for now we have too many tasks to employ them at, and not nearly enough guards to do it."

"Nothing to worry about, milord," Feroy gave a confident grin. "That's why we have chosen our best fighters for this trip." He tilted his head towards the burly young guard who was climbing on his seat in the front wagon. "Tesyb will be worth two men by himself if it comes to a battle, you know?"

"I don't doubt it," Hudan snorted. "He was already a good fighter even before the bandit raid, but that near escape from death in that fight with Nokozal has made him train harder than anyone else here in the past month. He's more than capable of holding his own now. I also wanted to send Yufim with you, but for now his skills are better used as a hunter."

Duvas, who had been quiet until now, interrupted with worry, "You do have that... stuff kept safely, right?"

Feroy gave a barely noticeable tap with a finger on the side of his fur coat, and nodded quietly in response.

Yesterday, they had decided to give a small amount of gold to the ex-mercenary, just in case he needed to grease some palms while doing this trade in Kirnos. The plan still remained to sell as much coal as they could, but the Baron of Kirnos might ask for gold as border taxes instead of coal, and in that case the small satchel Feroy had kept tied to his chest under his fur coat would be very helpful.

Duvas gazed towards the sky, with his hands interlaced together. "May the goddess bless you all."

Kivamus looked at the ex-mercenary. "Alright then, you should leave before it gets late. I hope this journey is safe and successful, since a lot depends on it. Good luck!"

Feroy gave a curt nod. "I'll do my best. You can trust me on that." With that, he turned around and climbed on his seat next to the guard sitting on the seat of the second wagon. With a quick whip to the horses, the wagons lurched into motion, and Tiranat's first trading mission to Kirnos was underway.

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Once both of the wagons had turned left outside the gates and disappeared from their views, Kivamus looked at the guard captain and the majordomo. "Come on, let's return inside now. It's too damn cold here!"

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An hour or so later Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall after breakfast, while Hudan was out training the guards. Duvas had just returned back after allotting the workers for the day - which included noting down who was working where so he could keep a track of everything. Gorsazo had gone to tutor Syryne in one of the empty inner rooms of the manor house after everyone had taken their morning meal. The full series lives on My Virtual Library Empire (M|V|LOEMPYR).

Other than the time spent to help her mother in cooking, as well as her daily morning classes Syryne was getting from Gorsazo, she was spending most of her time in her makeshift laboratory these days because of her newfound interest in botany. Despite being the same age as her in his newfound body at twenty-one years old, Kivamus couldn't help but be proud of her enthusiasm in learning and he had already promised to do his best in guiding her using his modern knowledge.

Soon, the outer door of the manor opened and a servant walked inside.

"Milord, the carpenter Darora wanted me to tell you that he would like you to visit where he was building that uh... wood machine in the South."

Kivamus was excited to hear the news. "It's the wood press machine," he corrected the servant. "Is it already built? I thought it would take a few more hours."

The young servant nodded. "I had gone to the South to refill the braziers with coal and seeing a small crowd gathered together, I went to take a look. That's when the carpenter told me about it. I even saw a

few kids running around while holding some baskets." Then he added with a shrug, "Not sure what that was about."

After allowing the servant to return to his tasks, Kivamus stood up and looked at the others while putting his fur coat on. "I am going to visit this new machine. Either of you want to come with me?"

Duvas, who was sitting as close to the fireplace as was feasible without risking a burn, shivered in response. "Not now, my lord. I just came from the outside. My old bones can't take any more visits in the snow for now. I'll visit it sometime later in the day."

Kivamus chuckled at the old majordomo. "That's okay, you can keep yourself warm here."

"I'll accompany you," Gorsazo said as he put his own fur coat around himself. "I'm free for now."

"Great, let's go then. We'll find Hudan and take him with us too."

They exited the manor hall into the snow which was still falling continuously. Rubbing his hands together, Kivamus was thinking about where the guard captain would be at the moment, since he usually went to the empty area outside of the manor in the east to train the guards, but thankfully he saw Hudan talking with a few guys near the servant hall.

Giving a holler to him, Kivamus gestured to him to come over.

Soon, the guard captain came jogging towards them, his own fur coat - which was already sprinkled with snow - making his huge frame look downright gigantic.

"You already done with today's training?"

Hudan shrugged. "These days we just don't have enough free guards for me to train, with many of them out hunting apart from the three who went with Feroy. So it doesn't take too long for me to correct their stances and have a training fight with them after the warmups."

Gesturing the captain to follow him, Kivamus started walking towards the manor gates. "I am visiting the new wood press machine outside the village walls. Call up a few off duty guards and join us."

Hudan nodded, and it didn't take long for him to find a few guards who were resting in the servants' hall nearby. Soon, Kivamus, his former teacher, and his protection detail exited the manor gates and began walking to the South under the falling snow. They kept following the narrow alley next to the walls of the manor, and walked through the middle of the village, which seemed more or less deserted at the moment.

With most of the able bodied men and even women out of the village walls to work as labourers, and their children or elderly family members who weren't able to work staying in one of the two long house blocks, it only left the few unlucky souls who hadn't been able to find a place in the new buildings, and still had to stay in their shacks for the winter. That meant apart from a few dogs who were huddling inside the now-empty houses, there was nearly nobody visible on these alleys, especially in this freezing weather.

#### Chapter 208 The Wood Press

They kept walking and soon they passed the last huts of the village in the south, and began walking through the empty area towards the newly built village walls which were barely visible in the snowfall. On the way they passed the small shed which was being maintained by madam Helga to grow the Rizako mushrooms, where a servant seemed to be replenishing the coal. Wait... no. He realized that it was actually a few small wooden branches which the servant was taking inside the shed. Duvass must have told them not to use coal here for now.

Before long they reached the tall walls surrounding the village, with the small gap in the south-eastern part being busy with a few men working there. Looking closer, he saw Taniok attaching a series of much stronger planks than the ones they had used in the bunks onto a sturdy frame which he had already constructed, while a few other workers helped him in the process. This would become one side of the gate, with the other already fixed to a frame on the wall.

"Doing well, Taniok," he praised the balding carpenter as they paused for a moment to heat up their hands from the brazier burning there.

Taniok grinned. "Should be done in a couple of days. With the adzee threat gone by now, we can use all the hours of the daylight for this."

"Good, good. That will only leave the gate in the south-west," Kivamus commented.

"Just give me a week or so and I'll have both of these gates built," the carpenter boasted.

"I'm sure you will," Kivamus praised with a grin.

"I can't wait for the day when we have strong walls and gates surrounding us from all sides," Hudan commented. "It would make our job so much easier."

Kivamus smiled. "Only a week, Hudan. Only a week."

They kept watching the carpenter at work for a while, using the idle time to heat up their hands and bodies as much as possible from the brazier. Looking back towards the last houses of the village in the north, he realized that although it felt like it had taken too long to reach the village walls while trudging through the snow, it was probably not even five minutes - but with the visibility quite low in the snowfall, the slowed perception of passing time had made it feel like it had been much longer.

Soon, they began to walk again and exited the gap in the walls, with Kivamus immediately noticing just how far the tree line seemed to be now. With most of the labourers working in the South these days, the southern foreman Pinoto had kept the forest clearing going at an excellent rate. There was easily more than a kilometre of empty space in the South by now. While the first 500 meters of that would be kept empty to give a clear line of sight outside the village walls, the sowing would start in the area ahead of that.

They kept walking and before long they passed a more or less circular depression on the snow covered ground which had been surrounded by a thin rope fixed to small posts. This was where the digging of the pond had been started before the snow had postponed the task for the spring. The new drains that they had dug in the north of the village around the longhouse blocks were also connected to this still incomplete pond, with the long depression in the ground easily making it clear where the drains were. F+in%d& the trans+l@at!io@n on M#V&%LEM^PY@R.

Not too far ahead of that was the destination, where there was a small crowd already gathered at the moment. Reaching closer, he saw that there was a wide tree stump in the middle, and the new wood press machine was fixed above it on a sturdy frame. A couple of labourers were already using the lever to turn the screw around, while the young carpenter Darora was watching from nearby.

A small group of kids, including Lucem and Clarisa, were also watching curiously with empty baskets in their hands.

Seeing him approach, Darora walked closer and grinned. "It's done, milord! You came at the right time. This is the first trial of the machine so I'm waiting to see if everything works well for a few tries before I go back to my workshop to work on the second crossbow again. That's why I allowed the kids to stay here for now when they begged to see the results of their hard work, after they had brought more than enough baskets of sawdust and wood shavings for us."

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"That's okay for the first trial," Kivamus gave a nod, "but make sure to send them inside soon. It's way too cold for them to stay outside too long."

As the labourers strained to turn the lever connected to the screw, he noticed that the screw had been carved directly into a small straight piece of a Fedarus branch. That was the reason it was possible to carve a screw at all - because the grooves were big and wide enough to make it easy to do it by hand - not to mention it had been done in just over a day. Otherwise it might have taken too long, which would have defeated the purpose of starting to make sawdust briquettes quickly to supplement coal as a fuel.

He also noticed a wide wooden plank which had been fixed to a post on the ground. There were already a few scribbles on it, and he saw a young girl arguing with Clarisa while she added to the squiggles.

Being surprised about how they could possibly have learned to write so fast, he asked Gorsazo about it.

His former teacher gave a laugh. "They can hardly write at all," he informed in a low voice so the kids wouldn't hear it. "However, Clarisa has a sharp mind and she already knows how to write numbers up to twenty. Since we can't afford to keep someone literate here all day to keep track of how many baskets each kid has brought, so yesterday evening I came here and wrote the names of all the kids who were interested in doing this along with a unique number in front of each name."

Kivamus frowned. "A unique number? But they can't even read yet... How would they even recognise which series of squiggles - since that's all it must look like to them at the moment - is their name?"

Gorsazo grinned. "I already knew that, which is why in the evening classes yesterday in the first longhouse block, I came up with the idea to allot a number to each kid." He gestured at the small crowd of kids gathered near the board. "Most of them can't even read numbers yet, but Clarisa has taken that responsibility for every kid for now. Every time a kid brings a basket and drops it into that waiting pile, she asks their unique number, and increments the daily basket tally in front of that unique number on the board. This way she will also get some practice to read the names of those kids, while the other kids who are behind her in learning will be motivated to keep track of their own unique numbers."

The teacher shrugged. "It's hardly an ideal solution, but this way all of them will be motivated to keep learning so they can make sure that their competitor isn't catching up to them in the basket count."

Hudan gave a loud laugh at the underhand method to make kids keep learning, while Kivamus looked at Clarisa - the young maid who used to be beaten by the previous baron in the past. "It does seem to be effective, that's for sure. She already seems to have become a leader of them."

Soon, the labourers had turned the screw enough times, and Darora told them to stop. "That's enough. Now turn the screw around in reverse, and let's see if the briquettes have come out well."

Giving a nod, the labourers did as they were asked and soon the sturdy plank began to rise upwards from the tree stump with each turn of the screw. Once it had risen up enough, Kivamus saw that the stump had a series of rectangular indents carved into it in a grid, and that's where the sawdust and wood shavings must have been packed before using the screw to bring the plank down to compress it.

With the kids curiously watching from nearby, one of the labourers planted a chisel on the edge of a rectangle, and gently nudged the briquette upward. Soon, he had in his hands a cuboid shaped brownish material which was roughly around ten centimeters on the two short sides and twenty centimeters on the longer side. He handed it over to Kivamus, who took the briquette in his hands looking around at it from all sides. He even used a small force from his hands to try to break the briquette in two parts, but it didn't seem easy, although he knew that putting more force would still do it.

"Looks good enough to me," he commented, while the labourers got busy removing the other briquettes. Soon, there was a stack of more than a dozen such briquettes stacked on the snowy ground.

"Will these really burn as good as a log?" one of the guards asked in curiosity.

"Let's try it right now then," Kivamus said. He took the briquette in his hand and walked over to the burning brazier nearby. With the servant having replenished it with some firewood earlier in the morning, it wasn't empty yet, but there was still enough space in the brazier for him to put the briquette inside it. He gestured to the guards to add a couple more of them with the first one, and soon, four of the briquettes started glowing in the heat of the already burning wood in the deep pan of the brazier.

Before long, one of the briquettes caught fire, and soon it was followed by the rest of them doing the same, making the kids clap their hands seeing the product of their hard work producing results. The guard who was curious earlier walked closer and put his hands next to the fire with a frown, seemingly to assure himself that the fire from the briquettes was also real.

"It burns so well, milord," Gorsazo remarked. "I know it's just wood, so it was going to burn for sure, but it seems to have caught fire way too quickly - much faster than a block of wood of a similar size would have."

Chapter 209 Risalis And The Romasi River

"That's because it's not nearly as dense as fedarus wood which is burning next to it," Kivamus explained. "Even after using this wood press machine to compress the sawdust and wood shavings, it is still much less dense than any wooden branch cut directly from the tree. That means the small air gaps between the compressed particles easily transfer the air to the inner particles which makes them burn so well."

Gorsazo gave a nod, thinking about it, while the labourers had started to refill the mold with more sawdust from a basket to repeat the process.

Kivamus looked at the carpenter and called him over. "Well done, once again. This is working much better than I thought. I'm not sure about it yet, but in the future we can make another wood press machine which will reduce our coal consumption even further."

"That will require us to allot a pair of labourers to gather more sawdust," Gorsazo said, "since the kids can only gather so much of it."

"Yeah, I am not planning to do it right now." Kivamus added, "Even this single machine will be enough to supplement our coal to make it last more than a month. That should give us enough time to clear the necessary farm land here." He looked at the carpenter. "It's still early in the day, so you should use the rest of the time to continue your work on the second crossbow. We really need more of them."

Darora nodded. "I will have to go to help disassemble the water wheel tomorrow afternoon, but other than that I will put my full focus on making more crossbows. I have a good understanding with Cedoron now, and since the first one has been tested successfully, we already know the exact measurements of all the parts we need." He continued, "I was talking with the blacksmith about it yesterday, and he explained to me about the specialisation method you had taught him. So, one of his apprentices will be specialising in forging the goat's foot lever, while another one will only make the iron bolt-heads. A third one will make any nails and the other small iron parts we need for it, with Cedoron supervising over all of them while helping out any of them who need it."

Kivamus grinned on seeing the carpenter take the initiative on this. "That will help in their production speed, and it will also slowly create a stock of all those parts to use in the future, in case one of the crossbows needs a repair or replacement of a part."

"Of course, it's not just him who is going to use this method," Darora bragged with a smile. "I have also been teaching my two apprentices about wood crafting, and I have decided to give the responsibility of crafting the stock of the crossbow to one of them, with the prod being made by the other - this apprentice being a woman. Those are simple parts and they can do it easily enough by now. That will give enough time to me to craft all the finer parts while keeping an eye on them."

The carpenter explained, "When I start getting all the parts from everyone within a few days, I will assemble the crossbow myself." He gazed into the distance for a moment. "I will only be able to give a better estimate after a week, but I believe we should be able to do much better than the whole month we had taken to make the first crossbow."

Hudan's eyes sparkled with anticipation. "Now you are just making me impatient for the day when we have more crossbows to give to the guards!"

Giving a chuckle at that, Kivamus felt quite satisfied that at least a crude imitation of the modern assembly line process was already being used by the carpenter and the blacksmith. "That's excellent! I can't wait to see the final product!" He praised Darora, making the young but talented carpenter beam with pride.

Then he turned to look at the kids gathered nearby, some of whom had picked up a few briquettes and were looking at it in curiosity. "Lucem, Clarisa, come on. We need to go back to the manor. The rest of you, return to the longhouse blocks and warm yourself properly. You can come again at lunchtime to gather more sawdust."

"Aww... I really wanted to keep watching... I am not even feeling cold!" Clarisa protested, before she sneezed, making everyone laugh while she blushed in embarrassment.

"Can I at least take one of them with me?" Lucem asked while showing the briquette in his hands.

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"Yeah, sure." Kivamus gazed at the other kids. "The rest of you can also take one of the briquettes if you want - either to burn or to keep as a memento. These are the first briquettes made in Tiranat and your hard work was an important part of making it."

"What's a memento?" a boy asked in with his face scrunched up in confusion.

"It's something that you keep with yourself for a long time to remind yourself of a particular person or event," Gorsazo explained. "In this case these briquettes will remind you of the first time you had worked in Tiranat, even years after today - even if it was only in return for some treats and not coins. Assuming these briquettes last that long, of course."

The boy nodded in understanding, and soon there was a race to pick up the best briquettes amongst the kids. Even though all the briquettes were of the same shape and size, there was still a competition between them coupled with some arguments to get whichever briquette looked the favourite to a kid, until Gorsazo had to scold them to hurry up.

When they were all done, Kivamus gestured to the carpenter and the guards towards the village walls which were barely visible in the north. "Let's go!"

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In the evening, Kivamus was sitting in the manor hall once again with his advisors sitting nearby. The fire was cracking loudly in the fireplace making the insides of the hall much warmer than the freezing weather outside in the continuously falling snow.

Remembering about his trip to the eastern stream, he recalled an idea he had been thinking about since that day. Looking at the expectant faces of the others, he began, "Now that I have seen the stream between the hills myself, I know for sure that we simply can't make the kind of waterwheels found in the much deeper river waters of Cinran or Ulriga in that stream. However, the surrounding hills on both sides of the stream were close enough that I think a different solution can work in that place."

"What are you talking about?" Hudan asked in confusion. "How can the nearby hills decide whether we can build a water wheel there or not?"

Moving his hand through his silver hair which had grown long again over the winter, Kivamus grinned, "Because those hills give us a possibility of making a small dam there!"

"A dam?" Gorsazo repeated. "Like a barrage which is built on the sides of some big rivers to prevent flooding?" To support our work, please read on M|V|LE\_MPYR.

"I think I know what you are talking about," Duvas muttered while gazing at the fire. "The northern city of Risalis - where I was born - is not very far from the Kinsari Mountain Range, which separates the Kingdom of Reslinor from our neighbouring country Binpaaz in the east. The mighty Romasi river - which originates in that range and passes through the city of Risalis before it drains into the ocean in the west at the capital Dorastiz has a long history of flooding." He added, "It was decades ago from today, so I don't remember too well, but when I was young, I had gone on a hunting trip with my older brothers close to the Kinsari range."

Before he continued, Kivamus stared at the majordomo. "Hunting? You? With the fragile health in your childhood that you had told us about?"

Duvas snorted. "It's not like I went there by choice! I wasn't always this old, you know. At the time I must have been... perhaps twenty years old I think, and just like my older brothers, I also had to follow the orders of our father. Even though he was only a minor noble in that big city, for us his word was absolute, and he had ordered me to join my brothers in that hunting trip even though I wasn't up to it."

The majordomo shook his head slowly. "Anyway, the point is that we had gone close to the mountain range through its foothills, following the same river if I am remembering correctly, and we had found a huge lake there, where my brothers had even done some fishing. My brothers had told our father that they had done fishing in a lake, but he had scolded them and told us that it was an artificial reservoir of water, which had formed there because of a dam which the mad king had constructed in the past to

prevent flooding in the downstream cities. I was quite curious about it, so I had asked about it in detail and found out what a dam was. That is what you mean, right?"

Kivamus nodded, being surprised at the excellent memory of Duvas, even though he must be pushing sixty by now. "Indeed, it sounds similar enough." Being curious about exactly what the mad king had constructed, he asked, "Tell me, was there something special about that dam, or rather the wall which made the dam? Anything which could be used to perform some tasks - like grinding grains?"

Duvas thought about it for a while. "I don't think so, but it was so long ago that I can't remember for sure."

"Well, it doesn't matter right now," Kivamus waved it off, "but that's what I plan to construct here. I want to make a dam between those hills to block the water of the stream, which will also create a small water reservoir further uphill of the dam."

Gorsazo frowned. "Block the whole stream? What will that do to the water which flows downstream?"

#### Chapter 210 Fire Clay

"No, I don't mean to block it permanently," Kivamus explained with a small laugh. "We will create a small barrier - maybe five to ten feet high in the path of the stream, which will make water gather upstream of it. Once the water has reached the height of the dam, it will begin flowing once again over the barrier, and it will resume the earlier path of the stream. However, now the water flowing over the dam will be falling to the ground with a lot of force, which we can use to turn a water wheel - hopefully the same one we are using to remove water from the mine shafts - which is why I designed it to be easy to disassemble and in that particular... uh, overshot design." He shrugged. "Anyway, I know there are fish in that stream, so we will make something called a fish ladder, which will allow them to easily move upstream and downstream of the small dam."

"Wait, wait..." Hudan interrupted with his eyebrows raised very high. "How the heck are fish going to climb a ladder? No matter what you claim, I simply refuse to believe that it's possible!"

Kivamus guffawed loudly at that. "No, no, the fish are not going to climb like a human. Hahaha..." He explained once he had controlled his laughter, "It will basically be a thin slanted area of the dam on one side, perhaps a foot wide, which will have small steps on it just like a staircase. The fish can easily jump from the level of the river water downstream to the first step, which will only be a... few inches high, and then on to the second step and so on, until they reach the gathered water body on the other side of the dam. It is just named a fish ladder," he added while trying to suppress his laughter again, "it doesn't

mean the fish are going to grow legs and start climbing on a ladder... Don't worry, I may have some really unique ideas, but even I can't make fish do that."

Hudan laughed as well along with others at that. "Well... it still sounds difficult, but it is more reasonable than what I was thinking earlier."

Kivamus nodded and explained further, "Unlike now, it won't require a couple of labourers to step on the side cleats to rotate the wheel, since the force of the falling water will be doing it instead. Assuming the barrier can be built high enough, the water can be made to fall right on top of the wheel - which we call overshot water wheel, and which has one of the highest efficiencies of water designs, from... what I have read in the library. We will attach a long axle to the wheel this time, which will rotate with the power of the falling water with a good amount of torque... uh, rotational force. We can use that force to run a sawmill or to grind grain into flour - just like the ones which are built on the Kal river in Cinran. Even though the designs are a little different, both of the water wheels will perform the same tasks just as well."

"It's only a small stream though..." Duvas objected, still sounding sceptical. "I have seen those water wheels in Cinran on the Kal River, and those are a lot bigger than the ones you have made for the mineshafts. Can this uh... overshot water wheel really produce the same power as them...?"

Gorsazo grinned while looking at the majordomo. "Are you really questioning another of his otherworldly ideas?"

Kivamus groaned hearing that word. By this point it was already a running gag between him and his former teacher, since nobody else knew the real meaning of that word here, but he couldn't call him out on it, since it would require a lot of far-fetched explanation he wasn't ready to share to the majordomo.

Duvas snorted in response. "I know Lord Kivamus' ideas are often mystical, but it sounds difficult to believe that a wheel which is less than half the size of the ones used in Cinran will be able to produce the same power, not to mention we aren't even sure if we can even make a dam here on that small stream."

Kivamus shrugged. "I can't guarantee that it is going to work. There are a lot of ways it can go wrong, but I do believe it is feasible enough to make a dam there. As for the higher power generated by the smaller wheel, that is something I am a lot more confident about. The reason is that the wheel design in Cinran is called an undershot water wheel - where the flowing water just pushes the wheel from the bottom, that is, from under the wheel. That design requires a large quantity of water to move the wheel - like a

big river - but even then it is very inefficient. From what I remember, it can only capture around twenty percent - which is a fifth of the energy of the flowing water to move the wheel."

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He continued, remembering those huge wheels he had seen while travelling to Tiranat, "You all must have seen those water wheels in Cinran - they are huge, and for a good reason. It's because they need to be big enough to capture a lot of water to push against the paddles of the wheel to move it."

Kivamus added, "On the other hand, the design I have made for the mine shafts - which is called an overshot water wheel - is a lot more efficient, even if it is smaller in size. This design has a much higher efficiency of nearly eighty to ninety percent, since unlike the undershot water wheel which only uses the force of the flowing water, the overshot water wheel also uses the power of gravity to move the wheel. That's why even with a small size, this design can produce a lot more rotational force in the axle. This force can then be used for any task which is difficult to do manually."

"Then why doesn't everyone use this overshot water wheel design?" Hudan asked in confusion. "It sounds like it would produce a lot more power, especially if the wheel was built as big as the ones in Cinran. It doesn't even sound that complex, so the local carpenters and craftsmen would certainly know about this design there even without someone like you telling them about it."

Kivamus raised his eyebrows. "Think about it. I just told you the answer earlier." When Hudan still looked confused, he explained, "The overshot design requires water to be falling on the top of the water wheel. How can that ever work in a flowing river in the plains, like in Cinran? We can only utilise the overshot design here because we will be making a dam - which simply can't be made in the plains region. That's why an overshot water wheel is only feasible to make in hilly regions - whether by utilising a dam, or by putting the water wheel right under a cliff where water is falling from a height."

"Oh..." Hudan scratched his head. "I didn't even think of that..." The full series lives on My Virtual Library Empire (

"That's alright..." Kivamus looked at Duvas. "While I didn't do any digging when I visited the coal mines and the stream, I am confident that there must be seat-earth under that soil, since the coal was also formed from some vegetation far in the past."

Before he continued, Gorsazo interrupted with a frown, "Wait, you said the coal was formed from vegetation, like trees and plants? How is that even possible? They look completely different!"

Kivamus paused for a moment, not realising he had said something which would be difficult to explain, even if Gorsazo knew about his source of knowledge. He looked at his former teacher with his head tilted, hoping he would take the hint. "Uh... that's what a book said in the library. We can talk about it later if you want, but it's beside the point right now."

Gorsazo looked at the other two people in the hall, both of whom seemed curious. "Ah... well, you are right. I have a teacher's mind, so I was just curious about it. You should continue what you are saying."

Kivamus smiled with relief that Gorsazo hadn't pushed the point in front of others.

Hudan asked, "Anyway, what will we even make the dam from? I don't think it can be made from wood, and I'm sure none of us here have any other ideas about it."

"Neither do I," Duvas agreed. "It has been decades since I had visited that dam near Risalis, and even then I still have no idea what it was made from."

Kivamus nodded, remembering from his memories of reading way too many things from the internet in his past life, "That is what I was getting to. So, basically, a common type of that seat-earth is fire-clay - which is basically another type of clay. We will have to dig under the frozen ground to access this fire-clay, but it will be an excellent material to make the dam with some wooden support." Suddenly he realised another use of it, and grinned. "Another good thing is that the fire-clay will also be a perfect material to make any refractory lining in a furnace - even a blast furnace - in the future."

He knew that it would be a while until they could get to it, but the possibility of making a blast furnace in Tiranat in the future had made him giddy with excitement.

Seeing that others were getting confused at this point, he summarised, "Leave the technical parts to me. But the point is, we need to make a dam on the stream, and preferably before the snow melts, since there would be a lot of water flowing down the hills at that time from the melting snow which will move into that stream, so it can be used to fill the water reservoir very easily. Not to mention, it would be much more difficult to build a dam with a larger quantity of flowing water, unlike now when it is a much smaller stream. As an added benefit, that reservoir will also increase the number of fish which can live

there, apart from the pond we are digging in the south, which will also increase our supply of fresh fish for the village."

"Alright then," Duvas nodded, "I agree that making a dam soon is a good idea, but it won't be easy to dig under the frozen ground. We do have more than enough tools in the village now, but we don't have any labourers skilled in that. No, wait..."

Kivamus grinned. "Yes, exactly! You already realised what I am going to say!"