

Londoner 221

Chapter 221 Taniok And Darora

"It wasn't Madam Nerida's fault after all," the majordomo replied with a shake of his head. "It was another maid who was jealous of Leah for being able to live outside the manor and with the man she likes, so she was tearing up any recently repaired clothes or sheets so Leah would have to work even more." He looked at Kivamus. "Don't worry, I've taken care of it. The maid has been warned that if such a thing was ever repeated she would be let go from the manor, and apart from the food and lodging, she also wouldn't get any wages for two months as a fine. Madam Nerida also went a step further and is giving a lot more work to her as a punishment."

Kivamus chuckled thinking about the strictness of Madam Nerida. "I have no doubt that she can keep all the maids in line in the future."

He and the others kept walking around the manor and he saw with satisfaction that their cattle, along with the couple of nodors, and the chickens they had were safely indoors in this snow. The rabbits which the hunters had been bringing in had also been kept safe in an enclosure inside the cattle barn. The horses did have to work during the day to pull the log movers, but they too had a warm place to rest in the night after their stables had been enclosed by planks, just like the cattle barn.

He turned towards the main gates of the manor, and saw with pride that the on-duty guards looked attentive in their watch. Their decision to pair one man and one woman at each of the watch shifts at the manor gates had worked well and that was what had allowed them to send Feroy out at the same time when they were regularly sending four hunting groups to hunt.

As he was turning to return to the manor house, he saw the two carpenters entering the gates. Being curious about them, he stopped for a moment and waited for them to catch up to see what news they had brought.

"Milord," Darora reported with excitement after reaching there as he removed something from the satchel on his side. "The second crossbow is ready! Here it is!"

Hudan took the offered weapon, and turned it around in his muscular hands, making the crossbow look like a small toy in front of his giant frame. "Finally! Have you tested it?"

"Only a little," Darora replied, "but I don't think there would be any problems. After the experience of making the first one, this time I know where it could have gotten problems like the trigger getting stuck sometimes in the first one, so I have made sure that those things won't repeat in this one."

"That's great! I'll give it to the women guards to test right now," the guard captain replied. "When will we get the next one?"

Kivamus chuckled at his excitement and looked at the young carpenter for the answer.

Darora shrugged. "Can't say yet, but it should be even faster this time, likely in less than a week."

"Perfect!" Hudan exclaimed. "I can't wait to get another one!"

Kivamus looked at the older carpenter. "What did you want to talk about Taniok?"

"The south-eastern gate in the village walls was just completed," the balding carpenter replied with pride. "I'll start working on the last gate in the south-west from tomorrow."

"Nice, nice!" Kivamus grinned.

"This means that now we can finally skip putting any guards on the south-eastern gate in the nights," Hudan suggested, "like we are already doing with the northern gate. That will ease up the workload on them. It's true that earlier we had planned to bar the south eastern gates from the inside permanently until we could afford to hire more guards, but by posting women on watch duties there it is feasible to still keep it open - at least in the daytime. Once the third gate is also ready, we can do the same there, and that will finally allow me to change the guards' shifts from twelve hours back to eight hours, even while sending four hunting groups out at the same time."

Kivamus nodded and looked at the older carpenter. "It should take less than a week, right?"

"At most," Taniok boasted.

"That's good to hear," Kivamus praised. "I can't wait to finally announce to everyone that Tiranat is a fortified village, even if it'll still be protected by a palisade wall only." He looked at the young carpenter. "Keep working on the third crossbow for now. I have another thing that I want you to start crafting soon, but I am still tinkering with its design in the sketches."

This book is hosted on another platform. Read the official version and support the author's work.

"Of course, I'll do as you say," Darora replied. "Oh, before I forget, I also found out that all the water in the third mineshaft was also removed by this afternoon, and the labourers have shifted the water wheel to the fourth mineshaft in the evening. It really was a good idea to make it easy to disassemble, in that... modular design."

Duvas shook his head in wonder. "I also didn't expect that it would be so easy to shift the water wheel and to remove the water from the mines so fast! Three mineshafts are ready to start digging coal already! I expected that to take weeks!"

"It's true that it is happening at a good pace," Kivamus agreed, "but we still don't have enough workers to start mining coal without pulling more workers from forest clearing in the south."

Duvas nodded. "Yeah, we have already shifted two dozen men from there for digging clay. Although by using sawdust briquettes, coal consumption has slowed down noticeably, so we can probably wait for another week or two before we really need to start mining coal, otherwise we would start scraping the bottom of the last coal barn."

"Let's wait until then," Kivamus said. "We'll decide what to do after another week."

It was the evening of the next day, and Kivamus was making the final touches on the sketches for the next machine he needed to be built. Looking at the last few empty parchment left on the shelf near the long dining table which doubled as his working area, he really needed this machine built soon so he could continue sketching.

Duvas was warming his hands near the fireplace, while Gorsazo had gone to teach the classes in the longhouse block. With the snowfall continuing since the last few days, the amount of gathered snow on the ground had started to increase once again, and there was already a few inches of snow even inside the manor, which meant the snow would probably be half a foot deep outside the village in the forests. That would make the hunters' task more difficult, especially those groups which had to go in the east, since the snowfall would be much heavier between the hills. Hopefully the sledges the carpenters had built for them would be helpful for them to continue bringing in the animals they had hunted.

The outer door opened and Hudan walked inside while he also saw Feroy standing just outside the door. The ex-mercenary brushed up the snow from his fur coat, before he made a beeline towards the fireplace, and took a moment to warm up his body.

"You are right on time," Kivamus commented as he folded up the parchment until he needed to explain it to Darora later. "So how did it go? Any problems on the way?"

"There was a big scare yesterday on our way back when the guards and I had camped for the night on the side of the road," Feroy answered after taking a seat in an armchair near the fireplace. "We thought it might be an ambush from the nearby sounds, which is why all the guards remained awake all night. So we kept waiting with our swords and spears ready for anything to happen but nothing happened. I think it was probably some wild beasts in the forest on the sides of the road to Kirnos."

The ex-mercenary continued, "However, I have also confirmed that Torhan's bandits are regular visitors in Kirnos, so it's possible that despite our precautions, the news of our purchase might have gotten out to them and they might have sent a few scouts to keep an eye on us."

Hudan frowned. "So our earlier suspicions of a connection between Torhan and Kirnos were true after all..."

Kivamus nodded. "With how bloodthirsty those bandits are after they put half of Tiranat on fire in the first raid without caring who might be burned inside, it's not hard to believe that they might have been scouting the caravan to plan an ambush."

"That's what I think too," Feroy agreed, "but since they couldn't have known about our visit to Kirnos in advance, most likely they just didn't have enough armed men in Kirnos to safely ambush the four of us."

"That's certainly possible," Hudan said. "It also means we can't send you there again without much better protection. Just four guards would simply not be enough to protect a caravan against Torhan's bandits, especially if they are anticipating you."

Kivamus began, "We'll have to think seriously about that in case we are ready to send another caravan to Kirnos. For now, tell us how this trip went."

"It was both good and bad," Feroy replied with a grimace.

Duvas raised his eyebrows. "What does that mean?"

"The good news is that I've brought two full wagon loads of smoked fish," the ex-mercenary replied. "The servants have already started transferring the barrels into the kitchens and the store room there."

Kivamus raised his eyebrows. "That's... better than I expected. So that means you are able to sell both wagon loads of coal?" Then he frowned and added without waiting for a reply, "No, the numbers still don't add up... You shouldn't have had enough gold to buy that much fish even after selling all the coal."

Feroy grimaced. "That's where the bad news comes in..."

Chapter 222 Calculations

The ex-mercenary gave them a summary of the trip including the fact that most of the fish was on credit as well as about meeting the young master Lanidas who was the only son of baron Farodas, and how he had tripled the taxes for them. However, everyone had a good laugh at the way the ex-mercenary had managed to make the young master pay double the price for the coal, before Feroy told them about the price of the smoked fish which they still needed to pay.

Duvas winced. "Even after the discount which that merchant gave you, it is still nearly seventy gold per wagon! Although the coal you managed to sell at those inflated prices would help, we still need to pay around ninety gold to that merchant on the next trip." He glared at Feroy. "I don't think that you should have made that deal to buy on credit without asking us..."

"Even I wasn't sure about whether to do that," Feroy said with a shrug, "but the young master Lanidas seemed to be quite angry with us, especially after the scolding he got from his father. "I think if we go to Kirnos again, he will probably demand such a high tax that we might as well not go there at all. That's

why I thought it's better to buy as much fish as I could this time, since there might not be another trip this winter."

The majordomo looked like he was going to scold the ex-mercenary again, before Kivamus intervened. "It's alright, Duvas. Since that merchant trusted Feroy enough to provide the fish on credit, it means he is willing to wait a month or two to get the payment. That means we don't have to pay the remaining amount before the tax collector arrives."

"That's true enough," Duvas grumbled, "but we'll still have to pay that ninety-five gold in the future."

"That we do," Kivamus agreed, "especially since that merchant seems brave enough to be willing to go against the orders of the nobles of Kirnos, which will be very helpful to us in the future in case we need to buy fish regularly from there." He looked at the ex-mercenary again. "Why is that baron increasing the taxes so much anyway? He has to know that the people of Kirnos will rebel against him if it continues like this."

"I heard some rumours that Count Cinran has increased the taxes he levies on his barons from a fifth of their total revenue until last year," Feroy said, "to a fourth of the revenue now. I really can't say how much truth is in these rumours, but it seems like a good reason for the baron to increase his taxes as well, so that he can pay the higher taxes to the Count."

Duvas shoulders had hunched down like he had the weight of the whole world on his shoulders after hearing that their taxes might be increased further. "We are probably not going to have enough gold even to pay the taxes we already owe to the Count at the previous rates, but if he has really increased the tax rates like this, then..."

Kivamus took a deep breath to not let this news overwhelm his mind, and did a rough calculation of how much extra taxes they would need to pay if these rumours were true. "I remember that we had to pay around 100 gold per month as taxes at the previous rates of twenty percent, which had totalled to around 950 gold for the whole year. If the taxes have really increased to twenty five percent of our revenue now, that would mean an extra 25 gold per month, or around 250 to 300 gold for the whole year." He sighed, "This might just make us bankrupt..."

He gazed at Duvas who was looking downwards in resignation, while Hudan and Feroy had downcast expressions as well. However, instead of that scene depressing him as well, it somehow strengthened his resolve to do better for them. He was their leader now, and it was his duty to make sure anyone serving under him didn't feel mentally defeated, especially when it wasn't even confirmed news yet.

"We will deal with it somehow," he assured them while looking into their eyes. "Trust me on this. We still have around a month before the tax collector arrives, and we will somehow make a deal with him to let us survive. It is hardly to the Count's advantage to make us bankrupt, which would mean the villagers might start migrating elsewhere and Tiranat would cease to exist. We will deal with it one way or another, when the time comes for it. It might very well be that this is only a rumour, so don't lose hope just yet, okay?"

This story has been taken without authorization. Report any sightings.

Seeing that his words had managed to give some confidence to others, he tried changing the topic. "For now, what is indeed confirmed is that this smoked fish will help us a lot to reduce the consumption of wheat for sowing."

He made some mental calculations about how much fish a single wagon could carry based on how much grain was carried by Pydaso on it. "At a rough estimate, I believe those two wagons of smoked fish can feed our whole village of around 375 people for at least a week on an exclusively fish diet. If we keep two meals - including breakfast - of vegetables and wheat which we have in storage and the meat which the hunters are bringing, and only provide fish as the dinner to keep a varied diet, it will last us for nearly two weeks."

"I agree," Duvas said after taking a deep breath, "but would it even save enough grain that we won't have to buy it anymore for sowing?"

Kivamus thought about it for a moment. "We used to spend an average of just under one and a half sacks of wheat to feed the whole village for a day before the stonecutters arrived, so now it should still be around one and a half sacks per day, or around ten sacks per week. That's how much wheat will be saved by including this smoked fish in the diet. However, that consumption of wheat was before we started sending out hunters. Right now it should be around seven to eight sacks of wheat consumed per week for the whole village, which means the same amount of smoked fish will last a few days more when supplemented by the meat brought by hunters."

Duvas gave a thoughtful nod. "We had estimated that we would need to buy at least ten sacks of wheat after the winter to complete the sowing, although it could probably rise up to twenty sacks. So you are probably right that it was a good decision to buy this fish, especially since most of it is on credit. If there aren't any big problems like a damaging bandit raid or a fire, we might just be able to make do with the grain we already have in the stores."

"Exactly!" Kivamus agreed. "In case we are able to send Feroy on another trip, he would be able to buy more smoked fish which would make it certain that we won't need to buy any more wheat to complete the sowing. However, unless the merchant is willing to extend us another credit until the spring when we will start earning again by selling coal, it would still cost us a lot of gold, which would defeat the purpose of not buying wheat."

Feroy began, "I think I might be able to convince him to provide another two wagon loads of fish on credit, but it would require us to pay for at least what we already owe him."

"Let's think about it when we are ready to send you on another trip," Kivamus suggested, "which will be only when we can spare more guards in the future to defend the caravan. How did your other mission go?"

"That was actually not that difficult," the ex-mercenary replied with a grin. "With how much Baron Farodas is charging as taxes from the local merchants, fishermen and the farmers, even those who are well off are disgruntled against him. Those who didn't have much to begin with, including those who were homeless, had lost any hope of their lives getting better in the future, so they were quite enthusiastic to think that there might be good opportunities to find work in Tiranat."

The ex-mercenary continued, "I'd provided the losuvil powder to any locals in Kirnos who looked sick, and even some food to those who looked like they hadn't eaten in days or if their children looked hungry, so there is already some goodwill for Tiranat in their minds." He shrugged, "Even so, travelling in winter is not easy, so I don't think we are going to get any immigrants before the snow melts. But after that? I think you might be pleasantly surprised."

Kivamus grinned hearing that there was a good chance of Tiranat's workforce expanding in the future. "I can't wait for that day!"

Hudan looked at the ex-mercenary. "Well, you must be quite hungry by now, so let's get you something to eat, including some of the adzee meat which we saved for you and the other guards who had gone with you." Looking at Kivamus with questioning eyes, he added, "I think we can even spare some ale for Feroy since he missed it on New Year's Eve."

Once Kivamus gave a nod in permission, Feroy beamed on hearing about ale. "That would help a lot to unwind! Tesyb and the other guards also deserve some of it, you know?"

"Of course, I was already thinking of that," Hudan said before he smirked, "or did you think you would also get to drink their shares of the ale?"

The ex-mercenary laughed at that. "I never said that!" Then he looked seriously at Kivamus. "Before I leave for the meal, I heard something else In Kirnos which you might find very interesting."

"What is it?" Kivamus asked curiously.

Chapter 223 Perika

"You already know that Kirnos is located at the south-western border of the Reslinor kingdom," Feroy explained, "with the Nisador Mountain Range acting as the southern boundary of Reslinor. What I am going to tell is only a rumor I heard, and it concerns what lies beyond those mountains."

Kivamus nodded, remembering a very simple sketch Gorsazo had drawn for him as a make-shift map for Reslinor from his memory. It was only a vague outline, but it still gave him an idea of the immediate surroundings of Tiranat, until Pydaso hopefully arrived with a better map in the spring. "Yeah, you mentioned that those huge vesorions roam in the arid wastelands south of the Nisadors."

Feroy nodded. "They do, and those are just one of the many kinds of dangers to humans in those lands, including the flying bakkores and other wild beasts." He added, "While I have travelled around a lot, even I have still never been south of those mountains, mainly because there is nearly nothing to be found there. Even bare survival is difficult in that barren terrain." The ex-mercenary continued, "Coming back to the topic, in Kirnos I heard a rumor which might turn out to be very helpful to Tiranat in the future, even though I don't know much about what lies beyond the Nisadors. I also have no idea if those rumours have any truth in them or if it was just an old man's imagination."

"I think I have an idea about what you are going to tell about," Duvas remarked. He explained, "Neither of the two countries surrounding those wastelands - including the Kingdom of Reslinor and the Giralican Oligarchy were ever interested in conquering those lands. It would just cost too much - without any tangible return from those wastelands - and would distract from the much bigger problem of Binpaaz in our east. Anyway, despite nearly no one living there, there are still some free cities in those wastelands, who survive independently of any authority other than their ruling city lords."

"Free cities?" Kivamus repeated with raised eyebrows. "You mean big cities like Ulriga?"

Duvas laughed. "No, no, it's just not possible for any human habitation in those barren lands to grow as big as Ulriga - which is easily one of the five largest cities in the whole of Cilaria. From what I remember - and this is far from any updated news - even the biggest of those free cities would be around the size and population of Cinran, or perhaps be a little larger. It would probably be much more accurate to call them free towns, not free cities, but their City Lords like to call them cities, and the names just stuck."

Kivamus nodded. "That makes more sense, but Cinran is still nearly ten times larger than Tiranat. That means those free cities could also provide a lot of workers to us if we could somehow incentivise them to migrate here."

Duvas shook his head. "That is extremely unlikely. The people who live in those wastelands - even if living inside the walls of those free cities - are hardy and rugged. They simply need to be, or they just wouldn't survive in that place. However, one of the reasons why neither of the surrounding countries tried to conquer those lands is because of the difficulty of travelling through those wastelands. That's why there is hardly any travel from those free cities to Reslinor. That means the people who live there have been staying there for generations at least. They consider those free cities as their homeland, and are very unlikely to migrate here. Not in the present condition of Tiranat anyway."

Feroy began, "That relates to what I was going to tell you about. I heard rumours in Kirnos that there used to be a small iron mining village called Perika located south of the Nisador Mountain Range. Kirnos used to import iron ore from them in the past, before shipping them out up north to Ulriga for smelting into ingots. However, from what I heard from some old people there, those iron imports stopped around two decades ago, right after the previous war ended and the demand for iron fell sharply. As of now, there has been no contact of Kirnos to Perika for at least a decade, and no one even knows whether the village of Perika even survives to this day or not."

A case of theft: this story is not rightfully on Amazon; if you spot it, report the violation.

"Hmm..." Kivamus muttered, thinking about it. The fact that there used to be an active iron mine near Kirnos was very positive news, but nobody even knew if it was even possible to get iron ore from there anymore. He looked at the ex-mercenary. "Did you find out how far that village was from Kirnos?"

Feroy thought for a moment. "At least twice as far as Kirnos is from Tiranat, from what I heard, but that doesn't take into account the difficulty in travelling on that barren terrain. The guy who told me about Perika, who was probably approaching seventy now, used to have a friend who worked as a miner there in the past, although he is long dead by now. After I gave the old man some losuvil powder to treat his fever, he told me a lot of stuff - mostly rumours - including the fact that he had heard that it took around

a week of travel to reach Perika from Kirnos, mainly because it gets so scorching hot in that region, that they could only travel during mornings and evenings."

The ex-mercenary continued, "The only good thing was that Perika was located right in the foothills of the Nisador mountain range on its southern side, which meant that after leaving Kirnos and circling around the western end of the Nisadors, all a caravan had to do was to follow the edge of the mountains on its south, and they would eventually reach Perika without losing their way. Otherwise, from what he told me, it is way too easy to lose your track in that barren wasteland, and you would die from thirst or starvation long before you found a human habitation to help you. That's how vesorions survive in that heat anyway, by feasting on the corpse of anything which died from the harsh environment in that region."

Kivamus thought about the distances involved. From what he had estimated from that sketched map as the time taken for wagons to travel between them, Kirnos was probably around eighty to hundred kilometres away from Tiranat. That would make Perika somewhere under two hundred kilometres away from Kirnos, or around three hundred kilometres away from Tiranat, by going around the Nisador mountain range from the west. If they had modern transportation methods here, like a railway line connecting the iron mines, that distance would be nearly nothing even without a tunnel through the mountains which could make the distance even shorter. However, as it stood right now, they would have to send horse drawn wagons in a caravan to import iron from Perika, which would be exceedingly difficult in that arid terrain.

He exhaled loudly. "Even if that village is still there, it's not like the Baron of Kirnos would allow us free passage from there to send a caravan to Perika. He would certainly charge very high border taxes on any wagons passing from Kirnos to import iron ore - not that we even have any gold to buy ore at the moment. We don't even have any facilities to smelt that iron ore, nor do we even have any workers to do it!"

He shook his head. Just another resource that would go unutilised, because Tiranat was too small and too poor at the moment...

He looked at the majordomo. "You just said that there wasn't anything valuable in those wastelands, but if there was an iron mine in that region, wouldn't it make sense for the surrounding countries to keep control over those wastelands, no matter how barren they may be?"

"During the previous war around two decades ago," Duvas explained, "Tiranat hadn't been founded yet, and I lived in the north of the kingdom, so I'm not sure about the exact details, but I do remember that the war had started after immense iron ore deposits had been found in the Tolasi Hills, which are

conveniently located in the middle of the three major countries of Cilaria. Of course, people have known about the iron ore deposits in those hills for centuries, but until a few decades ago, it was thought that those were just minor deposits, and didn't have much iron anyway. That's why all three countries had a mutual agreement not to do any mining there, since Tolasi Hills have always been kind of a buffer area between the three countries. That had worked well in the past to keep peace between them, at least in that region."

The majordomo continued, "However, I still remember the time somewhere around twenty-five years ago, when the news had spread like wildfire that some prospectors had found by chance that Tolasi Hills' iron reserves were actually huge, and much, much larger than anyone had thought in the past. That's why there was an immediate rush to capture the hills by all three countries, which led to the last war."

"Those hills are still standing right there, Kivamus said, "including their huge iron ore deposits, but from what I know, there is no iron mining going on there at present. So how did the previous war end to reach the present condition?"

Chapter 224 Binpaaz And Giralica - Part I

"It ended for the same reasons by which most wars end..." Duvas sighed. "The war had been going on for years, and alliances were built and broken so many times in all combinations between the three countries. After nearly half a decade of continuous war, there is a mental exhaustion which sets in over any country, since nearly every home has had someone from their family dead or disabled to the ravages of war. Other than the trained retinues of nobles - including knights - the vast majority of the men fighting in that war were militiamen pulled from farms, and after many years of bad harvest because only a small number of people were sowing the seeds or reaping the crops, there was a serious famine in our kingdom, and I believe the situations in the other two countries wouldn't have been too different from that."

The majordomo continued, "Eventually, the three countries decided that it wasn't worth it to continue the war, for a while anyway, and there was a three-way peace agreement to return to the status quo before the war. That treaty required that neither of the three countries would try to mine iron ore from the Tolasi hills, and they all agreed not to deploy their knights close to those hills, as well as to return their men to the farms."

"It has been two decades though," Kivamus muttered thinking about the inter-war period in the twentieth century on earth. "That is often long enough for countries to replenish their population, and start going to war again, often for the very same reasons..."

"You might not be wrong there," Hudan commented. "Binpaazi knights have often been seen raiding deep into Reslinor in recent years, and that's probably why Count Cinran seems to be so worried about an attack on Cinran in the near future. I mentioned in the past that I was born in the outskirts of Ulriga, but when I wanted to become a knight in the past, it was only in Cinran where I found an opportunity to become a squire, likely because Count Cinran had already started thinking of increasing his trained force of knights to deal with a serious attack from Binpaaz in the future."

"I agree with that," Duvas said. "Fort Aragosa was built near the Tolasi hills to prevent a deep incursion from Binpaaz, but its main task is to prevent an attack on Ulriga. Cinran is often left to its own devices, or at least that was how it used to be when the current Duke of Ulriga - your father - actively ruled the duchy. As of now, your older brothers seem to be doing most of the governing, which is why Count Cinran doesn't know how much protection he can expect from Fort Aragosa in case a war breaks out."

"Is it really possible that Fort Aragosa will leave Cinran to be conquered or ruined?" Kivamus asked with a frown. "I don't think any country would allow its territory to be stolen that easily."

Duvas gave a rueful chuckle. "Of course it wouldn't! But you already know about the long running rivalry between Count Cinran and the Duke of Ulriga. That's why, in my opinion, in case of another war with Binpaaz or Giralica, all the knights of Reslinor posted in Fort Aragosa and even a newly gathered militia army by the Duke, would be ordered to wait until the very last moment, before they really had to go and defend Cinran. That duration would be long enough for an enemy country to besiege and probably even destroy most of Cinran, which would bring Count Cinran and his forces to their knees, and would leave the Count completely unable to challenge the Duke for power for another decade or two. As ruthless as it seems, that's exactly how it was done in the previous war by your father."

Kivamus took a deep breath, having heard very similar strategies used on earth in many past wars. "You are right... Now it's easy to understand why the Count hates the ruling family of Ulriga so much. In this case even if the war ends favourably for Reslinor, Count Cinran will have to focus on the reconstruction of Cinran, which would drain him financially even more than the war already would have, and he certainly wouldn't be any challenge to the Duke's power..."

The narrative has been taken without authorization; if you see it on Amazon, report the incident.

He shook his head. "This is certainly an effective way to keep your subordinates under control... despite the hardship the people of Cinran and the surrounding areas will have to go through."

Duvas looked at him. "You do understand that it wouldn't be just Cinran which will be left for an enemy country to destroy until the very last moment, right? Tiranat didn't exist during the previous war, but in case a new war breaks out in the future, both our enemy countries would already know by now about the coal mines of Tiranat, not to mention it is located directly on the way to Cinran for any invading army of Giralica. That means the Duke, or rather your brothers, wouldn't send any help to us until our village is already turned into ruins."

The mental image of his village destroyed by an enemy army was enough to send Kivamus' blood boiling. Hudan had clenched his fists at that thought, while Feroy's face was also showing a rare expression of anger.

"I don't think my brothers would send any help to us even after Tiranat is destroyed," Kivamus muttered with a glare in the direction of Uliga. "Having this village destroyed and most of its people killed - including me - without even having to dirty their hands works in their favour."

He took a deep breath once again and looked in the eyes of the three men around him. "Despite my brothers and other rival nobles wanting to assassinate me, and our neighbouring countries wanting to capture Tolasi Hills while destroying Tiranat on their way, I won't let them succeed. No matter what! Whoever will come to destroy Tiranat will be sent home in caskets!"

Hudan punched a giant fist into his palm with a grin. "I am completely with you to make that happen!"

Feroy had a dangerous smile on his face, and gave a nod to him without saying anything. Duvas was also looking proudly at Kivamus. "I have no doubt you will do what is best for the people of this village."

Kivamus grinned at their trust in him and continued, "Tiranat has a long way to go, but one day we will become strong enough to resist any attack on us. Until then we have to hunker down, and not let any rivals or nearby nobles know about any progress we make towards that target."

He looked at the guard captain and the ex-mercenary. "For that we will need to know in advance if such a war is imminent in the future. Duvas mentioned recent raids from Binpaazi knights into Reslinor. How serious were they?"

Hudan gave the reply after thinking for a moment. "I know for sure that there were a few such raids in the previous summer, where Binpaazi knights rode in on their horses, and put many farms on fire in the

east of Cinran, and returned before the farmers could ask for help from Cinran. It usually happens a few times every year, but I haven't heard any news of a more serious attack into Reslinor from them in recent years - that would involve both their cavalry and infantry, including swordsmen, spearmen and archers."

The guard captain continued, "If they became serious about attacking Cinran, then they could also bring their siege engines like battering rams, catapults and ballistas. Some trebuchet were also used in the previous war from what I've heard, and they can easily reduce a town to rubble without even needing to breach the walls. Thankfully, as of now Binpaaz seems satisfied by harassing the farmers near the border, which is why they are only using knights for raiding, since they are a lot more mobile on their horses than any infantry."

"I agree with Hudan," Feroy said. "While I don't think there is going to be a war in the coming year, it does seem like Binpaaz is building up towards it, and is testing Reslinor's responses before they decide on a serious invasion. I think we might still have a few years before a war breaks out, but that's the best case scenario. Nobody really knows what goes on in Binpaaz."

Kivamus nodded. "I'm glad to know we still have some time, although I accept there is always a chance of things going wrong. Also, I think these recent raids might very well be the reason behind Count Cinran increasing the taxes, assuming that is not just a fabricated rumour by the merchants in Kirnos." Then he shook his head thinking about another thing. "However, I don't think I would be wrong in guessing that Fort Aragosa would have just let these recent raids happen without any retaliation, am I?"

Chapter 225 Binpaaz And Giralica - Part II

Duvas nodded. "Of course, Fort Aragosa is fully controlled by the Duke, or rather, your brothers now. Like I said earlier, they are quite satisfied letting such small raids go unpunished, since it only weakens Cinran, and later on, they can just claim that they got the news too late to respond in time, which is plausible enough that the Count can't even complain against them further up the hierarchy, to the king in Dorastiz. These raids on the farms also reduce the grain harvested in the domain of Count Cinran, which would also lead to an increase in food prices, like it has in the past few years, and it would, in turn, diminish the power of Count Cinran, while Ulriga would remain just as strong as ever."

Kivamus grimaced thinking about this cutthroat Medieval politics, where a superior was satisfied letting his people be attacked by an enemy, just to weaken their political enemies. "What about in the previous war? Did Reslinor even try to attack or raid inside Binpaaz?"

"I was never a fighting man," Duvas shrugged, "so I don't know too many details about it, while Hudan and Feroy must have been teenagers at the time of the previous war, so even they wouldn't know much about it."

Kivamus looked at both of the men who were in their thirties, and both of them gave nods.

The old majordomo continued, "However, I can still tell you some basics about why the country of Binpaaz is considered such a difficult enemy to defeat. The reason is their mighty Fort Tugarr which defends the only entrance into Binpaaz in this region of Cilaria. Unlike Fort Aragosa - which was built to defend Ulriga and is located in the middle of vast plains, as well as fort Nertas - which defends Giralica from the other two countries and is also located in flatlands, Fort Tugarr of Binpaaz was built in a relatively narrow gap between two mountain ranges - The Kinsari Mountain Range in the north which separates Reslinor from Binpaaz, and the Nomarian mountain range in the South which separates Giralica from Binpaaz."

Duvas added, "Fort Tusgaar has tall and mighty stone walls extending from one mountain to the other, with the fort in the middle of it, which makes this entrance into Binpaaz virtually impenetrable. Even in the previous war when Reslinor and Giralica had made a temporary alliance against Binpaaz, their combined forces couldn't breach Fort Tugarr or its walls, which is why the inner regions of Binpaaz must have escaped from the war completely undamaged, unlike the other two countries whose farms near the Tolasi Hills were burnt and trampled over many times by the maneuvering armies. That's probably the reason Binpaaz now feels confident enough to raid into Reslinor, while Southern Reslinor is dealing with a minor famine in recent years with the food prices reaching astronomical prices."

Kivamus really wanted a much better map at this moment, but the mental image he had from the sketch Gorsazo had made would have to do for now. However, it was still not difficult to see why Binpaaz would be so bold and adventurous to send their knights to raid into Reslinor without any serious fear of retaliation.

"Coming back to your question about Perika and why that region wasn't conquered by any neighbouring country," the majordomo continued, "this is the first time I am hearing that name. So that mine probably wasn't too big or famous enough to be known in the north of the kingdom where I lived at the time. Either way, after every country saw how huge the iron reserves were in the Tolasi hills, a small iron mine like that would be easily ignored in favour of getting access to the Tolasi Hills." He added, "Feroy did tell us that Kirnos used to import iron ore from Perika until two decades ago before they shipped it to Ulriga for smelting, which meant the duke was satisfied with the arrangement at that time without feeling the need to conquer those wastelands, but once the war ended, the iron demand fell very sharply, and there was probably no use for spending gold to buy any more iron from Perika, and certainly not to conquer that region."

Kivamus gave a slow nod, while thinking about the situation. As of now sending a caravan to Perika, or buying iron ore from there was simply out of their capabilities, if that place had even survived by now. However, it was good to know that they might get a relatively close source of iron ore in the future, even if those deposits weren't supposed to be very big.

Leaving the future problems for later, he thought of trying to change the downcast mood which had descended in the manor hall after they had realised that Tiranat would most likely be standing alone in case of an invasion by Girnalica without getting any help from Cinran - who would have problems of their own - or Ulriga - where his brothers would be quite happy to see him dead and his village in ruins.

Looking at the ex-mercenary, he praised, "Regardless of whether Perika still stands to this day or not, you have done exceptionally well on this trip. At this rate you might very well do better as a merchant than as a guard in the manor!"

Hudan guffawed at that suggestion, while Duvas gave a small smile as well. Feroy had also started laughing, and that laughter turned out to be infectious and made everyone in the manor hall burst out laughing.

"I'm just fine working as a guard, you know?" Feroy replied with a shrug after everyone had calmed down, "although I don't mind going out on trips once in a while to act as a merchant for the benefit of Tiranat. Only a few times in my life have I had a place to call home, so I will do my best to make sure Tiranat remains safe from all its enemies, and as prosperous as I can help to make it, whether by acting as a guard or as a merchant."

"That's plenty good, Feroy," Kivamus smirked, "that's plenty good indeed. I still think you will be our best choice for leading any other trading caravans we send in the future."

"I'll gladly do that," the ex-mercenary replied, "even if I have to deal with greedy nobles like the Lords of Kirnos. If anything, it was fun to negotiate with young master Lanidas!"

Kivamus grinned remembering the way Feroy had made Lanidas pay through his nose for the coal. "I think we will need to wait for a few weeks before sending you there again. By that time rumors about Tiranat might have spread further among those people, and you might even be able to bring some immigrants with you."

Feroy nodded. "I agree. Most of the people there were already looking gaunt with hunger, with the baron increasing the taxes on everything - including the fish caught from the ocean. With the grain prices already very high there and the merchants having only a small stock of wheat anyway, catching fresh fish was usually the best way to feed your family in Kirnos, but now even that is not easy. That means at least some of those people might already be looking for greener pastures."

"Well, let's hope we are able to get more workers after the end of winter," Kivamus said. "Now you must be hungry, and ale is waiting for you and the other guards who went on that trip. Go on and have something to eat and rest well tonight."

Feroy nodded and stood up, and exited the manor hall with Hudan following him outside.

The temple bell rang for five times right at that moment, marking the end of the workday for the labourers. With this being the middle of winter, the days didn't last long, and by this time, the sun would be close to setting, if it hadn't already. Kivamus wished that he could create some better lighting here - preferably electricity based - which would allow workers to work longer hours, but there wasn't anything he could do about it at this time.

Thinking of the sketch he had finished earlier today, he looked at the majordomo. "How is it going with the production of sawdust briquette? Do we need to put in more workers to gather sawdust?"

"Not at all," Duvas replied. "Those two workers we had assigned to the wood press machine work during all hours of the daytime, and even then they can hardly use half of the sawdust and wood shavings which the kids bring in. There is already a small pile of that gathering next to the machine by now."

"We might consider making a second wood press machine to make more sawdust briquettes in the future, but I don't think it is needed for now. We are already saving a good amount of coal from this, and I have something else in mind to use that sawdust in - specifically paper." Kivamus added, "I already have the blueprint ready for that to show to..."

Before he continued, the outer door and a servant announced the arrival of Darora.

"Speak of the devil," Kivamus muttered with a snort, as the young carpenter entered the hall. Gesturing him to take a seat near him, he continued, "We were just talking about you."

Darora grinned. "Then you have the new machine design ready for me? I can't wait to get started on something new!"

Kivamus smiled at the man's enthusiasm, and nodded as he stood up and walked towards the shelf near the long table. "I have way too many things which I want to get built and have already drawn, but making paper is a priority for us right now, and that's what I've called you for. Let me show you."

Duvas had also walked close to the long dining table in curiosity, as Kivamus picked out the latest parchment he had drawn on and spread it over the table in the light of a few tallow candles, as well as the roaring fireplace.

"I agree that if we can really make paper here," the majordomo began, "it would save us a lot of gold which we would need to use to buy parchment for you, not to mention our only paper register which I use for tracking our finances is getting full now, but I still don't understand why we can't just make parchment here. That would do the work just as well, and we have no shortage of animal skins these days. Just a dozen or two new parchments made every month would be enough for my usage of writing, as well as for your sketching blueprints. So do we even need to make paper here?"

Chapter 226 Mould And Deckle

"The simple reason is that paper isn't just going to be used by us two in the future," Kivamus replied. "Right now you can't even imagine just how widespread the usage of paper can get in the future. We can use it to give children something to write on, we can replace the costly parchments for us, and perhaps even print books in the future. It also takes several days to convert a hide into parchment, but paper can be made much faster than that in a larger quantity, which will make books accessible to everyone who wants them." He looked at the majordomo, who still looked sceptical. "Just trust me on this."

Duvas smiled. "Of course I trust you. You have proved the usefulness of your ideas time after time, no matter how absurd they felt in the beginning." He added, "By the way, you meant to write new books, right? I don't understand what it means to print books."

Kivamus smiled. "Printing... is a little difficult to explain without actually showing it. Let's leave it for the future when we are ready for it." Once the majordomo nodded, he looked at the waiting carpenter, who looked eager. "This wouldn't be a single, individual machine, but will have several parts which will be used in sequence for the whole process of making paper." He pointed at the blueprint he had drawn. "Most of the parts look simple at first glance, but they need to be sturdy enough that it wouldn't break under load."

He put his finger on the sketch of a rectangular wooden frame. "This is the simplest part. You will need to make around a dozen of these for now, one of these will become the deckle while the other will become the mould. I will ask Cedoron to make a bigger fine mesh to attach to half of these, just like he is making for the new safety lamps for the coal mines. Later I will show you how to attach the mesh to the frames when both are ready."

Darora frowned. "You mentioned this already but these are still too simple... I can easily make them by tomorrow evening. Is this all?"

Kivamus chuckled at the impatience of the young but talented carpenter. "Hardly. After this I need a wooden tub, just like the ones the maids use to wash clothes in, as well as a wooden beater - again, similar to the ones they use for washing clothes."

Duvas looked at him with raised eyebrows. "This sounds like you just want to order more maids to wash clothes... Is this really how paper is made?"

Kivamus ignored the jibe, and continued, "We will need a medium to large sized cauldron for boiling, but we can just use an extra one from the kitchen for this. We already have enough ropes we had bought from Pydaso before winter, so those can be used for drying." Thinking about it, he muttered, "Hmm... We will also need to make some felt for this, since I haven't seen any of it here, but it should be doable from the rabbit or wolf hairs. We will also need a good amount of lye." He looked at the majordomo, "Are you still dumping the wood ash in holes in the ground like in the past?"

"Of course not," Duvas huffed, "I'm not that forgetful! We've already started to gather it in big earthenware pots to use as fertilizer in the farms after you told me about that a month ago. They are being stored outside the manor like you had ordered, so there wouldn't be any chance of it catching fire and damaging other buildings."

"Good, good. There should already be enough ash for making lye then. If we can make it in a decent quantity, we might even be able to start making soaps here."

Duvas stared at him. "But we had already bought enough soap from Pydaso to last the whole village for the winter - although they'll likely last a month or two longer since the villagers are habitual of using the smallest amount they can get away with to save some coin."

Kivamus frowned. "No, that won't do. Tell them there is no need to be frugal about that. Like you said, we have a lot of it in stock." He added, "Also, soap is something we just can't do without even after the winter ends, and I don't want to buy something which is that easy to make and at such inflated prices from that money-grubbing soapmaker guild of Plumron. Anyway, that's an issue for the future, since Plumron basically has a monopoly on soapmaking and it's not going to be easy to go against them."

Finally, he focused back at the carpenter who looked impatient by now. "Now this is the difficult part for which you are here." He pointed at one of the blueprints made on the parchment. "I need you to make a trip hammer, like this one. We certainly can't spare enough iron to make even the head of the trip hammer from it, so it will be made of wood, with a layer of iron around it."

Stolen from its rightful author, this tale is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

He explained further, "There will be a simple rectangular frame around a man's height, with the pivot of the trip-hammer attached to an axle in the middle of that frame. One side of the hammer will have its iron wrapped head, while the other side, which is the haft - or the handle in case of a normal sized hammer - will be pushed downwards by a cam." He added, "The cam is just a smooth triangular piece of wood shaped like a single tooth - which will push down that side of the hammer and raise the hammerhead on the other side of the fulcrum - the pivot - which will then fall down under the force of gravity."

Darora scratched his cropped black hair. "I know the concept of a cam, but how will the cam push down the hammer's haft? This whole hammer will weigh as much as half a dozen men, if not more. I don't think it can be done by hand."

"Of course it can't," Kivamus agreed. "I was getting to that part. That cam will be attached to the water wheel we will install under the dam on the eastern stream. It will take maybe ten more days to remove all water from the mine shafts, and after that we can shift that wheel to that stream. We will use a long wooden axle to shift the rotational motion of the water wheel under the dam to another wheel located on the shore. This arrangement will be enough for the trip hammer, once you have made the second wheel with cams on its circumference. Later on, we can use gears to transform the rotational motion of the second wheel from a vertical plane to a horizontal one, in case we want to use it to grind grain or some other stuff like that, but that's for the future."

Seeing that Duvas was getting confused now, while Darora was squinting his eyes looking at the blueprint, he added, "Leave the details of how the full system will work to me. I will explain whatever is needed if you have any problems, but for now you should start making the frames first, and then you should return to make the third crossbow. By the time that is ready, we will have started the

construction of the dam, and you can start making the trip hammer and the second wheel and axle arrangement. That would be completed around the time the dam is finished, and after that we can start the installation of everything there."

Darora nodded. "Even though I will have to start working on the trip hammer only after a week or so, I will still take this blueprint with me, so I can familiarise myself with the design in my free time. The wooden frames are simple enough, but the blueprint will be helpful to see the dimensions for reference."

"That's a good idea. you can take it right now," Kivamus said as he rolled up the parchment. "Come back here with all the frames when they are ready, so I can show you how to attach the wire mesh to it once Cedoron has made them."

"Of course milord," Darora said before he took the parchment, and exited the manor hall.

Kivamus looked at the majordomo. "Call up the blacksmith tomorrow morning, so I can explain about the wire mesh to him." Once Duvas nodded, he continued, "We have enough pelts stored now, so order a few servants to take a few of them and pluck the hairs from them. We will use some hot water and repeated agitation and compression to make felt from those hairs, which will be used to compress the paper later."

"Won't it be a waste of those precious pelts?" Duvas asked. "We can sell them for a good price to merchants after winter."

"Don't worry, only two or three pelts would be more than enough for now." Kivamus added, "Tomorrow morning, tell a servant to bring up some of the stored ash, so we can boil it to make lye. That can be a little dangerous, so we will do it outside the manor walls in the east, and I will supervise the process. Once we have some lye, and the mould and deckle have been built, we can start the process of making paper. The final product, at least that of a decent quality, will have to wait until we have the trip hammers ready, but we should still be able to start making some of it once we have some felt made from the hairs. Ideally we will also need a separate paper press machine for making the final product, but we can just use the wood press machine for this in the beginning, since by that time we will start mining coal again and we can spare that machine for a while."

Duvas took a deep breath. "You have thrown around a lot of new terms here, and I hardly understood half of them, but I will trust you once again that you know what you are doing. I will give the orders to the servant and call Cedoron tomorrow. I know I shouldn't doubt your admittedly extraordinary ideas by

now, but every time you mention something new, I start to think if something that complex can really be made in Tiranat..."

Kivamus smiled. "That's alright, Duvas. It's okay to have some doubts, I hardly know everything after all. Either way, I believe it will be many years, if not decades, by the time I start to run out of ideas which are simple to implement, and by that time even I wouldn't be sure if any advanced designs can be made in Tiranat. We'll see what to do when we reach that stage." He grinned. "For now, enjoy the journey!"

Duvas stared at him for a while then shook his head while smiling. "I wonder how you can even think of so many unique ideas..."

Kivamus returned the smile, without giving an answer. Gorsazo had basically raised him since he was a child, and considered him like his own son, which is why there was no real risk of his former teacher calling for him to be burned at the stake when he had revealed everything about himself. However, Duvas was much older and had a similarly traditional mindset. He had no doubt that Duvas wouldn't betray him in anything, since the old majordomo considered Tiranat to be his home now, but in case he revealed his real origins, he still wasn't sure what Duvas would do. That's why it was better to be safe than sorry. Perhaps one day, he could tell more about that, but for now, it was better to keep his secret to himself.

Chapter 227 The Southwestern Gate

~ Hyola ~

"It's nearly dark now..." Hyola muttered, while gazing outside the southwestern gate of the village. Although it wasn't really a gate yet with the carpenter still having it under construction, it would only take a day or two before this last gate was also completed. One side of the gate was already fitted to the wall, while the other side - which was nearly ready - had been put tilted on the log wall by the carpenter when he left for the day, before he started to attach it to the wall by tomorrow.

It was her time for watch duty, she being the only woman who was put on watch duty even on the village gates, unlike the other women guards who were put on duty only on the gates of the baron's manor. It had only been a few hours since she had started her watch, and she had a long night of duty ahead of her. Kerel was the other guard standing nearby, with his mane of iron grey hair, and a longsword behind his shoulder.

Snowfall had stopped for the moment, although there was nearly half a foot of snow gathered outside the walls, where people didn't trample over it all day. A brazier was burning on one side of the gates,

and that's where she had been heating up her hands for a while before she came back to the gates and told Kerel that he could go to the brazier now.

Hyola looked at the older guard after he had walked away. "Shouldn't we close the gates now?"

She did realise that they couldn't really close the gates when the gate wasn't even completed yet, but since yesterday they had started to lean the other part of the gates on the gap between the wall and the already attached part of the gate so that there would be a semblance of security. It wouldn't really make them more secure, but it still felt better than having a completely open pathway into the village.

"Hmm..." Kerel muttered while looking at the darkening sky, with a faint sliver of the moon visible up there. "Nobody else is out on this side of the village, right?"

"One of the carpenter's apprentices had gone to take a leak earlier, but he returned a while ago, and he was the last one."

Kerel gave a nod. "Let's do it then." He walked to where the unattached part of the gate was kept leaning on the wall, and beckoned her over. "Come on, give me a hand here!"

Hyola started walking from her position on the other side of the gate to where Kerel was waiting, while casually glancing outside the gap as she crossed it. However, just before she passed the gap, she thought she saw some movement in the distance behind the closest trees, which were more than five hundred yards away - no, five hundred meters away. That was the new terminology Lord Kivamus was teaching to the villagers, and she had to try to learn it too. It probably would have been impossible to see any movement there only a short while later when it got darker, but with the sun having recently dipped in the west behind those trees, the western sky was still bright enough to silhouette any movement in that direction.

She squinted into the distance. Had she just imagined it? Who could be out there at this time anyway? She was pretty sure that there was no one else due to come inside from this gate. Maybe it was some wild beast?

Noticing that she had stopped walking while standing in that gap, Kerel looked at her. "Hurry up. I can't move this gate by myself. It would be difficult even with the two of us."

"Wait..." Hyola whispered towards him, while looking through narrowed eyes towards those trees. "I think there is something out there."

Immediately, Kerel left the unattached part of the gate, and walked towards her with his hands on the hilt of his sword. "What did you see?"

"I'm not really sure..." Hyola muttered, while pointing towards those trees. "I think there is something behind that tree - the one with the crooked branch. It could very well be a wolf, although it wasn't big enough to be an adzee or a bear."

Kerel walked outside the gap of the gate, with Hyola following him while taking her crossbow in her hands from the shoulder sling where it was normally hung. They kept looking between those trees for a while, and neither of them saw anything.

"Maybe I just imagined it," Hyola muttered. Perhaps she shouldn't even have mentioned it...

No! She still remembered the instructions all the guards had been given by Feroy. If any of them saw anything suspicious, they weren't supposed to doubt themselves. Even if it turned out to be a false warning, they were instructed to tell it to their superiors, or to whoever was nearby.

Eventually, Kerel gave a nod. "I don't see anything either. Let's go back and put the gate in place."

Hyola took a deep breath and nodded. Both of them returned inside the walls, with Kerel moving ahead towards the gate part, while Hyola followed him there. Just before she walked behind the walls, she took one last look towards the trees, and once again she saw something moving.

If you encounter this tale on Amazon, note that it's taken without the author's consent. Report it.

"There! I'm sure I saw something this time!" she whispered urgently.

Kerel frowned, and gestured her to come inside, while putting a finger on his lips. Once she was also hidden behind the walls, he whispered, "It's difficult for us to see clearly because there is no source of light there, while whoever or whatever is out there can easily see us in the light of the brazier. This

makes it more likely that there are humans there, not animals. Let me move the brazier away, and then we will be on equal grounds."

Hyola nodded while staying behind the walls on the right side of the gap, and before long, the older guard was back after putting the brazier a few dozen feet away behind the walls on the left side. "Now we won't be illuminated in its light," Kerel whispered from his side of the gap. "Keep yourself behind the walls and just try to peek from the side. This way whoever is out there is less likely to notice that we are watching them."

It took a few seconds for her eyes to adjust, and once again Hyola saw some movement behind that tree with the crooked branch. "Do you see it now?" she whispered towards the older guard. "There is definitely someone behind the tree I pointed out earlier."

"I see it," Kerel murmured after a while. "That isn't anyone from our village, or they would have no reason to hide there."

"Then could he be a bandit?" Hyola breathed. "Why would a lone bandit try to attack a village by himself?"

"He could very well be a scout..." Kerel replied. "We need to tell this to someone." He looked behind them, with the last houses of the village around a hundred meters behind the walls. "With only two of us here, it's not a good idea for one of us to leave, which would leave the other alone. It seems like there's only a single scout out there, so there is no emergency of an imminent attack right now. The mounted guards on village wall patrols should be passing from here soon. We can tell them to let others in the manor know about this. They can get the news out faster on their horses than we can do on foot."

"Yeah, let's do that," Hyola muttered, while squinting her eyes towards those trees in confusion. She had seen some movement behind another tree which was some distance away from the first one. Wasn't that bandit - or scout - or whoever he was, supposed to be behind the tree with the crooked branch? How had he moved so far without them seeing anything?

Suddenly, she saw some movement behind another tree which was on the opposite side of the one with the crooked branch. Wait... Had the scout moved his place once again without her noticing it?

She kept looking towards those trees with concentration, when suddenly she also saw movement behind another tree and she blinked her eyes in surprise. No man could possibly move that fast. The meaning of seeing movement behind many trees chilled her to the bone.

"Goddess save us..." Kerel mumbled. "That's not a single scout! There's a whole gang of bandits out there!" He looked back towards the village with a huge frown. "Where are the riders when you need them..."

"Shouldn't we blow the horn now?" Hyola asked in fear. "Those were our orders."

"We don't have a gate here which we can close after blowing the horn," Kerel whispered furiously. "We only put that slab of wood so any wild animals wouldn't sneak inside in the night. It won't do anything to save us from bandits! For now they seem content to watch from a distance, but if we blow the horn they will realize that we know about them and will attack immediately, and we can't possibly take on that many men by ourselves!"

"You're right," Hyola nodded, before she realized Kerel was looking outside and wouldn't see her nod. "It's probably better to wait until the riders on patrol are here, or until we see these bandits moving towards us."

"Yeah. But if the riders still aren't here after a while, and we see the bandits coming to attack, then you will run fast to the manor to get help, while I will try to hold them on as long as I can."

Hyola immediately realised what that would mean for Kerel, but orders were orders. It would never feel right to her to leave her watch duty partner in case it came to an attack, however, Kerel was her superior, and was only behind Hudan and Feroy in the hierarchy of the guards. That meant he knew what he was talking about.

"Okay," she whispered reluctantly before she nodded and steeled herself for a fight, just in case. She didn't know when these bandits would decide to attack or when the guards on patrol would be here.

Hyola was still standing behind the walls and trying to make up her mind about whether she could leave Kerel to his fate if it came to the worst or if she would support him in resisting the bandit raid. She exhaled loudly. This was going to be a difficult night.

Suddenly, Kerel looked sharply at her. "Run! Run to the manor immediately!" The older guard had brought his sword in his hands, and used his other hand to bring the horn to his lips before he blew loudly on it.

Her mind having gone blank by the sudden order as well as the loud sound of the horn, it took a moment for Hyola to understand what was happening. She peeked from the side of the wall to confirm it for herself, and what she saw sent shivers down her spine - and it had nothing to do with the weather. The bandits were coming out of the trees in droves, with something metallic glinting in the hands of them in the moonlit night.

"Hyola! Run to the manor right now!" Kerel yelled once again as he moved to stand between the gap in the gate.

"But..." she hesitated. If she left, that would mean Kerel would be by himself, and most likely wouldn't survive the night.

"Hyola!" Kerel bellowed. "You need to get help or the village will be defenceless if they get past me! I will be fine until you bring the other guards, but you have to go immediately!"

Blinking her eyes which had suddenly gotten wet, Hyola gave an uncertain nod, before she suddenly got an idea, and handed over the crossbow and the quiver of bolts to the older guard. It wouldn't help much, but it was better for Kerel to use it here than for her to take it to the village.

The older guard gave a nod of thanks, before he turned towards the west to make his last stand. "Go!"

Hyola nodded once again with blurry eyes, and turned around before she began to run faster than she ever had in her life. She had to bring help and save him! Kerel's life was in her hands now...

Chapter 228 Wistfulness

~ Kivamus ~

~ A short while ago ~

Kivamus was waiting for dinner in the manor hall with Gorsazo and Duvas, while Hudan had begun to tell another story to Lucem and Clarisa near the fireplace which had kept them enraptured. While waiting, he had been thinking about how to begin the process of paper making after all the required wooden parts were made, while the majordomo seemed to be discussing something about the classes with his former teacher.

Although he had mostly adjusted to life in this medieval world, once in a while he still wished he had the luxury of having a variety of restaurants and coffee shops near his apartment, like he had in London. While he lived there, he always had a habit of laying down on a recliner with a cup of coffee in his hands after a long day of work, with the tv showing some pointless show, unless he wasn't just reading about random stuff on the internet. That was such a mundane habit and yet it always relaxed his mind a lot, but it had been so long since he had experienced any of it.

Having a nearly instant access to soda drinks, coffee, tea as well as to all kinds of snacks from all over the world was something he was pretty sure that everyone living in London took for granted, and yet it was only after coming to this world that he realised that having those modern conveniences were such a huge luxury.

Thinking about his old life was making him feel wistful, as he tried to recall the taste of everything he used to like eating in London. Amongst the beverages, somehow he had always preferred coffee over tea, since tea just didn't have that impact which caffeine gave to a tired mind, but right now, he would be grateful if he could find any of those drinks here. He had even asked Gorsazo about it and found that while there was indeed something similar to coffee here, it was not grown in Cilaria and had to be imported from other parts of the world, which meant it was costly enough that even the luxury preferring previous baron of Tiranat hadn't dared to buy it.

However, Ulriga was a big port and always had some merchant willing to sell it, which is why it was always stocked in the palace of Ulriga, but the original Kivamus had never liked that beverage, which is why he didn't have any memories of how it tasted and whether it was really similar to coffee. He had even thought of buying a small quantity of it from there in the future, but in their current situation they simply couldn't afford to buy something like that just for his own luxury.

While his mind was still lost in the past, suddenly, he heard the sound of a horn blowing from somewhere in the village. Without wasting a moment, Hudan stood up with his hand on the hilt of his sword, and ran towards the outer door.

"Stay inside, everyone, and bar the door," the guard captain instructed, before he exited the hall and closed it from the outside.

Kivamus was the one closest to the door, so he quickly followed the guard captain's instructions, and barred the door with a thick wooden bar, wondering what had happened. Was it Nokozal? Had he finally gathered up enough bandits to attack the village again? Or was it Torhan's group, who must have realised by the news from their scouts and Feroy's recent caravan journey to Kirnos that Tiranat was ripe for raiding again?

While the ex-mercenary was already back with the other three guards, there were at least three hunting groups out from the village right now, which meant they probably didn't have enough guards to resist a full scale raid. He walked back towards the chair next to the long dining table while wondering if it was a mistake from him to send that many hunting groups out when the gates weren't completed yet.

It was already dark by now so the northern and south-eastern gates must have been locked by this time, but the south-western gate was still not finished. That had to be where the raiders were coming from. His mind was still feeling calm enough, because he trusted his guards, and knew that they had successfully repelled a raid already, which meant they knew what to do in such an emergency.

However, he did realize that without any way to look into the distance - like from the top of a watchtower - the horn would be blown only when the bandits were already too close to the village. That meant he had to prioritise the construction of watch towers as soon as he could. Once the last gate was completed, those watch towers would be the only way to see around the village and to give an early warning to the guards in case of such an attack.

Duvas was looking upwards saying a prayer, while Gorsazo was trying to calm the kids. However, looking at the still-fearful faces of the kids, he wished that the guards would reach the open gate in time to help the two guards already there. If this was a serious raid with enough bandits and they came inside the gates, who knew how much damage they would do. No, he trusted Hudan, and had to believe that he would be able to deal with the threat somehow.

Once again wishing he had a way to communicate directly with the guards, he sat down on the armchair. It was going to be a long night.

~ Hyola ~

Hyola was running with all her might back towards the gate, along with many other guards wearing leather armour and armed with swords and spears, who had been off-duty in the manor, while Hudan, Feroy, Tesyb and their other good fighters had already ridden to the gates on horses ahead of them. She hadn't seen Calubo amongst them, so he might have been put on duty on one of the other gates, even though they were supposed to be barred for the night by this time.

She kept running while she wished they would manage to reach the gates before Kerel had to fight with those bandits by himself. She didn't even want to imagine how it would feel if she saw Kerel's corpse near the gate - only because he had sent her away to safety and decided to fight the bandits by himself.

Before long, she and the others had passed the last houses of the village in the south-west, and immediately, she saw that there was a group of guards gathered near the gate in the distance. It was already dark, but the brazier burning near the gate was providing just enough light for her to see them.

She still didn't know the fate of Kerel as she kept running, but at least it meant that she had managed to warn the manor in time and the guards had reached the gates before the bandits entered inside. That meant the village should be safe tonight, unless there were bandits attacking from other directions too. Shaking her head, she tried to focus on the present. Thinking about the whole defence of the village was better left to Hudan and other senior guards. They must already have thought about it. She just had to focus on helping the guards here.

She put her hand on her side to feel the reassuring touch of the crossbow before she realised that she had already given it to Kerel when leaving. While she did have a dagger with her, it just didn't feel right without her crossbow on her side.

Before long, she and the others reached the south-western gate of the village, and saw that some of the guards were standing defensively just inside of the gates with their swords out, while the mounted guards had exited the gates with burning torches in their hands and seemed to be circling around a stationary group of people some distance away. Were they the bandits?

That couldn't be right. Even if they would have realised by now that the village was better prepared to repel a raid than they thought, they still shouldn't be standing motionless like that, without trying to attack the mounted guards, should they?

Suddenly, she realised that she hadn't seen Kerel so far, and her mind went into a panic. She frantically began asking all the guards about his whereabouts, before one of them told her that he had gone with Hudan and the mounted guards to brief them about the raiders.

Exhaling loudly, she thanked the goddess that he was alive, while waiting for the mounted guards to return. Something still didn't feel right to her, seeing that the raiders seemed to be huddling together in the lights of the burning torches from the mounted guards surrounding them. However, the rest of the guards were also waiting here on Hudan's orders, so that's what she had to do as well.

Soon, she saw that one of the guards was riding his horse fast towards the gate, while the group of raiders had slowly started walking towards them as well, with the mounted guards circling around them.

Once the mounted guard - Tesyb - reached the gate, he looked at the anxious expressions of others and jerked his head towards the village. "Going to inform Lord Kivamus 'bout this sorry lot." With that, he started riding once again, and was soon lost to the darkness towards the village.

What did that even mean, she wondered. Why were the bandits walking towards the gates so peacefully? Why was Hudan even allowing them to come towards the gate and the village? Was there some other attack as well on another side of the village, which is why the mounted guard had gone to inform Lord Kivamus about this? She kept waiting anxiously to get more answers while looking impatiently at the people now reaching the gates.

Soon, she saw Hudan walking in the front while holding the reins of his horse, while the group of unknown people - the bandits - followed behind him with downcast eyes, with the guard captain talking seriously to one of them - probably their leader. Once they were all inside, with the remaining guards standing around them in a circle with their swords ready, she saw Feroy, Kerel and other guards following behind them, before the ex-mercenary ordered the guards to put the unattached part of gate in its due place to close the gates, and make the village just a little more secure.

Finally, she saw Hudan bringing his horse close to the waiting guards, ready to address everyone.

Chapter 229 New Arrivals

"There is nothing to worry about," the guard captain announced to the other guards. "These people are hardly bandits, although they did have plans to steal food from the village if it came to the worst. I'll explain more later after I have informed Lord Kivamus about them. For now, take all of them to the jail in the manor, after taking whatever they have as their weapons. They will spend the night there. Also, keep an eye on them on the way, and make sure everyone stays with the group."

With that, the guard captain mounted his horse once again, and started riding towards the village, while Hyola moved to look at the new group. They only had a brazier burning nearby as well as the light of the burning torches in the hands of some guards, but it was still enough to tell the sorry state of the new arrivals. None of them seemed to have proper clothing, with rags and tattered clothes being the norm. More than half of them were men with gaunt faces and haggard looks, some of them looking like they were barely older than teenagers, while some looked too old to be out in this weather. There were some women in the group too, looking just as underfed as others, while she was surprised to see even a few kids and children peeking fearfully from behind the adults."

Hyola raised her eyebrows high. These were supposed to be bandits? Did they really think they could take on a whole village by themselves? Most of them looked like they couldn't even lift a sword if they tried their best. Who were they?

By now the guards had started collecting the weapons from the new arrivals, and Hyola realised that most of those weapons were shovels, sickles and trowels...? Didn't these people realise that they couldn't possibly fight against trained guards armed with proper swords with these... farming tools? What were they even thinking?

"Here, kiddo," she heard from her side, and turning around she found Kerel standing next to her, with all his limbs still attached to him. He had her crossbow and the quiver of bolts in his hands. He grinned. "Seems like I didn't need it after all!"

Hyola couldn't help but laugh seeing him hale and hearty. "I'm glad to hear that!" she replied after taking her trusty crossbow from him and putting the sling around her shoulder.

Once the guards had gathered anything that could pass for a weapon from the new arrivals, Feroy spoke from atop his horse. "Come on, let's take them to the manor now." He pointed at a pair of guards, "You two will also join the watch duty at this gate for tonight - just in case there are real bandits out there - along with Kerel and Hyola who still have to finish their own watch duty here. I'll send someone to replace you two soon, so you all can have some rest too. It wasn't time for you two to be on duty, after all." Then the ex-mercenary looked at Hyola and Kerel. "Well done, blowing the horn on time, and coming to call the other guards. Make sure nothing else enters the village tonight."

Hyola nodded, and walked towards the gates, while followed by the others who would be on duty tonight. She gazed upwards at the sky and thanked the goddess for keeping everyone safe. She still didn't know what was going on with these new bandits, but Hudan would take care of it.

Taking a deep breath while rubbing her arms, she readied herself for the watch duty. While the excitement had passed without any problems, it was still going to be way too cold tonight...

~ Kivamus ~

~ A few minutes ago ~

He had been waiting for a while now without any news, and by now even he had started getting anxious. Syryne had come into the manor hall earlier and had taken the kids to make them help in the kitchen where Madam helga was cooking dinner, so they wouldn't be thinking continuously about bandits coming to kill them. Gorsazo and Duvas were sitting uneasily near the fireplace, while he had been pacing in the manor hall, since he was feeling too agitated to calmly sit in a place right now.

Soon, the outer door opened and Tesyb walked inside wearing a fur coat.

"Milord, Hudan sent me to tell you that there is no danger to the village right now," the brawny guard reported.

Immediately, there were sighs of relief from his former teacher and the old majordomo, while Kivamus nodded gratefully for the news. "Why was the horn blown then?"

"There was indeed a group of people outside the south-western gate," Tesyb replied, "so Kerel was right in blowing the horn. That's why Hudan and other guards rode fast to that place, assuming they were bandits. Although there are women and even a few children in that group..."

Taken from Royal Road, this narrative should be reported if found on Amazon.

Duvas frowned. "They aren't bandits then? Who else would be out there in this weather?"

Tesyb scratched his head. "Actually, they probably are bandits, kind of..."

Now it was Kivamus' turn to raise his eyebrows. "What are you talking about? Are they bandits or not? How could children be bandits anyway?"

Once again the outer door opened and this time it was the guard captain who walked inside. Tesyb looked at Hudan gratefully. "I think it's better if he tells you about it."

The guard captain nodded. "I'll explain everything to Lord Kivamus. You go and make sure there are no problems at the jail."

Tesyb quickly nodded and exited the hall, before Kivamus looked at Hudan in confusion. "Why would there be any problems at the jail?"

"It's better if I start from the beginning," the guard captain replied. "When I rode to the south-western gate I saw that there was a small crowd of people with iron glinting in their hands. That's why I immediately assumed that they were bandits, so I rode out of the gates with some other guards to attack them." He continued, "However on reaching there I saw that those desperate people were far from the fearsome bandits I was expecting. They had farming tools in their hands instead of swords and spears, and none of them seemed like a killer. Feroy agreed with me on that, and said that none of them could have killed anything in their lives, except perhaps an animal for their dinner."

"Okay..." Kivamus muttered. "Then who are they?"

"I didn't have time to interrogate them too much, but Feroy is bringing them here so they can stay in the jail tonight, and he will ask them all the necessary questions." Hudan added, "I can still tell you that they came from the west, from somewhere near Kirnos."

"Oh, that's interesting," Kivamus said. "Could they be immigrants?" He shook his head. "No, that's not possible. You said they were on foot, so they couldn't have reached here this fast even if they left the same day when Feroy returned from Kirnos. Let's wait for him then."

This time there was a longer delay before the outer door opened once again and the ex-mercenary walked inside. Looking at Kivamus, he smirked. "Milord, you'll be happy to hear this news."

"Just tell us already!" Gorsazo grumbled. "You are the third guard to come here in the past hour and we still don't know anything about who those people are!"

Feroy shrugged. "I had to make sure to get everything out of them before I came to report here." He took a seat near the fireplace before he continued, "They are a few families of farmers who had joined together for the journey, or at least they used to be farmers until a few months ago when Baron Farodas had dismissed all the farmers for the winter. Usually, that wouldn't have been too much of a problem, since it happens every year, and just like the other locals, these people save in the summer months so they can buy food in the winter. But this year, the taxes had been increased by the baron of Kirnos, and when they couldn't pay it from their meager savings, their huts were seized by the baron's guards, and these people were thrown on the street."

The ex-mercenary continued, "Their story is similar enough to the man I met on the last day in Kirnos, which is why I know that they are likely telling the truth. Anyway, they tried to make do with what little they had, while living in the space between other people's huts, but around a week ago, the young master Lanidas was visiting the locality and decided that he didn't want to keep those people who didn't pay taxes in his town, especially if they didn't have any hope of earning enough coin to pay the monthly taxes. These people were farmers and wouldn't start earning until the spring, which is why they were thrown out from the village. Not knowing what to do, with the huge forests to the north of their village, and the barren wastelands in the south, one of their two remaining options was to pay enough coin to a visiting ship to travel to another place where they could find work, but without any coin in their pockets that option was out."

"That meant the only hope for them would have been to travel to the east," Kivamus muttered.

Feroy nodded. "Indeed. So, eventually a few of those families who knew each other from working on nearby farms joined together and decided to travel towards Tiranat, thinking maybe they would be able to find work in the coal mines here. This was a few days before I went to Kirnos, so I must have passed them on the way, but they had decided to hide inside the tree line whenever they saw anyone else on the road, which is why we didn't see them on the way."

He continued, "When they finally reached Tiranat in the evening after a long journey with barely anything to eat on the way, they were surprised to see tall palisade walls around the village, which was very different from what they had heard in stories from others who had visited Tiranat in the past. That's why they were hesitating before asking for a refuge here. The guards at the south-western gate saw the farming tools in their hands - which they had stolen while escaping from Kirnos hoping it would

make Tiranat more likely to take them in - and thought that those were weapons, which is why they blew the horn just in case."

"That was a good decision by Kerel," the guard captain commented. "While this was basically a false alarm and there was no real danger to the village, it is better to be safe than sorry."

Kivamus gave a nod after a moment of thought. "You are right. So you have put them in jail for now?"

Chapter 230 Safe Integration

Hudan shrugged. "We don't really have any other place where we can keep them, do we? Both the longhouses are already filled to their capacity with villagers even sleeping on the overcrowded floors there, while the damaged huts in the village won't do anything to prevent the cold if we put the newcomers in them. However, the jail was made from thick logs just like the longhouses and would easily keep them warm enough, although it would still be crowded for them inside."

"I also want to ask them more questions individually before we let them openly integrate with the other villagers," Feroy added, "just to make sure there are no holes in their story. I don't think there should be any problems, but it's better to be safe than sorry."

"I agree with that," Kivamus said. "So, how many of these refugees are there?"

"Nineteen people in total," the ex-mercenary replied, "who are coming from five different families. That includes two children, and three kids who are too young to work. Other than them, all the men and women have experience in farming."

Kivamus grinned. "That experience is going to be vital when we start farming in the spring! We do have Pinoto here who used to be a farmer in the past, but he can't do everything himself. Getting this many experienced farmers might very well be the reason which will make our farming project successful in this village full of coal miners."

"I did say that you would like the news," Feroy replied with a smirk.

However, Duvas was frowning. "I know it's probably a moot point right now, but are you sure you want to take them in? We hardly have enough grain to complete the sowing after feeding the people we

already have in the village. Including these newcomers, Tiranat would have nearly four hundred people whom we will have to feed in the winter from our limited stock of food."

Kivamus smiled. "It's true I was only expecting immigrants to start coming by the end of winter, but we will manage somehow. We already needed some extra workers to start mining coal."

"I don't deny that," the majordomo replied, "but there is a good possibility that the Count will increase his taxes this time, which will make our situation even more difficult. We don't even have a way to house them properly, assuming Feroys clears all of them as safe to give refuge in Tiranat."

"There is hardly any chance that some bandits would have made up this elaborate story to enter our village when they had small children with them, but I'll make sure that they aren't a threat to us," the ex-mercenary replied. "As for housing these refugees, the jail was already sitting empty these days, and while it was a little crowded inside for that many people, they were more than grateful to find a roof over their head and a promise of warm food waiting for them later tonight." He added, "It's still true that putting them in the jail means they are also inside the manor which can be a security risk, but with so many guards here all the time, this is probably the best place to keep them for now. We have already taken whatever farming tools they had brought with them as makeshift weapons."

Kivamus was glad to see that the ex-mercenary had already understood the importance of getting more workers here, even though the majordomo still seemed reluctant. He looked at Duvas. "Just think of it this way. While we will have to spend food on feeding them, the coal which we will be able to mine by the end of winter with these extra workers will more than pay for their upkeep. We might even get some surplus coal to sell this way, which will help us in paying the taxes. Anyway, what other choice do we have? They aren't bandits so we can't just send them and their children away from the village in this freezing weather, can we? They would die of hunger or cold before reaching any other human habitation, and that's assuming Nokozal or some other bandit group doesn't just make them their slaves after seeing them with little children which makes them defenceless."

"I guess you are right," Duvas muttered. He exhaled loudly. "In that case, I better meet with Madam Nerida and tell her that she'll have to cook more food tonight since we have more mouths to feed now."

"That's a good idea," Kivamus agreed. "Until we get some criminal who we need to put inside that jail, we can just let them stay there. That way they will be together with familiar faces, which will make them comfortable here, and we will get a better idea about them in the coming days before we think of shifting them to another place."

Unauthorized duplication: this narrative has been taken without consent. Report sightings.

Duvas gave a nod at that, and exited the hall after putting his fur coat around him.

Feroy stood up as well. "There is still some time before dinner, so I am going to talk with these farmers again." With that he followed the majordomo outside.

Hudan, who had been standing until now, finally found an armchair near the fire and sat down with a sigh. "I never knew when signing up to become your guard captain that my life would become this exciting. Although I still prefer it over the solitude of living in Madam Helga's inn in the past."

Kivamus smiled. "I'm glad you are here to lead our guards. I wouldn't know who to trust with Tiranat's defence without you and Feroy here."

"Still, I can't wait until the south-western gate is completed," Hudan replied. "If we already had that ready, there would have been a much lower danger of any bandit raid, whether they were ex-farmers or not."

Kivamus nodded. "Only a few more days now. After that, we have to start making the barn in the south for mushroom farming, and then we can finally put Taniok to start building the watchtowers."

Gorsazo, who had been quiet until now, finally spoke up with a proud smile. "I'm just glad to see so much progress being made here. We arrived in this village in a very difficult situation, but the village is already unrecognisable from how it used to be a few months ago."

Kivamus grinned. "It's only a start, Gorsazo. It's only a start."

It was late afternoon of the next day and Kivamus was standing in the courtyard of the manor along with Duvas while looking at the frames of mould and deckle which Darora had brought. Thankfully it wasn't snowing today, so they were standing next to an empty table near the servants hall, on which the

frames were kept. Some of them were small sized, while others were a little bigger, so that they could find out by experience which size was the best for making paper.

Cedoron had also brought a single sheet of handmade wire mesh to put on the mould. It was far from the quality one would expect from a mesh made on modern Earth by proper machine tools, but the blacksmith had still outdone himself in producing this mesh, with his experience making similar but smaller meshes for the safety lamp having certainly helped him in this.

"Alright," he looked at the young carpenter. "Now, take this mesh and nail it to the back of one of these frames. Make sure there is no gap between the mesh and the frame."

Darora nodded, and bringing out a hammer and a bunch of nails from a side pocket of the apron he was wearing, he took one of the frames from the table, and began to align the mesh over one side of it, before he started hammering the nails on the sides of the frame. The iron nails which the blacksmith and his apprentice had made in the past had turned out to be exceedingly useful here.

As the carpenter worked, Kivamus continued while looking at the blacksmith, "This mesh looks like it would be good enough to do that task it is meant for. I want half a dozen of these in total, half of them in the size of the smaller frame and the others in the larger size."

"It will take some time even if I put my apprentices on it since the mesh has to be woven by hand, but I can still bring all of them in a day or two," Cedoron replied. "Although I'll have to stop working on the safety lamps for this. Making more crossbow parts will also have to wait."

"Hmm..." Kivamus muttered. "That's true, but we already have four lamps now, and those will be good enough to give enough light for the workers to keep removing the standing water from the mineshafts. We can afford to wait a few days before you make more lamps. As for the crossbow, Darora already has all the parts for making the third one, so we can wait a few days before you provide him parts for the fourth one."

Once the blacksmith gave a nod in agreement, he asked, "What is the status of our stock of iron ingots? Although I'm glad that I had bought more than enough iron from Pydaso, expecting that we would need to use a lot of it in the winter, we are still using them at a good rate without buying more of it."

Cedoron thought about it for a moment. "Most of the iron ingots are stored here in the manor, so I'm not sure how many are left here, but at my shop I still have around a dozen of them. When bringing the ingots the last time from here, I had taken a look in the storeroom, and I think there should still be enough iron to last us another month at the current rate. That's only for the small things we are making like the wiremesh and the safety lamps. I don't think we can make the iron frame of the trip hammers' head without buying more ingots."

"I was expecting something like that," Kivamus grumbled. "That's okay, it will take a while until the dam is built and the water wheel is shifted there, so there is no hurry to make that anyway. Keep working on the safety lamps after you have provided all the meshes, and then I'll need you to make some fine iron parts for the seed drills, since the snow should start melting in a few weeks, and we will need to start sowing soon after that."

"Of course," the blacksmith nodded. "I'll be glad to try out something new once again."

Soon, Darora stood up, and putting his hammer down on the wooden table, he picked up the frame of the mould. "It's done, milord."