

## Londoner 66

### Chapter 66. Shortfall

image

Feroy took a big gulp of ale from his mug, and gave a contented sigh. "Ahhhh... that hits the spot." He began, "Not everything, milord. But we got most of what we wanted." He explained, "We weren't able to secure another wagon on such a short notice, you know? But we've still brought fifty-seven sacks of wheat in our six wagons. We could have added a few more sacks, but I decided not to, since we needed some space for the other items on the list."

"Getting enough grain is more important than anything else, Feroy," Gorsazo observed. "Don't you realize that?"

"Of course I realize that," Feroy grumbled as he took another swig. "I did it because I was able to give the damaged wagon to a wainwright there. He said that he didn't get many orders these days, so he'd return it to us in less than a week. So we'll be able to get that wagon back on our next trip, you know? That means, this time we'll have at least seven wagons to load grain on, even if we can't secure another wagon. That would allow us to bring seventy sacks on the next trip."

"Hmm... That's only a hundred and forty nine sacks from these two trips, including the twenty-two sacks we had bought from Pydas a week ago," Kivamus said. "But from our estimates for feeding three meals a day to the whole village for four months, we needed a total of hundred and seventy-five sacks of grain. That means we will be short by twenty-six sacks!"

Duvas said, "We also need some grain to use as seeds in the coming spring as well."

Kivamus shook his head slowly. "Earlier, when I had talked with Pinoto, we had made an estimate that we need sixty sacks to use as seeds every year. I had thought that we would be able to use the spare grain from these two trips as seeds. But that doesn't seem possible now." The flames continued to crackle in the fireplace, as the daunting challenge made itself apparent to everyone.

"We still have an option to buy those seeds after the snow melts in the spring though," Gorsazo said. "From what we had planned at that time, a hundred and seventy-five sacks of grain was for four months, but Pydas told us that the roads would open again within three months, unless the winter is particularly harsh this year. An extra month of grain was just to be on the safer side."

"Yes, but what if the winter does last longer?" Kivamus asked the unsettling question. "The villagers would go back to starving in that case..." He added after a moment, "Buying more grain after the winter seems like the only option for us though."

Feroy said, "I'd have advised against buying the grain after the winter, milord, if only we had any choice in the matter."

"Why do you say that?" Kivamus asked, as he adjusted himself in the armchair to get closer to the warmth of the fireplace.

"I mean," Feroy began, "Pydas guaranteed us only two trips to Cinran, so it is likely that we won't be able to buy more grain before the winter, you know?" He gazed into his mug of ale for a while, before he continued. "But the thing is, the food situation in Cinran is already not good, and it's likely going to get worse. With two successive poor harvests, the price of grain is already much higher than last year, and my guess is that it will keep rising in the coming months. So if we are going to buy more grain after the winter, we'd likely have to pay an even higher price than what we are paying now."

"That doesn't sound good..." Duvas remarked. "Pydas already charged us unreasonably high prices for the wheat."

Feroy took another big gulp of ale. He frowned at the mug, and seeing that it was empty, he upturned it over his mouth to drain the last few drops of ale. He looked around, and seeing both of Helga's kids and Clarisa sitting on the long dining table nearby, he said, "Hey, Syryne, refill my mug, would ya?"

Syryne looked at her mother sitting near the fireplace with others, who gave a small nod to her. "Sure, Feroy," she said, and walked over to take the mug from the ex-mercenary, and exited the hall towards an inner storage room.

Feroy scratched at his small beard. "While we were in Cinran, I took some time to ask around about the grain prices in the market there, just in case Pydas was padding up his prices too much. But the merchant wasn't wrong about the prices, you know? While it varied a little between different shops, the prices there were still similar to what he'd told us, if not a little higher."

Feroy continued, "Being unable to pay such prices for food, I heard that people from nearby places are being brought into Cinran everyday to be sold into slavery after they couldn't pay back the debts they took to feed themselves. The situation is still not that bad right now, but by the time the winter ends, there would be a lot more people who would willingly agree to become slaves so they can just get something to eat."

Kivamus thought for a moment about the harsh realities of the world he had found himself in. He had done what he could to improve the life of slaves within his own domain, but this was a merciless world and there were a lot of people here who must be going to sleep on empty stomachs every night.

Adjusting to a life as a Baron in a strange medieval world was difficult enough for him, and he couldn't even imagine what it would have been like if he had found himself as a commoner when he woke up in this world. In the future, he would keep trying to do what he could for the underprivileged, even though he had no idea how he could do anything to help them. But for now, he had to focus on his own village, and ensuring that at least everyone under his own rule had enough to eat every day.

"We can't really afford to do anything about people outside Tiranat," he said, "when we are barely able to feed everyone here. If it stays like this, we'll already be short on grain by the end of winter." He sighed. "If only we could send Pydas on another trip to Cinran before the snow blocks the road..."

Duvas said, "It is not impossible, my Lord, even if it is unlikely. Although Pydas still has to return back towards Ulriga after his last trip, so he would have to leave Tiranat before there is a chance of the road to Cinran being blocked. However, from what he told us, there is still a small possibility of squeezing in a third trip before that. We'll have to wait and see for another week until the caravan returns from Cinran again, and then we will talk with Pydas and see if he is willing to go for a third trip."

He added, "As it is right now, the weather is getting colder every day, but we still haven't seen any snow so far. So a third trip might just be possible if the Goddess smiles upon us. We can only hope that she won't leave us hungry now, after she has already sent Lord Kivamus as a baron here to help us."

"I hope so too, you know," Feroy interrupted, "but you do realize that there is a reason why people can still live in Tiranat even in the winter, while the road to Cinran gets enough snow that even travel becomes impossible there?"

Duvas looked at him in surprise, before he shook his head in chagrin. "How could that have slipped my mind!" He looked at Kivamus in apology, "It seems my age is catching up to me."

Getting confused by now, Kivamus asked, "What do you both mean?"

Feroy gave the answer, "The road to Cinran passes much closer to the Arakin Mountains than Tiranat itself, you know? I had noticed that immediately when we first came to this village, but I wasn't completely sure about it, so I kept an eye on the Arakin Mountains on this trip to Cinran as well." He added, "This time, when we were around halfway on the road ahead of Madam Helga's Inn while returning to Tiranat, I noticed that the road slowly started to turn towards west, and the mountain range kept getting further away from us."

He continued, "What it means is that the road to Cinran goes much closer to the mountains, and so it gets a lot more snow than Tiranat itself. That's why, while there is enough snowfall on the road to completely block travel on it for more than a month, Tiranat itself doesn't get nearly that much snow. That's the reason there is still a village here in the winters, otherwise it would be buried under many feet of snow in the winters - like that road itself." He added, "What I mean by this, is that even if we don't see any snow in this village in the coming week, it is still possible that it might already be snowing on that road. That's why Pydas could still refuse to go on the third trip even if there isn't any snow in Tiranat at the time."

"We'll have to wait and see, then." Kivamus tried to visualize the region in his mind, but having access to good maps would have made it much easier. It wasn't like he had access to any online maps here, so he could easily get more information about the region. Even though he realized that the quality of maps in this world would be quite inaccurate to say the least, he asked, "Don't we have any map of this region here? That would make it easier to see the terrain here."

Duvas shook his head. "No, my Lord. And I even tried asking about it in the past in Cinran, but there weren't any maps for sale there as well. But there would certainly be some maps of the whole Duchy available in Ulriga. But you have to know that this region was completely unexplored before we found coal here, so any maps of the Duchy wouldn't show this area in any detail."

Gorsazo remarked, "Even then, it's not like we can even buy something from Ulriga right now."

"Didn't Pydas say that he lived in a village near Ulriga?" Kivamus asked. "We can tell him to buy a good quality map from the city when he returns to his home, and he can bring it to us when he comes to Tiranat next time, after the winter. As for the level of detail of the map, we can't really help it, so I'll buy whatever map he brings for us. Having even a poor quality map would still be better than not having any map at all."

"It's a good idea, my Lord," Duvas replied, "I'll tell Pydas about that. But I have to say that even a simple map wouldn't come cheap."

"That's alright, Duvas, I believe it would still be worth it. Consider it an investment for our future. That being said," Kivamus asked, "why did they even build the road so close to the mountains? If they had built it a little more towards the west, we would have had all year connectivity to Cinran."

Duvas replied, "The workers at that time just cleared a road through the forests wherever they found it easiest to do so. Since this was a previously unexplored area before they found coal here, I don't think anyone expected that the roads would get blocked in the winter. And once the road was already completed, the Count and the Baron didn't see any reason to build a new one."

"It does make sense," Kivamus commented.

Gorsazo said, "There is one thing I wanted to ask though. Would it be better to negotiate the prices directly with the grain merchants on the next trip to Cinran?"