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Chapter 69. Spearheads

The young servant continued, "He said that while the spearheads wouldn't be top notch, since he would be focusing on quantity, they would still work well enough." Seeing Kivamus nod at that, he continued, "He also mentioned that based on what you had told him earlier, something about uh... special-zation, or uh... speciali-zition or something." He scratched the side of his head for a moment. "I'm sorry, milord, I can't remember the word properly. He said that he'll put one worker just to sharpen the spearheads after he had made them, and another one to focus on fitting the spearhead into shafts, and so on, based on the logic of that... special-zation, so that he can produce things faster."

"The word is specialization." Kivamus smiled on hearing that Cedoron had already seen the benefits of specializing workers in particular tasks on his advice.

The servant was rubbing his arms to stay warm now. He added, "He also wanted someone from the manor to go to his workshop soon, to tell him what kind of spearheads were needed, since he said that the design varies based on its use. That was everything, milord."

Kivamus nodded. "Okay. You seem cold now, so go and warm yourself up in the servant hall and send someone else here. You don't need to go out in the cold again immediately."

"Thank you, milord," the young servant said happily. "I will send someone right now." And then he quickly jogged away, seeking the warmth of the servants hall.

"Duvas, when the other servant comes here, send him to Cedoron to tell him about the spears and braziers." Kivamus asked, "Hudan, what do you think about that question of the type of spearheads?"

"Well, the spears can be made in different lengths and weights, based on their use," Hudan explained. "For example, there are throwing spears, or javelins, which are lighter. There are also pikes used by formation of foot soldiers in pike-squares, as well as the heavier lances used by mounted knights. You know that the primary source of danger here in the village, as well as on any escorting journeys comes from wild beasts instead of opposing armies. But we don't have any mounted armored-knights here to use any lances, nor can we throw javelins at any attacking beasts when fighting them from close, so what we need here is half a dozen pikes - which are long enough to keep any beasts away from the guards."

He added, "I'll also have to tell Cedoron to add two lugs on both sides of the spearhead, which are like uh... cross guards on a sword, which will prevent boars and other such wild beasts from working their way up the shaft to attack the person - even after they have been stuck with that spear. Those boars can be quite strong, and they have been known to gore the defender to death that way before dying themselves. However, we would still have to compromise on the quality of the shafts for the next trip of the caravan, since we can't make good quality shafts this quickly. For now, I'll search for strong but thin sticks like you said, which can be used as temporary shafts for a few weeks, and after the caravan returns, we can just remove the spearheads from them, and we can make proper pikes when we get the opportunity."

"That will work, I guess," Kivamus said, being glad that Hudan knew a lot about the subject of medieval weapons.

"I'll send a trained guard along with the servant to let Cedoron know about which type of spearhead he has to make," Hudan said. He looked at the rising sun for a moment. "I should go and start training the recruits now, and then I will take a few people to look for straight pieces of wood which we can use as shafts for now."

"Okay, you can leave, then," Kivamus said to the guard captain. He looked at others with him, "Let's return back to the manor hall now, it's so cold outside."

Duvas nodded. "I will return after I send the servant and the guard to the blacksmith."

"Alright." With his arms pulling his fur coat tighter around him, Kivamus and Gorsazo started walking back towards the inviting warmth of the manor hall.

While they were sitting inside the manor hall, a servant announced the arrival of Pydas. The merchant entered the hall on Kivamus' invitation, and sat on one of the armchairs near the fire.

"Thank you, Milord," Pydas said. "It's a cold morning today."

'That it is. So, how did the trip go?" Kivamus asked.

"Well enough, milord," Pydas replied, while leaning towards the fireplace for warmth. "I was able to buy nearly everything you asked for, although I couldn't buy enough iron nails at a short notice. No blacksmith had such a big stock ready for sale."

"Yeah, Feroy told me about that yesterday," Kivamus commented. "A shortage of nails is going to be a problem for us, but I'll have to find a way to deal with it."

Pydas added, "I thought about giving them advanced orders to make more nails to buy on our second trip, but the prices they were asking were astronomical, so I decided not to give the orders without asking your permission to spend that kind of money."

Kivamus shuddered for a moment, thinking about paying too much money again, with their already dwindling finances. They barely had enough money to buy grain for the villagers, so he couldn't afford to splurge on iron nails. He would have to think of an alternative for it. "That was a good decision. I'm not sure I would have bought them from you if the prices were not reasonable. Let's skip the purchase of any more iron nails then."

Pydas explained after a nod, "Because of the rising prices of grain, the demand for clothing, nails and most other non-essential things has gone down in Cinran, so the blacksmith there didn't even have their usual stock of nails with them, since some of them had to lay off their apprentices recently. I still managed to buy a small amount of iron nails, although it's far from the quantity you asked for." He added, "However, they did have enough of a stock of iron ingots, so I was able to buy more than enough of them. And because the blacksmiths didn't have much use for those ingots these days, they were happy to sell them at a decent enough price."

"That's very good. That extra stock of iron will certainly be helpful for us. For now, let's finalize the payments for you." Kivamus continued, "For the fifty-seven sacks of grain that you have brought, the total price at a rate of four gold crowns and five silver coins will be uh..."

"Two hundred and fifty-six gold crowns, and five silvers," Duvas answered after scribbling for a moment on a parchment. "Let's call it an even two hundred and fifty-six crowns, shall we?"

Pydas sighed looking at the majordomo, seemingly exhausted by his penny pinching. "Alright, so be it," the merchant said. "Apart from that, I also spent forty-seven gold crowns to buy the salt, iron ingots, as well as the small quantity of iron nails which I could find." Looking at Duvas, he added, "And I cannot

give any discount on that since I already spent that money. So, the total amount would be three hundred and three gold crowns."

Kivamus gave a nod, after mentally adding the numbers. "Alright, we already paid you a hundred and fifty crowns in advance a week ago, so Duvas will pay you the difference today." He continued, "Now, for the coming trip, Feroy has told me that you will be able to get the repaired wagon when you go to Cinran this time. So that means you can bring back grain in seven wagons, or around seventy sacks of grain, the prices for which would be something above three hundred gold crowns. Let's also assume that you will have to spend up to a hundred crowns more on the other things I'm going to ask you for. So after subtracting the sixty-nine gold crowns for six wagon loads of coal which you will take with you this time, the total should be something around three hundred and thirty crowns. We will pay you half of that in advance this time as well."

Pydas nodded, "That will be very helpful, milord."

Kivamus began, "This time, I want you to buy some thick ropes as well. Duvas will give you an estimate of the quantity later. Some salt would be needed as well, I think. Duvas, talk with Madam Nerida about that, and let Pydas know if we need to buy more salt."

Apart from the grain and salt they were buying, he did remember that they needed other things to provide a balanced diet to the villagers, or at least as close to a balanced diet as they were going to get here. He asked the merchant, "Would it be possible for you to buy some vegetables too, like potatoes, carrots, onions, or cabbages?"

Pydas took a minute to think about it. "Well, I can't guarantee you what I can buy there, but I should still be able to buy most of those, except for cabbages. Those are only grown in the warmer coastal climate of Ulriga, but they spoil fast - within a week usually. So those aren't available for sale in Cinran. Apart from that, if you want pickled fruits, I can certainly buy some of that for you, but their prices are usually double of the fruits themselves, if not higher..."

Hearing that it would be that costly, Duvas immediately winced and said, "Let's leave any fruits for now, since you'll already have a shortage of space on those wagons."

Pydas nodded. "That will certainly be a problem, but I'll see what I can do about that."

Hearing that the price of iron ingots was low right now, Kivamus saw it as a good opportunity to stock up on them. They needed the iron to make a lot of tools to clear the forests and start farming, not to mention using the iron for making some new weapons like more swords, spearheads, arrowheads and so on. He could also think of many other things which he could get the blacksmith to make to improve the life of the villagers.

He spoke after a moment of thought, "You said that the prices of iron ingots are low right now, so make sure to buy more of that as well. When you have bought everything else, fill up any remaining space in the wagons with iron ingots." Finally, he asked, "By the way, do you think you might be able to go on a third trip to Cinran?"

Pydas shook his head slowly. "I can only give you the final answer to that after I return from the second trip, but looking at the cold weather today, I don't think that it would be possible. I do have to return back to my home before the roads are blocked."

Kivamus gave a reluctant nod. "Well, we can still hope that the weather holds for a third trip, otherwise we would be really short on grain towards the end of winter. I don't even want to think about what would happen if the winter lasts longer this year..."

It was already costly enough to buy enough grain for the village, and of the twenty-five hundred gold crowns they had started with, they had already spent above three hundred crowns of it on just the first trip, not to mention what they were paying to the blacksmith and the carpenter. And that was only the beginning... He gave a sigh. There was no other choice anyway if he wanted the village to survive the winter.

He looked at the merchant. "Well, that will be all for this trip. Take the advance from Duvas and then you can leave for today."

"I'll do that milord. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to trade here," Pydas said with a contented smile and stood up to wait for the majordomo.

Kivamus gave a nod to him, but remembered something else. He asked the merchant, "I heard that you were quite agitated on the recent journey when the wild boars had attacked the caravan."

Pydas grimaced. "I have had a few run-ins with bandits on the road, but they are usually after your coins, not your life itself. They don't scare me much, since you can always earn more coins as long as you are still alive. But the worst incident I remember was when a wild boar nearly killed me in the past when I was just a child. I still have the scars on my arm from those huge tusks. And that night near madam Helga's Inn... seeing those boars charging towards me..." He seemed to shiver for a moment from the memories. "I'd prefer not to talk about it any more, if that's okay with you. Thinking about that time still gives me nightmares."

Kivamus nodded in sympathy. "That's alright, I'm just glad you are okay. Duvas will give you the advance now." He looked at the majordomo, "That reminds me, ask Feroy what will be the payment for the wainwright for repairing our wagon, and give him the required amount before he leaves."

"Of course, my Lord," Duvas replied as he got up from his own chair to provide the advance to the merchant from their limited stockpile of coins, which seemed to be dwindling by the day.