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Chapter 85. Crossbows

"You are right," Kivamus replied. "Those arbalests are much heavier, and they are slower to reload as well when compared to a bow, which would make them undesirable weapons for most people. That means it would be very costly if a noble wants to produce them in bulk to equip his whole army with them."

He continued, "However, what I have in my mind is something much lighter than arbalests, so that even women can use it. While it would still take longer to load than a bow, the crossbows would work just as well in the defense of the village, especially when shooting their bolts from the height of a watchtower." He added, "Also, while I think a well trained archer can probably shoot arrows at nearly double the pace of someone shooting with a crossbow, that limitation can be reduced by having others nearby to help load the crossbow."

Duvas gave his opinion as well. "I think most nobles would still prefer every archer to shoot a bow himself, instead of letting a single person shoot with a crossbow while others are just helping him. Of course, it's a different fact that it must be very difficult and time-consuming to make those arbalests, which would make their costs much higher compared to a bow - which can be made much more easily and cheaply. That must be why I haven't ever heard of their use."

Kivamus nodded. "That is true as well, but if we can produce them ourselves instead of buying them from another city, the prices should still be manageable for us. Cedoron seems like a well trained blacksmith. It will certainly take him a few tries to get all the iron parts right, but he should still be able to produce a working crossbow with the help of Taniok. And after we have worked out any problems in it, producing more of them would become much easier."

He added, "Pydaso told us that the price of iron ingots was cheap right now, so that will also help to keep the costs low. But, even with their higher costs, we need the advantage of those crossbows to properly defend the village, especially with our limited number of guards - half of whom haven't picked up a sword in their lives before we recruited them. With those crossbows, we can even use women to defend the village, while still letting the men work at other necessary tasks in the village - that's something which wouldn't be possible with a bow."

Hudan nodded. "From what I understand now, a bow would still be a better weapon for an attacking army - since they can shoot faster and an army can be equipped much more cheaply with bows. But for those who are defending a fortified place - like Tiranat will be, after we have completed the walls and the watchtowers - a crossbow would work just as well. They might even be more useful than bows when we are defending against a big attack if we get other civilians to help the trained crossbowmen to reload

the crossbows, while they stay below the side walls on the platform of a watchtower. That is not possible for an attacking army to do in the field, otherwise those civilians would be sitting ducks for our arrows."

"You seem to have understood the uses very well," Kivamus commended him.

Duvas asked, "But it will take time until Taniok gets enough free time to make those crossbows, so do you want me to postpone telling the villagers that we are hiring women as guards? Otherwise, we would unnecessarily be paying the women guards, since they wouldn't be able to do anything without those crossbows."

"No, you should tell them about that as soon as you can," Kivamus replied. "It wouldn't be easy for the villagers to believe that women can be guards too, so it would take time until they can come around to the idea. Telling them about this in advance would help us in getting a trickle of volunteers regularly, since we very likely wouldn't get as many women as we are hiring immediately. Also, most likely those women wouldn't have fought even once in their life, and even if we gave fully loaded crossbows to them, it would take time for them to get into the proper mindset to be ready to shoot down a charging bandit, or even a knight in the future. So even though it will take time before we can make any crossbows, Hudan can use that time to give them the very basics of training. For example, he can start giving them physical training by making them run around the manor regularly, and they can still get very basic training with a wooden sword."

Seeing that Duvas was going to interrupt him, he spoke over his voice, "I know what you are going to say. And I am not saying that women are going to become expert swordsmen anytime soon, but unless they learn to keep a cool mind even when someone stronger than them is coming at them with a sword in their hands with an intention to kill them, they wouldn't be able to shoot a crossbow properly anyway. I know we are only going to put the woman on duty at the watchtower, but you can never know what will happen in an attack, so letting them get familiarized with other guards with whom they would be fighting together, and getting them in the proper mindset to be ready to shoot a charging bandit is just as important - just in case they have to use the crossbows while on the ground."

He looked at the guard captain. "Hudan, once we begin to get volunteers, you should start giving them basic training like I mentioned. In fact, you should do that with other guards as well. Any off duty guards which get sword training from you, should also be trained to become extremely fit physically. We have already talked about making a dedicated training ground in the east of the manor, but you should start on that from now itself."

Hudan nodded. "I do make them run a little to get their bodies warmed up before I start to train them, but it is true that I can do better in that. I will start doing that from now on, and I'll include more such exercises like sprinting, and jumping, along with making them run more to build their stamina. When we start to get women as guards, I will include them in the physical training as well."

"Good," Kivamus said. Looking at his slightly protruding belly, courtesy of the lazy habits of the original Kivamus and his copious drinking - just like all nobles in this era, he said, "Actually, I will join you too."

"Uh..." Hudan hesitated. "Are you sure my Lord?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm quite sure about this," he replied. He needed to get a lot more fit if he was going to endure life in a medieval place. His backside still remembered the pain of sitting on a bumpy carriage seat for nearly a week while on the journey from Ulriga to Tiranat. "Just let me know when you start physical training for the guards in the morning, and I'll join you as well."

Remembering from the memories of the original Kivamus, he said, "In the past I never focused on remaining fit and learning even the very basics of using a sword, since I spent all my time in the library. While I don't think that I am going to become an expert swordsman, nor do I think I will have enough time for it, but even so, in the future, once I have gained some better physical fitness, I will join you for the basic training of using a sword as well. I know you and other guards will come with me to defend me wherever I go, but it's not a bad idea to know enough swordsmanship to at least be able to hold on against someone who wants to kill me until the guards arrive. It has already happened twice, and I'm pretty sure it's not the last time that someone tries to kill me."

"It does make sense, I think." Hudan grinned. "But don't think for a moment that I will go easy on you milord, just because you are the baron! If you are going to join other guards in training, you will have to go through all the same exercises as them."

Kivamus laughed as well. "That's fine, I wouldn't expect anything else."

In the evening, Kivamus' talk about other things with Duvas and Hudan was interrupted by the arrival of madam Helga in the manor hall. Gorsazo seemed to be quite distant to him for the past few days, and

he hadn't come to the manor hall again. He wasn't sure what was up with him, but hopefully he would come and talk with him if there was any problem he was having.

"It is done, my lord," Helga announced with a smile. "The temporary shed was completed in the south of the manor, and I have transferred the first batch of mushrooms there as well, after placing a few old logs and sawdust there. A brazier will be burning there continuously to keep the air inside the shed warm all the time. Also, while I did send a servant to tell the blacksmith to make a few water troughs, he told me that it would take time, since he's already behind in making other tools, but he should still be able to give us two such iron troughs by evening tomorrow. For now, I have kept a few buckets of water there near the fire, which should work fine until then."

"That's good to hear!" Kivamus praised. "Yesterday's Rizako stew was delicious, and I can't wait to have it again. Eating such warm and tasty stew in the winter would be very nice for us and for the villagers as well. It's a pity that Feroy wasn't able to have that stew, since you said that he really likes it. And since we are using the remaining mushrooms for replanting, he wouldn't be able to eat that stew any time soon unless we are able to cultivate them successfully."

"That's true enough, but he wouldn't really mind if there is a good chance of getting Rizako stew regularly in the coming months," Helga replied with a smile. "We will know within a few days if the replanting was successful or not. And if it is successful, we will start to get the first crop of Rizako mushrooms in six to eight weeks. At that point, if the dedicated barn is ready for them, we can use those mushrooms to replant them again inside the barn at a larger scale, which would allow us to harvest a good amount of mushrooms in the coming months. That means, if everything goes well, then we should be able to provide those mushrooms to the villagers by the end of winter, at which point our grain stores would be getting low as well."

Kivamus nodded. "Let's hope for the best then. And good work!"

"Thank you milord," Helga replied with a smile. "I have to go and prepare dinner now."

Kivamus gave another nod, and madam Helga went further inside the manor towards the kitchen.

He looked at Duvas. "How is it going with the blacksmith? Has he taken on more apprentices? I thought he would be able to complete the water troughs by today."