**Chapter 12**

**THE PURSUIT OF**

**THE CHARTREUSE GRYPHON**

**HE JOSEF JOHNAM INSTITUTE AND THE PRESTANRICK TANZALLIUM UNIVERSITY ARE THE NATION OF PERENCIA’S MOST NOTABLE UNIVERSITIES AND ARE BOTH LOCATED IN SUENA. They have existed alongside each other without conflict for over seven hundred years despite the two schools’ differing educational philosophies. This close association has proven most beneficial. Their renowned faculties have cultivated long and amicable working relationships, allowing instructors to transfer from teaching at one school to the other, or, in rare instances, to holding a position at both. The universities’ respected administrators frequently sit together on community boards and often hold seminars to discuss mutual interests.**

**The relationship between the two schools’ students, however, is quite antagonistic. Whenever those from one school meet some from the other, they always exchange taunts; occasionally, they even brawl. Each group further regularly vandalizes the grounds of the others’ schools. The members of Suena’s Town Watch and the schools’ administrators continuously try to prevent such disturbances and property destruction. And the townspeople despair whenever they see the damage caused by these pranks.**

**One aspect of this constant conflict which none objects to, however, is the schools’ annual week-long competition, The Pursuit of the Chartreuse Gryphon, held during the middle part of the first month of spring. Students from both schools, along with many residents of Suena, gather in the Amphitheater each of the five days to watch this spectacle of athletic challenges, demonstrations of skill, contests of the mind, and other events such as processions, parades, plays, and singing presentations. At its finish, whichever school is judged the victor earns the right to possess The Chartreuse Gryphon—a large, green-colored plaster statue set on a wooden platform with poles to lift and carry it around with—for a year. The victorious school then bears its trophy back to its home grounds in a triumphal procession. And, in those years when the winning school scores a decisive victory and not a close one, the bearers of the gryphon will not have to worry the members of the other school will attempt to steal it in route and carry it off to their own.**

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***Eleventh day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The new year had begun. The long weeks of wintery rain had finally ended. Farmers had started planting. The rivers crossing the plain of Suena, already full, began rising even more from the snow’s melt in the mountains. The norias by the streams were busily turning to fill the aqueducts leading to the universities and the reservoirs intended to hold the water for agricultural use. High-water levels currently slowed travel along the Vernado River.**

**This month was also the final one of the winter quarter for the Institute and the University. In both schools, students labored to complete their coursework and prepare for their final examinations. And, in between these tasks, they looked forward even more to the upcoming Chartreuse Gryphon competition. The townspeople likewise readied themselves for the onslaught this yearly event brought upon the town. The Town Watch prepared by taking on more men.**

**For Malakiah, Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian, this year’s Pursuit of The Chartreuse Gryphon would be the first one they would be able to witness—the previous year’s they had missed because of their obligations at the Academy. They knew classes would not conflict with the contest’s events. Just as at the Academy Qualifying Examinations caused classes to be canceled, at both the Institute and the University, The Chartreuse Gryphon competitions did the same during its five days.**

**Despite being students at the Institute, however, Malakiah and the cousins were forbidden to participate in the competition—much to their annoyance. Malakiah knew he could have excelled in the obstacle course. And Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian knew they would have dominated wrestling. Yet the Academy rules—which Warden Haydian himself had told to all members of the Academy attending either the Institute or the University on an earlier Adonai’s Day—expressly stated that none of them could participate in any events.**

**“Furthermore,” the warden had stated firmly, “none of you shall perform any prank or act of vandalism such as those in which students of the Institute or University are known to partake. Adonai protect any of you—from me—should I determine that you have been involved in such goblinshines!” His glare told them such was no idle promise.**

**Then he had continued to tell them in what capacity they would serve during the competition.**

**“Frequently, Squires, the students and others watching the contest tend to become unruly and prone to fight. Our duty then becomes to assist said Town Watch to control the crowds. You will learn more about that later.” He then gave all of his listeners a grim smile. “It may be a long and tedious chore, Squires, but at least you will be able to watch the events every day without paying admission. I know that would make me a very happy man. And, if you want to keep me one, such better gladden your hearts as well. Now, have any of you questions?”**

**“Warden Haydian,” asked Malakiah. “Some students building the competition’s obstacle course requested me to advise them on such construction. Am I permitted to assist them?”**

**“Squire, you may help design and construct any obstacles on which *both* schools’ participants will compete. But not in building a training course for one school only.”**

**“Warden Haydian,” spoke up Scottius, “I have been asked to train students of the Institute in wrestling. May I so instruct them?”**

**Haydian shook his head. “Should anyone ask you to demonstrate holds, moves, or defenses, you may—provided you demonstrate such instruction to *any* who may ask you regardless of his school! To impart information to members of only one school would be considered as showing partiality! And such you *will* avoid!!”**

**The warden answered several more questions and then dismissed them.**

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**Malakiah and the cousins left the chapel after the morning service on the morning of the eleventh. As was their norm, they were heading to the library to study. However, this morning, they noticed—all over the courtyard and around the reflecting pool—students busily working on projects that could only be for The Chartreuse Gryphon competition.**

**Malakiah and the cousins strolled around, observing individuals building floats to carry in processionals and parades; creating posters, handbills, decorations, or banners; making costumes or uniforms; rehearsing songs or short plays; or working on any of the other myriad things deemed necessary to celebrate the contest. Malakiah and those with him were asked several times if they wished to help, but they declined, explaining that the Academy forbade them from participating. They then sought out the library which they found nearly empty.**

**Malakiah, the cousins, and all other squires at their first Chartreuse Gryphon competition soon discovered few students would occupy the benches of the lecture halls during the week before the event. Such absenteeism was accepted. Accordingly, the teachers, when they would have had a lecture, gave to whoever showed up reading assignments and then permitted them either to study or to leave. Usually, Malakiah and the other squires would stay, glad to gain this extra study time.**

**The next afternoon and the one following, Malakiah and the cousins, atypically, had matters to attend to regarding the competition. After making brief appearances at their classes to learn their assignments, they rode their horses across town, over the bridge crossing the Vernado River, and then down the second street on the left to the Amphitheater, entering through the service corridor.**

**There Malakiah spent several hours both days advising groups from the schools on how to construct the obstacles for the competition’s course. The Institute’s and the University’s students knew of his formidable reputation on the Academy’s course and so valued his expertise. And he was pleased to help them however he could. When the course was completed on the second day, he challenged all there to run it against him, promising to buy a pint of ale to any who could best him. None could.**

**Close by to the obstacle course on the wrestling square, Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian, on these same two days, served as advisors as well. They discovered the first day, however, although they had been asked to demonstrate wrestling techniques, they had also been invited for another reason—the largest students from both schools were most eager to try their grips on Scottius. And he, once he had discerned they held this foolish desire, was most willing to oblige them. One burly fellow after another went against Scottius, and each suffered a swift defeat. Despite their aching muscles and bruises, some thought they might be more successful competing against Jefhian or Hathian. Again, none were. Malakiah watched these matches when he could and enjoyed them.**

**Finally, after spending a couple of hours defeating all those naïve enough to challenge them, the cousins switched to instruction, which they continued for the rest of the first afternoon and the entire second one. They were dismayed to observe those competing had only minimal knowledge of wrestling. Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian, however, had insufficient time to give them any lengthy instruction. They, therefore, limited their teaching to only a few basic holds and defenses. By the end of the second afternoon, they were pleased their pupils had made some progress.**

**Besides the regular wrestling, the competition featured mud wrestling. A student named Affred said he would be participating in that contest and asked the cousins if one of them could offer him any assistance.**

**Jefhian rolled his eyes; he exchanged looks with his cousins. “Verily not! That event requires no skill. It consists only of buffoonery and the trait of slipperiness! And as such is intended solely for amusement! It is not worthy of our instruction. A pig—a creature native to mud—could emerge the champion of that contest.”**

**Affred smiled at Jefhian’s protests. “Then perhaps I must find a pig to instruct me—I can only hope he will not be too much of a boar!”**

**Jefhian groaned. “How dare you subject me to such *pun-ishment*!”**

**He threw a mock punch at Affred’s head who ducked the blow with a smile.**

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***Thirteenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**That evening, at dinner in the Institute’s dining room, Malakiah and the cousins discussed their surprise the two groups of students, despite their well-known animosity, had been able to work together within the Amphitheater. Too bad, they all agreed, such could not become standard behavior.**

**Later that night, Malakiah was walking alone back to The Belly of the Beast. As he passed the opening to an alleyway, he heard a scuffle within. He knew the safest and prudent course would be to continue. But he also knew that such was not the vocation of a knight—one who was supposed to offer help whenever needed. He shielded his eyes to adjust them to the reduced light in the alley and then ventured in cautiously.**

**What he found surprised him. In the dark, narrow lane between the two buildings, he discovered his friend from the hostel, Gregian, facing three husky individuals whom Malakiah recognized from the Institute. The three slowly circled Gregian, their fists ready, looking for an opening. Gregian, similarly poised, was prepared to meet any attack.**

**“Gregian,” Malakiah cried out. Then he addressed his friend’s three assailants. “Gadreel! Aslam! Dumeas! What be the purpose of this fight?”**

**“Well met, Squire,” answered Gadreel. Despite Malakiah’s arrival, none of the fighters relaxed their stance. “You have arrived just in time to help us strike a blow for our school.”**

**“What mean you? Why seek you to contend with Gregian?”**

**“Contend with him? Verily not! We seek instead to injure this one who has dung for brains.”**

**“For what reason? How has he harmed you?”**

**“He has not harmed us—at least, not yet. But he would compete against us. And most likely score many points on his school’s behalf. That outcome we surely desire not. Therefore, we would injure him to prevent such an annoyance.”**

**“And I declare you goblins shall not,” snarled Gregian. “Depart from me now or I thrash you and leave you all to sleep the night on the cobblestones of this alley.”**

**“Boastful words,” said Aslam, sneering. “You could hardly best the three of us. Now, think you can prevail against four?” He nodded his head in Malakiah’s direction.**

**“Most true,” added Dumeas. He threw a wild punch Gregian easily avoided. “Surrender now and we will gently break one leg—only.”**

**“Verily so,” said Gadreel. Now he turned and addressed Malakiah. “Come, fellow member of the Institute. Aid your brothers in preventing this simple-minded cur from that accursed University from competing against us. With your help, we four could easily lay hold of him. And deal with him! What say you?”**

**Malakiah quickly assessed the situation. Gregian was a large fellow and quite strong. Most likely, he could easily hold his own against anyone or perhaps two of his current assailants. Yet he would be at a disadvantage against all three. If Malakiah joined with Gadreel and the others, Gregian would be overwhelmed and at their mercy.**

**Nonetheless, even before Gadreel had requested his aid, Malakiah had known what course he must take—there was none other open to him. He darted between the three to stand next to Gregian. The realization of what his action meant brought forth a barrage of oaths.**

**“I say ‘nay’ to your foul intent, Gadreel, Aslam, and Dumeas,” he proclaimed. “My honor as a knight forbids me from allowing you to work such mischief. And I so swear the only way you shall perform such injury to him is after you have bested us both.” He nodded and patted Gregian’s shoulder. “I have your back, my friend; let your fight become mine.”**

**Gregian smiled. “I wondered which side you would come in upon. Have I lately said I am glad we met?”**

**Gadreel and the other two glared at Malakiah. “Traitor,” growled Gadreel. “How can you help one such as him? Whose side are you on?”**

**Malakiah smiled back. “I am neither on the side of the Institute nor that of the University. I am on the side where Adonai and the Knighthood would have me be—that of the just! I will suffer none injured for the reason you intend—to gain an unfair advantage! I stand in opposition to your purpose—as I would to any who would attempt the same. Verily, if Gregian himself should later wish to employ such underhanded methods on any as you would now, I would oppose him just as strongly.”**

**“I thank you, friend Mal,” retorted Gregian, “for that lengthy explanation. Might I also mention you make long-winded speeches during a fight as would a knight in a tale told by a bard?”**

**“Now,” said Malakiah, ignoring the barb, “your design to injure Gregian cannot succeed. Therefore, leave swiftly. Else, most assuredly, you shall find the floor of this alley most uncomfortable to wake up upon.”**

**Gadreel snarled. “Verily not—we shall pound your heads on the stones beneath us.”**

**“Permit not your mouth to issue a promise your body cannot deliver!” replied Malakiah calmly.**

**Gadreel and the other two met this taunt with glares. Malakiah thought he had cowed them. Then, with shouts of defiance, Aslam and Dumeas, their fists raised, charged at them with Gadreel behind.**

**Malakiah and Gregian, standing back to back, exchanged blows with the three for several minutes. Then Gregian whispered to his partner between swings. “Mal, some advice my uncle—an experienced tavern fighter—gave me once. When you must fight several opponents, you concentrate on knocking them down quickly until you have just one still standing. Then that last one you put down *for keeps* before another gets up off the floor. That way you can reduce your opponents *quickly*.”**

**“Most useful information. Let us use it!”**

**Within five more minutes, the two had their opponents dispatched. Aslam had been rendered unconscious; the other two just lay there rubbing bruised jaws. Both Malakiah and Gregian had only received scratches and later would discover they had sore ribs.**

**Malakiah and Gregian left the alley and their vanquished foes behind and proceeded back to their hostel. As they walked, Gregian watched for any other Institute students lurking about.**

**“Thanks for my rescue, Mal,” he said. “May I offer to buy you a pint of ale on some future date?”**

**“Verily so. But at what establishment could you share such a pint with me?”**

**Gregian shrugged. “Yes, that would be a problem. Perhaps I will have to settle for staking you a meal at the hostel.”**

**“That too would be most welcome—but may I choose which meal? Sometimes the fare at our hostel is somewhat of an adventure.”**

**Gregian smiled. “Mal, is the fare our hostel provides ever anything such as that mystery roast which they served to you as cadets in the dining hall of the Fortress?”**

**Malakiah chuckled. “So that muck is so *infamous* even you outside of the Academy have heard tales of its delights? Verily, Gregian, naught in all Perencia—or even Tarn—can compare with that dish. Its recipe could only have been obtained from a she-troll—who was happy to surrender it!”**

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***Fifteenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The Adonai’s Day two days later would not be a typical one for most Academy members. Many of the younger cadets would be away from Suena this day learning about cave castle defenses with the instructor Sir Arkiman—just as Malakiah, the cousins, and Whithus had undergone a year ago. Those older cadets who had had this instruction the previous year—ones such as Whithus—for them the day was typical. They were organized into squads and marched out of the Fortress to perform agricultural or construction work. Atypically, because, on this day they were led by third-year squires and available knight candidates.**

**Malakiah and other first- and second-year squires who attended classes at the Institute and the University and who typically would have led the cadets, however, had been informed through a circulated message that, at the hour which they would customarily have met at the Fortress, they should instead assemble inside the Amphitheater. There, they were told, they would receive further instructions. Accordingly, Malakiah and the others had stayed in Suena on the night of the fourteenth, attended a morning service at the Institute’s chapel on the fifteenth, and then headed across town to the Amphitheater. The total number of squires assembled was about fifty. Malakiah was surprised to discover Santos present.**

**“And what causes you to be here, high and mighty Knight Candidate so soon-to-be?” Malakiah asked his friend with mock reverence. “You should be preparing for your grand quest. Studying maps and charts. Attending to a dozen other minute tasks. Have you somehow displeased your illustrious uncle, causing him to sentence you to this forlorn duty?”**

**“Verily not, you lowliest of squires,” Santos answered. “I volunteered for this duty. I had to make sure you would not mess it up too badly!”**

**Looking about, Malakiah noticed Drakos was absent. He hoped that cur was working on his academic project this day instead of leading cadets in a work project. However, if he was directing one today, Malakiah could only hope Whithus was not in his squad and being abused by that copper-plated, self-inflated tyrant.**

**While they waited, some of them idly walked around the arena’s floor, looking at the equipment. Several expressed to any who would listen—or pretend to—their annoyance at being forbidden to participate in the events. Of more interest were the senior squires who related experiences from previous competitions. Malakiah, to his annoyance, saw Iland, Dreg, and Darrell were present as well.**

**Finally, three members of the Town Watch arrived. One of them—tall, lean, and bald-headed—pointed at the second level of a section and ordered the squires to take seats. When they were all seated, he stood on the walkway below and addressed them.**

**“A pleasant good morning to you, Squires,” he said. “I thank you all for coming here today—as if such was of your own volition.” This remark evoked but a momentary chuckle. “I am Warden Walthus; I am in charge of the Town Watch for the city of Suena. And, as I recognize none of you, it pleases me to know that, in the performance of my duties, I have never had to encounter any of you.”**

**He paused and gestured to the two men who had arrived with him and now stood off to one side. “The men are my assistants—Sergeants Reynard and Danae. They will supervise you during your five days of watching the crowds at the competition. Any questions or problems you have, you shall direct them into their awaiting ears.”**

**Reynard and Danae nodded.**

**Warden Walthus paused briefly, took a deep breath, and then continued. “Essentially, Squires, your primary duties during the competition shall be to walk along this walkway on which I am now standing, remaining visible to deter anyone with a desire to cause a disturbance from acting upon such. We hope our presence will quell any annoying behaviors before they start. Yet, we may not rely on expectations!**

**“We know from experience most fights break out between students from the two schools. Accordingly, years ago, we devised a strict seating arrangement. Look about you, Squires, at the sections here in the Amphitheater. During the competition, all spectators will sit in the second level of seats—the same ones you are in now—or the level above. Students from the Institute shall have their seats in the four sections on the Amphitheater's northern side. We name that area the red quarter. Students from the University shall have the southern side or the blue quarter. The western side or the green quarter and the eastern side or the yellow quarter—which we are now in—are for the townspeople. This method we have to separate the students we refer to as ‘dividing and conquering.’**

**“You may wonder why the first level seats, which are closer to the events and thus preferable, are not being used. Verily, they are not used in the red and blue quarters to keep the students from the events. Such prevents possible interference. In the yellow and green quarters, however, these seats are used to host the competition's non-athletic events. There is no need to discuss them now—you will learn of such later!**

**“Now, Squires, you have been advised of our two main methods to prevent fighting—keeping the schools separated and having individuals—that is you—in place who represent a visible barrier to such activity. Still, fights can occur within any group or between groups for any cause. You all know most well what happens when you mix ample amounts of ale, hot tempers, and disappointing results of sporting events. Harsh words are uttered, shoving matches follow them, and, finally, fists are thrown, erupting into a fight. A small battle between two people we can manage. However, a distinct danger is that once one begins, it may spread and involve more people. This occurrence we cannot permit! If we let any fight grow beyond a manageable level to become a riot, Adonai help us!**

**“Therefore, Squires, your primary responsibility is to stop any fighting before it begins. If not, before it can spread. So, keep your eyes on the crowd. If you or your fellow—you shall all walk this walkway in groups of two—see what looks like a fight about to start, arrive there swiftly. Verbally confront the potential assailants. Order them not to fight. Warn them most firmly. They are permitted two warnings from you. If they require your attention a third time, you summon a member of the Town Watch to affect their removal from the Amphitheater. Should they fight and you can persuade them to cease, they may stay provided they fight not again. If they resume fighting, summon a member of the Town Watch to see to their removal. If you must physically restrain them from fighting or they attack you, they shall immediately be obliged to leave the Amphitheater.”**

**Walthus, seeing a raised hand, said, “Yes, Squire?”**

**“What means, Warden Walthus,” Jefhian asked, “‘physically restrain them’? Are we permitted to carry swords or the like?”**

**Walthus shrugged. “Despite you squires’ expertise in handling such, during your days on duty here, you shall not be permitted to possess *lethal* weapons. Such is the theocracy's decision, and, therefore, I will hardly endeavor to dispute it. You will instead use a tool which we shall provide you. Sergeant Reynard shall give you further information.”**

**The warden turned and nodded to his assistant. He then took a seat.**

**Reynard moved to stand before the squires. As he did, he lifted over his head a stout stick about three and one-half feet long. The top third of it was wrapped with what appeared to be a long, thick strip of coarse wool.**

**“A pleasant day to you, Squires. I hold in my hand what we call a ‘persuader.’ Each of you shall carry one while on duty. Its function should be simple to discern. You use it to ‘persuade’ someone to mind after he had refused to obey orders and now threatens to or has become violent. It is designed to hurt without necessarily injuring. We shall shortly provide you with instructions on when and how to employ it. And, hopefully, we shall not corrupt all those techniques which your weapons teacher, Sir Rodian, had labored so hard to instill within you. Warden Walthus has told you you shall work with a partner. Pray choose one now. I request all of you squires who have performed this duty before to stand.”**

**Slightly more than a third of the group—twenty total—arose.**

**Reynard frowned. “Are there any more squires coming tomorrow not present today?”**

**“Verily—about ten,” volunteered Randius. “They are supervising cadets today in work projects. They are all senior squires—surely they will have performed this duty before.”**

**“Their absence is most inconvenient,” Reynard said. “Nonetheless, we must work with what we have. You squires standing—pick someone inexperienced to be your partner. Once they have done so, those of you left temporarily pair with another for training today. Tomorrow, when the remaining squires get here, we shall endeavor to ensure each inexperienced squire pairs with an experienced one. Now, choose and assemble on the arena floor. Your training on using the ‘persuader’ awaits!”**

**Partners were swiftly selected. Santos picked Malakiah, saying, “We might as well get used to working together.” Then they all went down the stairs to the arena floor to join the two awaiting instructors. Warden Walthus took his leave at this point.**

**Reynard and Danae divided the fifty squires into two groups—one of twenty-six and one of twenty-four. Danae assumed charge of the smaller one which contained Malakiah, Santos, and the cousins. He first instructed his charges to form two lines facing each other. Then he walked between them, handing out ‘persuaders’ to each person. He paused when he stood before Scottius.**

**“Most truly,” he said, eying the massive squire as he handed him his stick, “had we a few more such as you we would require a lot less such as your fellows.”**

**“Possibly so,” grunted Scottius. He looked at what he had just been given. “What would you have me use this for? A toothpick, perhaps?”**

**“Perhaps you can offer it to your opponent to give him a more even chance. Now, pay attention to my instruction and you shall learn. And, once you have, try not to break the stick—or whomever you strike with it!”**

**Danae chuckled as he continued down the line.**

**Once everyone had their sticks, Danae told the squires to spend several minutes limbering up. Most squires practiced their various sword-fighting forms, alternating between attacking and defending.**

**Danae next explained the persuader’s usage. It was not—except in an extreme situation—intended for hitting persons to render them unconscious. Instead, its wielder was to strike at a person’s arms to numb them or at one’s legs to make him temporarily unable to stand. Danae also indicated where to hit the highly unruly for maximum effectiveness: the center of the chest, the stomach, the groin, or the upper back.**

**The watchman had the squires practice on each other, telling them to strive for accuracy but also for gentle contact. At least for now, he said. The squires attempted to follow his directions. Those who inadvertently struck too hard risked painful hits when their partners later responded.**

**They practiced attacks on each other until the midday hour. Then their instructors gave them an hour’s break for rest and to eat when their lunch arrived in a cart from the Fortress. In it were baskets of fruits, rolls, sausages, chunks of cheese, and two kegs of cider. All ate most heartily.**

**After lunch, Reynard and Danae distributed whistles. These, they told their charges, were for signaling each other and the members of the Town Watch.**

**“Should you see a fight or what looks like one about to start, one of the two should indicate such by blowing his whistle *twice*. Then proceed immediately to the scene to address the situation. Whoever’s group is nearby and hears the whistle blown, one of you in that second group also blow your whistle *twice,* and then *both* of you head toward the first sound to assist the first group there. The second group should initially stay back and observe the first one to avoid provoking the situation. However, should the second group observe a fight occurring and the first group needs assistance, a member of the second group should request further help by blowing his whistle *three times twice*. That is the signal for all squires and members of the Town Watch in nearby sections to arrive to assist in handling the situation, which, by this point, is presumably a large fight about to erupt.”**

**“How many groups of squires in a section will there be?” Malakiah asked.**

**“We have eighteen sections in this arena. Each school is allotted four. That leaves ten—five on each side—for the townspeople. We anticipate having sixty squires. Accordingly, we shall place two groups—four squires—in each section set aside for the schools. The remaining fourteen groups or twenty-eight squires will be spread across the other ten sections. There are fewer squires per section among the townspeople because we expect them to be less troublesome. There will also be twenty members of the Town Watch in the arena plus four watch leaders. The members of the Town Watch will be stationed wherever their leaders think they are most necessary.”**

**“We will be taking orders from them as well as you?”**

**Reynard shook his head. “From the regular members of the Watch—no. They will just work alongside you. And, hopefully, offer you useful advice. You should only take orders from the Watch leaders in an emergency—such as a full riot. I think such an occasion will be quite obvious should such occur. Adonai willing, it shall not!”**

**They practiced a few more hours with their persuaders. Then Reynard and Danae walked them through the sections of the Amphitheater and assigned them their areas for the next day. Santos, Malakiah, and Randius, who awaited an experienced partner, were given a section for townspeople in the southwestern part of the arena. It was located next to the quarter for University students. Santos, based on his experiences from previous years, told Malakiah and Randius their section would most likely be a peaceful one.**

 **“Exactly what we want,” said Randius. Next, he quoted for humorous effect, “‘It is good to live in peaceful times.’”**

**The others chuckled at this observation.**

**After Reynard and Danae had given them all their assignments and had advised them what time they were to arrive tomorrow for the first day of the competition, they dismissed the squires.**

**As they still had several hours before any of them needed to return to either the Fortress or their respective schools, Santos idly suggested they all visit the Bathhouse to clean up. He was not surprised Malakiah approved of this offer. He was, however, caught unaware when the cousins and several others cheered his suggestion as well.**

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***Sixteenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The next morning Malakiah and the other squires arose at their usual time. After a larger than customary breakfast and the required morning service at the chapel, they rode to the Amphitheater. The crowds were forming when they reached there half an hour before opening time—the ninth hour.**

**Reynard and Danae met the squires as they passed through the service corridor and handed them their persuaders. Unpaired, inexperienced squires they ordered to await the arrival of an unassigned experienced one; ones with a partner were told to proceed to their assigned stations.**

 **Malakiah and Santos went ahead; Randius followed later when he was paired with Karolus. Malakiah did not know Karolus. He was a third-year squire who had just finished classes at the University.**

**Malakiah spotted Drakos paired with Iland; Malakiah rolled his eyes—little good could come of their association!**

**Shortly, it was the ninth hour. The competition opened with two honor guards of five individuals, one marching from an entranceway on the north side of the arena’s floor dressed in red and white uniforms and the other from one on the south side wearing blue and black. Each honor guard was followed by rows of students who would participate in the events; they were also dressed in their schools’ colors.**

**The details marched in lockstep towards each other until they almost met in the center of the arena. Abruptly they stopped and turned back in the direction from which they had come. The students following them halted as well. Next, in unison, the guardsmen raised their long horns and blew a sustained blast that echoed throughout the Amphitheater.**

**“My lords and ladies! Fellow students! Good townspeople of Suena!” rang out a voice. It came from a young man standing in a section on the first level of the red quarter. He, too, was dressed in a uniform of red and white. Oddly, even though the man was across the Amphitheater from him, Malakiah could still hear his voice most plainly. Malakiah could see he was speaking into a tube that led into a large box at his side. Presumably, that device magnified his voice. *It had to be another innovation by Donivan Phredisus*, Malakiah thought.**

**The man in the red quarter continued. “On behalf of the Josef Johnam Institute. . .” The mention of the school’s name evoked loud cheers from those behind him and derisive jeering from those across the arena. “I bid you welcome this morning to the six hundred and thirty-seventh competition of The Pursuit for the Chartreuse Gryphon. My name is Kastor. I am the director of the games for the students of the Institute.” More cheers from those behind him. “Now, may I introduce to you all the symbol of our renowned school—Albertus the Scholar!”**

**A loud cheer arose as out of a doorway in one of the red quarter’s sections strolled a figure—gray-haired with a bushy mustache and wearing the cap and gown of an academician. He leisurely walked over to take his place beside Kastor. When he arrived there, he turned and faced those on the levels above him. He waved a scroll over his head. The students in his quarter cheered his actions; those in the blue quarter jeered.**

 **Next, a man in the quarter beside Malakiah and Santos rose. Appropriately, he was dressed in blue and black and had a box beside him similar to Kastor’s.**

**“My lords and ladies! Fellow students! Gentle people of Suena!” he said. “We, the students of the *equally illustrious* Prestanrick Tanzallium University . . .” He paused as those behind him began cheering and resumed when they stopped. “Also bid you welcome to the competition this wondrous day. And my name is Pallux. I bear the title of director of the games for the students from the University.” Again, more cheering. “And, now you have met the tired old man from *that* school, allow me to introduce to you the young and vigorous one who represents us. Come forth, great Nikolas the Inventor.”**

**Now, from a doorway behind Pallux, a dark-haired man with a full mustache came walking swiftly. He was garbed as a laborer. And, when he turned to face the students on the higher levels, he waved a sizeable hammer over his head.**

**Santos nudged Malakiah. “Verily, Mal, would you rather contend with a man carrying a hammer or one carrying a scroll?”**

**“I know not—a scroll could bear some weighty knowledge.”**

**“But what if that scroll’s contents were so erudite its reading puts one to sleep?” ventured Randius. “Such is another possibility to consider.”**

**The cheering finally died down and Kastor made another announcement.**

**“Good people, as you may all well remember, last year the most deserved winner of the esteemed prize—The Chartreuse Gryphon—was the Josef Johnam Institute.” Cheers and jeers followed his words. He continued when such had subsided. “Now, it is our most reluctant obligation to bear it back here this morning. However, we are most confident of our ability to reclaim it on the fifth day.” These boastful words evoked jeers from the University’s students. “Guardians of the gryphon, now bring in the majestic beast.”**

**At his words, the red and white members of the honor guard started playing a dirge. The Institute students began wailing loudly. And, as all watched, six uniformed men led by another bore the gryphon on its platform into the arena. They carried it in a circuitous route around the arena’s floor before they finally placed it on a large mat before the green quarter.**

 **“Head guardian of the illustrious gryphon,” intoned Kastor solemnly, “perform your most sad duty. Divest the gryphon!”**

**The leader of the bearers, more finely arrayed than the others, stepped onto the platform and approached the gryphon. The statue’s right claw held an upright pole and, hanging from its crosspiece, was a red and white banner. As the guardian lifted this banner from the crosspiece, a wail arose from the red quarter followed by a cheer from the blue one. Shouts then emanated from the Institute’s students proclaiming how they would take back the gryphon. Equally defiant ones came from the University’s declaring they would win it instead. And, all through this shouting, Malakiah continued to watch the crowd for signs of trouble.**

**“Worry not,” Santos told him, observing his concern, “it is far too soon to worry about fighting.”**

**“When need we be concerned?” asked Malakiah.**

**“At least not for a few days,” said Karolus, standing nearby. “And then only after a few events have disputed. Such is what enrages the spectators the most.”**

**With the divesting of the gryphon, the opening ceremony was concluded. The honor guardsmen, the participants, and the bearers left the arena’s floor to join their fellows. A man in a section on the first level of the yellow quarter arose from his seat. He identified himself as Zylvanus, the head judge and official of the competition. He also introduced his two chief assistants, Elizas and Maurzy, and six others who would assist on the arena floor. Their function, he declared, was to ensure that all events ran smoothly and without interference.**

**“We thank you, venerable Zylvanus. And those assisting you for being here,” said Kastor. “Verily, how would we carry on without you?”**

**“How so, Kastor?” retorted Pallux. “By cheating like a contagion of goblins every chance you and your contemptible fellows in red could!”**

**Those in the blue quarter roared with laughter at their leader’s insult. Kastor glared back across at him. “Pallux, what you have said is a blatant defamation of our characters!”**

**“Verily, what you mean to admit is I have blatantly *defined* your characters!”**

**“Sirrah, I would come over there and beat you senseless—but truly Adonai has made you such from birth.” Now those in the red quarter laughed. “Why else are you a student at that school instead of one over here?”**

**Here those in the blue quarter jeered.**

**Malakiah looked toward Santos. “Could this be the prelude to a fight?”**

**Santos shook his head. “Verily not—that is just routine banter between the two schools. They exchange such—and worst—every year. It always comes to naught.”**

**Karolus nodded. “Verily, we have heard nothing yet. And, by the way, not many know this fact, but Kastor and Pallux are twins. This hostility between them is but an act. I would not be surprised if the two of them have not rehearsed their exchanges.”**

**He and Randius then strolled off to the other end of the section.**

**Reassured, Malakiah listened as the two hurled further insults. Finally, the two directors, sensing the crowd tiring of their verbal exchange, broke off. Kastor announced the first athletic event of the morning, wrestling, would begin immediately. Then, at the tenth hour, he said, would be mud-wrestling. He urged the participants in those events from both schools to hurry down to the arena floor and get a grip on each other. His remarks evoked a loud groan from the crowd.**

**Pallux next told the crowd that, throughout the day, matches involving games of the mind would take place in the first level of the yellow quarter. He urged students from both schools to take part to earn points for their schools. Townspeople, he said, were also permitted to attend these matches, although without the option of participating.**

**“How else, gentle townspeople,” he said, “can we students maintain the notion of our superior mental abilities except by keeping you from displaying yours?” That evoked a laugh. Then he told all that, in the first level of the green quarter, were games of chance in which the townspeople were welcome to take part. All profits from such, he declared, would be donated to worthy causes within the town of Suena. And whichever school collected the most money to give would receive an extra hundred points!**

**“Therefore,” Pallux said, “pick those tables decked in blue and black because, surely, you want to play those games hosted by the illustrious—and soon to be victorious—University.” Those behind him cheered. “And also,” he declared, “because they are the only *honest* ones.”**

**“Verily not,” countered Kastor. “You should select such tables only if you want to experience rigged games and dishonest handlers! I would sooner expect a troll to respect my sister than believe one of their players would not cheat! For an honest game, seek out a table decked in red and white—those of the fair-playing and truly soon-to-be victorious school, the Institute!”**

**Now, Kastor’s quarter cheered, and the two brothers exchanged another round of insults.**

**Later, as they watched with one eye the crowd and the activity on the arena’s floor with the other, Malakiah asked Santos how the judges scored the wrestling.**

**“Essentially the same as at the Academy, Mal. The judges watch the participants and award points for technique, getting opponents into holds, breaking out of holds, throwing the other one to the ground, etc. You win the match at the end either on points or, naturally, immediately by pinning your opponent for a count of three. The mud wrestling is scored the same, although earning points in technique is much harder. As you can imagine, all that mud makes it much harder to grip an opponent.”**

**“How are the pairings determined? Is it by lot?”**

**“I have heard by challenge. One from one school announces his intent to contest one from the other. However, if the one challenged feels he could not win, he may decline to wrestle. Such a choice prevents one such as Scottius from issuing challenges to those he could surely beat to accumulate easy victories and points. I have also heard one may fight numerous opponents or even the same one several times on different days.”**

**“So then the winning wrestler earns points for his school with each victory?”**

**“Verily.”**

**They subsequently observed the mud wrestling. Malakiah soon concurred with Jefhian’s earlier assessment. In mud wrestling, an agile person could readily slip from most holds because of the mud’s lubricating nature and so thwart another person’s superior skill. Accordingly, a victory came more from luck than prowess.**

**After the last wrestling match of the day was called, the two directors arose again, Kastor speaking first.**

**“Good people of Suena, our next athletic events shall involve tossing large and heavy things about. The first one shall determine who may hurl the heaviest weight over the highest crosspiece. That shall be at half past the tenth hour—a few minutes from now.”**

**“The second one,” said Pallux, “shall decide who can hurl a fifteen pound hammer the furthest. It shall follow at the eleventh hour.”**

**“The third one,” declared Kastor, “shall be to discern who can flip a log ten feet in length—end-over-end—the greatest distance. That shall follow hammer tossing at half past the eleventh hour.”**

**“And, the most unique tossing event,” stated Pallux, “dwarf-tossing...”**

**“What!” roared a deep voice from the yellow quarter. All looked toward the source. Malakiah saw a short, bearded fellow rising to his feet. He shook his fist. “What manner of insult have I just heard?”**

**Pallux smiled and bowed in the direction of the interrupter. “My greetings to you, most illustrious visitor from the nation of Ferrokken. Pray permit me to continue. I wished to inform all that the event, dwarf-tossing, would not be held because no dwarf could be found willing to let us hurl him about. A pity. Unless, sir, you could be persuaded to volunteer?”**

**The dwarf merely glared back and snarled, “Nobody tosses a dwarf!”**

**As the diminutive figure resumed his seat, Santos told Malakiah this routine was repeated every day.**

**Pallux shrugged. “Alas, yet another refusal! Maybe someday we shall have a victim, err volunteer. Now, for these events, the rules of scoring. In each one—weight over bar, hammer, and log—the five highest or longest throws at the end of the competition shall score points. An individual may hold more than one scoring position. Should he merit all five top positions at the end of the competition, he shall achieve bonus points.”**

**Pallux paused and looked across the arena at his rivals. “I wish you luck, you of the Institute, for verily, what you are most skilled at tossing is your lunches—after having only one small sip of *weak* ale!”**

**Those behind him roared at his taunt; those across from him jeered loudly. Kastor’s response was, “When I lay my hands on you, Pallux, I shall toss you over my shoulder and into any available pile of foul substances.”**

**The three throwing matches began on one side of the arena’s floor. Watching closely, Malakiah noticed his friend Gregian competed several times in each event, always achieving scoring positions. Gadreel, Aslam, and Dumeas also participated, although they scored not as prominently.**

**At the twelfth hour came log-rolling. Such was a competition that Malakiah had never seen before. It consisted of two contestants standing atop a massive log floating on a shallow trench of water. They could freely cause the log to spin fast or slowly by using their feet. And to win the contest, an individual had to maneuver the log to cause the other to fall into the water. Any deliberate touching of an opponent was a disqualification, although a participant could kick water in the other’s face. Malakiah and Santos watched the matches with great interest, finding amusing the clever ploys some contestants devised to dislodge their fellows.**

**After the log-rolling came javelin tossing at half past the twelfth hour. This competition interested neither Santos nor Malakiah. Malakiah idly wondered what it would be like if the javelin sailed overlong and into the seats. Surely the spectators would scatter frantically seeking to avoid it.**

**The weightlifting events followed at the thirteenth hour. On one side of the arena, a stout platform was set up upon two supports. Weights were then stacked upon it. Each contestant would crawl under the platform between the supports and, using the strength of his back and legs, try to lift the platform off the supports. Scoring was based on the amount of weight raised and how long the individual could hold it up. Malakiah noticed Gregian again competed in this event. Malakiah further wondered how Scottius would have placed in this contest.**

**The next competition Malakiah thought was a most unusual one—presenting plays. On stages at opposite sides of the arena’s floor, the two schools performed short plays—one following the other. These plays were rated by the six judges and by twenty townspeople selected randomly from the yellow and green quarters. As the two directors explained, the plays presented could be dramatic or comical, historical or fictional, original works written by a student or ones published by others. The first play performed that day was a comedy called *One Busy Day in the Marketplace of Suena*; an Institute student had written that one. The subsequent play put on by the university students was another comical one called *Seven Dwarves for Seven Elves*; it was mildly bawdy and most absurd—it evoked many laughs from the audience.**

**At the fourteenth hour—midday—came an event Santos had told Malakiah about and, since then, he had very much looked forward to seeing it—namely an hour-long contest of *Armed Warriors* that employed persons to take the part of the pieces.**

***Armed Warriors*, Malakiah knew, was a game between two persons played on a square board. Each player had sixteen pieces—eight fighters, two castles, two knights, two theocrats, a queen, and a king—to move about and attack the other player’s pieces with. Each game piece further had its specific weapon, individualized move, and means of fighting. Malakiah, although himself not a player of this game, knew it was mainly one in which its players developed strategies and battled. And, ever since Santos had told him of this event, he had wondered how people could portray it as a competition.**

**He watched as the students set up a large board of eight squares by eight of alternating colors in the arena’s center. Then, on opposing sides, sixteen players positioned themselves; they were dressed in their schools’ colors and as the pieces they would represent. Which side went first was swiftly determined by a wrestling match between the schools’ mascots. Once that was decided, the kings alternately called out their moves. Occasionally, one required a piece to assume a square occupied by another. Such then necessitated those two pieces to battle for it. The start of a fight always evoked a loud cheer from the audience.**

**Santos told Malakiah, during the first such fight, always in this game, when one piece took another’s square, the piece whose square had been taken was simply removed from the board and the occupying piece then placed there. The replacement was not disputed. However, in this contest, Santos said the two pieces actually contended for who would remain in the square by waging a non-lethal battle whose victory was assessed by the watching judges. Santos said this variation changed the nature of the game considerably and forced the kings to call the moves to consider the consequences of all battles most carefully.**

**“But Santos, could they not just have a mock battle with the taking piece predetermined to be the winner?”**

**“Verily yes—but where would the suspense be in that?”**

**They continued to watch the match with Santos commenting on each side’s strategy. He declared the red side as being the most daring and the blue side as more cautious. He added, fortunately for the red, his pieces kept winning. Several times, if the fights had gone the other way, red’s position would have been most dire.**

**Malakiah noted Gregian was a castle on the blue side. And Gadreel and Aslam were castles on the red side. He also spotted Dumeas as a knight. Dumeas had fought twice in battles with his padded hand axe and shield. Gregian, Gadreel, and Aslam—all holding wooden two-handed battle axes—had moved but not yet fought anyone.**

**And neither would they this day. The red king’s fortunes finally turned. He sent one of his fighters to contend with a blue theocrat piece in a bold move, hoping to seize a decisive square. But his fighter lost, exposing the red king to subsequent attacks. Within a few more moves, the red king was surrounded by blue opponents and obligated to surrender. Nikolas, standing on the walkway before the blue sections, jumped and waved his arms about, prompting the blue quarter to cheer their victory. Albertus, standing on the walkway before the red sections, fell to his knees and covered his eyes.**

**Now Pallux stood; he praised the blue side for its victory and ridiculed the red for its loss. Nickolas joined in the taunting by thumbing his nose as the red quarter. Kastor arose and countered his rival’s taunts.**

**When the exchange was done, they announced the next series of matches would be challenge tugs-of-war between groups in either school. They would begin at the fifteenth hour.**

**Just as these matches were starting, two members of the Town Watch arrived. They informed Santos and Malakiah they could now take a break for lunch and whatever else they required. They were to return, however, before the start of the next event.**

**Santos and Malakiah, following a quick stop at the privy, helped themselves to some rolls, sausages, and pieces of cheese sent in baskets from the Academy. Then, as they ate, they strolled on the walkway through the adjacent blue quarter and kept walking until they came to the yellow one.**

**Once there, Malakiah stepped down among the seats of the first level; Santos trailed after him. Malakiah stood watching and listening. Santos looked around and then shook his head. “I recognize none of these games. We shall have to inquire.”**

**As they spoke, four individuals entered the area. Malakiah recognized three of them.**

**“Well met, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,” Malakiah said, greeting them. “So you are participating in these games this day for the Institute?”**

**“Verily so,” replied Azariah. “The physical contests are not our food and drink. But we gladly demonstrate our prowess in games of the mind. And, I must say, in all modesty, in them we are most proficient.” He noticed Santos. “Your pardon, friend of Malakiah; your name is not known to me.”**

**Malakiah performed the introductions. “Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, this is Santos Tanzallium, a knight candidate from the Academy. He will shortly begin his quest. And I will have the honor to accompany him.” Then he paused, noticing the fourth individual with the other three. “Azariah, there is one among you whom I know not. Pray now introduce him to us.”**

**“Ahh, my pardons for being so negligent,” Azariah apologized. “This one is our partner in mischief, Deiniol; he studies political theory.”**

**Deiniol shook hands with Santos and Malakiah.**

**“It is my pleasure to meet you both,” Deiniol said. He paused when he realized something. “Your surname is Tanzallium. Then you are . . .”**

**Santos nodded. “Verily. His Grace is my uncle.”**

**Azariah looked at Malakiah. “Never knew you had such highly-placed friends, Mal.”**

**Malakiah nodded. “Having such has proved very useful. His Grace is also my sponsor.”**

**“A student of political theory, you are?” Santos asked Deiniol. “Have you then studied the writings of Niccolo Bernadi? My uncle is much interested in his theories.”**

**“Most assuredly,” answered Deiniol, “I have a passing familiarity with them. I have also written commentaries both on Niccolo’s life and his works. And read those of your uncle’s.”**

**“Mal,” spoke up Hananiah, “if I may ask, what brought you here to this area? We know you cannot participate.”**

**“Idle curiosity. I wished to learn what games were being played in here.”**

**“I can tell you those, Mal. One of the most common ones is called *Memorization*. The leader reads off ten items. When he is done, each player writes down as many as he can remember. Whoever had the most correct wins. If there is a tie, though, the leader then reads another, longer list, and the remaining contenders try again. The game continues until one player has the highest score. Mishael here currently leads in *Memorization*. He has a tally of twenty-seven items—no ogre-brained individual from the University will likely match that score! Other games involve puzzle-solving and riddling. Equally popular are quizzes involving the recall of knowledge and the game of pantomime called *Charades*. Mal, know you the game called *Forbidden*?”**

**“No, I know that one not.”**

**“In that one you must prompt your teammates to guess a word. The difficulty is you are forbidden to give certain words as your clues. For example, if you want them to guess ‘dog,’ words forbidden to say would be ‘bark’ or ‘hound.’ And a most interesting game is *Heckle*. Know you that one?”**

**Malakiah’s only response was a puzzled look.**

**“Verily, Mal, that is a unique one you must surely try sometime. In it you have two teams. One side derives a short story their leader will try to tell. However, as he endeavors to, the members of the other team heckle him, interrupting him continually with insults.”**

**“But how is that a contest? How may such be scored?”**

**“Simple. If the other team makes an insult and receives none in return, the judge awards them a point. But if the team telling the story can return an insult to the other, they earn the point instead.”**

**“But could not the insulters return an insult for an insult and still take the point?”**

**“Verily so; the exchange can go back and forth several times.”**

**“What then, Hananiah, if the response was one simple and vulgar such as ‘boggle you’?”**

**Hananiah smiled. “That the judge would surely disallow as an unworthy reply.”**

**“*Heckle* sounds like a particularly intriguing game—I would love to participate in a session sometime.”**

**“There is one scheduled to be played later this day. Would you be able to come by and watch?”**

**“Nay, such we may not attempt! Santos and I are on duty. And speaking of such, we should not remain here much longer!”**

**“A pity then!”**

**“Malakiah,” interjected Mishael, “I happen to know there be taverns nearby our school where, on selected nights, *Heckle* is played in their backrooms. Another most popular game is called *Monsters in Mazes*. In that one, individuals assume the roles of warriors, magic-users, clerics, and the like, and then compete in mock battles—either together or against monsters such as orcs, goblins, giants, trolls, or even dragons.”**

**“What are ‘orcs?’” Malakiah asked.**

**“They are creatures similar to goblins. They are easily confused. Jonron Reuel, in his famous *Lady of the Earring* stories, referred to certain creatures in his first book as ‘goblins’ and then later refers back to them as ‘orcs.’”**

**“Yes,” replied Deiniol, “such games are also played in the tavern which is my favorite to frequent—it is called The Lions’ Den. As is theirs down the street—The Fiery Furnace.”**

**“If you wish, Malakiah,” continued Mishael, “we could inquire for you when a game would be held and later inform you of its time and date. And, for that game, you would not be restricted from participating.”**

**“My thanks to you, Mishael. That effort on my behalf would be most appreciated!”**

**“Come now, Mal, we must be going,” warned Santos. “It should serve us most ill to return late to our stations. A pleasure to meet you, associates of Mal.” He nodded to them all and stepped back up to the walkway. Malakiah nodded farewell as well and followed after his friend.**

**They left the yellow quarter and continued walking around the Amphitheater. They passed the sections containing the Institute students. Malakiah nodded to several individuals whom he recognized. They kept walking, speaking briefly to Jefhian, Hathian, and Scottius as they passed each one in their sections. Soon they arrived in the green quarter. Again Malakiah stepped down into the first level of seats, curious to see which games of chance were there and observed tables with cups for tossing dice, wheels for spinning and betting on the results, and tables where the dealers passed out cards, tiles, and cones to the players to game with. He was not familiar with these games either.**

**They returned to their station in ample time. The two members of the Watch then passed on down to relieve Randius and Karolus.**

**The two directors announced the next event—competitive dunking booths. This announcement puzzled Malakiah. He certainly knew what dunking booths were. He had seen such in various fairs back in the Emerald Valley. What he understood not was how such could be made competitive. He asked Santos.**

**“That is a mystery most easily explained, my friend,” laughed Santos. “And it all goes back to these students’ knack for complicating things. Just having someone sitting in a booth for others to hurl a ball at a target to drop them in the water would be far too simple. Instead, they have it where two persons—each in his booth—hurl balls at each other. The first one who strikes the other’s target and drops him in the water wins the match.”**

**“Are two balls hurled at the same time or are the balls hurled alternately?”**

**“Simultaneously, naturally! It adds to the excitement. And the possibility both may strike the target at the same time.”**

**“Who wins in such an occurrence?”**

**“Neither—that would constitute a draw.”**

**Malakiah and Santos enjoyed watching the dunking booth competitions. More than a few ended in draws. Obviously, the participants were most practiced.**

**The next event, high-jumping, began at the sixteenth hour, followed by long jumping at half past the sixteenth hour. Both of these events were only of marginal interest to Malakiah and Santos. The next event at the seventeenth hour, the two circuit race, in which the participants ran twice around the inside of the arena, was only slightly more interesting. The archery competition followed the race and then the axe-throwing contest. By now, it was late in the afternoon and both Malakiah and Santos were becoming most tired.**

**The quarterstaff fighting at half past the eighteenth hour peaked Malakiah’s interest as this event was familiar combat. In such, two individuals would face one another, each holding a long, thick staff which he would wield to strike at the other and to defend against return blows. Customarily such battles would occur with the contestants standing and facing each other on level ground. However, to make the competition more interesting, the two schools’ matches had the fighters contest each other by standing on a narrow plank across the pit previously used by the mud wrestlers. The simple rules were the two could strike with the staves as they chose, and the first to land in the pit or step off the plank lost the battle.**

**The two squires watched several highly competitive matches and a few humiliating trips into the mud. At one point, it appeared Albertus and Nikolas would spar, but that instead turned out to be a pretense.**

**The obstacle course races followed the quarterstaff matches. Once again, Malakiah wished he could be down there competing. He found himself critiquing the efforts of the participants. By doing so, he felt sure he would have beaten any other participant there.**

**Finally, to the relief of Malakiah and, he was sure, those others working, the directors announced the last event of the day—mock jousting.**

**We decline to use horses, the directors declared. Instead, our “knights” shall “ride” on platforms pushed about by their teammates to engage in glorious battle with their foes. Each knight shall attempt three passes, striking at their opponent with the weapon of their choice. Being knocked or thrown from the platform will cost one the match. Receiving what the judges decide is a mortal wound would similarly cost one the victory. Otherwise, on each pass, the judges shall assess the damage each one inflicts upon the other and award points. After the third pass, the winner shall be declared by points received.**

**Malakiah could see the participants wore dense padding to protect themselves from the wooden and blunted weapons they wielded. And, thus equipped, they laid into one another with foolish enthusiasm. Few combats between individuals lasted the full three passes. Most ended because the judges declared mortal blows had been inflicted. Few students, moreover, possessed the necessary skill to knock another from his platform. Santos, knowledgeable of jousting, told Malakiah none of these students would have lasted long in any genuine joust.**

**With the conclusion of the jousting matches, the competition ended for the day. Malakiah noted, though, while the townspeople began leaving the arena, most of the students remained expectantly in their quarters. He asked Santos why.**

**“They all await the end of the day’s scores,” Santos answered. “The judges shall add them up and announce them shortly.”**

**And soon they were. Several minutes later, Zylvanus, the head judge, stood. Seeing him rise, all in the Amphitheater fell silent.**

**“I now have,” he said, “the tally of the scores for those events completed this date. As you undoubtedly know, some are still pending and will not be known until the last day of the competition. Therefore, these scores reflect only those of the events completed.”**

**He paused, obviously wanting to build up the suspense. The arena grew even quieter. Finally, he said. “The score for the Institute is 225; and for the University, 212.”**

**Those in the red quarter cheered the announcement; those in the blue one jeered. Then all stood up and began clearing the Amphitheater.**

**Malakiah and the other squires could not leave yet, however. They had to attend a short meeting with Reynard and Danae on the arena floor. They briefly discussed any problems which any had experienced. Fortunately, there had been few. No fights had occurred, although several warnings had been issued. Their leaders thanked them for their efforts and told them to return tomorrow morning at the same time.**

**As they rode home, Malakiah asked Santos if they would have the same schedule tomorrow.**

**“No,” replied Santos, “Days one, three, and five have essentially the same pattern of events. But Days two and four have a different one.” He shook his head. “Verily, though, I am content to wait until tomorrow to learn what that one might be.”**

**“Yes, I too am content to remain ignorant of such until I must know of it. Now, where shall we dine this night, my friend?”**

**As they were discussing places, the cousins rode up. Jointly they decided on a location. They dined well but all chose to retire early, weary after their long and busy day.**

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***Seventeenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The second day of the competition began without an opening ceremony. The first event was to determine who could balance for the longest time a slender pole five feet in length on the palm of his hand while staying within a circle ten feet in diameter. Both Malakiah and Santos watched with amusement the contestants' antics as they darted left and right back and forth trying to keep the pole upright.**

**Wrestling and mud-wrestling followed pole-balancing; then came rock hurling, which replaced the weight over yesterday's crosspiece event. Gregian placed prominently in this contest, Malakiah noticed.**

**At the eleventh hour, Kastor arose and informed the audience they would now begin today’s Six-Fold Champion competition. As all listened, the red director described the events composing it: hammer-tossing which would start immediately, a race of one circuit around the arena at the twelfth hour, weightlifting at the thirteenth hour, long jumping at half past the sixteenth hour, archery at half past the seventeenth hour, and quarterstaff fighting at half past the eighteenth hour. The blue director then stood and explained how the competition would be scored. The description was long and tedious—Malakiah soon lost interest.**

**Log-tossing followed the hammer throw. Next was the circuit race—part two of the Six-Fold Champion contest. Then came javelin tossing and next weightlifting, the third part. By now, Malakiah was quite restless and had taken to pacing back and forth on the walkway. He almost wished for a disturbance in his section to break the monotony.**

**At half past the thirteenth hour, when yesterday had been a drama contest, today there was a singing one. Each school coincidentally selected to sing songs from different plays of Willium Baravon. Unfortunately for Malakiah, though, the plays were not ones with which he was familiar. Santos, however, seemed to enjoy the melodies.**

**Malakiah looked forward to another game of *Armed Warriors* after the singing but learned to his initial dismay that instead the schools would play today a game of Capture the Enemy’s Banner. Before the game’s start, the two directors instructed all spectators to remain in their seats during the event to avoid interfering with the players as they raced around the sections looking for their opponents’ hidden banner while also trying to turn back opponents seeking theirs. Accordingly, for the next hour, the Amphitheater's walkways and aisles were filled with students searching and confronting each other. Finally, a member of the Institute discovered the University’s banner tucked behind a doorway. First, he tried to carry it back stealthily. However, when the other side learned he possessed it, his return became a frantic relay race to reach the red director’s section—his side’s home base—to turn over the banner and claim victory for his team.**

**The second event of the afternoon was one Malakiah had never heard of—Catapult Wars. The directors soon explained its design. They said this competition would involve contestants from each school using catapults of their construction to hurl missiles at a large target built to resemble a castle. Scoring would be based on the accuracy of their hits upon the structure. And should any catapult’s shot knock the king from the structure—the directors meant a dummy placed atop the castle—its team would immediately win the contest.**

**The competitors from each school each set up their catapults and took their allotted five shots. Most machines failed to launch their missiles far and even fewer hurled their projectiles accurately. None of the teams achieved a high score.**

**After the catapult contest came the competitive dunking booths followed by high jumping. Next came long jumping—the fourth part of the Six-Fold Champion contest. Then followed a one-circuit hurdles race and next archery—the fifth part. Axe-throwing came after archery and later the last event of the Six-Fold Champion contest, quarterstaff fighting. The obstacle course trials followed quarterstaff fighting. The last event this day, instead of mock jousting, was a processional contest.**

**When Zylvanus announced the scores at the end of the second day, they were 457 for the University and 450 for the Institute.**

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***Eighteenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The third day of the competition followed the pattern of the first one but again without an opening ceremony. Malakiah was beginning to find the events boring, although he enjoyed the *Armed Warriors* match at midday. This time the blue side led a steady attack against the red one, losing only two fights. Gregian and Gadreel, both playing as castles, fought for an extended period before Gregian finally bested his opponent with an unexpected move that knocked Gadreel to the ground and left him defenseless.**

**Overall, most matches went to the University that day; when the head judge announced the scores, the University was ahead 622 to 590.**

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***Nineteenth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**The fourth day had the same schedule as the second one. There was another contest to determine a Six-Fold Champion and, instead of an *Armed Warriors* match, Capture the Enemy’s Banner game. This time the University retrieved its rival’s banner.**

**Santos and Malakiah had their first disturbance when one spectator in their section, apparently much influenced by ale, objected to the judges’ decision of which group won the singing competition. His loudly-voiced opinion caused another person nearby to answer back a dissenting one. Insults started flying back and forth—first between just those two and soon those with them. Malakiah and Santos, supported by Randius and Karolus, had to confront both parties and warn them to stop shouting or face removal. After ten tense minutes and the arrival of two members of the Town Watch, the two groups quieted down.**

**The matches that day went evenly to both schools. The final scores were the University 795, and the Institute 770.**

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***Twentieth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**Malakiah was glad when the fifth and final day of the competition arrived. He believed that he would have enjoyed attending one day of The Pursuit of the Chartreuse Gryphon or possibly two, but he would find the whole business tiresome after that. He almost looked forward to having a regular day of classes tomorrow.**

 **The fifth day followed the pattern of the third. *Armed Warriors*, which had become Malakiah’s favorite event, was won for the first time by the red side. This different result may have been because its king played a deliberate match. Or because he had changed around which students played certain pieces. In any case, the red side emerged victorious in every fight and swiftly defeated the blue side.**

**Finally, the last event of the day was completed. Today, Malakiah noted, whereas on other days non-students began leaving after the last event, almost everyone remained in their seats waiting.**

**“Today is the deciding one, Mal,” Santos said. “We learn which school shall win the gryphon!”**

**“Then you mean those scores we heard yesterday plus those points earned today added to them?”**

**Santos shook his head. “Such as what you described are just those earned for the physical contests. Also to be added to them must be each school’s scores for the games of the mind. Then one school shall receive one hundred points as a bonus because it collected more money in the games of chance. Often that bonus decides the contest. Verily, it can be the giant on the battlefield.”**

**“Will it take long for the judges to make their announcement?”**

**“Verily it can—for those awaiting it. Now is when we must watch the crowds.”**

**A tense ten minutes passed during which the schools’ mascots, Albertus and Nikolas, led their respective schools in chants haranguing their rivals. Some of the songs were clever; others were just insulting or physically impossible. Malakiah hoped none would stir up the students’ tensions too high and lead to brawling.**

**Finally, Zylvanus, the head judge, rose and raised his hands. The crowd fell silent.**

**“Students of the Institute, students of the University. I have now tabulated the final scores of the events carried out before us on the arena floor for these past five days. The total for the University is 1067. And, for the Institute, . . . 947.”**

**A roar from the blue quarter followed his words.**

**Over the commotion Santos shouted to Malakiah. “The University typically wins in the events on the arena floor.”**

**Elizas, Zylvanus’ assistant, arose next and waved his hand for silence. When the crowd quieted, he announced in a high voice, “And I have the scores from the games of the mind. For the Institute 288; for the University, 221.” Now those in the Institute’s sections cheered loudly.**

**Zylvanus’ other assistant, Maurzy, now stood and waited for the cheering to end. When it had, he proclaimed, “And, having counted and so determined which school has raised the most money through the games of chance, I now declare the one hundred extra points shall be awarded to—the Institute.”**

**Zylvanus then added, “Therefore, by a score of 1335 to 1288, we, the judges of The Pursuit of the Chartreuse Gryphon competition, declare the winning school to be—the Josef Johnam Institute.”**

**A thunderous cheer erupted from the red quarter following the judges’ announcement. Albertus ran about the walkway, encouraging the students to shout even louder. Those in the blue quarter remained silent.**

**When the cheering subsided, Pallux spoke up.**

**“You have played well in this competition, you of the Institute. However, not well enough you may rest easy in your victory! Full well you must have noticed the final score stands at 1335 to 1288. It is not fifty points or more! Therefore, you students of the Institute and my nemesis, Kastor, I declare your victory is at hazard! Look then not for an easy time bearing your prize back to your school! Instead, look to meet us on the way!”**

**Those behind him roared at his veiled threat.**

**Kastor glared back. When the students at the University had ceased their roar, he replied, “Try what you will—we welcome your feeble attempts. For they shall come to naught, you of the University. This night, the gryphon shall rest on the grounds of the Institute—adorned with our banner!”**

**Now those behind him cheered.**

**The exchange between the two puzzled Malakiah. He looked to Santos for an answer.**

**“Mal,” Santos explained, “whenever the gryphon is not won by fifty points or more, by a long-standing tradition, the losing school’s students may then try to steal it from the winning one as its students strive to bear it back from the Amphitheater to their school. And, if the losing school’s students can successfully seize it and then transport it onto their school’s grounds—before the winning school may recover it—the gryphon will become the trophy of the seizing school to keep instead for the next year. Think of it as the losing school being awarded a surprise seventy-five point bonus.”**

 **“Shall it be our task to guard the gryphon’s transfer to prevent such a theft?”**

**“Verily not. Transportation is a part of the competition. And the Academy requires us to remain aloof from such matters.”**

 **“But will not the Town Watch wish to prevent such mischief on the streets of Suena?”**

**“Only if the students’ actions sufficiently disturb the town’s peace. Let us hope their efforts reach not that level.”**

**Malakiah considered Santos’ words, then he shrugged. “Then, if the competition is over, what is required of us now?”**

**“Sergeants Reynard and Danae shall tell us that in our final meeting. Come, let us join the others there.”**

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**After the squires made their reports, Reynard and Danae thanked them for their assistance. All of them, they said, would receive favorable reviews in Warden Walthus’ summary to the Academy. Then they dismissed the squires, telling them they hoped they would see some of them again next year.**

**With the meeting concluded, most left the nearly empty Amphitheater. Only about thirty students from the Institute remained clustered around The Chartreuse Gryphon. They celebrated their victory by laughing, singing school songs, and drinking flagons of ale.**

**Malakiah readily surmised these individuals would be the gryphon’s guards and bearers back to the Institute. This realization brought a thought sprite into his head. He mentioned its communication to Santos, Randius, Karolus, Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian.**

**“My friends, it might be most interesting to follow the students as they transport the gryphon back to the Institute.”**

**“Why so, Mal?” asked Santos. “What mischief have you heard of that you are withholding from us?”**

**“You recall Pallux’s ominous warning the University would steal the gryphon. I would like to see if they indeed endeavor to.”**

**“Malakiah,” said Karolus, “such threats are made every year. And they are mostly idle and empty.”**

**Malakiah shrugged. “Perhaps so. Still, I have a mind to walk after the students. Will any of you follow with me?”**

**Santos expressed his desire to accompany Malakiah. The cousins looked at each other, nodded, and then Jefhian said they would come along. Randius next indicated his intent to go with them as well.**

**Karolus shook his head. “Malakiah, I believe you are seeing a goblin where none is! I will bet a round of ale I have stated correctly—that naught will happen!”**

**Malakiah reflected on Karolus’ challenge, then replied. “Nay, I decline that wager—I am not that certain of my suspicions.”**

**Hathian nudged Malakiah. “Verily, I think you should take that bet, Mal. Stand by your convictions.”**

**Malakiah looked at Hathian curiously. Then the truth hit him. “And why is that? Could it be because, no matter who wins, you and most of the others will drink for free at the loser’s cost?”**

**Hathian muttered, “Curses!” The others laughed at his exposure.**

**Santos added, chuckling, “Then, Comrades, our mission is set—we shall follow the gryphon. And, whether its fortune is to be taken to the Institute or stolen away to the University, so be it! But, my fellows, remember this! We must only observe this business—not interfere in it! Such would bring down the Academy’s wrath upon us!”**

**Thus decided, the seven squires waited. Finally, their carousing done, the students formed their processional. Three took positions on either side of the platform to man each pole. Another took the leader position. But on this day, unlike the opening one, the procession had five students carrying cudgels walking on either side of the platform. Together these seventeen attendants conducted the gryphon out of the Amphitheater.**

**As they followed, Malakiah asked Santos, “Why are not more of the Institute’s students present to escort the gryphon back? Then, surely, the University’s students would have no possibility of stealing the gryphon.”**

**“Verily, Mal,” Santos answered, “that suggestion has much logic. But the town of Suena forbids large gatherings of students, feeling such assemblies are both provocative and potentially destructive. Their reasoning is an example of how strict adherence to a law causes problems, whereas allowing a little variance to it would forego such.”**

**Malakiah asked, “Santos, were you the duke, would you allow such an exception?”**

**Santos frowned. Finally, he said, “Verily, why not? An excellent idea! I shall make it the first law which I enact!” He looked at Malakiah. “Were I convinced all your ideas would be that good, I would make you my chief administrator. Would you want the office?”**

**Malakiah smiled back. “What would the monetary consideration be for my services?”**

**Santos sighed. “If you have to ask that, my friend, you are not rich enough to take the position!”**

**The procession went down the road from the Amphitheater. At the intersection, the students turned right, heading towards the Vernado River. They crossed the bridge, passed between blocks of warehouses, and then entered the town’s marketplace at its southwestern corner. This square, congested with merchants and their goods, forced the procession slowly to proceed as it worked its way across to the square’s eastern side.**

**The Institute was located east of the marketplace with the University several blocks south of the Institute. The students desired a route by which they could convey their prize swiftly to the Institute. They knew that venturing too close to the other school could embolden their rivals, and none of the students wanted the great humiliation the gryphon's theft would cause. Therefore, those in the procession approached the center road from the eastern side of the marketplace, knowing it led directly to the Institute’s main gate and was placed far north of the University.**

**However, when they reached the square’s eastern edge, the procession’s leader noticed the entrance to the street they wanted—and even those around it—were blocked. Some merchants had unloaded their wares and parked their wagons in them. A few others were arguing with them. The students’ leader knew the way would eventually be cleared, but he wished not to wait. He told the others in the procession they would exit the marketplace by the eastward street at the south end of the square and then regain their desired street by turning north at the first intersection.**

**Halfway down the street from the marketplace, the attack began. Those in the processional, however, were not set upon by other students. Instead, a large ceramic barrel was hurled down from a rooftop. It split open in the street before the gryphon platform, spilling forth a foul-smelling liquid.**

**As the students uncomprehendingly stared at the sight, many more barrels came crashing down. These, upon shattering, however, let forth no liquid. From these broken vessels emerged swarms of insects which promptly descended upon the students and began stinging them unmercifully.**

**The students swatted at the insects futilely. Finally, their only option was flight, leaving the gryphon behind. And, once they had done so, from nearby alleys and doorways emerged individuals, their heads and upper bodies covered with gray cloaks. They, apparently unaffected by the stinging insects, picked up the gryphon on its platform and hastily bore it away. They first headed east and then took a southern road.**

**Malakiah and the others, trailing behind, saw the whole attack. Fortunately, they were far enough away to avoid the swarms of insects. Santos began issuing orders.**

**“Randius, Karolus,” he cried, turning to them, “find members of the Town Watch. Tell them what we saw. Bring them here. Go, now!” Randius and Karolus ran off. Then Santos turned to the cousins. “Scottius, Hathian, Jefhian—you go after those who took the gryphon. They will head to the University. Prevent them from reaching their school with it any way you can! Fight them if you must!”**

**“But Santos,” Jefhian replied, “is this not a matter between the schools? We cannot interfere in such! You even said as much!”**

**“In a normal situation, my fellows, your words would strike the mark! But this situation is most assuredly not such! The sophistication of this attack suggests it was conceived by one trained in techniques of combat—not mere students! Therefore, we are justified in acting! Now, go after them! We need to seize the abductors and present them to the Town Watch for questioning. They may be the only ones who can answer the questions on who provided them aid. Now, hurry! They must not escape us by reaching their University with the gryphon.”**

**The cousins did not move, obviously unconvinced by Santos’ words.**

**Finally, Santos shouted, “Then, in the name of my uncle, the Duke of Suena, follow after them, now!” He smiled. “You may tell anyone who challenges your interference I said that to you! That should shield you.”**

**The three, finally assured, ran off.**

**Santos turned to Malakiah. “We shall head to the rooftop where we saw the containers hurled from. Perhaps we shall find someone up there for the Town Watch to interrogate. Let us go. Or must I order you as well?”**

**“Verily not, Your Grace,” said Malakiah with mock sincerity. “I present my most humble self at your service.”**

**“Excellent, Sirrah. However, as I am not yet a duke, you may address me as ‘my lord.’”**

**They ran toward the base of the building from whose top they had seen the containers hurled. They circled the structure, looking for a stairway. Fortune favored them for, while looking for such in the alley behind the building, they spotted a man carrying a barrel to a cart. The one he had, and other similar ones in his cart, matched those they had seen hurled earlier.**

**“Mal,” whispered Santos, “perhaps we should acquaint ourselves with that man. I doubt, though, he will speak willingly.”**

 **They approached the fellow in a manner they hoped would not alert him, but he, obviously suspicious, jumped onto the wagon's seat and whipped his mule as soon as they came close. Santos, however, was able to seize the animal’s bridle.**

**“What means this action?” the man asked. “Why are you squires hindering my departure?”**

**“We mean you no harm,” replied Santos. “We would only ask you some questions. And should your answers bear up, your leave shall not be long delayed. First, your name, Sirrah.”**

**“My name be Armand, young squires, if it suits you. And, should it not, I have no mind to change it.”**

**“Your name be a commendable one, good Armand. Now, pray tell us what your barrels hold.”**

**The man smiled. “Naught but premium cider from my farm. The best available in Suena! Why, I even deliver my product to your very Academy, Squire.”**

**“Cider? Most excellent, Merchant Armand. Then I will buy a container from you.” Santos turned to his friend. “Mal, select one. We shall share its contents with our friends this night.”**

**“My apologies, good Squires, but all my product has been sold. I have none extra to sell to you.”**

**Santos looked at the merchant. “And what if I offered you three times its price?”**

**“Adonai bless you for your generosity, good Squire, but nay. I must deliver to my client the number which he ordered.”**

**“Not even if I offered you *seven* times the price? Surely for that profit you would willingly tell your client that one container broke on the way!”**

**“Verily not! I am, Squire, an honest man!”**

**“Are you? Let us presume to see. Mal, select any barrel from the cart and then smash it at your feet. If it spills forth cider, then, good Armand, you shall have my apology, three-fold payment for your loss, and our permission to leave without further ado. However, Sirrah, I strongly expect you shall not wish us to break open any container of yours—for whatever price we offer for its contents.” He looked to Malakiah. “Pray make your selection now.”**

**Malakiah approached the cart.**

**“Who are you to subject me to this test?” Armand objected. “I shall protest this treatment to the Town Watch.”**

**“Pray protest,” said Santos. “And when they ask you who subjected you to it, tell them your persecutor was Santos Tanzallium, nephew to His Grace, the Duke of Suena.”**

**All the bluster left Armand. “Pray break open none of my containers,” he said meekly. “Adonai protect us if you should.”**

**“Because they contain stinging insects, Armand? Such as the ones set upon the students bearing the gryphon?”**

**“Verily so. My farms provide me access to the hives of such terrors. And I was paid well to place such creatures in containers such as you see here and bring them here today for others to work their desired mischief. You saw how they were employed.” He smiled. “Most amusing it was to see them swarming.”**

**Santos glared. “Who paid you to supply these containers?”**

**“You shall never hear his name from my lips,” Armand snarled.**

**“If not me, perhaps the Town Watch may make you utter it. Who helped you to hurl those containers from the rooftop?”**

**“Again, I shall reveal naught.”**

**“Santos,” Malakiah spoke up, “look what I found in the cart.” He threw to the ground four gray cloaks. “They are similar to those worn by those who carried off the gryphon. And they have a most pungent odor.”**

**Santos looked at Armand. “One more link to connect you to the assault on the gryphon procession. Now, give me something, Armand. Tell me why these cloaks smell so foully!”**

**Armand smirked. “Know you of the city so little? These cloaks are soaked in a liquid that repels the insects.”**

**Santos turned to Malakiah. “We are quite done with this one, Mal. Let us turn him over to the Town Watch. Then we must find our fellows whom we sent after the gryphon.”**

**Malakiah bound Armand’s wrists with a cord he found in the cart's bed. Then, with Armand sitting to the side and Malakiah behind him, Santos drove the cart from the alley and into the street where the shattered barrels still lay. The insects had long since disappeared. There they awaited the return of Randius and Karolus.**

**Their friends arrived directly with several members of the Town Watch trailing after them. Santos identified himself to them, turned Armand over to their custody, and then told them all Armand had revealed. Gregmon, the head of the squad of watchmen, grew most concerned when he heard of the barrels' contents; he instructed two of his men to drive the cart to the river and throw its cargo into the water to drown the insects. Then he told Santos and Malakiah he wanted them to accompany him back to the station and give a verbal statement. Santos promised they would be there directly. But first, he said, he and Malakiah must discern the fate of the gryphon.**

**“Very well, my lord, but pray come directly.”**

**“I promise we shall shortly. And could you provide us with some of your men? We know not what we shall find in our efforts to learn of the gryphon’s whereabouts.”**

**“Verily.” Gregmon pointed to three men and told them to assist.**

**Santos, followed by Malakiah, Randius, Karolus, and the three watchmen, ran down the street to the east. They turned south at the first intersection, following the course which Santos and Malakiah had seen those taking the gryphon go. At each subsequent intersection, they looked south and east, seeking signs of the gryphon’s passage. With the lead the University students had on them, Malakiah knew not how they might catch up. However, Santos said he knew the most direct route towards the University, which the other students must be taking. The others followed his lead.**

**Santos’ assumption paid off. They rounded a corner and saw, down the street, the platform with the gryphon resting upon it. And, standing upon it were Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian. A ring of snarling, angry students surrounded the platform. The cousins had somehow stopped those carrying the platform, separated its bearers from it, and then seized it. Now they were defying anyone to try and take it back from them. Malakiah knew he would have to ask them how they had achieved such.**

**Malakiah, Santos, Randius, and Karolus ran down the street, broke through the ring of students, and, yelling to their fellow squires, leaped up onto the platform. Then they turned to face their new attackers. The arrival of these reinforcements enraged the students, prompting them to fight even more viciously.**

**“We are most glad you deigned to join us, dear friends,” Jefhian yelled to Santos and the others. “We were preparing them for you.” His uniform was torn and his face bruised.**

**“Could you, however, next time, arrive a little earlier?” asked Hathian. He then kneed his opponent in the groin and smiled when the other doubled over. “They never would allow that in our wrestling class. A pity!” He shoved his victim away with his foot.**

**“Speak for yourself, Hathian,” grunted Scottius. “This is the best fight I have had in ages.” He picked up one of his assailants, spun him over his head, and then threw him into two others, knocking them back and down. “Send me some more!” he roared.**

**Malakiah, Santos, Randius, and Karolus, however, had little opportunity to fight. The three members of the Town Watch, who had lagged behind the squires, once they reached the battle scene, began blowing their whistles. All University students still able to run began leaving. They knew by remaining they risked arrest for street brawling. The street was soon empty except for the watchmen, the seven squires, those University students too injured to move, and the once again abandoned gryphon.**

**Malakiah and the others now looked toward their casualties. There were the usual cuts, scrapes, bruises, and a few broken bones, but no severe injuries. Healers, summoned by all the fighting, began administrating to the wounded.**

**The squires next concerned themselves with the gryphon. They decided they should let it lie where it was for, eventually, one school or another would retrieve it. Indeed, such happened. The original bearers—recovered sufficiently from their encounter with the stinging insects—arrived, having been searching for the gryphon. The students listened with interest to an account of the cousins’ battle with the University’s students and thanked them for their efforts. As they picked up the gryphon, Santos told the bearers their intervention had only been allowed by abnormal circumstances. Should the University attempt another seizure, he advised them, he and his fellow squires could not help them out. Thus warned, the students sped towards the Institute with their prize.**

**Among the wounded, Malakiah discovered his friend Gregian. The young man had suffered bruises and a broken arm. Malakiah found Gregian had a gray cloak bearing a familiar pungent odor.**

**As a healer prayed over Gregian’s arm, Malakiah asked his friend how he could have taken part in that unspeakable attack.**

**“Honestly, Mal,” answered Gregian, “I knew naught of its nature. I and the others were simply told to cover ourselves with those smelly cloaks and hide in the street until we saw the others abandon the gryphon. Then we were to grab the gryphon and run with it. We never told *how* they would be forced to abandon it!” He sighed. “I guessed we just cared not to know. We only wanted to seize the gryphon and he promised us we would.”**

**Malakiah’s ears pricked up. “He, Gregian? Who was it?”**

**“I know not,” replied Gregian. “There were four of them—but only one spoke to give us our instructions. They kept their faces covered with cloaks. But I would guess they were students. His voice sounded young.”**

**“Might you recognize it if you heard it again?”**

**Gregian shook his head. “Nay, I think not.”**

**The healer finished. “Try to move your arm now,” he said.**

**Gregian did. “The pain is gone. I can move it now. Thanks, Healer.”**

**“You are welcome. Now, pray remember to say the prayers of thanks to Adonai we have discussed. Several each day for the next few. And perform your penance.”**

**“Yes, Healer; I shall.”**

**As a Town Watch member escorted Gregian away, Malakiah reported to Santos what the University student had told him. Santos nodded hearing the information.**

**“His story rings true. Remember, you found four cloaks in Armand’s cart. One for him and three of his associates. He had to have had help. He could never have hurled so many containers from the rooftop as quickly as they came down by himself.”**

**“You strike the mark. But how can we ‘persuade’ Armand to reveal his confederates, Santos?”**

**“We may have to rely on Gregmon to make him give them up—one way or another.”**

**“A pity we are not in former times. Then we could haul Armand down into your uncle’s torture chamber. Those places had ways which allowed those who wanted to know things to loosen an uncooperative tongue.”**

**Santos looked at him in surprise. “Mal, my friend, I know you must be speaking in jest. Normally those who advocate torture are even more morally bankrupt than you!”**

**As they spoke, three other squires strolled up to them. Their leader, Iland, spoke.**

**“Malakiah,” he said. “I know what you and the others have involved yourselves in—the affairs of The Chartreuse Gryphon competition! And despite all the warnings which Haydian made to us not to!” He and the others smirked. “I look forward to seeing Hammering Haydian get hold of you.” He turned to Santos. “And even you, high and mighty knight candidate-to-be and nephew of the duke. You shall be cleaning out stables alongside them.”**

**Now he and his two friends laughed.**

**Malakiah looked to Santos; his friend appeared utterly unconcerned. Instead, he folded his arms across his chest and stared back at his taunter.**

**“Might I inform you, Squire Iland,” Santos replied, “I have full confidence my reason for involving myself, Malakiah, and my fellow squires will withstand the scrutiny of Warden Haydian and the Academy—for we handled an assault and a breach on the town’s peace. It was not a matter solely between the schools. Therefore, our participation was allowable.”**

**Iland glared. He had not anticipated this response to his challenge. “Perhaps in the assault on those bearing the gryphon earlier, Santos. Maybe there your justification for involving yourselves will bear muster. But what of later when first three of you and then all of you fought off the University’s students trying to take the gryphon to their school? Defend your interference then—if you can!”**

**“Said students gained possession of the gryphon by questionable means—such possession could then be considered fruit from the forbidden tree. Thus, as they should never have achieved the gryphon in the first place, it was appropriate to deny it to them and allow the Institute to recover it. I declare your threats are meritless, Iland. We need not fear we have violated any rules of the Academy.”**

**Iland had no response to Santos’ remarks.**

**Now it was Santos’ turn to smirk. “However, what of your violations this day, Iland? And those of your friends?”**

**Iland, Darrell, and Dreg exchanged looks. “What mean you?” challenged Iland.**

**“There is a certain air about you three,” returned Santos. “I noticed it as you approached. The same odor was found on cloaks a merchant named Armand possessed. Could you and your friends have been wearing such when you, they, and he hurled certain containers from a rooftop earlier today?”**

 **“Verily not!” cried Darrell. Dreg vigorously shook his head. Iland tried to remain calm but was sweating heavily. Malakiah, having overheard the entire conversation, beckoned for Scottius, Jefhian, and Hathian to step over. He assumed their presence might prove necessary very shortly.**

**“Iland, Darrell, and Dreg,” Santos said, looking at each one as he said his name, “harken to this! The Town Watch, which you might not know, has Armand in its custody. And they have ample proof of his involvement in the assault on the gryphon procession. As far as he is concerned, the only matter remaining is how much punishment he will receive. He may possibly reduce that amount by telling who aided him. And, when you think about it, why would he not give up his confederates to suffer less? And if such are you and we learn that from him, your lot shall be much worse than if you confessed it yourselves!**

**“Yet, let us say Armand is that rare individual who will not give up a fellow in a criminal enterprise. Nonetheless, when I mention my suspicions to the Town Watch, they will arrest you and deliver you to our friend Warden Haydian. He will then question you. If you are indeed innocent, you need to have no fear. Kindly Warden Haydian will readily discern that. But, if you are guilty, can all three of you stand up to his examination? For, if anyone of you breaks, then he shall have all your necks in his noose!”**

**None had a reply to his words. He smiled at them.**

**“My last bits of advice to you are these, my friends. If you are guilty, the sooner you confess, the easier the punishment.” He now looked at the cousins. “Jefhian, Hathian, and Scottius, take your brother squires to a member of the Town Watch. Tell him these three assisted Armand.” Then he addressed Iland, Darrell, and Dreg again. “You had best pray to Adonai you find the Hammer in one of his rare, forgiving moods.”**

**He nodded to the cousins who led the cowed squires away.**

**By now, the sun was setting behind the mountains in the west. Malakiah and the others headed back to the Institute. When they entered the gate, they were greeted by the sight of the gryphon under a pavilion and again adorned with a red and white banner.**

**They stayed for a half-hour and celebrated with the other students. Then, after dinner, Malakiah and Santos visited the Watch Station to give them their requested statements. Malakiah also persuaded Santos to pay Gregian’s fine and have him released from the crowded, communal cell. The grateful Gregian accompanied Malakiah back to their hostel.**

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***Twenty-fifth day of the first month of spring, 2122***

**It was not until the next Half-Day that Malakiah saw Santos again when he came by the hostel.**

**“Verily, Mal, we discerned correctly. Once Warden Haydian had Iland, Dreg, and Darrell before him, it was a race to see who could confess first! Involving themselves in the competition was bad enough—but committing a criminal assault? Haydian was madder than a dragon robbed of his proverbial golden treasure! They would face expulsion—normally! However, those three have an influential sponsor. They will escape with punishment only. That maddened Haydian even more. The Academy’s disciplinary committee pacified him by granting him the authority to choose the three’s punishments. Verily, I would not wish to be in their shoes when Haydian decides it!”**

 **Malakiah shook his head upon hearing his friend’s news.**

**“Nonetheless, Mal, their involvement reveals only a part of this matter. Surely you can discern the rest!”**

**Malakiah’s blank expression showed that he did not.**

**“Mal, my friend, Iland and his two goblin-brained friends could never have devised that intricate plan to steal the gryphon. Nor secured the services of Armand. What is more, why would they? They were someone’s dragon claw.”**

**“But who? And for what gain?”**

**“Who know we wields an evil influence on Iland?”**

**Now the answer was immediately apparent to Malakiah. “Drakos! But, what would be his motive for assisting in the theft of The Chartreuse Gryphon?”**

**“Drakos himself? He has apparently none. But his father, Lukifer Herathic, might well have one. He is a known gambler. He could have bet the University would win the gryphon. Then, when the gryphon went to the Institute instead, he paid to arrange its seizure to protect his bet.” Santos sighed. “Verily, such is most possible. But proving it is beyond our means. I fear Drakos’ hand—and that of his father’s—shall remain undetected.**