

Chapter 5: The Friendly Fighter

Kallwyn swore. He had been so certain that Gerald Greyhand would win the wrestling match. But he had been tempted into making that stupid bet.

He walked away from the sand pit dejectedly, then tried to look on the bright side. He only lost ten courah, right? Then he reminded himself that he had chosen to pay double what the bet taker had offered.

He walked off in the direction that the bet taker had gone after taking his money. He decided that the con man probably would have made off with the money had he won the bet anyway, so...

In a sudden burst of inspiration, he changed direction. The con man, if he was worth his salt as a con man, would have used misleading directions to confuse Kallwyn.

"But wait," Kallwyn said to himself, "He would have wanted me to think he was going a different way so that I would go that way, but then he actually went the first way!"

He thought for a moment. "But he'd know that I'd see right through that, so he'd go a different way!" Again, a moment of thought.

"But if he knew I'd see right through that, he wouldn't go a different way, he'd go the same way because I would think that he had gone the first way!" He nodded confidently. "So I'll go the first way!" Then he stopped. "But if he thought that I'd be going through all that, he'd just stop making different decisions, and just decide to use the time he gained from stalling me back here trying to decide which way he went, and—hey!" he said, as he realized what had just happened.

And with that, he set off the way that the con man had gone.

Meanwhile, Jonas of Quinteria, master of the ancient martial arts form of Agkeihtō, was following a certain con man named Jack.

Jonas knew of Jack, but had never caught him in the act of conning foreigners; he knew it happened but never had enough evidence, nor reason, to go after Jack and settle the score. Jonas didn't like other people taking advantage of his skills, so he'd have to do something about it.

He knew where Jack lived, also; he was good at remaining unseen by others when he wanted to, which gave him the uncanny tendency to seemingly sneak up on people. After one match he had followed Jack home to see what he did with all the winnings he earned from making the right bet; betting on Jonas, that was.

He snuck in through the second floor of the shared housing unit, which the real-estate marketers had taken to calling apartments. The second floor was uninhabited and Jonas had no problem getting in.

He knocked on the door to Jack's apartment, then moved to the side.

"Who's it?" he heard Jack call from inside the apartment.

Hearing no response, Jack grabbed a knife from the table upon which a heap of gold sat; the winnings from that day's competition. He opened the door and leaned out, trying to figure out who had knocked.

Like lightning, Jonas swiftly kicked Jack in the stomach and leapt onto him, twisting his wrist until he relinquished the blade, and swooped up the knife. Then, looking Jack in the face, he said, "Where's the gold, McClousky?"

Kallwyn, who, by sheer chance, had stumbled upon the apartment building and gone inside, watched in awe. Jonas had some sort of accent; it made him sound like he was saying "McClosskey" rather than "McClousky".

Jonas was a Quinterian, born on the outskirts of the kingdom of Quinteria five years before it was annexed by the Overking (this sort of annexing of kingdoms happened an awful lot). He was taught Agkeihtow from a young age by an old monk named Ursol, who lived in a monastery on a nearby mountain. He was part of a cult of sorts which worshipped Nature, and Agkeihtow was their defensive form of martial arts. He had served in the Enri Djirin for three and a half years, and was skilled with the quarterstaff, the sword, the pike, and the battleax. He had risen quickly through the ranks of the Enri to the level of Djirak, or "King's Lieutenant", and answered only to the Overking and his council of advisors that ruled from the capital. He had fought against the insurrectionists of Turrellia and their allies, though the war was lost and Turrellia became the Union of Turrellian Territories and was ruled by the Turrellian council. He also had an accent (because of his nativity) and pronounced his j's like h's.

Kallwyn looked at Jonas, who hadn't noticed him yet, and said nothing.

"On-on the table," stuttered Jack.

"Listen, McClousky," Jonas said. "This is how it's going to go. I'm going to get off you. You're going to grab that kid's money from the table *plus* fifty courah for the hustle, and if you even think about backstabbing me, I'll break your neck."

"F-fifty?" Jack said, incredulously. "That's my earnings for a week—"

Jonas tightened the pressure he held on Jack's windpipe.

"O-okay," Jack said. Jonas got off him and moved towards the table, his hands in the air and his steps slow. He grabbed two five-courah pieces and then another ten, putting them all in a pouch and shuffling back over to Jonas.

Meanwhile, Kallwyn was slowly retreating from Jonas, being as quiet as possible. Jonas looked at him, caught his eye, and winked.

Jack returned with a sack, jingling with coins.

Jonas took it and began counting.

After a while, he handed Jack back two five-courah coins, and said, "Don't try to bribe me. Now get out of my sight."

Jack ran back into the room and shut the door.

Jonas walked over to Kallwyn and handed him the bag of money. “Fifty courah more for your troubles, young man. But I recommend not placing questionable bets in the future.”

“Th–thank you,” Kallwyn stammered. The man had gone from quiet rage to normal, casual behavior in a matter of minutes. Kallwyn had heard about people who changed personalities – bipolar, they were called. Kallwyn decided not to take his chances with the man. He adjusted his grip on the sack and turned to walk away.

“Stop,” Jonas said quietly.

“I really need to go, sir...” Kallwyn began, but Jonas cut him off.

“No, do you hear that?” he asked, quietly still.

Kallwyn listened carefully; and indeed, he could hear something: heavy footsteps. Coming their way.

“Get behind me,” Jonas said quickly, a little louder. Kallwyn obliged.

A knock, rather loud, sounded on the door. Then Kallwyn could hear the door being thrown open.

But to maintain suspense, or what little has been left by the incompetent writer, we will switch subjects.

There was more to Jonas than it seemed. He had not just been a Dji’Rak in the Enri Djirin, he had deserted his post. He had escaped to b’Zheouh after leaving the Enri Djirin subsequent to the end of the Turrellian Wars, due to the Overking’s loose hold on b’Zheouh and the surrounding territory. This may have been because there was no standing garrison for several miles, and there were so many uprisings that the Overking was on the verge of letting it secede and become its own city–state. The only problem was that there was no efficient way for b’Zheouh to self–govern. All these problems compounded and made b’Zheouh the ideal place for Jonas and many others to hide, such as Jack.

In addition, b’Zheouh was a safe haven for international criminals who likely would not put up with Kings’ men ransacking the place from time to time, and the Overking understood this, so he let it be. He did, however, keep pushing for b’Zheouh to form its own government. Some things were too hard to keep hold of.

The Reef Armada, belonging to the legendary and ferocious pirate captain Christopher Reef, had once taken hold of b’Zheouh and occupied it until there was nothing left to plunder. The general populace didn’t mind terribly much, and took to throwing large gatherings for Reef and his crew, along with the crews of his seven other ships. This had made b’Zheouh very poor for several years until one day, the Overking took pity on it and sent large amounts of money to the harbor to help out with reconstruction. The money was given to the pirates as thanks for them not killing all the people of b’Zheouh, and the port remained poor for a while. A wealthy merchant named Samuel Derrick brought five cargo ships full of tobacco and spice, which Reef and his armada plundered and sunk. They later gave the cargo of the merchant fleet to the people of b’Zheouh as a thank–you gesture for their hospitality some years earlier.

A certain Ribbon Jameson was a lesser captain in the Reef Armada, after ditching the crew of the ship he had “borrowed” from the pirates who attacked Sahmonvale. He had taken the ship as a gift to the great Christopher Reef when he had heard of the pirate’s notoriety. Captain Reef had let him keep the ship, given him a loyal crew of pirates, and allowed Ribbon to join the armada. This is largely unimportant as it seems unlikely that Ribbon will ever reunite with his brother Kallwyn, but it was interesting to think about and the author felt the need to explain it, in an attempt to aggravate the reader and allow the suspenseful feelings to accumulate in said reader’s mind.

But now, back to Jonas and Kallwyn’s predicament.

“Jonas Raul, you are under arrest for deserting your post of the Enri Djirin and allowing your regiment to fail against the rebellious stragglers of Turrellia!” a voice yelled.

“Listen closely, boy,” Jonas said, “We’re going to have to fight our way out.”

“O—okay,” Kallwyn reluctantly replied.

“They’ll see you with me and they’ll assume you’re an accomplice,” Jonas continued, “so can you fight?”

“I can’t—” Kallwyn began, then said, “I can use a sword?”

“No use,” Jonas said, “You’re going to have to run.”

“Okay,” Kallwyn said. He turned towards Jack’s door, and Jonas opened it. Jack looked quizzically and somewhat fearfully in their direction, for Kallwyn and Jonas respectively.

“Listen, McClousky, if you want to live, you’re going to take this boy out the back. No swindling, now. You’re going to take him somewhere safe and forget he existed.”

“Y—yeah...”

“Now!”

Jack scrambled to grab Kallwyn’s arm and ran over to the back exit, pulling him out the door. Kallwyn surreptitiously pocketed a knife from Jack’s table and continued following him, exiting the apartment and dashing off into the sunny morning.