

## The Race

Tiro had spent his whole life training for this moment. His first real chariot race! He could feel his heart thumping in his chest. The noise of the crowd was the loudest sound he had ever heard. On the other side of the gate in front of him, 150,000 Roman citizens were cheering for their favourite teams and racers. Some of them would be cheering for his team, the Sky Blues. He looked down at his bright blue clothes and felt a surge of pride.

"I've made it," he thought. "This is it!"

There were eight charioteers in Tiro's race. Two racers from each team: the Reds, the Whites, Tiro's Sky Blues and the Greens. For as long as anyone could remember, the Sky Blues and the Greens had hated each other. They would do anything to win. But today the Greens had the advantage. One of the greatest riders alive, Scorpus, was racing for them.

"He's won over a thousand races," Tiro worried, "and this is my first one! How can I beat him?"

"Are you ready, Tiro?" shouted Flavus, Tiro's teammate.

"I'm ready!" Tiro called back, but he could feel himself getting nervous.

"Remember what I told you!" Flavus yelled again. "Ride hard, ride fast, and whatever you do, don't hit the spina!"

The spina was a low barrier that ran down the middle of the race track like a long, thin island in a sea of sand. It separated one straight part of the circuit from the other. Tiro knew that he would have to make fast turns around each end of it if he was going to win. But what if he turned too fast and lost control? He did not want to think about that.

Suddenly, the crowd became hushed. Tiro knew that the race was about to start. Out in the arena, the dignitary who had funded the races was standing up. The crowd leaned forward in their seats as he slowly raised his arm. Clutched in his hand was a piece of bright white cloth. He held it aloft for a few moments, then dropped it with a flourish. The crowd erupted. The race had begun!

The gate in front of Tiro crashed open, and blazing sunlight flashed into his eyes. For a few moments he was blinded. By the time he had recovered, the other racers were already dashing ahead.

"Come on!" he cried to his horses, and they leapt forward. All around him the air was filled with deafening cheers, thundering hoof beats and the rumble of juddering chariot wheels.

Ahead of Tiro the rest of the competitors were vying for the lead. Chariots swerved into each other as each rider tried to force his rivals to the outside of the track. Everyone knew that the closer you were to the spina, the faster your lap times would be. A charioteer from the Red team was at the front, but Tiro could see that Scorpus and his Green teammate were catching up. As the three chariots turned at the end of the spina, Scorpus raised his whip. Given the signal, Scorpus' teammate crashed violently into the Red chariot. Tiro watched in horror as the Red rider was knocked off his feet. His horses pulled away, and both the Greens were through!

"Jupiter protect me!" thought Tiro. "What a move!"

As the riders finished the first lap, a servant took a large, egg-shaped stone off a platform on the spina. One lap was complete.

The race was so fast! Riders tried to hit each other with their whips. Servants carrying buckets threw water on Tiro's chariot wheels as he rode past. He was glad when they did. Sometimes the wheels rubbed too much where they were attached to the chariot, and Flavus had told him about races where the wooden wheels had caught fire!

After five laps, the two Green chariots were still in the lead, but Flavus was catching them up. Tiro was looking for any chance to overtake the Reds and Whites. Suddenly there was a space in front of him! The two Red chariots had pushed the White riders to the edge of the track. This was Tiro's chance!

"Go! Go! Go!" he cried to his horses, and rushed through the gap. He could hear his opponents shouting angrily behind him. They had been taken by surprise. He was through!

The crowd roared. As he turned at the end of the spina, Tiro took a quick look at the stone eggs. A servant had just taken another one down. There was only one left. The final lap had begun!

Tiro could hear his horses gasping for breath as he drove them even harder. He was desperate to catch up to the leaders. He could see that Flavus was trying to overtake the two Green chariots. All three of them were alongside each other. The cheers of the crowd grew even louder.

Then Scopus raised his whip.

"No!" Tiro screamed. "Flavus! Watch out!"

It was too late. The other Green rider turned and slammed into Flavus' chariot. With a terrible cracking sound, the wheels of both chariots shattered. Giant splinters flew into the air. Tiro watched horrified as both riders were thrown to the ground.

Scopus yelled triumphantly.

Tiro was shocked by what had happened. But when he heard Scopus cheering, he became angry.

"Scopus! I'll never let you win!" Tiro shouted vengefully. He urged his horses on, and with each hoof beat he closed the gap.

The final turn loomed ahead. Tiro was now close enough to Scopus to see the green ribbons and pearls which decorated the champion's horses.

"You're in trouble, boy!" Scopus called, mockingly. "Are you trying to challenge me? Do you want the same fate as Flavus? I can arrange it!"

"Just try it!" Tiro barked back. "You haven't got a teammate to help you now, old man!"

With a snarl of rage, Scopus pulled hard on his reins. His chariot swerved towards Tiro. But Tiro was ready. He slowed his horses down and Scopus shot past in front of him, leaving a gap on the inside. Realising he had been tricked, Scopus turned his chariot as hard as he could to get back in front of Tiro. But he turned too hard. He turned too fast. With an enormous crash, his chariot collided with the golden columns at the end of the spina and spun into the air. Scopus tumbled to the ground.

Tiro could not believe it! He was in first place! As he crossed the finishing line, he looked up at the crowd. People were waving pieces of bright blue cloth and the arena was filled with cheers. Servants ran towards him, slowed down his horses and helped him out of his chariot. Then Tiro saw Flavus sitting at the side of the track. He looked dazed, but alright. Tiro shouted joyfully. He had won!

By Ed Moss

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The Race – 4a – Text

## The Race – Oral Teacher Questions

What was Tiro waiting behind before the race began? (AF2) **A gate.**

Can you think of any groups of people nowadays who are like the Sky Blues and the Greens? (AF7) **Various answers, with justification. Any teams who compete regularly and have a long rivalry.**

What was the race track made of? (AF3) **Sand.**

What shape do you think the race track was? (AF3) **A long oval or O-shape, with two straight sides and two curved turns.**

Why did Tiro not want to think about turning too fast at the end of the spina? (AF3) **If he turned too fast he might lose control or crash, and the thought of that is horrible and scary.**

Who started the race and how did they do it? (AF2) **A dignitary held up and then dropped a piece of white cloth.**

Why do you think the author wrote that the crowd 'erupted' when the race began? (AF5) **When a volcano erupts, there is suddenly a lot of noise and a lot of motion. When the race began, the crowd were suddenly very loud and full of movement.**

Why has the author described the horses' hoof beats as 'thundering'? (AF5) **The noise they were making was very loud and sounded like a rumble of thunder.**

Why would a charioteer try to force other racers to the outside of the track? (AF3) **If you were closer to the spina, you would have faster lap times. If your opponents were further away from the spina, they would have slower lap times.**

How do you think Tiro was feeling when he said "Jupiter protect me!?" (AF3) **Amazed or shocked at the move the Green team had just made and scared that they might do the same thing to him.**

Why might the wooden wheels rubbing against the wooden chariot cause a fire? (AF7) **If two pieces of wood rub together too hard, the friction between them can cause heat and a fire.**

What were the egg-shaped stones used for? (AF3) **Marking how many laps were left in the race.**

What does the word 'snarl' make you think Scopus was like as a person? Why? (AF5) **Various answers, with justification: wild; like an animal; scary; angry; aggressive; proud (because he has just been insulted and responds so angrily); other answers possible.**

Which part of the story was the most exciting? Why? (AF6) **Various answers, with justification.**

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Write the meaning of each of these words. (AF2)

citizens \_\_\_\_\_

surge \_\_\_\_\_

dignitary \_\_\_\_\_

funded \_\_\_\_\_

aloft \_\_\_\_\_

juddering \_\_\_\_\_

vying \_\_\_\_\_

charioteer \_\_\_\_\_

violently \_\_\_\_\_

triumphantly \_\_\_\_\_

vengefully \_\_\_\_\_

mockingly \_\_\_\_\_

collided \_\_\_\_\_

## The Race – Vocab 2

Write five extended sentences. Each one must include two different purple vocabulary words from the text. You may not use the same word twice.

Example: Sam kept his arms aloft while he was on the rollercoaster, even though it was juddering the whole way round.

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Write the meaning of each of these words. (AF2)

citizens – members of a particular country or city who have certain rights

surge – a sudden and great increase

dignitary – important person in society

funded – paid for

aloft – up in the air, or in a higher position

juddering – shaking powerfully or violently

vying – competing

charioteer – person who drives a chariot

violently – in a forceful, harmful or extreme way

triumphantly – happily and proudly, because of having achieved something

vengefully – in a way that takes or wants revenge for something

mockingly – in a way that makes fun of someone

collided – crashed together



Look again at how speech marks (" ") are used in the story. Whenever a character speaks, the words they say have speech marks around them, like this:

"Remember what I told you!" Flavus yelled again. "Ride hard, ride fast, and whatever you do, don't hit the spina!"

Here is a conversation between Tiro and Flavus after the race. Put speech marks in the correct places in each sentence.

Remember: speech marks go around everything a character actually says.

Flavus, are you alright? called Tiro when he saw his friend.

I think so, said Flavus, but I won't be able to race for a while!

Concerned for him, Tiro asked, How bad was the fall? What did you hurt?

My left arm, groaned Flavus. He was clearly in pain. I landed right on it, he explained, and I think it might be broken!

Flavus held up his arm to show Tiro. A big bruise was already growing blue and black under the skin.

Ouch! That looks awful! Tiro exclaimed. But you've been lucky, Flavus! A broken arm is a lot better than it might have been.

You're right about that, Flavus agreed. I'll race again, you'll see.

And next time we'll both beat Scopus! Tiro cried.

Flavus nodded. You're right about that too! he laughed.

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