

BROOD WORLD BARBARIAN

by

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I

Sand, fear, blood and gawkers – the trivia of a thousand arenas on a thousand planets in a thousand ages. I am an athlete of great proportions, strength and skill – one who kills by order of the gawkers or my master, whichever calls first – and I am one soon to be killed.

She came yesterday on the day of the games after I had neatly decapitated the former champion of the Sabre worlds by means of wrist pressors only. Declared the season's Grand Champion, head garlanded with red-brandy vines, chest proudly extended against chest band, I swaggered away from the game's space on wrist pressors only, as if to say, *Look at me, you weaklings. I have bested your best. Now who is master and who is slave?*

Their sun of a thousand yellow rays beat down on my back as I pushed way across the game's space into the lower ramp to my cage, expecting there to relax with wine, song and the caress of the opposite sex, as, I suppose, has been done by my kind for ages past.

Then she came. The lights burned brightly as the crowd surged past our flux cages. The public was not satisfied with the death, pain and sadism of the arena, but demanded that my cage – all our cages – be kept open to public gathering. Like my cellmates I was a freakish one-G animal, trained by means of gravitylike pressor and tractor beams to tear and hew at others.

She walked with her father. He, merely a seven-tenths-G animal, was human and shaped like myself. He had a strong smile, cropped grey hair and rugged features set off by sunken eyes, a bulbous nose and bright, straight teeth. Oh God! How I hated that animal – that all-powerful, all-great leader of the Sabre planets. Trevic Strenger and his family walked in public gathering to view *me*, this season's Grand Champion, in my 'natural' habitat!

First came the retinue of sycophants and guards. Cloaked in tight plastic of weblon to nullify pressor and tractor rays, they stationed themselves to one side of my cage, holding the crowded path open for the dictator Strenger and his family.

I threw my wine outward to vent my disgust and anger, helplessly watching as it struck the surrounding magnetic field, to be sucked inward and downward instantaneously as the powerful field latched onto minute iron particles in the liquid.

They didn't yield an inch nor did they acknowledge my act by even a twitch of the mouth – except Trevic Strenger. He passed his hand back to his beautiful wife and gently tugged her forward so as not to miss the show, just as he did the night I was taken, five years ago, on my rocky planet.

I came from an unusual brood and, had I known then what I now know, even their fleetest hunters would have gone back to the ship empty. My brood cell – brothers, sisters, mother and father – had left me for the day. I tossed rocks at the passing pack animals below our cave, not aware of the hunters swooping over me, preparing to entangle me in their rays and beams. I spat at Trevic with the thought, and he pulled his head back to laugh, just as he had the day I was brought, bound and struggling before him.

Oh, I was more than a barbarian from the Planet of Rocks. I was an educated barbarian, for their pleasure would not be enough unless they knew that inside of each gladiator lay a trapped, cunning and scheming modern mind – a mind equal perhaps even to their own in knowledge, yet trapped by their science and their orders to fight on a barbaric level of their choice. I spat again when I thought of their educators and how facts were poured into my animal brain day and night, indiscriminate facts. Did you know that a man named Plato once said, “Know thyself”?

I spat again in honour of such useless information.

His wife’s face strained at her husband’s sadistic laughter and I imagined that she disapproved. Then I vowed some day to kill Trevic Strenger with my own bare hands. I watched the daughter.

She pushed through the crowd and I saw perfection. I had known many other women, slave women thrown to us along with victory wines and victory songs. I had seen none with the grace, the litheness, the colour, the shadows of this one. Daughter of a mad king and a radiant slave-queen, she was – and her eyes seemed to glow with a kind of empathy for me I had never before known outside of the brood chamber.

I opened my gnarled fists, dropping my cups, and sprang to the field’s side. My chest band pulsed with heat as its magnetic field fought against the lines of force. I strained my body mightily to bring it closer to her side until only inches separated us and my metal chest-belt glowed cherry red from hysteresis.

Across those billions of lines of flux sprang the stronger invisible rays of my love. Her blue eyes met my grey ones and mine clung while the world dissolved around us. Though worlds of differing customs and a powerful kingdom lay between us, I vowed to reach her as deeply and strongly as I had just vowed to kill her father.

Would Patricia Strenger respond to me? Could a barbaric brood-world creature reach her more refined heart? Though doubt assailed my thoughts, I clung to my twin emotions of hate for her father and my new-born love for her.

“Barbarian,” he said, “you must come to terms with your simple emotions. In you lie only the pure emotions – hate, love, anger – not any refined, civilised, subtle and complex ones.”

Snarling, I threw my drinking vessel at him, only to see it stop in mid-air, then retreat backward from the invisible wall. He did not even laugh at my anger.

“Our people crave heroes,” he continued evenly. “You may be a great one. With gladiator success come civilised opportunities which would normally be denied to one of your kind. You may soon see complete freedom, then complete citizenship with all the rights and privileges of a Sabre citizen. Shall we drop this silly feud now?”

Hate boiled in me like a hidden volcano and I did not answer.

Trevic Strenger paused silently to watch my heaving chest, then added: “After all, barbarian, had it not been you who was captured, another from your brood world would now be standing where you are –

another would now be offered full education, citizenship and opportunity for world-wide adulation.”

I could not control my emotions. So complete was my hatred for this man who had torn me from brood home that my whole muscular body convulsed as I spat directly at his face.

Without change of tone in his voice he said, “Tomorrow I will introduce you to Urut of Ewit, a two-point-five-G champion.”

I sneered, as I had yet to learn of either Ewit or Urut of Ewit and therefore lacked comprehension of his plans for the morrow.

Trevic narrowed his browless eyes to watch as he bored in with his varied rapierlike pieces of knowledge, “Urut can crush rocks on your planet between his two hands. On his world a day lasts seven of yours. A day’s work to him means seven times twenty-four or one hundred and sixty-eight of your hours. Can you fight him even one of his days, Grand Champion?”

I knew the answer. Urut’s skin would be as tough as rock, his stamina far beyond any normal one-G human’s bounds, and his strength would be like ordinary muscle taut against the pressure of invariant hydraulic presses. I would most surely die tomorrow. I knew it and Trevic Strenger knew it. But I spat again in barbaric defiance.

II

I awoke in the morning to the sounds of tractor and pressor duels around me and knew I had overslept on this, my last day. According to my educated brain, thousands of years before a certain B. Franklin had said, *Early to bed and early to rise will make a man healthy, wealthy and wise.*

I paused briefly in disgust at giving thought to such revolting associations. Why had not my mind been permitted to remain that of a normal brood-world barbarian?

I bound my two pressor beams to my wrists and my two tractor beams to my ankles and gyrated my body through the endless contortions of tension and countertension so necessary to the modern gladiator.

I pulled my leg muscles to their limit of endurance, slowly but surely overcoming the tractor-versus-tractor configuration. Then, and so rapidly that the eye would be unable to follow, I twisted my body muscles to push pressor against pressor until, biceps bulging, I heard the faint click of wrist plate against wrist plate, signifying I had once again overcome the hidden power of my death machinery.

Only then did I eat lightly, my good nature returning slowly as I felt a sense of well-being.

Again I passed my body through every one of the hard-learned exercises designed to test to the utmost one muscle against another, passing through the last just as the aurora at the side of my cage indicated that I was to move out into the arena.

To avoid death from chest-band pressure, as my cell slowly contracted around me, I moved forward, following the energy glow. There, under the beat of their merciless sun, was the open arena, its sand, its

hate-driven gawkers, its blood of the past and psychic blood yet to flow.

Pushing my way toward the ellipsoid's nearest focus, I then squinted to see the squat hulk of Urut of Ewit at the far end.

The crowd of blood-mongers surrounding our large cage, except at floor level, howled on my entry. Knowing I was the handicapped, they screamed for Urut's blood which, could I but arrange it, would be most happily furnished them – for it was his blood or mine.

Almost I felt sorry for that hulk – short, broad of torso, leg and arm; flat-headed with parrotlike lips; humanoid of form and lizard-hided of skin.

My survival was at stake and my mind swivelled back to life-and-death calculations. He had the sun. Trevic Strenger would have seen to that. He had more. As strong as I was, my muscles were but one-G-trained. As quick as I was, he would act faster. Very probably I would not find any weak spot in his natural armour, whereas to him I was but an anthropomorphic jellyfish.

In a gladiator's daze I calculated my survival paths overlong – already he was swimming toward me with tractors and pressors working together.

No sooner had I tensed to meet his first attack than he was beyond me, already rebounding from the magnetic wall.

I pushed both tractors outward at the widest angle of my legs, unconsciously reaching for the bedrock which I knew to exist there. Both arms were folded against my chest band to place pressors in their firmest position. He struck like a ten-ton boulder rolling down the mountainside. My muscle-banded legs vibrated with the pressure and my reserves soon evaporated.

His right tractor could reach around to the side of my head to hold while his left reached to my right side and I knew scant instants stood between me and decapitation.

More in instinctive desperation than for any reason I switched pressors down low and slipped my body under his. He rocketed overhead to slam mightily against the far side of the arena's shield, chest band glowing red, while I twisted around from back to belly on the sand floor.

Still no strategy came to my mind. Can a pygmy subdue the elephant? Can the ant topple the pedestrian? Can a simple one-G human resist for long the heavy-planet man under one-G conditions?

I concentrated every bit of thought and will on my survival. Brute force against inhuman force was my only strategy.

He sliced through the air again and I dodged. He brought both legs into play to cut me in two and I again dodged. He tried the ploy of alternating leg tractors and arm pressors and I eluded him. Not until he sat above me in the overhead tractor-lock position did my strategy bloom. Though only tiny moments of time were involved, my thoughts ran as follows.

Why can I dodge this lightninglike man so easily? How is it he misuses his speed so much? Could it be that he is unused to fighting in a one-G environment – that this is his first experience on such a light world? If so, his timing must be too fast and I am not really eluding him. He misses me and then I dodge.

Using tractors, pressors, fingers and toes, I crawled excruciatingly slowly across the bottom until his tractors caught bedrock below and I could slide out from under.

He jabbed down with pressors but this time I was ready. I kicked my tractors into his squat belly and followed behind his moving arms with my own pressors. He somersaulted then and pinwheeled before catching himself.

Now I had the trick. Every time he moved I swung either tractor or pressor, catching his motion from behind and enforcing it. I used his own strength and speed against him until finally, during one complex manoeuvre where his tractors reinforced his pressor movement, I doubly reinforced his action with my pressors and tractors and his two arms snapped.

The gawkers screamed and howled for blood but I had other ideas. Already exhausted, I doubted my ability to penetrate his thick hide, though he lay helpless. More important to me than his destruction were the death of another and the love of a third.

Urut floated around and around on tractors, frantically twisting his body to redirect his dangling arms and their pressors. I shot forward and spoke for the first time.

“Urut. Co-operate with me and live to fight another day.”

In a high, squeaking voice he warily asked, “What is it you want?”

“I want out of this cage and you can help. What they do to me outside and where I go should be of no concern to anyone but me – and no one will suspect your help in what will follow.”

“What do I do?”

“I am going to use both pressors and tractors to propel myself through the cage. Only if I go very quickly will my chest band remain sufficiently cool for me to survive. I am going to place myself within range of your tractors and with their help, and the quickness of your legs, I can crash through. Will you do this, Urut?”

“But you will die if we are not quick enough. Why should you place yourself within my control when you have already won?”

“Urut, my friend, you and I have no quarrel. We have never had. We fight only to survive – now let us help each other live. I want freedom and revenge. You want your life. Why should we not bargain?”

The crowd began the death chant.

“Blood – blood! Kill the hulk! Kill the hulk –”

I could tell from their frenzy that soon something must be done or their passion would be on all of us. Urut could also sense it. The idea of mutual help was not yet fully integrated in his mind but he nodded.

“May your mud-nest be pleasing!”

I swung to the other side of the arena to begin my plan.

From hundreds of previous fights I knew every inch of arena bedrock and I used the knowledge to advantage. I flung wrist pressors at each point behind me and ankle tractors ahead of me, accelerating swiftly in line with Urut. The crowd hushed and Urut patiently moved his hulk into position for the throw.

I swung past his body swiftly. More swiftly still he lashed onto me with both tractors webbed together. I felt the fringe of their beams pass my arms, then my head and thick neck absorbed the pull and I was flung up to and against the magnetic field surrounding us.

My chest band glowed and part of my body tried to wrench itself backward – but still onward and through I passed. I flew over the heads of those in the first tiers, then plowed into the next ranks.

Heads popped; chest, arm and leg bones snapped. I arose amidst the gore of dead and dying gawkers. Their hush changed to screams. Pandemonium reigned.

A small number in the crowd rushed to the exits but the majority stood shouting, “Champion! Champion! Champion!”

Over and over again their acknowledgement echoed – like the beating of surf on the rocky shores – until my very bones vibrated with the chant. Never before had one escaped the magnetic arena and the crowd was wild with enthusiasm.

I should have trusted to my judgement of their emotion. My next move was utterly foolish. I swung out to reach for Trevic Strenger, hoping to crush his thick neck between my pressors. Above and below me and all around me flew his weblon-encased protectors.

High over me were the platforms of heavy rays, while on each side were the smaller hand weapons – but I had agility, speed and co-ordination far beyond those of any group of Strenger guards. I had one tactic which would catch them by surprise. My muscles were trained to use beams but my mind was trained to use muscles. With those I bowled over the first group, tumbling weapon and guard onto the tiers below.

III

Fighting one-G animals in an open environment and with full knowledge of their beams and rays, I was more than a match for them all. But no matter how I hacked and hewed, how cleverly I spilled their heavy weapons, I still could not reach Strenger. I can see him yet in my memory, sitting back, watching with faint amusement as I tossed his guards here and there like feathers – only to find more guards taking their places.

The gawkers shrieked with pleasure over this new form of entertainment and I turned and ran, dashing up beyond the seat rims, finding space between the roof and two structural pressor beams to squeeze my bulky body through.

Outside the arena I fell several hundred feet before my rays caught bedrock below and I could twist myself across the pylons and roadways of this ungodly civilisation to search for the city’s end and silent peace.

Behind me, perhaps a mile away, the guards boiled out from the arena area and I swept down low below their sight level. Another mile and another and another – when would the city end?

Then little by little trees, parks and farms replaced city blocks, until only farm land and tall mountains lay ahead. That first night I slept in peace among the wild foothills of this strange world, free for the first

time since being taken from my brood world. In my dreams lived the face of Strenger – but also in my dreams was the sad, melancholy face of Patricia and my body longed for both in their proper place.

The morning sun no longer seemed so hot and sultry. The air seemed fresher and the planet, even with its strange flora and fauna, appeared friendly. I speared a small carnivore with a tractor beam, drank fresh water and ate the raw meat, then washed and rested while I thought.

Were I to go back to the city my large bulk would easily identify me as the Champion. My muscles would be impossible to hide in this civilisation.

Farmers I knew about because of my helter-skelter education – I knew, for example, that some Sabre planet genius had called farmers stewards of the state. Could I trust the farmer not to turn me in for one of Strenger's high rewards? I thought not.

Though I searched my brain for other informative tidbits on this society, I concluded that only the mountains and hills would hide me.

I removed my tractors and pressors, fastening them to my chest band by means of twisted fibres, then unhesitatingly I strode off toward the snow-capped mountains ahead.

Day followed day and night followed night. I easily speared game with tractor or pressor while I followed the animal trails from elevation to elevation. My body stayed in trim and my hate gradually oozed outward as my path came closer to the appearance of rocky plateaux similar to my brood world – all, that is, except the tiny, reserved corner of my emotions which repeated my need over and over.

Kill Strenger.

The rocky path wound upward and I trod closer to the snowy peaks, my body now covered with animal skins for warmth. Slowly the rock turned to snow, then snow to mixed snow and ice, glazing white while I moved onward and upward, never hurrying, never slowing.

Miles of ice were crossed and only once did I have to pull myself from a deep crevice by means of a tractor beam. Finally the downslope snow line was reached on the mountain's other side. I stepped with relief into familiar rocky plateaux, fully expecting a similarly leisurely pace downward. Then it happened.

It was Strenger again. I was caught. His men dropped the cage neatly over my body and turned the field on high. He came from behind the rocks, with his bold smile and just looked, hands folded against his chest.

“The gawkers now love you, barbarian, and we can still make a truce. Come, I invite you to bury your hatred. You are one of the greatest of our world's champions – over all time – and it saddens me, your waste. By popular demand I can now release you from gladiator status to become a free citizen. But how can I permit a hate-driven barbarian to roam free among us?”

I showed my feeling by emitting a low growl. I clenched my fists, imagining his thick neck in my hands.

Trevic beckoned his retainers to lower the cage. He found a convenient rock upon which to sit while he pleaded his case again with me.

“Know this, barbarian. Your use of tractor and pressor beams can be traced wherever you go on the Sabre planets. Even so, you have no further need for them, no matter what your decision.”

He motioned with his finger and my cage began to tighten until my chest band squeezed me from all directions. Weblon-encased tools drove through my shield and skilfully cut my beams from my chest band, after which the cage was restored in size.

“Your chest band is made of the world’s strongest metal. It cannot be removed without special scientific tools. Wherever you wear it, you are subject to immediate seizure and capture. Do you still wish these marks of the gladiator?”

My tongue finally loosed.

I spoke in an angry voice. “You tore me from my brood world without my permission, mad king, and I shall one day kill you!”

Unable to reason with me further, he beckoned his men forward. My cage was lifted by weblon devices and I continued my trans-mountain flight as his captive.

IV

They towed me farther into the mountains, disregarding any inconvenience inertia might make to my caged body. My chest band glowed again and again as my body bounced off the cage’s sides.

Perhaps fifty miles inward, we followed another rocky path down to the valley of our destination. Below us, laid out in neat geometrical array, were the energy cages of thousands of humans.

Walking like tiny bugs between each cage were the weblon-protected guards who passed out either food or water or else the whip – whichever seemed most appropriate for the moment.

A scrap of random information forced its way into my conscious mind – forced, I suppose, by the association of the antlike men far below. Only a century ago someone named G. Harcel had said, “Men are tiny bugs once they have seen their souls.”

Could any information be more useless at a time like this?

High on one side were the mine tailings, glistening red from the evening sun. Immediately behind those tailings stood the factory, puffing out streamers of noxious gases which, I eventually learned, represented part of the physical and chemical wastes resulting from separating weblon metal from the ores found deep in the planet’s crust.

My cage was tugged next to a larger one. The aurora along the side, signifying an opening in my cage, burned brightly and I hurried across into the larger. Trevic Strenger paid his last respects then.

“Enjoy your new lessons, barbarian. When you have learned more, find a way to contact me. Perhaps we may yet be friends.”

He walked away and I flung myself furiously at my magnetic shield.

My routine was simple. Each day, every day, I was chained to a row of ten other prisoners who walked two miles along the valley floor and three miles downward on sloping shafts to our work area. Here alternating tractor-pressor beams were given to us, each a model considered too large for a single human to support.

Two of us would hold the mining tool, aiming it at the green streak of weblon metal running throughout the enormous, partly natural and partly man-made caverns. The alternating tractor-pressor forces acted swiftly on the cavern walls, grinding all but the impervious weblon metal to thin mono-molecular layers.

Follow-up crews sucked up the dust-mixed metal and transported it back to the surface, where further chemical and physical processes separated the pure weblon metal from the mono-molecular dust layers. Large ships transported the purified weblon to other industrial locations for treatment into forms and shapes for use wherever beam neutrality was required.

It was obvious from the beginning that I was different from the others. Most were political prisoners with only puny muscles. Most were gregarious creatures, friendly with one another, some counting days until their release while others were hopelessly resigned to making the best of a lifetime under lock and chain.

Though I was as sociable as anyone on my brood world, here I snarled and spat until, like one with a great scabrous disease, I was avoided by all.

Enemies were easy to make. The chip on my shoulder was as big as a sturdy oak, balanced precariously and waiting patiently for anyone to tip its trunk toward the ground.

It took only one or two short tussles for my strength, agility and training to show.

We were fed in line and normally the distance between my chained figure and others in my line was the maximum length of chain between us. One day a particularly fast, aggressive person bumped against my broad body in his eagerness to get nourishment. I swung around snarling, grabbed his neck between my giant paws and began to squeeze the life from him.

Only the whips of the guards and the combined pulls of other prisoners dragged me from his body while life still throbbed in him.

Another day my reflexes were sufficiently quick to grab the whip from a guard as he swung its tip toward me. I turned the whip around and nearly lacerated the guard to death before others could stop me.

That was the day all of them, prisoners and guards alike, combined positive efforts against me. That I was not only asocial but beyond the restraints of any ordinary prison had now become obvious.

In the first attempt at my life one of the heavy tractor-pressor beam generators was tipped on me from a height of about fifteen feet. Fortunately my gladiator-honed senses caught the movement and I easily side-stepped and safely evaded what seemed to me was the generator's slow fall. I didn't catch on then.

The next time a small, wiry prisoner pushed his body against mine in such a way that I tumbled backward into the yawning black chasm below us. I twisted and caught the edge of the chasm's rim and quickly drew myself upward.

Already the guards had moved my attacker beyond reach, passing him quickly to the surface to become part of a different and unreachable work crew. It was then I began to suspect.

One day the guards left our work crew. All became quiet and I looked up from my work to see every eye staring at me. Some had grasped rocks and stones while others grabbed the neck chains lying

nearby. Slowly the group closed in on me, eyes glazed and muscles taut.

I moved swiftly to my gladiator's stance and waited quietly. Every sense on the alert, I could place every one of the nine around me. How little they knew of my training. None had access to gladiator power beams and I was now faced with a purely two-dimensional problem.

The rocks came first and I easily dodged them. Then, in quick resolve, all nine swooped in toward me. I rushed through the circle, grabbing the nearest one holding the chain. Lifting him from the ground I flailed the group, though the chain was still held by two others. Those poor misguided point-seven-G fools had no concept of a gladiator's training and strength.

I flailed until it seemed that none survived. But two had climbed above me during the melee to redirect the mining beam at my body.

I am quick and well co-ordinated but even I could not move as fast as their fingers on the machine's switch.

Quite probably the alternating tractor-pressor beam had never been used on human flesh around these prisoners before. They certainly had no knowledge of the effect of the beams when used this way. I stood my ground and let the waves of current ripple through my body, neither resisting nor helping the flow of alternate tugs and pulls, and my gladiator-trained body as well as my water-based tissue withstood the strains well. Every piece of metal I wore – including my hated chest band and the newly attached neck band – disintegrated into mono-molecular powder as fine as any created in the weblon mines. I was truly free of their hated instruments of capture now.

I leaped to the machine's top and from there crushed any attackers' heads like eggshells. Now only I, the mining machine and the solitude of the caverns remained in this branch of the tunnel. I wondered how long I had before the guards returned.

Behind me lay certain capture. Directly ahead of me lay granitic rock, but to my side lay the deep, perhaps more dangerous chasm. What choice did I have?

I picked up the mining tool and chain, using the latter to tie the tool to my back. Then slowly, using trained fingers and toes, I picked my way down the steep crevice's side, using the slightest of indentations along the wall to support my own two hundred pounds and the additional two hundred on my back.

Down I crawled. Down until my fingers and toes were sore beyond description – down until I reached the first ledge. Here I rested, conserving my strength for the next lap downward. Again and yet again I travelled downward, resting from ledge to ledge, sometimes finding one only when it seemed that my last reserves of strength had been reached. Would I never reach the bottom?

I dropped pebbles down the long, dark, silent tube, hearing only the sibilance of air sweeping around its path – never hearing splash or bounce of its final strike. It was then I paused to consider.

It was highly doubtful that I could go up again, and going farther down seemed useless. Now was the time to unlimber my mining instrument.

Then I pointed the alternating tractor-pressor inward against the chasm's wall and powdered my way forward. The first layer powdered at my feet and swept outward into the chasm below. Soon I was scabbling with my hands and knees to force the dust backward behind me. Fortunately the

mono-molecular layers filled less space than in their more complex forms and air from the chasm swept in behind me as the stone ahead powdered to the floor.

Mile after mile I bored ahead. When tired, I rested. Then I bored again for miles. Days passed. Even my gladiator's physique suffered from lack of nourishment. My body became sluggish, my mind tormented by memories of the sneering laughter and red-spurting throat of Trevic Strenger and by the graceful body and full lips of his daughter. The latter vision filled my mind to overflowing until my muscles responded.

I pressed on, even forgetting which way was up and which down and distrusting my fatigued senses for knowledge of either direction.

Dust filled my mouth, my eyes, my ears and, it seemed, even my mind, until I could go no farther. With one last effort at survival I shoved my poundage, and my machine against the wall, lurched forward. Under sudden acceleration both the machine and my body fell outward and down as the thin wall between my tunnel and the opening broke through.

My body revolved around and around. Centrifugal force flung my arms and legs outward as I plunged through a narrow fissure.

I strained my back, neck and belly muscles to bring my turning to a stop but did not succeed. Light glimmered several hundred feet below and my frustrated mind focused on it until my spinning made it appear a whole galaxy of light particles swinging around me in tighter and tighter circles. My mind let go.

My back and head hit the water first. To this day, I am unaware of the extent of the true damage done to me in the fall.

V

How long did I lie there? Weeks? Days? Minutes? No one will ever know. I do know that hundreds of thousands of scraps of their educative process passed through my mind, only one of which I remembered on regaining consciousness.

“The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to talk of many things: Of shoes – and ships – and sealing wax – Of cabbages – and kings –”

Could any thought have been more out of place and foolish or less useful?

On returning to consciousness, I found my body to be whole and undamaged but bruised terribly. Water was washing over me. Some trickled into my open mouth and some laved my nose and ears, trailing my hair downstream like fine wires extended.

My right arm lay under me, touching the rocky stream bed below. My left arm lay partially submerged, the hand resting on a shallow bank.

My legs were upstream, resting on rock. My eyes were pasted shut by the dust around their rims. Soon I became aware of the mining tool's soft hum and the gentle tugging and pulling of my flesh under its influence.

I waved my right hand around in a circle and felt the broken chain with which I had attached the

mining tool to my chest. I scraped mud from my swollen eyes, opened them and found I could see. Phosphorescent particles emitted sufficient photons for me to view my surroundings dimly. The mining instrument was on and pointing steadily in my direction.

I drank until my shrunken belly was fully distended, then lay back to rest and to sleep peacefully under the gentle vibration and hum of the tractor-pressor beam. Probably never before in history had a human being been subjected so long to the rapid alternate pull and push of the tractor-pressor beam. Would its effect be harmful? I didn't know.

When I awoke I crawled again to the stream, taking my fill. Below me I could see the shining shapes of water creatures, among them the unmistakably welcome shape of a fish. I struck with my right hand and grabbed the unwary creature tightly. Its cold flesh furnished my first nourishment in what seemed like months but may have been only days.

Again I slept, then ate and slept again. Later I walked over to my mining instrument and turned it off.

I felt light-headed, but oddly healthy and not in the least tired. I attributed this to the effect of poisons manufactured by my own system under unusual stress and at the time had no idea of the damage done to my body. I could have acted no differently under the conditions. Suffice it to say that I felt unusually alert and full of a sense of well-being, though attributing all of these characteristics to normal results of excessive stress.

I began my long walk along the stream hopefully toward light, air and freedom, packing the mining instrument on my back once more. The walls of the stream bed became narrower. Soon they reached a point where my broad shoulders could no longer squeeze through. My way forward was finally halted by granite blocks.

With almost a swagger of confidence, certainly more than the moment warranted, I unlimbered the tractor-pressor and blasted my way out.

The ship waited for me at my exit point. Of course – use of tractor or pressor beams anywhere on the planet could be easily followed by Strenger and his men.

I turned too late to re-enter my cavern retreat. A rock bounded from my head and I fell forward to lie unconscious once again.

When I gained consciousness, my feet were trussed together, my arms tied behind my back and my head ached. I was in a cabin. Two gnarled men sat in front of me, alternately eating and gawking. Was I back in the arena? Were these my new keepers?

I strained at the bonds on my hands and feet but the ties were stronger than I. I humped my body to a sitting position and looked at my two captors, hatred washing through me in waves.

“Pretty, ain't he?” the one on my left said to the other.

“Needs a bath though. Think we could oblige him?”

Both stopped eating. One tied a drag rope to my legs and hauled me outside the cabin to a nearby spring. My flesh was torn and bleeding from the sharp rocks and sticks over which I was dragged and my head was still dizzy from the blow on my head, but I uttered no complaint.

They pulled the rope end over an overhanging rock until I was dangling upside down over the water, my head scant inches from its surface. I took a deep breath, expecting the worst. It came. I was dunked under water seven or eight times, probably saved from drowning only by my one-G physique and high lung capacity.

I was dragged back into the cabin, trussed up against the post and forgotten for the time being.

They finished their dinner, checked various instruments lying around the cabin, then turned back to me. The older one – grey-haired and with a stubble-covered chin – was the first to speak directly to me.

“You might as well tell us why you were snooping around our private weblon mine. It’s your only chance of saving your life.”

My mind, now quite confused, failed to function as quickly as it might have done under gladiator conditions. I said nothing.

The one with black hair and coal-black eyes bent his bulk over me and said, “If you are a government agent we will let you go free on another planet. It’s to your advantage to tell us the truth.”

I coughed some water from my burning lungs and said, “I am a gladiator. I have no name.”

“All gladiators have names,” the first one said. “Besides, what would a gladiator be doing using pressor-tractor equipment in these mountains? Come on, fellow – if you value your life – tell us the truth.”

I strained every muscle of my body to burst the bonds. At last my body sagged. I knew a spasm of futility before I lost consciousness again.

I came to inside their ship. The interior was pure luxury and there I learned how the gawkers had searched for me in vain. I was one of the most popular heroes of all Sabre history – my life was public property and not even Trevic Strenger, dictator over all, would dare to violate it openly.

But no trace of me was found until my mining equipment had been sensed by these law-violating miners near their illegal mine.

I was kept bound inside their ship while they checked and double-checked my now clean-shaven features with pictures taken during my gladiator days. Convinced I was truly the escaped Grand Champion, they struck my bonds, not knowing how close they were to true death at the moment.

I soon learned that everywhere I was loved by the people. But I felt certain that I would still be unsafe anywhere on a planet ruled by Trevic Strenger and his type.

I stayed with the mining ship, hoping to get back to my brood world one day. But how could I flee when my two goals of hate and love were here? Not only would deserting them be unnatural to my brood training – it was unnatural to the unusual state of my biology, still deeply hidden from my conscious processes.

Still, in violation of every instinct, I left civilisation behind to flee toward the Planet of Rocks of my birth. Seven long light-years lay ahead, meaning months of travel. Hundreds of thousands of strange worlds would be silently, unknowingly passed as we sped onward. How many contained brood worlds? How many had produced two-and-a-half-G monstrosities like Urut of Ewit? How many

contained Patricia Strengers or Trevic Strengers? How many had educated barbarian champions and how many even held the humanoid form?

The days passed slowly. I became acquainted with the two outlaws. An objective study of their patterns of behaviour gave me a certain recognition of their finer shadings of emotions. All three of us were outside the law but these two still subscribed to certain ethics and species-assisting patterns of behaviour – much as each of the brood helps another for the sake of survival of the whole.

Unlike the brood, they had days when their minds were dominated by mixtures of pure emotions. They certainly exhibited pure forms of overt anger and calm complacency but they also showed fine shadings of moroseness and languor. I began to recognise emotional subtleties and, for the first time, began to question my pure hatred response to Trevic Strenger. Was he really as bad as I had projected or did he, too, have comprehensible feelings and behaviour-motives mixed into his treatment of me?

One day I noted the outlaws' deep concern for one dial on the ship's panel. Daily the dial's indicator swung upward and daily other instruments were checked and rechecked against it. Presently I read their concern – patrols were on our path. A whole fleet crawled toward us, closing in slowly.

There are no manoeuvres that can deceive a determined fleet. Our only hope lay in an act of some god who, out of the goodness of his being and the emptiness of space, would reach outward and hand us some device or means by which to escape.

To make matters worse, I had no place to stand and make the fight mine, using my gladiator's training. I felt trapped like an animal and could almost feel civilisation's magnetic cages crush through my bones again. My chest, where I had worn the metal band of servitude, had healed and was covered with keloids. I wanted no more slavery.

One slim hope remained to me. My captors searched the directory for any kind of planet with breathable air. Then they began long-range perturbation analysis of surrounding stars, hoping to spot planets within range.

One bright yellow sun on our pathway seemed to offer hope and they quickly adjusted our route slightly to pass near its planets. We swung inward in a giant cycloidal loop, and an automatic analysis assured us that one planet, fourth from centre, had breathable, oxidising air.

But now our range was within the patrol's striking power and their beams reached out for hundreds of thousands of miles to vibrate our craft ceaselessly.

Though weakened structurally, we recklessly approached the planet's atmosphere, dropping swiftly into its density to skip and skip again as the craft was buffeted by the force of its own passage. Now weakened further and red from heat, it plunged at even sharper angles until its tail section broke off and our front portion spun uncontrolled toward the water below.

VI

The miners must surely have been killed in the plunge. At the time I attributed my survival to my gladiator's training and my powerful physique. I had bunched my muscles together and dived out of the ship an instant before it splashed.

I hit hard, maybe as hard as Urut had hit me. Maybe a little harder – I don't know. In any case my

body sustained the shock and I swam to the surface, spotting land perhaps ten miles away. Toward this I swam and just before sundown reached the sandy beach where I lay in exhausted stupor.

The jungle ahead of me was unrecognisable. Whether fern or animal, flora or fauna, I could not tell. Only experience would show.

Food was my immediate concern. Next came shelter and water. I rose, rather unnaturally recovered, and strode confidently into the strange organic configurations ahead.

Suddenly my emotional complex dropped from open elation and overwhelming optimism to complete apathy. Death would have seemed a pleasant release. Striving always with my gladiator's training and the stubbornness born of brood world, I consciously searched everywhere without success – no recognisable cause was creating my emotional void.

Down the scale of emotions my feelings plummeted – and slowly and silently the fibrous matting of the jungle undulated toward me. It was white with streaks of grey running through it and gave the appearance of some broad-patterned, supine foliage which moved like a leech. Who could tell what it really was? I wanted to back away but my apathy was too deep. I stood in an abandonment of despair, even squatting so the slimy thing could more easily flow up my body.

My apathy was dense – as dense as thick glue – and the thing nearly covered my back. I squatted lower to let it cover more of me, then felt its acid trickle over my skin. Apathy prevailed – nonetheless, under the stimulus of pain, my gladiator's instinct snapped my body erect and my hands and feet flung the horrible thing from me.

Acid had etched the skin all over my back, neck, arms and shoulders. Just as suddenly as the skin had been destroyed my body began its preconditioned, rapid repairs, though at the time I was too busy to give the phenomenon thought.

It was not yet safe, however. The thing flowed toward me as before and my apathy was as leaden as before. Why should I move when all of life seemed so useless, so hopeless? W. Shakespeare did not quite say it, but my mind, sunken in depths beyond conscious control and mired in the facts of the educators, paraphrased it as: 'O mighty barbarian – dost thou lie low? Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, shrunk to this little measure?'

I will say this about the paraphrase – at least there was some relation between its semantics and my condition of the moment, though there was little else to recommend it.

Yet my fighting instinct had been aroused and at another level of my being I exploringly fought back. First I strove for excitement and the adrenaline lift which accompanies it. Then I strove to force enthusiasm into the cellular portions of my body – to no avail. Whatever force the thing had, my manufactured enthusiasm was not the answer.

I let my body freely wage swift endocrine war as my emotions tore from cheerfulness through antagonism, overt anger, covert anger, resentment, fear, grief and apathy. Nothing manufactured by my body for my body helped.

As the thing crawled closer I switched my endocrine war outward against the whole world of loops and snakelike whorls around me, raging within my soul but nonetheless subtly spouting torrents of emotion outward through some unseen orifice of my stilled body.

It was when I again hit the apathy band that the thing stilled. Each time my body broadcast apathy, it retreated a little farther. My body had instinctively found the key to survival on this planet. The thing's emotional load lifted from my body. Again I felt light-hearted and full of a sense of health, though I still poured tons of black apathy at the crawling thing now scurrying away so rapidly.

I turned back to the tangle of organic misshapes and little by little ferreted out its secrets. The ropy black serpentlike form dangling from above responded to fear. The flapping fanlike objects responded to overt anger and the other dangers responded to other emotions either singly or in combination.

No single entity could easily be identified as food, but now that I was learning to walk through the jungle by casting my emotions externally here and there, I followed the first stream upward with hopes of learning what was edible and what was not. Clearly the acid- and base-forming entities were inedible. Time after time I succumbed to all their emotional complexities, learning only after their acidic or basic sting to fling them off and redirect my emotions outward. Time after time, my skin rapidly healed itself.

Order began to appear from the chaos surrounding me. I watched the slinker root, a slob of jellylike flesh that looked like a weathered tree-root from my Planet of the Rocks, as it flushed out its quarry, a small blob of milksac covered with horny projections.

Using almost pure fear, its emotion swept outward to cover growths of pink and purple velvety layers of some vertical materials. From the bottom of this growth the milksac animals – if that's what they were – rushed directly toward the jellylike growth.

There they were easily held until the chemical base dissolved their vital layers, after which they were absorbed into the attacker's system.

For lack of better hunch, I followed the next jellylike sack. It captured a victim. I tore it away from its grasp, using my hands for the act of tearing and my emotions for the act of neutralising the strange beast.

I placed the juices of the injured beast on my tongue and found them sweet – but some poisons are sweet. I didn't know the difference but my body did – or so I thought at the time.

I chewed and swallowed and stayed healthy. Looking back on the experience now, I wonder. Did my body adapt to the alien food or did my instinct determine what was food and what was not?

I ate my way across thousands of miles of outrageous growths and forms as I travelled from coast to coast across one great continent. Occasionally I hid from search ships – the Patrol would not rest until our bodies were discovered, I reasoned. I left no daily trail by use of tractor or pressor beam and my human body could hide among the fibrous, gelatinous, oozing, slinking, stinking mess around me.

I crossed two mountain ranges, walking high above the life-plateau, living for weeks on air, water, fat and determination. Lonely pools of water were to be found at these higher levels.

The longer I survived in that emotional jungle the more grip I had on my own emotions – until I could instantly turn up the emotion of hate against Trevic Strenger or the passion and hunger of love for his daughter.

I soon was aware of his ships less often and rightly assumed their surveillance of the planet to be more or less precautionary and automatic.

Now I wanted the ships down, but only under my own terms. The problem was to attract their attention in order to make them a bit suspicious – but not overly so – and to trap the trappers.

Fire is common to most planets – but during a year’s survival on this one, I had never seen a conflagration. I assumed that the patrol would also have observed this obvious fact. Could I make the unnatural happen by natural means?

The unnatural did happen but in a different way. I found a large piece of metal with fused pieces and burned spots. Either our ship or another had caused this piece to be flung across the continent where it burned and fused on entry into the atmosphere; but whatever the true case, I had the part I needed to attract Strenger’s persistent watchers.

Above the organic line, which is also above the rain line, are mountains, thin dry air and pools of water resting in bowls of rock lined with streaks of nearly pure lead. No weather or natural disturbance occurs at these heights or does so only occasionally. The pools are remnants of another era in the planet’s ecology.

Before placing my plan into action, I had much work ahead and hoped my body was equal to its task. First, I found the pool nearest to the organic growth line. The pool I chose featured rocks jutting overhead. From one of these overhangs I tossed in more stones until the pile below the water’s level was nearly to its surface.

I then lowered a large organic membrane to this new rock level under the surface, folding it into a kind of loosely formed bag with its corners and sides above water. I tied the corners together loosely and tied the other end to a rock overhead.

Within the newly separated layer of water I slowly lowered the spaceship’s metal part, keeping one end high above the rock projection and lowering the other end to the bottom of the water-filled bag.

I tied another piece of organic rope to the top of the metal structure and looped its end to a rock some seven feet back from the water’s edge. Then, carefully, I pulled on the metal, bending it farther and farther until it just touched a streak of partially oxidised lead jutting from the banks of the pool. Again and again I pulled the metal until I was in absolute control of its motion and could touch the lead streak with the ease of long practice.

The next day I drove hundreds of organic entities ahead of me, using only the apathy band, for I had learned that this emotion was associated with acid-bearing life. Up the rocks they tumbled and rolled, gyrated, squirmed and crawled until the pool was reached.

When the pool was made sufficiently acid by these monsters, I went after the base-bearing kind, using covert hostility for the drive, and I also drove them into the pool without qualms. There the bases partially neutralised the acids, forming a serviceable electrolyte.

How many beasts of which kind should I drive to create the huge battery I wanted? I did not know. Neither did I know about the permeability of the membrane sectioning off some liquid from the rest, nor the difference in electrolytic potential between the streaks of partially oxidised lead crawling along the pond’s basin and the unknown metal now jutting above the pond’s surface. With so many unknown I could only try – perhaps to fail and try again.

After rest I pulled the metal down to the lead streak by means of the attached rope and was rewarded by observing a weak spark as the gap nearly closed. I returned to the herding of more creatures. Night

came and the following day and I still herded creatures to the pond, testing the spark size with every new batch.

I hoped that the spark of light could be seen from a spaceship at night – or at least that the electromagnetic waves radiating from the source would alert the patrolling monitors. I had not figured on the quick response which actually occurred.

I was driving my last batch of creatures ahead when the ship came. I crouched behind the rocks to watch when the rays hit and I was stuck rigid to the spot.

Through instruments of science or intellect, possibly both, they had outwitted me again. I was incapable of moving a muscle.

The ship I had seen was the decoy. Another one had landed somewhat earlier to trap me.

VII

There were two of them, one on either side of me, and they held me fast with heavy portable pressors. I strained with every bit of muscle tissue to no useful end.

All around me the life I had driven from the jungle below boiled in confusion and from that movement came my idea. I summoned my energy and emoted apathy, driving the group toward one of the men. He faltered, then fell under the onslaught. The other also slumped. The pressors slipped from me and I ran to each man in turn. One pressor I threw into the acid pond. The second I focused on the ship, wedging it between two rocks.

I turned to the fallen men. One was encrusted with an acid which had eaten deeply. Almost dead, he would be of no help to me. The other was visibly shaken. I ran my own emotional output back up and down the scale several times until I could key into his basic confusion, then brought him up to a comfortable emotional level.

“How many are in the ship?” I quietly asked.

“Three. But who are you? What are you doing alone on this surrealistic planet?”

Now it’s strange, but up to that point I had not thought of myself as a name. On the planet of my birth I was just one of the brood and could easily be identified by smell or appearance. On the Sabre planet I was known as barbarian or Champion or Grand Champion. Here on an alien planet, under an alien sun, I was again being asked a most fundamental question whose answer I could not give.

“Are you on regular patrol around this planet?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“What are your duties?”

“We are to observe and report any slightest irregularity in shape or phenomenon or behaviour over the whole planet’s surface.”

“How long has your patrol had the planet under surveillance?”

“Better than a year. Ever since outlaws were seen to approach the planet.”

I moved the patrolman closer to the pressor beam so that I could more quickly reach its controls if I needed to.

“What did you expect to find here?” I asked.

“None of us knows. We merely take orders. We sighted the pond’s heat activity by auto-infrared surveillance and watched you at work. It was then we laid our trap to capture you and find out what was happening.”

“Are you a follower of the gladiators?” I asked.

“Who isn’t?” he replied. He looked up expectantly.

“Then you are familiar with the disappearance of your Grand Champion over a year and a half ago?”

He looked me over from top to bottom before answering, then said excitedly, “Why, I believe you are he. Yes – you must be –”

His emotions bounced from my artificially maintained level to his interest and sincerity.

“If you are indeed the Grand Champion of a year ago – you should know that your status is that of a free man. After your successful fight with Urut of Ewit and your escape from the arena you were declared free by the enthusiasm and will of all the people. How did you get here?”

At one time I might have snarled and growled at this representative of their civilisation. Now my mind froze as my conscious portion became aware of my own lack of emotional response to him. I listened politely and rationally to his talk. My mind, though, buzzed with consternation. Was I wrong to hate Trevic Strenger so? Was their world really all bad? Would I have been better off on the Planet of Rocks, chasing rock wolves and fighting with others of the brood?

Then, against all the instincts which make up a brood-world barbarian, I freed the man and docilely followed him to his ship.

The way back to Sabre planet was filled with wining and dining in the best of the patrol tradition. Word went out that the Grand Champion had survived shipwreck on a horribly inimical planet, and space for parsecs around was charged with the news.

My fame had spread – and my prowess increased. I had been the Greatest of Grand Champions and had so been declared on official gladiator roles. And only Trevic Strenger knew my true status but even he was not certain how I had come to be found on the forlorn Planet of Emotion.

VIII

We were like two giant computers battling one another. Trevic Strenger knew that every move I made might lead inevitably to his death – for I still meant to keep my vow. I knew that anything he did might

cause my destruction directly or indirectly. He held the power, the education and the experience.

I was the Great Grand Champion, beloved of the people and not entirely unused to facing the thought of daily danger. Urut of Ewit was now champion, for no ordinary one-G humanoid had been able to withstand his stamina, strength and speed once he had grown experienced in one-G conditions. Between Urut and myself the people gawked as only gawkers can.

When I entered the gladiator stands, the gawkers stood and cheered for fifteen minutes. On the other side, far away from my grasping hands, Trevic Strenger sat surrounded by his sycophants and guards. Did I still wish him ill? I genuinely did not know. I knew only that I meant to kill him.

Urut entered and the crowd applauded him with enthusiasm. Today was his show as well as mine. Then Trevic began his clever move against me. He arose, stilled the crowd, announced that the newest and best of champions, Urut of Ewit, be challenged by the world's Great Grand Champion.

As he knew it would, the idea caught the gawkers' imagination and they howled their approval. I was committed before my barbaric wits could form a defensive reply.

Only by sustaining the people's good will could I be safe from Trevic, and he had cleverly made use of the situation. I had to fight. I flung off my civilised accoutrements and leaped into the arena, no longer bound by chest band, free to enter and leave whenever I wished.

I caught the tractor and pressor beams, tying them quickly to my ankles and wrists, and waited for Urut to move. He looked at me sadly from his heavy-lidded eyes and parrot-shaped mouth and I knew he had no desire for what he felt was sure to come.

His first blow, with pressor, was light and I knew he was pulling his attack. As any other one-G gladiator would be, I was clumsy, slow and weak compared to Urut. I was also out of training. At any time he could have decapitated me or ripped my body to shreds, for his timing was perfect.

For purpose of show, I'm sure, he let me cartwheel him several times and the gawkers thought my response would soon build in duration and quality. I knew and he knew that we were mismatched and that he had the advantage. Survival on the Planet of Emotion had taught me that emotion, too, can be a club if only one knows how to generate it. I had much practice and while Urut had his will with me – now under tractor lock, then under pressor throw – I sought the key to the emotions in his humanoid bulk.

My endocrine system worked rapidly, generating pure emotions from apathy to grief, resentment to fear, boredom to happiness. None worked. I then tried combinations as I had learned to do on the Planet of Emotions. Once I saw Urut falter briefly and pause to stare from glazed eyes. I thought then I had the key but lost the combination.

My powerful physique was tiring fast. Urut had pressors on opposite sides of my body and tractors at right angles, on opposite sides. I was being simultaneously squeezed and pulled on different body sections. I could almost feel cartilage tear and muscle tissues pop.

The gawkers were yelling for blood as I continued my search.

I caught the emotional combination to his alien form and Urut paused again briefly. I drove my emotional wedge in and he faltered. He stumbled and fell to his chest as I slowly rose from the sand, giving every appearance of pushing back on pressors and pulling back from tractors still clinging to me.

The gawkers screamed.

As my body strengthened, my emotional output rose and Urut twitched in agony. I have no idea what the emotional content meant to his way of life; but it was a powerful antidote to his physical superiority.

By the time I reached his side, my body was fully recovered and, using every ounce of my two hundred pounds of muscle, I might have been able to decapitate him. I looked to the crowd and asked their pleasure and I thanked the great brood-God that nearly all screamed for his release.

The gawkers yelled, stamped their feet and clapped their hands together. For them the solution had the appeal of a well-laid plot. How else could they have both their Great Grand Champion and the newest Champion to carry on with their future entertainment?

The day of Strenger's trap ended and I rested in my public-donated apartment that was lined with trophies of my earlier slave-status wins. Now, I thought, it was my turn against Strenger. My plan took form.

During my planning stages and the impasse to follow the faulty educative process to which I had been subjected caused A. Zlinsky's phrase to repeat through my mind. It ran: 'To the wise go words!' A meaningless utterance. I tried to suppress it. It wouldn't go away, so I found myself trying to rationalise it. I did need a true and honest education to compete with Strenger – maybe that was what Zlinsky's silly quotation meant. I don't know. But eventually it led me directly to more efficient and better organised educators.

The habit pattern my mind had developed of tracing all knowledge through quotations or simulated quotations whenever possible was disturbing. My new educators explained that I would slowly lose the habit with time if I made a conscious effort to do so and that it arose from faulty use of the educator when I was a gladiator trainee.

Time passed. I became more acclimated to civilised behaviour patterns. My emotional control was nearly perfect and I could more easily read the emotional patterns of others. Were it not for my vow against Strenger's life, I might have learned to enjoy my new free status.

When I was invited to attend the annual fealty procession and to serve as one of many state showpieces for public consumption, I could not help but suspect that Trevic Strenger's next trap was ready. My own plan was shelved and I prepared myself to look for any opening, regardless of cost to myself.

Since our procession was to approach Trevic Strenger's seat within a matter of feet, I knew our day of confrontation had come and that I was being baited. He couldn't know of my new ability to manipulate emotion, with which I would trap trapper.

I took his challenge. On each leg and arm I attached secret pressor and tractor beams and joined the grand procession. Behind the others, I slowly approached his position to give my symbol of fealty to the state. I could sense Trevic's muscles tighten as I approached him. His emotions became snarled and bent by covert hostility.

I grabbed his emotions by means of my new talents and twisted them down through grief and apathy. Downward they went until his whole face became placid, his arms and neck muscles relaxed and his whole stance presented a hopelessness.

Only one person stood between Trevic and me and that one quickly left, urged on by another emotional impulse from my hulking body.

I faced Strenger as if he and I were alone in the world. His eyes seemed to plead and I scorned him, for what power could this emotional invalid have over me?

And then I knew that my hate for him was over and I dropped my long vow of hate and vengeance.

Suddenly the floor dropped from under me. Instantly my reflexes snapped on tractors and pressors and I curved my body into the best stance to slow my fall.

Slow it would not! Somewhere above me automatics caught and sheared off my powers. No matter how I scrambled and twisted my body, the machinery kept up with my efforts, seeming to anticipate every one of my merely human emotions.

The fall was not far. I landed catlike on all fours and bounded up to my feet again. Automatic machinery continued to nullify my pressors and tractors and steel bars surrounded me. Light came from the walls outside my new steel cage.

I heard a door open in the outside wall and then Trevic Strenger's careful tread. He did not smile; neither did he frown. I reached forward with my emotions to engulf him in apathy again but he spoke quickly.

"Turn off your machinery, barbarian. Throw out you tractor and pressor beams, too. I expect you to try for my life again and, as you can see, your attempt has not and cannot succeed. Face up to the fact that your machine-built education is only veneer-deep, your emotional control is uncivilised and your continuous attempts to kill me are more barbaric than our gladiator's arena. At least, there you know the rules."

I threw the pressor and tractors outward but remained silent. "That's better," he said. "At least you are intelligent enough to know when you are captured. That's more than I could say for you when I first caught you on you Planet of the Rocks. You fought until exhaustion then. Why not now?"

I remained quiet but watchful. I read less emotional hatred in his voice and actions than before, perhaps because I projected less of my own thoughts into the situation.

"I don't know what mutational talent you used to control my emotions to such a deep apathy before I triggered your fall into this chamber," he continued, "but I can assure you, you are here to stay unless this senseless hatred of me is gone or – as is most likely from your stubborn character – you die of old age. Which shall it be?"

Unbidden to my mind came Farragut's thought, "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!" I pushed it below my conscious level and spoke to Trevic for the first time since his capture of me.

"I thought to kill you upstairs but then realised its futility just before your trap door opened. My hate has burned itself out."

He smiled and I noted how pleasant the smile was – not at all malevolent as I had believed for so long.

"How can I believe your statement now?" he asked.

“You have urged me to accept the civilisation you represent. What guarantee do I have that it consists of the advantages you have told me about?”

“Try it,” he said instantly.

“Then try me,” I also said instantly.

He laughed at my answer and seemed to consider my request quite seriously. He reflected only minutes, however, then bravely motioned to his retainers.

“Free him.”

The bars around me rose and I faced Trevic Strenger, separated by only feet. I could easily have killed him at that moment.

IX

Years had passed since Trevic’s momentous decision to free me. Sitting at the helm of this tiny empire known as the Sabre planets I looked back with nostalgia at my innocent entrance into its society.

Man had gone to the stars and returned, gone again. And those remaining at home had formed a weakened gene reservoir. Noting this state of affairs, man had returned the gladiator games to his home planet and then forcibly invited back the barbaric and the humanoid – any mutational sports or freaks bearing new and untested genes were brought to Earth as gladiators.

Here in the arena of strength, agility, intelligence and courage the long screening took place – its purpose to find new blood for the human race. Those freed, like myself, were the backbone of humanity’s new drive outward and inward. Slowly man returned his genetic protoplasm to an honoured, aggressive, survival status.

I’ll not forget the day of my final release from both the steel cell and my own inward-driven emotions. Trevic Strenger stood before me, bravely waiting for me to call his bluff – to kill him suddenly or to accept his offer for civilised peace. He waited. Then suddenly he tore off his shirt and I could see the thickened keloids around his chest where his gladiator band had once burned into him.

Patricia Strenger, hair now greyed, skin wrinkled, figure long gone, sat by my side. She crushed my hand in thoughtful empathy as I looked down on the newcomer from far beyond the Sabre planets. His hatred of me was volatile and could have exploded at any moment, were it a gaseous compound.

I could have dulled the edge of his emotions with my own freakish control over external emotions, of course, but this would also crush his spirit. Who knew? Perhaps the young barbarian below me would be my replacement. I smiled at the thought, all the time knowing that he would interpret my brief flicker as a sneering grin of hatred.

To my mind came unbidden phrases from quotes of our ancient past and I had finally learned to reconcile my thoughts to their contents. J. Christ had said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

I signalled to have the snarling barbarian thrown into our ship and prepared myself for our long trek home.

