

My Time in the Arena

By Dennis Knight

I trained for weeks, a combination of exercises that featured spins, bursts and thrusts, and finally on a sunny afternoon in Denver I arrived at the time and place of battle. The gladiators I met there were female, male, young and old, some strange, some familiar, but all of them foes in waiting.

We could see, hear, and smell the electricity emanating from the arena. Our mounts waited on the stadium floor, and we would be matched to them in a promise of spoils to the quickest, an asset I was sure my training had honed.

As we vied for position at the gate, the arena master finally lifted the bar, sending us to our fate. Breaking from the pack, I was swift to the vessel I had picked, a sleek silver number that seemed well positioned and ready for a worthy captain like me. In fact, I had been so intent on Silver Streak I was unprepared with another selection when I arrived to find a female combatant of about my own age, in a pretty yellow dress, inserting herself into my cockpit, a little indelicately, I might add.

With my choice denied, I surveyed the field and found only one vacancy, a faded blue model jammed in a corner. Old Blue might not have been my first preference, but I leapt in and readied myself for the contest.

As we waited, I had an eye on that mean girl in the yellow dress. As she gripped the wheel, her mean green eyes ran a pantheon of fierce expressions. She didn't seem to notice me, but I was determined she soon would.

The arena boss rang a bell, threw a lever, and the game was on. Movement on the circuit, pursuant to American racing tradition, was counter-clockwise, but quite irregular with aggressive charges, deft evasion and blunt collision. The atmosphere, ripe with ozone, sizzle and the pop of electricity was alive with shrieks, laughter and whiplash. I was knocked off my moorings several times, but I gave as good as I got.

I kept Silver Streak and the pretty yellow dress in my vengeful sights, but she seemed always a lane out of reach, so I tried to rattle her from afar with chain collisions that never got through. I lost track of her in yet another cycle of bumping and being bumped around the circuit, when I was stunned by a massive impact to the blind spot of Blue's left rear bumper that sent us into a spin. At the apex of our rotation I had a glimpse of green eyes sparkling in triumph.

The arena master flipped the switch, turned off the electricity and the hostilities ended. I left Old Blue and walked, a little wobbly, to the exit of that wonderful old bumper car ride at Elitch Gardens. The girl ahead of me in the pretty yellow dress looked back, fluttered her big green eyes, and smiled, and I knew it was meant only for me. I may have lost the battle, but my spirits won the war.