

The Cycle of the Gladiators

By Kevin Eastwood

The year is 2040. Fort City, Utah. This is a time when technological geniuses and trailblazers have perfected the modern world into a hub of high-tech masterpieces at the service of some sectors of humanity. At the same time, corruption, pollution, poverty and desolation have reached their pinnacle and ravage those poor people who have failed to attach themselves to the upper echelons of society.

The Centra district of Fort City, an outskirt district bordering the desert, had been abandoned by the government long ago. Crime has scared even the bravest of police officers from the lone patrol of the Centra grave. By day, Centra was a ghost town with eerily deserted buildings which seem to have gone out of maintenance long ago, rubbish blowing around like tumbleweeds on the desert, ravaged roads and streets filled with potholes, a blistering heat in summer and a disturbing silence. Anyone sane knows enough to stay away from Centra at night, for fear of coming upon the gladiators, a new breed of madmen.

As it may seem, the gladiators are a dangerous and sinister folk. These gladiators were once fellows who led sad and depressing lives in the slums of Fort City and have succumbed to the evil forces of insanity and greed. Drugs, depression, death and poverty are factors that lead one to becoming a gladiator. What does a gladiator actually do? Besides scaring off anyone to come near Centra, the gladiators compete against one another in dangerous stunts and tricks. Such stunts include jumping from building tops, fighting fierce, mutilated beasts brought from the dungeons, death matches, knife swallowing, and much more. Some may seem more dangerous than others, but all usually end in death of at least one gladiator. The driving force behind all this insanity is money. Winners take all, losers usually die, and those that don't die, wish they did. Being a gladiator can either make or break you, which is why most gladiators have had disturbing pasts, there is no living exit to the gladiators.

Gladiatorism has become something of a spectator sport in Fort City. Some of the less adventurous bet on who would win the challenge. The spectators are very whimsical, which is one reason you would never want to survive a loss. Champions stand tall with massive amounts of “blood money” won from other, less fortunate gladiators and an ego that would put the stars to shame.

Enter Stefan. Stefan is the reigning Champion of the Gladiators. The Scourge of the Beasts! The Hellmaster of the “Devil Run”! The Untamed Enigma! The list of titles goes on. Lesser gladiators cower at the mention of his name. A young man of a well-built frame, fair skin, light brown hair and an eccentric haircut that radiates from the top of his head. Stefan was poor and downcast once, but he quickly rose through the ranks of the gladiators to become Champion. His wallet, overflowing; his properties, grand; his skill, overly proficient; and his reputation, unmatched. Many a foolish challenger have fallen for this trap, and their spirits haunt anyone who would even *dare* to challenge Stefan. Stefan had achieved absolute status as Champion of the Gladiators. Or had he?

Enter Mox. Mox is a lesser gladiator of Centra, a poor second cousin of those who have achieved glory. Mox's name means about as much to the people of Centra as the name “Jim Edward Smith the 38th” would to a half-faced, one-armed, three-legged beggar in Iceland. Mox can be described as an average looking fellow of fair skin, dark hair and medium size. Mox, like Stefan, began life surrounded by corruption and crime before moving to Centra. But where Stefan achieved glory, Mox found more suffering. Mox had made a few victories over other pawns only to discover that they had not a single penny in their pockets. But Mox is different from his cynical, suicidal counterparts. Where one would usually want to curl up and die, Mox moves on, challenging even greater heights, even the greatest of them all. Yes, Mox had challenged Stefan, Champion of the Gladiators.

The 'Devil Run', the site of the showdown and Stefan's signature event. The 'Devil Run' is an event in which gladiators race motorcycles, known as hellrunners down a long, straight course. This may seem lame, but the hellrunners have a modified jet engine which enables them to reach speeds of

400mph. Mox was on a crash course with death, yet his perseverance overrides any fears he might have once had. The 'Devil Run' takes place on an abandoned military airport runway, which accommodated planes that needed exceptionally large runways. Out in the desert, the military base suffers from the same traits as Centra during the day: hot, silent and ill maintained. At night it is colder and slightly windy, but much the same unless there is a gladiator event.

10:32pm, night of the challenge, Erebus Military Base. It's dark, cold and there is a faint gust blowing through. A few people have already arrived and are waiting for the big event of the evening. More people began to trickle in towards midnight, when finally the time came. Mox and his less than mediocre escort arrived first, consisting of two down trodden, young men driving an outdated station wagon. Hardly anyone took any notice of Mox or his friend, Gray, everyone was waiting for Stefan to arrive. Those that did take heed to Mox would boo him or shout malicious insults. Minutes later, Stefan's entourage pulled up, which caused movement among the people as they tried to catch a glimpse of the Champion as he stepped out of his limousine. Stefan was dressed in a debonair black outfit of a dress shirt, pants and shoes. Stefan looked like a king in comparison to Mox and his tarnished dark leather outfit. Then the pair faced each other as they dressed into their racing outfits of trench coats, helmets, goggles, gloves and boots; all of which Stefan's were far more superior. Mox noticed how Stefan appeared so calm and cool as he was dressed by his peons, as if this was normal and that Stefan knew he would triumph over his adversary. When the riders were fully dressed, the rides were pulled out. Stefan's hellrunner, the Pandemonium was the ultimate bling machine which awed the crowd. Mox's hellrunner, the Virus, was far less spectacular which Mox had to borrow off of another gladiator. The gladiators touched gloves in the symbolic gesture of 'may the best man win' and boarded their machines. The entire crowd was cheering for Stefan with the exception of Mox's ally Gray who tried to distance himself from Mox to prevent himself from being mugged. The riders were entirely focused on the track now, waiting for the starting bullet, which fired a second later and the

riders shot out into the darkness.

Mox felt slightly giddy as he raced down the track at subsonic speeds, but he would not let this overcome him and he focused entirely on the track. Mox could not tell where Stefan was, but he caught a blur at the corner of his eye which meant that the two were dead even. Focus, focus, Mox said to himself. Utmost concentration was needed to prevail.

3km remained, Mox continued to focus and they were still dead even. 2500m, 2000m, 1500m, 1000m...Then Stefan made his move. As he had done in previous challenges, he pulled down the throttle to an astronomical speed, a speed that would normally overthrow any rider, but Stefan was insanely skilled. He edged the Pandemonium closer to Mox, to rub in the projected victory. Mox looked on helplessly as Stefan motored forward. But Stefan's cockiness had betrayed him. He had pushed down the throttle too much and the Pandemonium's tires were fast disintegrating. Stefan made notion as the Pandemonium burst into flames on the final 500m and destroyed Stefan along with any glory he had as Mox raced to victory.

Mox couldn't believe himself as he passed the finishing line and was greeted by a cheering hoard of spectators, which was in sharp contrast to the way he was treated pre-race. Mox was lifted off the Virus and hoisted into the air, a hero, as spectators chanted his name. The spectators from the starting line came motoring across the track in various machines, completely ignoring Stefan's charred wreckage. Mox was the new Champion, lord of the Gladiators. Among them was Gray who was ecstatic over Mox's victory.

Mox enjoyed his newfound glory, but it didn't feel the way he had expected. Mox's mind was troubled, he had defeated Stefan and won all of his possessions and money. But was this really ethical? To steal from the dead? He remembered the way Stefan was acting so calmly before the race, little did he know then that he would perish. Later at his new premises, he confided this thought to Gray. Gray was shocked and looked at Mox and said "Fool! What use is there in worrying about that corpse!?"

Stefan had taken the booty in the same way you had and hadn't given any thought to his fallen predecessor. It's a cycle, don't you get it!?" Mox knew what Gray was talking about, the Cycle of the Gladiators. Champion status was only temporary. No matter how skilled one is, you will always lose to a lesser gladiator eventually. Gladiators knew life was a game and that the aim was to enjoy it as long as it lasted. Mox's mind was never cleared of his biting conscience, and he realized that his dominance as Champion would be a depressing one.

Mox eventually perished at a challenge to a lesser gladiator, who claimed the throne. The Cycle of the Gladiators had continued. The gladiators are still seen as a peculiar people, never afraid of death, and a short, sweet life is a good one to a gladiator. Mox was not the only gladiator to be haunted by his conscience, but no one has dared to alter the culture of the gladiators, in the same way no one would want to interfere with a fragile ecosystem. The Cycle would continue on for centuries, never ending, never faltering, The Cycle of the Gladiators.