

**Ultimate Warrior,  
Colosseum Gladiator**

## **EARTHORSE**

**E**arthorse shifted his big, blond, muscular body uneasily. He could remember nothing from before the Final War. Not his parents. Not any particular home. Nothing. He had been born, he had been taught, as part of the New Cycle. But there the teaching had shifted, divided, confusingly. Earthorse had been reared to obedience by the Matrix. But early, because of his handsome, wild good looks, other voices had whispered to him, telling him of an Outlaw Life beyond the Matrix.

Earthorse had at first been confused. He knew no certainty beyond the balance of his own brawny body. He attended to the teachings of the Matrix more than he listened to the Outlaw whisperings. He suspected that something lay beyond the Perfect Circle of the Matrix, but he had not meant to veer off the Circle. He was, after all, a superior athlete in the Federation Games. Earthorse had always been eager to please.

Ultimately, he knew, it was his very physical perfection that would cause the Matrix to torture him slowly through the Process of Perfect Harvest. Earthorse was tied in total bondage.

Earthorse understood the New Order of Things. The World Federation had reinstated the death penalty. Not in the old way. Not in the wasteful way of the old revolutions with their guillotines. Not in the cruel and unusual manner of the ancient States of the old North American continent. The

Federation had shown him holographic documentaries of the old wasteful barbarities.

The day of his own sentencing, the day the Federation Didax had stared straight down into Earthorse's blue eyes to declare him unfit, perhaps, for anything but Harvest, they had immediately hosed him down, blown him antiseptically dry, and led him stripped into the Experience Therapy Chamber.

The Elite of the Federation Guards tied him naked into a contoured lounge-rack. Its leather surface was warmed from within. They strapped down, in the worthy Name of Didax, Earthorse's ankles, thighs, waist, chest, neck, and forehead. They attached small electrodes to his long thick unclipped dick, to his large furry sack of blond balls damp with sweat, to his nipples rising defenselessly on his large hairy pecs, and to his wet tongue, and to his ears. Earthorse quivered.

The Federation Guards stepped back from the lounge rack. On a signal, they showed him they could raise or lower the lounge in any part. They could rotate his big body, spotlighted under multiple laser beams, on its base. Another signal sounded, and the well-muscled Elite of the Federation Guards checked his bindings once more.

The door to the Experience Therapy Chamber opened automatically. The bare-chested Guards made way for a Federation Medax. He was like the others: perfectly built, and neither kind nor cruel. Efficiently the Medax pulled apart the lower and upper lids of first Earthorse's right eye, into which he dropped a warm solution, and then the left.

Earthorse tensed every muscle in his huge bound body.

At his signal, a brawny guard walked toward the lounge, his big commanding dick swinging down nearly the long length of his hairy thigh. He held a pair of Contagoggle Lenses that with his big fingers he slipped neatly beneath the upper and lower lids of each of Earthorse's eyes. Earthorse realized he could no longer blink. They had taken away from him his ability to look away. The Medax signaled the guards and followed them from the Experience Chamber.

Earthorse, tied into the contoured leather lounge rack, heard the door shush closed. The blue lighting that came from nowhere returned to nowhere. He lay unable to blink, alone

in the darkness. He knew they wished to discipline him, even to the point of torture. They wished to edge him to repentance, to re-entry to their Circle.

He had been at the time of his capture, two days before, the most celebrated and handsome stud-athlete in the Federation.

The lounge began to undulate beneath him. He grew warm in the fetal darkness. Comfortable. He heard a faint hiss and smelled an unidentifiable smell from his childhood. The lounge moved slowly, unpredictably, like some live leather beast beneath him. His body began to flow along its hot contours like slow lava inching down a crevasse. In his darkness was no up or down. This was, Earthorse had been told, the Preparation. Before he was to be Harvested, he was to see, the Federation Didax had sternly warned him, the Enormity.

Earthorse had dared to be different.

The Federation knew that he had thought tangentially. The fundamentalist Wastrel implications (and the whole Tribunal had agreed with the Harvesting Judge) were heretically enormous. Earthorse, they accused, had not conserved. He had misappropriated psychic energy from the Federation's single-mindedness. Earthorse, the prosecutor said, had thought "tangentially." They called it that. They said he had strayed from the thinking of the Perfect Circle. He had been surprised. He had never really taken the Outlaw whisperings seriously. What he had been thinking, he had presumed was merely a distraction, a kind of daydreaming, the way he was day tripping now, bound naked and alone, with his eyes held uselessly, uncontrollably open in the darkness.

Holographic Cinema had been his pleasure since childhood. He was excited then as he was relaxed now: almost against his wish. The Holocinema had always automatically altered the viewer's consciousness. The Didax Committee had regularly transported each Youth Compound Cadre to the Holographic Cinema Domes where the Cadets witnessed Cosmic History and learned the myth and thought of the New Conservationist Culture. Earthorse's Compound Cadets had lain about helter-skelter or sat cross-legged watching in every direction inside the Dome. They had sighed almost with

a single voice as the battery of lasers, hidden in the circling walls, burned silently into life.

The first two beams intersected and at the point of their intersection a chair was projected. One boy, one of a set of six clonic brothers, had tried to sit on the chair which his eyes and ears convinced him really existed. But he had fallen quickly to the padded floor of the Dome. The other Compound Cadets laughed at him. One big-armed teenage brute even punched his shoulder, but he seemed not to notice. He was dazed by the short circuit between what his senses told him existed and what his experience proved did not.

“The chair,” a Voice intercommed softly, “is a hologram. A projection actualized in thin air by the intersection of laser light.”

The Cadets lying obediently about sat up. Interested. They were at the time no more than sixteen and seventeen years old. The Didax Matrix had programmed this crop’s sexual and asexual breeding fifteen and sixteen years before. The Cadets were perfectly formed with the hard bodies of strong young boys, and they recognized within their Compound the clear superiority in the walk, talk, and looks of the young Earthhorse. Something in the slower, moseying way he moved.

“To the chair,” the Voice intoned, “is added a table.” Two more lasers glowed on. “And on the table, ancient writing instruments: a fountain pen and a bottle of ink. Spread beneath the table is a layer of Old Planet hay.” Another pair of lasers crisscrossed the Dome. “You may, the Matrix suggests, perceive the scent of the new-mown straw.” Earthhorse inhaled deeply.

“Concentrate,” the soft Voice counseled. “Become the smell of the hay.” Earthhorse stared straight into the golden yellow straw and smiled.

“In our Cinema Sensorium,” the Voice easefully continued, “each of your senses will be stimulated to consciousness levels recognizable by your mind. Until this century, the Cosmos was new. Many things lacked names. The Federation Didax makes a simple matter of waking your consciousness.”

Laser light interlaced the Dome, knitting the six dimensions into projected reality: height, width, breadth, time,

sound, and transcendence. Didax recreated whatever the Cadets called for. They reached for apples and their strong hard fists closed around nothing. "You must become the apple," the Voice said, and across the Dome floor the Cadets rolled and wrestled in hot panting harvest. They stretched their naked bodies to chase a laser of a galloping miniature horse. Their hands stroked nothing.

"The pony is," shouted a Dark Cadet with a beginning of fine black hair across his strong pecs, "a handsome animal."

The holographic film unreeled through the lasers. The pony galloped in circles through the Dome with the Cadets whooping behind him.

"Catch him! Catch him!" the winded Cadet shouted. "Feed him the apple!"

A large boy, it had been himself Earthorse remembered, had made a flying leap to the pony's back. He had wanted to please the darker, hairy, muscular Cadet, but he had only fallen through the projected laser pony and landed in a heap on the Dome floor.

The Dark Cadet had looked down at him. For a moment, their eyes locked, and, feeling a stirring in his young dick, Earthorse focused hard on the hairy built body straddling over him in well-hung heat. Earthorse felt droplets of sweat form on the dirty-blond bristles of his thick young moustache. The Dark Cadet slowly groped his own large balls, smiled, and said in his quiet deep voice: "You've frightened him off." The laser light and direction had changed.

"The pony's hiding in that cave," the third of the six clonic brothers shouted.

The Cadets slowed from their chase and milled about. Lying naked on the floor where he had ignominiously fallen, Earthorse tried staring straight through the laser projection. He wanted to see behind it, through it. But the Dome was filled with nothing else. The floor beneath him began to undulate.

"Come on then," the Dark Cadet said, reaching, offering Earthorse his strong hand. "Get up and follow with us."

"Why?" Earthorse asked, and the floor convulsed beneath him.

“Become one,” the Voice said, “with the cave and the darkness.”

“Why?” he asked the taller Dark Cadet.

“Be with us,” he said. “Circle in with us as Didax has taught. You must not be willing to disbelieve in the Sensorium.” Earthorse raised himself from the floor. “I will believe,” he said.

The Dark Cadet smiled. His whole body flexed with a triumph of authority.

Earthorse watched him glow in the purple laser light of the cave. He reached for the Cadet’s hand. The Cadet held steady. He closed his big hand around Earthorse’s own large fist. He was, Earthorse knew from the heat of the Dark Cadet’s hard touch, no thin-air laser projection.

As the Cadet pulled Earthorse to his feet, the other Cadets shouted at what they saw. Awed. They stood stock still, crowded together, huddled, in the roaring center of the Sensorium.

THE LASER CAVE WITH ITS DARK HORRORS FADED IN AROUND THE CADETS. NEW LASERS BURNT THICK INTO THE GLOOM. HIGH-PITCHED SCREAMS SURROUNDED THEM. THE ROLLING FLOOR TOPPLED THEM INTO SWEATING, COWERING HEAPS. THE TEMPERATURE IN THE DOME ROSE SHARPLY AND THE AIR GREW STEAMY WITH THE OLD PLANET’S POISONOUS VAPOR. EARTHORSE WAS CERTAIN ABOVE THE SHOUTING HE HEARD AN ANCIENT AUTO HORN HONKED BY THE GHOST OF A LONG-AGO INCINERATED CABBIE.

There was no ancient word or sound or sight that the Federation’s Reality Retrieval Synthesizer could not in all authenticity reconstruct on computerized hologramovies. Earthorse crawled on his belly through the naked writhing Cadets. He looked for the Dark Cadet who had towered over him. He found him.

“Believe on all this,” the Dark Cadet whispered so close into Earthorse’s face that he could smell the fresh warmth of his sweet breath. “Become one with it.”

THE CADETS CHOKED, THE AIR HAD BECOME UNBEARABLE. AN ANCIENT SUBWAY TRAIN ROARING

THROUGH THE CAVE DEAFENED THEM. IN ITS WINDOWS, MUMMIES OF THE OLD PLANET HUNG WASTED AND DEAD-FACED BY ONE HAND OR THE OTHER FROM METAL POLES. THEIR GREEN FLUORESCENCE SHRANK AWAY TO A RED PINPOINT IN THE CAVE OF SHADOWS. AGAIN THE FLOOR QUAKED AND THE CAVE BURST OPEN TO THE RUSTGRAY BLOOD-SKY.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THE OLD PLANET WAS HAPPENING NOW: BUILDINGS EXPLODED; BODIES ROCKETED THROUGH THE FLAMING AIR; BRIDGES SWAYED AND COLLAPSED AS RIVERS REVERSED IN THEIR COURSE; THE CRUST OF THE LAND BURST APART AT ITS SEAMY FAULTS SPEWING UP THE LAYERED DETRITUS OF A MILLION BURIED CIVILIZATIONS; THE OCEANS SIMMERED WITH ATOMIC BOILS, MELTING OIL TANKERS AND WARSHIPS AND IGNITING THE SAILS OF WHITE PLEASURE SLOOPS. THICK GREEN CLOUDS OF POISON BROKE FROM BURIED CITY MAINS, ROILING UP TO THE ATMOSPHERIC SMOGSHELL WHERE THEY BURST INTO A FIRE-STORM.

The six clonic brothers curled fetally close to each other. The other Cadets lay frozen in Armageddon terror. One of the clones rose to all fours, retching into a Sensorium bag. Earthorse and the Dark Cadet sat cross-legged, face to face, with their arms around each other's big shoulders, furry chest to furry chest. Absorbing everything. Their big dicks lying head-to-head down on the floor between them.

THE SOUND OF THE FIRESTORM CUED UNDER, THE EVIL PROJECTIONS DISSOLVED INTO A SINGLE GREEN MUMMYFACE DIALING DESPERATELY FROM A MELTING PHONE BOOTH.

Then that too faded. The lasers tuned out. The conditioned air returned to normal. The floor of the Sensorium came to rest. After a moment's silent debrief, the naked Cadets began laughing, quietly at first and then wildly, like boys who have braved through an initiation of terror. The Sensorium Dome echoed with their laughter. The Dark Cadet laughed too. It was the way his laugh began as a cruel snarl of upper

lip under his black moustache, that prompted Earthorse to ask: “You were frightened?”

“Frightened?” The Cadet quietly, firmly wrapped the palm of his hard hot hand around Earthorse’s big dick. He continued to laugh. “Frightened? Of the Old Wastrels?” He gripped his hand tighter around the lower half of Earthorse’s sex muscle.

That was the moment, Earthorse now remembered, that his Tangent had first sprouted on the outer circumference of the Perfect Circle of Didax and the World Federation of the Ultimate Matrix.

Earthorse reached back. He wrapped his own hand around the dark-rooted dick of the older Cadet. He gripped the big hot shaft hard and felt the dick veins roll under his pressure.

“You’re hurting me,” the Cadet said. He laughed and squeezed Earthorse equally hard.

“*You’re hurting me,*” Earthorse said.

They both smiled, tightened, and then relaxed their grip. “What is your name.” Earthorse did not say it like a question.

“I can become anything,” the Dark Cadet said. “What difference in a name?”

“A difference to me,” Earthorse said.

“Today,” he said, “call me Merar.”

The Cinema Sensorium exit swung open and Merar had risen, stretched his full height, soothed his dick back down to some engorged softlike thickness, and walked off to join three other older Cadets from the Federation Compound.

Earthorse had seen Merar twice since then—both times at the Federation Olympic Games; and then, curiously, a third time in a Cinema Sensorium hologramovie of Merar’s winning physique performance. Earthorse himself, as part of the same programmed Matrix, had grown strong and golden. He lay awake at night with images of the Dark Cadet pounding in his head and in his dick. Earthorse was the genetically engineered Perfect Circler, so the Federation Coach had written to Didax. The sheer ability of his legs and torso and head had been honed to perfect balance. To the video holograms of his golden physique, powerful and hairy and defined, Didax

had himself personally responded the way an emperor long ago responded to his Champions.

Shortly, the official Federation Sculptor had requisitioned Earthorse for the central figure in his heroic triptych commemorating the Rise of the World Federation. The Olympic Vidtex had provided the sculptor with hologramovies of Earthorse in motion; but, the sculptor had insisted, holograms would not suffice. For a painter, maybe. But a sculptor must touch. So Earthorse had been ordered to his studio where he was stripped, oiled, kneaded, and curry-combed from head to toe, each joint and muscle and bristle carefully scrutinized, manipulated, studied. Upon finishing his examination, the sculptor had pronounced Earthorse: "Magnificent." He in his long flowing robe stood back from Earthorse's naked body as if he had himself sculpted his flesh. "Magnificent!" he repeated.

Earthorse said nothing, but the sculptor took no notice. Earthorse was losing, despite himself, the center of their Circle. The Tangent in his mind grew away from the others' common ellipse in fits and starts of illegal micrometers.

UNSETTLING DREAMS OF THE NIGHT CREPT BACK TO EARTHORSE: TWO HORSEMEN BROKE THE FLAT HORIZON. THEIR HEADS ROSE IN THE DISTANCE AGAINST THE BLUE. THEY ROCKED EASY IN THEIR ANCIENT SADDLES. THEIR HORSES SURGED AGAINST THE REINS. THE MEN WERE WARRIORS, DARK AND BEARDED. THEIR HELMETS CAUGHT THE SUN. THE MEN AND HORSES WERE ARMED WITH FUR AND LEATHER. THEY ROSE PROUDLY AGAINST THE FULL LINE OF THE HORIZON. EARTHORSE SAW BEHIND THEM A TRAIL OF DUST AS THEY MOVED IN THE SLOWMOTION DREAM OPPOSITE HIM. A ROPE STRETCHED TAUT BEHIND THE SECOND HORSEMAN. GRADUALLY HE MADE OUT THE ROPE'S BURDEN: FIRST THE BOUND WRISTS, THEN THE STRETCHED ARMS DISLOCATED FROM THE BLEEDING SHOULDERS OF THE HAIRY MUSCLED MAN WHO WAS NAKED AND DYING BUT NOT DEAD.

SILENT ABOVE THE SAD PROCESSION A GREAT BIRD HUNG MOTIONLESS, FOLLOWING THE HORSE-

MEN TRAWLING THE WASTREL SIDE OF HUMAN MALE-FLESH. THE BIRD CAUGHT A DRAFT AND CIRCLED TIMELESS ABOVE THE HORSEMEN. THEY RODE EVENLY ONWARD, ACROSS A RIDGE ABOVE A STILL LAKE. WAVY IN THE NOONSUN SHIMMER, THEY DOUBLED IN THE PLACID LAKE REFLECTION. THE DESCENDING HOOVES OF THE UPRIGHT HORSES MET PRECISELY THE RISING HOOVES OF THE INVERTED WATER HORSES. BELOW THEM, AND ABOVE THEM, THE CARRION BIRD CIRCLED NOISELESSLY. IN THE MOUTH OF THE BOUND MUSCLEMAN, THIN WIRES ROLLED HIS TONGUE INTO A CYLINDER SWELLING PURPLE FROM HIS MOUTH. HIS FINGERS, BALLS, AND DICK HAD BEEN TIGHT-WIRED THE SAME. THE HORSEMEN, PROUD AND STRAIGHT, DRAGGED THE TANGENTIAL MAN, HIS MUSCLE-FLESH SCRAPING RAW, OFF INTO THE NOON BRIGHTNESS.

Earthorse had thought the dream only a memory from his secret nightmares, but a sudden shift of the recumbent lounge rack to which he was bound jerked him back into the Full Circle of the Experience Therapy Chamber. The procession of torture had frightened him in his sleep and now again. He had not noticed when exactly it was that the Sensorium lasers had slowly faded into the dark Experience Therapy Chamber.

He registered no surprise that the Federation cinefiles contained hologramovies of his most private dreams.

His mouth grew dry. He could neither blink nor turn away from the replay unreeling all around his bound body.

“As a Tangential Thinker,” the soft Voice floated through the Experience Chamber, “you must try hard to refocus your increasingly short attention span on the Perfect Circle of Federation Consciousness. Without the perfection of the Circle, you are not whole. You are parts. Without rehabilitation into the Circle, your Tangential Parts will be harvested by the Federation for redistribution throughout the Matrix by Didax’s order.”

Laser light scanned his naked body: patches of red and violet glowed from his head and groin; his immense chest

radiated magenta; his powerful legs orange. Earthorse tried to will to blend his rebellious Outlaw energies into the Perfect Blue. His were now the forbidden colors of Tangential Distraction. He strained to project the Ideal Didax Blue of Circular Consciousness. He truly wished to waste not; for without his contribution of energy, the Circle suffered.

He begged to understand. Always he had known the Whole was greater. Yet now Didax, with all the power of the Matrix behind him, would label him an Outlaw Wastrel and mark him for Harvest. Earthorse had obediently by day fit tightly into the Circle of Didax, programmed, to all their close scrutiny, quite properly; but by night the dark mustard dreams he could not control had leaked, tangentially, he guessed, from some atavistic activity of his steaming pituitary. Earthorse had been alarmed, afraid of the cold sweats of his naked sleep giving him away. He was hardly surprised when the Compound Night Monitor had cautioned him suddenly one morning, almost before even he was aware that nocturnally the Dormitory Scanners indicated that his Circular Energy Flow had shortened.

“Help me,” Earthorse had said then. “Help me now,” he called into the void of the Experience Therapy Chamber.

Somewhere a generator started with a whine. Earthorse recognized it as a recorded sound from a holographic history unit on industrialization. A new lesson. Multiple Transcendence Lasers crisscrossed the Sensorium Chamber.

“The warden and other officials have already assembled,” the soft Voice said. “Observe the Wastrels’ nervous anticipation. The rest you will experience completely. Totally. With all the old Wastrel feeling. We are here to help you. Aversion to the Wastrel old way of life may aid, even at this late moment, your return to the Federation Energy Circle. Your senses shall become one with the linear Wastrels of the Old Planet.”

IN WAS LED THE HOLOGRAPHICALLY RETRIEVED PRISONER. HE WAS STRIPPED, SEARCHED, AND SHOWERED. WETNESS FILLED THE CHAMBER. THE PRISON BARBER SHAVED THE TOP OF HIS HEAD LIKE A MONK. THE CONDEMNED MAN PULLED ON HIS

OWN BURIAL CLOTHES: A CLEAN KHAKI SHIRT, A SHORT JACKET, KHAKI PANTS WITH THE LEG SLIT TO THE KNEE. HE FELT, FEELS, THE WASHED SOFTNESS OF THE UNSTARCHED KHAKI.

BEHIND THE ONE-WAY WINDOW STANDS THE EXECUTIONER.

THE GUARDS AND A CHAPLAIN COME IN WITH THE PRISONER. HE IS YOUNG. HE IS HANDSOME. HE FEELS THEIR HARD UGLY HANDS FIRM ON HIS BIG ARMS. THE WARDEN ADDRESSES HIM BY HIS FIRST NAME. HE HAS NOTHING TO SAY.

“THEN,” SAYS THE WARDEN, “HAVE A SEAT, PLEASE.”

THE UNIFORMED GUARDS STRAP HIM IN VERY QUICKLY: HIS ARMS, WRISTS, ANKLES AND HIS CHEST. IT IS FAMILIAR. THEY ATTACH ELECTRODES TO HIS HEAD AND LEG. THEY STUFF HIS NOSTRILS WITH COTTON TO TRAP THE BLOOD. THEY TIGHTEN THE LEATHER MASK OVER HIS FACE. THEY STEP BACK.

THE GENERATOR WHINES AGAIN. AN EXHAUST FAN WHIRLS ABOVE THE CHAIR. A GUARD SIGNALS THE EXECUTIONER. THE SWITCH IS THROWN. THE MUSCULAR, HANDSOME PRISONER LIFTS AND STRAINS AGAINST THE STRAPS. HIS FISTS CLENCH. HIS BLOOD BOILS. HIS HEAD EXPLODES. HIS BODY SLUMPS TO A RELAXED POSITION. THEN THEY DO IT AGAIN.

A DOCTOR OPENS HIS SHIRT AND LISTENS THROUGH AN ANTIQUE STETHOSCOPE. “I DECLARE,” HE SAYS, “THIS MAN LEGALLY DEAD.”

Redness flushed through Earthorse’s whole being. His own fists clenched. Didax and the Matrix had paced him through the program of the other man’s old-fashioned Wast-rel execution. Yet the Medax and the Elite Federation Guards pretended to be neither kind nor cruel.

“Linearity,” the Voice came through many filters, and no longer sounded capable of human passion, “is imperfect. Beyond the line is the Circle.”

Earthorse focused intently, but his energy no longer converged at all with the program. His laser-scanned flesh

was a disintegrated rainbow of glorious color displeasing to the cool Blue of Didax. "The Circle is vicious!" Earthorse shouted. "It feeds on itself! Beyond the Circle," and he paused as the hot mustard tangents crossed in his head, "is the Spiral!"

The lounge rack shook violently. Earthorse felt he was strapped to the back of a horned-skin, cold-blooded muscle-lizard whose long neck could rise, turn, and devour him in its hot, wet, salivating mouth.

"Alternation!" he shouted.

The Holographic Sensorium faded fast to black. Only the soft disembodied Voice remained: "Alternation merits alternation."

The sentence, Earthorse knew, was now irrevocably pronounced.

Time had taught them the necessary use of everything. Generations before, they had nearly exterminated themselves with Waste. Only slowly have they recovered at all: regrouping out of the Old Wastrel ruins, focusing first the Old Planet's interior energy, then the energy of the Old Planet's one star, and finally the unified energy of the small human circle surviving the end of the terrible plaguing Waste.

It had happened. It was recorded. One day a woman, two years plugged to a dialysis machine, asked the courts, not for much, she said, just one kidney from her incurably insane brother. At first, the court had refused; but the woman was insistent, demanding. She pleaded against the foolish Waste. Her brother needed but one kidney. Other sympathetic survivors of the on-going Waste picketed, lobbied, pressured the judges. Before the onslaught of the harridan women, the courts that had once protectively declared the brother insane, bowed, and now declared him suitable for Harvest.

The woman became the symbolic center of the New Energy Matrix. The judges of the court, themselves survivors, granted her rights to her brother's body. She excised his kidney, and he smiled dumbly at her on a public video show. She sold next his eyes, right and left, and the hammer and stirrup in each of his ears. She sold his hands which to him, blind and deaf, were useless and wasted. Finally, in one grand auction, she bartered off his remaining kidney, both his lungs,

his gonads, and his heart. She was inspired that the New Federation Medaxes had perfected the nonrejectable transplant.

She died, finally, a very rich old woman, by her own hand, peacefully passing in the presence of Didax. In the early days of the Federation, she was venerated as the Mother of Harvests. Her energy, the Matrix pronounced, had given central focus to the Perfect Circle from engineered birth to scientific Harvest.

Thereafter, a caste of Outlaws, mostly rogue males, was segregated aside, hunted down, kept in camps. They were basically arrested Tangentials, who, since they refused to function wholly, were Harvested partly. Only clones were bred for specific parts and were in demand by only the most narcissistic. Earthorse knew he had somehow become one of the criminal Tangentials, shorted out for malfunction, as the Matrix diagnosed—and for excellent Outlaw reason, he now for the first time thought. Outside the Matrix, outside the Perfect Energy Circuit of the Great Blue Didax, lay a different, alternate world!

Earthorse had to laugh. Out loud. Even bound immobile, he laughed. The Enormity indeed! Because he had once been so Elite, his parts would command the bidding of only the wealthiest and most influential Harvesters. He laughed again, unblinking, in the silent and dark Sensorium where, hidden, he knew they were all listening. He laughed louder, for above him on the perfectly circular Dome were appearing the glowing red digital letters of his final computerized sentence.

Earthorse was a Tangential Thinker, far outside Didax's humorless Circle, and he roared at the absurdity: they, who so darkly conserved, condemned him. He read aloud each of his body-parts as its title appeared for sale on the Vidterm screen. He wished only that his wrists were not shackled so he might applaud the prices as the Federation bidding rose higher and higher on his Harvest Futures.

He neared convulsive hilarity as the names, the famous names of the highest bidders locked in next to his auctioned parts. Earthorse had been a Champion Circler at the Feder-

ation Olympic Games and his parts, the envy of many, had not been forgotten. Even his testes were sold to an aging inter-solar shipping magnate.

Then seizure!

The Federation power began to drain him through the electrodes the Elite Guards had clipped to his dick, balls, nipples, tongue, and ears.

Didax's suffocating Blue filled the room and stung his unblinkable eyes.

The Elite Guards pretended to be neither kind nor cruel. They watched his torture. They were hung and hard. They were what they were: whole and against him, laughing and jibing at the magnificence of his auctioned body parts.

In the Blue Dark of the beginning Harvest, Earthorse spied one Dark Face, more powerful now in its square-jawed manhood than it had been even as a Cadet, handpumping his enormous dark meat, hardened at the sight of the perfect blond muscleman strapped down at the mercy of the Elite Guard.

The Dark Face over the sensuously moving dick seemed to say: "Though you seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, fear not, for my energy is ever with you, and will never leave you to face your perils alone."

The last lock-together of look was wordless. Effortless. Lightening.

Grinding his big body down into the hungry Dark Blue, Earthorse steeled himself and laughed. He laughed loud and long. He laughed as long as he could spit and piss and fart and shit against them.