Sauron loved the sound of the barracks. It was a strange mix of clanging weapons, grunts of exertion and a few whimpers of pain here and there, and when all of it combined together it was almost soothing. Not that his presence was adding to that mind you, in fact it was the opposite - as the master of all this he only made the fighters around him nervous. Well that and the fact that he was built like a brick shithouse only with twice the bricks, 14ft of scaly muscle, a literal wall of strength. To say that he outclassed the fighters here was an understatement, and they all knew it. Not that he watched from above all the time - no, he’d brought the fighters here for his own entertainment, and he was hardly going to sit out the whole time. The ones unfortunate enough to face him had been woefully inadequate so far though. Skaran was a planet that many knew about by now, home to the greatest gladiator arena the universe had ever seen, and fighters from thousands of light years away came to claim their glory and challenge Sauron himself, the strongest of all. None had succeeded - none had even come close.

There was one exception to this - the Hulk, currently imprisoned in his chamber. Sauron was fascinated with him, to the point of offering him luxuries he did not afford the other fighters. Hulk was the only one that had put up anything resembling a fight. Of course Sauron had still pummelled him into the ground and planted a foot on the back of his head, but it had at least been some sort of effort. He was down here because he had seen the seed of a challenge, and like any good farmer realised he needed to cultivate it. Approaching Hulk’s cell he could see the green behemoth hard at work, tinkering with a device lying on his workbench. He keyed the code to the lock and walked in, having to duck slightly to get through the door.

“Any progress?” His voice bounced off the walls, rumbling around the confined cell. Hulk, or professor Hulk as he liked to be called these days, raised a pair of welding goggles up and turned to face him.

“It’s nearly ready. I had to do some extra work on the gamma capacitors but it looks like they’re holding now.” Hulk held the thing up, which looked like some sort of mechanical collar. It was to be worn around the neck, stretching down to the chest where there were some nasty looking needles pointing inwards. This was Sauron’s idea, his way of evening the playing field between the both of them. He’d based the technology on his own abilities, namely draining strength through contact, and after providing a tissue sample Hulk had been able to create a machine to effectively replicate that ability for the wearer. The idea was simple - this would make Hulk strong enough to put up a real fight if he wore it while fighting Sauron.

“Is it activated by contact?”

“Correct.” Hulk picked up his soldering iron and once more delved into the electronics, delicately soldering pieces in place. Sauron had provided everything he needed to make this, gone out of his way to ensure that the technological side was taken care of - he wasn’t about to leave anything to chance.

“I assume it’s usable by now.” Sauron rumbled, crossing his arms as Hulk finished the piece he was on.

“It’ll be finished in a few hours, give or take. I’ve just got to make sure nothing falls off.”

“Good. I want you to use it in your next fight, which will be in 5 hours time. I’ve scheduled an old friend for you to test it on. I believe his name was…Abomination.” Sauron relished the look on Hulk’s face, the mild panic. He was still feeling the pain from the last fight despite his high healing factor, and he knew without the device Abomination would beat him thoroughly, perhaps even kill him.

“I need more time.”

“No, you need motivation, and that’s exactly what I’m giving you.” Sauron frowned. “I’ve given you plenty already, provided all that you could need, with no small effort on my part too. Testing my patience is a risk you should avoid taking, especially considering how many you’ve taken already.” There was a hint of something dangerous in Sauron’s voice, and Hulk backed down immediately. He just nodded and turned back to the machine, once more picking up the soldering iron.

“It’ll be ready.”

“For your sake I hope so.” Sauron couldn’t hide his grin as he walked out the room and locked the door behind him. He was excited - for the first time in a long time he was looking forward to a challenge, something that had eluded him for far too long. He would be watching this upcoming fight intently, eagerly waiting for his own turn.

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“I’m going to enjoy this.” Abomination grinned as he stood beside Hulk, the pair of them shoulder to shoulder on the elevator up to the arena. The guards around them made sure neither could make a move, but that didn’t stop them leering and insulting each other on the way up. Abomination was the larger of the two though, and he was making sure Hulk knew it, rolling his massive shoulders and cracking his knuckles. “They’re gonna be scraping you off the floor when I’m done with you.”

Hulk didn’t react though, instead he just stared forwards and ignored his opponent. The collar was around his neck, and he was trying to avoid drawing attention to it. Abomination was not an idiot though, and under the pretence of mindless insults he was trying to get a better look at the device, trying to figure out what it did from a glance alone, something too difficult even for him. He would have to simply muscle through this one, a fact he acknowledged with an annoyed grunt and a straightening of his posture.

“Ladies, gentlemen and everything in between, welcome to the Skaran Colosseum!” The voice rang out as the elevator opened onto what looked like a concrete disk, surrounded by high walls on all sides. Far above fans cheered - or perhaps bayed for blood would be a more accurate description. People didn’t come here for wholesome entertainment after all, they came here to see the greatest fighters in existence tear each other to shreds, and that was exactly what they would get. Both Hulk and Abomination walked to the middle of the arena, separating as they faced each other and waited for the signal.

“BEGIN!”

Immediately Abomination seized the initiative, charging forward and closing the gap between them instantly. The first punch was light by his standards, a simple blow delivered to the gut of Hulk, but for any other fighter it would have sent them flying across the ring with a sizeable dent in their ribcage. Hulk however shrugged it off, grabbing Abomination’s wrist with the intention of pulling him into a hold and grappling. He needed to buy some time for the device to activate, and considering it was contact based a close-ranged fight would be perfect. He got a surprise however when Abomination unleashed an absolutely thunderous uppercut right into his chin. This was far more powerful than the first punch, hard enough to snap his head back and actually lift him off the floor for a second. Blood spurted from his mouth as he bit his tongue, a green spray that lit up the air for a second before he was on his back and facing the sky. That punch had been prepared - Abomination had done his homework it seemed, he knew all the places to strike and strike hard. Hulk didn’t have time to process this properly though as Abomination immediately jumped on him and began throwing punches and elbows down. The first few missed, leaving huge cracks in the concrete underneath as Abomination sunk his fists into the ground a few inches. Then he grabbed Hulk by the hair and started firing punches directly into his face, each one thundering through the colosseum. Hulk took two of them before he caught Abomination’s fist, delivering his own punch to the gut to buy himself some space, but it wasn’t enough - Abomination was just too strong, absorbing the punch and returning it with interest. Hulk’s face was slammed to the side, and he felt a tooth come loose as he tasted concrete.

“As weak as ever. Pathetic.” Abomination grabbed Hulk’s head and pulled him into a choke, his thick bicep pushing in on the smaller fighter’s neck. He was so caught up in his imminent victory that he didn’t notice the device around Hulk’s neck slowly glowing green, or the fact that his arm was slowly being pushed outwards by expanding bulk. He just doubled down, squeezing as hard as he could and grinning right by Hulk’s face. “Face it, you never had a chance. Just do what you always should have done and go…huh?” Abomination stopped as Hulk grabbed his forearm and slowly, impossibly, began to drag it away from his neck. The arm itself was growing very slowly, adding 2 inches of circumference just as his own arm deflated by the same amount. He was too focused on the predicament itself to see the transfer, but even as they struggled inch after inch was transferred over. He also hadn’t noticed Hulk’s head slowly creeping up his chest, the beast growing bigger just slowly enough for him to miss it. Hulk had always been 7ft tall, albeit extremely thick alongside that height, but now he was slowly pushing up to 7.5ft, closing in on Abomination’s 8ft height. Abomination knew Hulk was weaker; he'd fought him several times before and they had reached this exact position multiple times. It had always resulted in his win, without fail, so to see it being countered was unthinkable. He redoubled his grip, pouring all his strength into the hold, but it was like trying to push back on an iron wall. There was just nothing he could do to stop his arm being moved.

“Gah, what is this trickery?!” He broke the hold, getting some distance between them, and now he noticed the physical difference. Hulk was bigger than before, more muscular, as if during the fight he’d crammed in a couple years of working out. While trying to stop Hulk’s arm he could see the difference between them, the deeper chasms and thicker twists of muscle, the way his own biceps and triceps didn’t reach the same peaks as they had just moments ago. He was even taller too - the pair of them were eye to eye, something that was definitely not normal. Abomination had always made a point of looking down on him, and now with Hulk standing 8ft tall that wasn’t possible.

“Maybe you’re not as strong as you think you are.” Hulk’s response was calm, measured, and pitched in exactly the right way to goad Abomination into immediately attacking, which he did. Abomination threw the same punch he had at the start of the fight - albeit with more power - but instead of thumping into Hulk’s gut and forcing the wind from his lungs it impacted against a wall of iron. Hulk’s body was like rock, a living wall of impenetrable hardness, an ode to strength that shouldn’t have been possible. Abomination’s eyes widened as Hulk grabbed his wrist again, and this time he felt the slight drain of strength, the clawing fingers of fatigue rolling up his body and inducing tremors in his limbs. His chest retracted inwards, the pecs and abs shrinking away and the shoulders shrivelling back down as he lost 50 pounds of muscle from all over his body, then 70, then 90. He looked at his arms and his eyes widened as he saw his biceps shrink by almost 10 inches, the muscle just evaporating off him as Hulk received all his strength and then some. He looked up, and now he had to crane his neck backwards to see eye to eye with his opponent, Hulk at least 2 feet taller and a hundred pounds heavier. His eyes rolled over the collar, the green glow, and his mind instantly put 2 and 2 together.

“My strength! You cannot!”

“I can.” Hulk grinned for the first time in the fight, and that was when Abomination knew he was screwed. 10ft of green muscle was far too much for him to handle, and he knew it. He tried to get some distance but Hulk had him tight, pulling him into the same chokehold he had experienced just moments ago. Only this time instead of it slowly getting harder to hold onto Hulk found it was getting easier by the second. At first he had to secure his grip in order to keep his arm around Abomination’s neck, but soon the heavy heaves became ineffective scrambles, and eventually he barely had to try to suppress the once hulking creature currently whimpering in his grip. He was able to actually switch to one hand after a little while, just one titanic arm enough to easily wrap around Abomination’s entire upper body and hold him completely still. His pecs were like huge boulders now, titanic monsters of muscle that made Abomination look flat-chested in comparison, still swelling as he stood there. With each breath inwards his pecs pulsed outwards by a couple of inches, and then stayed there instead of going back down when he breathed out, Abomination’s chest mirroring the expansion but in the other direction. He waited until there was absolutely no threat to him before releasing, letting Abomination fall to the floor. He immediately got to his feet and went to throw a punch, then stopped when he realised he didn’t even come up to Hulk’s chest anymore. He’d shrunk to maybe 6ft tall, smaller than Hulk’s old size, and now that Hulk was at 10ft he was so much shorter that it was almost comical. The strength disparity between them was so great that Hulk weighed almost 3 times as much as Abomination now, all that muscle compacted into his body and forced to augment the already impressive structure there. Abomination couldn’t even work up the courage to throw a punch anymore - it felt like staring down a mountain and knowing it could obliterate you at any moment it chose. Hulk lifted a foot and pushed Abomination into the ground, leaning on him slightly to pin him to the floor.

“Are we going to admit who’s strongest?”

“Liar! You cheat!”

Hulk laughed. “There’s no lies here. If you’re stronger then it should be simple to make me move, shouldn’t it?”

Abomination tried, he really did, but he didn’t have a hope in hell anymore. Hulk had more muscle in one leg than he did in his whole body, and you could see it just by the difference in size between them. He wanted to rage, to roar and scream and act like the beast he had once been, but that would only embarrass him now.

“Rrrrgh….you’re the strongest.”

“Always have been little guy.” Hulk chuckled before reaching down and firing off one last punch. It was barely his full strength but still plenty enough to knock Abomination out cold, a tooth clattering across the concrete - some slight payback for the one he’d lost, a little bit of karmic justice. Hulk stood and raised his arms, and the whole stadium cheered. Most of all Sauron, who’d been watching this show with bated breath, hoping everything would live up to his standards. He was pleased, and now it was time to reap the reward of his investment.

“Well, it looks like Hulk has prevailed!” Sauron shouted, the microphone in front of him broadcasting his voice to every corner of the stadium. “What do we think, should we give him a REAL challenge?!”

The ensuing roar from the crowd was clear. After all, Sauron was a legend around these parts, not just undefeated but not even challenged. He vaulted out of his chair, falling far to the ground and spreading his wings at the very last second. It wasn’t enough to fully halt his fall, though he could have touched the ground lightly if he wanted - no, instead he hit it like a meteor, throwing up a huge cloud of dust that only made his eventual reveal more impressive. He strode out of the dust like the champion he was, and even with Hulk larger than normal it was clear he was outclassed. Sauron was enormous, 14ft tall and boasting muscles the size of Hulk’s arms rippling across his body. He grinned as he stretched.

“Bring it.”

Hulk did just that, running forwards to deliver the first punch, but it was completely hopeless. His fist smacked into Sauron’s abdomen and didn’t move it even a millimetre, the reptilian fighter just standing there and grinning the whole while. He returned the favour from above, smashing his fist into Hulk’s face and sending him sprawling into the dirt. It was just a fraction of his strength but already Hulk could feel the impact shuddering through his body, rattling his brain in his skull and causing little white spots to flash in his vision. He didn’t have time to get up before he felt a claw around his ankle, and then all of a sudden he found himself flying through the air. Sauron tossed him like he was a tin can, and Hulk grunted in pain as he smashed into the arena wall, leaving a sizeable dent before he fell to the floor.

“Hah! I forgot how light you were!” Sauron chuckled as he looked at his arms and confirmed what he already knew - the slightest bit of his strength had been drained away. Even the shortest of contact was enough to trigger the device, but at this rate Hulk would be unconscious long before the playing field was even. He decided to speed things up, and when he approached Hulk this time instead of throwing him around some more he swept him up into a bear hug. It looked almost comical - the height difference between them meant that Hulk’s legs didn’t even reach the floor, and worse still Sauron’s arms were huge trunks of strength that covered most of Hulk’s torso, capturing him in an anaconda-like squeeze.

“Come now, at least make this a challenge for once.”

Hulk roared as he felt his body bend in ways it wasn’t designed to, all his prodigious strength unable to prevent Sauron exerting his will, his bones literally yielding to the stronger fighter. Sauron grinned as he felt the trickle of drained strength become a flow, as he felt the body clenched in his arms begin to pulse and swell with stolen power. At first the change was barely noticeable, a couple of inches of height, a few pounds of muscle slowly dribbling into Hulk’s chest and traps, just framing his body a little better. Biceps packing on 5 inches, pectorals adding maybe 8 inches worth to their circumference, his shoulders and legs both pulsing outwards with 2 inches or so. Little gains all over his body, but what he gained Sauron lost in equal measure, the reptile’s shoulders and biceps and pecs all forced to relinquish part of their size. His groans abated slightly as the improved muscle structure let him hold himself together, stopped his ribs flexing inwards from the dominating squeeze of Sauron. Then the device really began to take hold, and Hulk’s grunts deepened in pitch as his chest was forced outwards. The growth started with height more than anything, Hulk’s legs no longer dangling in the air as he grew foot after foot, his 10ft height evolving into 11 as Sauron was shrunk down to 13ft. Bones cracked loudly as his skeleton was reshaped, new vertebrae popping into existence as his body was stretched in what felt like opposite directions. Sauron felt his own height diminish as he watched, bones grinding against each other uncomfortably as he was forced into a smaller form, until the pair of them were almost exactly the same height., 12.5ft each. Hulk’s arms exploded with knotted muscle, huge beach-ball sized biceps swelling into existence as Sauron’s arms withered away, the size simply ripped from his body. His pecs were also forced to give up size too, dropping from colossal 70 inches circumference to a still massive but more manageable 50, those 20 inches of size going straight to Hulk and forcing Sauron’s grip wider and wider to compensate. The back of one challenger flattened and shrunk, the muscles simply falling into each other, whereas on the other great canyons and valleys dug themselves into the flesh, marking the resting ground of huge slabs of muscle underneath.

“How’s this for a challenge huh?” Hulk chuckled as he took stock of their relative sizes, chuckling as he did so. “Have to admit, the size looks better on me than it ever did on you.”

Sauron just grinned. “Oh, I’ve waited a long time for you to be a real fight. I know you’ll put all that strength to good use, I can feel it.” He squared up, emphasising how one had grown while the other had shrunk. They’d met in the middle, but for the time being Sauron was many times thicker. That was changing though, Hulk was now grinning as muscle surged through him. The growth went from bottom to top strangely enough, so the first things to pump up were Hulk’s legs, the thighs and quads exploding into huge slabs of unrivalled power, literal slabs of muscle that were necessary to power what was to come. Again deep grunts filled the arena as abs the size of bowling balls punched out of Hulk’s abdomen, 8 of them filling the available space as the muscles around them quivered for a second then tripled in size. The growth of his chest was the most spectacular, his pecs gaining several feet of width and doubling in weight. They defined the shape of his torso with their size, turning him from stocky into overbearing, forcing him into the classic V taper coveted by most bodybuilders. Only instead of having a thin waist Hulk had a thick everything, with the already insane sizes just outclassed by the twin meteors welded to his chest. His arms were last, the growth slowly rolling down them and flicking tendrils of energy into biceps and triceps. Huge veins flashed on his skin as the muscles were engorged well beyond where they should have been, Hulk only flexing harder as he felt his shoulders explode with raw strength and his arms grow into hulking girders of mass. He swelled up to 13ft as well, pushing Sauron down to 11.5 in the process.

Throughout all of this it had become harder and harder to hold the bearhug, and Sauron was eventually forced to release it due to Hulk being simply too thick. Stepping back allowed him to take stock of the situation - with his shrinking and Hulk’s growth, Hulk was the larger of the two by quite a way now. At 13ft he was quite a bit taller than the now 11.5ft tall Sauron, and worse still their musculatures were looking pretty similar. Sauron didn’t have the advantage of weight and thickness, now they were about even (albeit with Sauron’s smaller height making him look a bit bulkier than his opponent). He licked his lips in anticipation.

“Come on then. Show me what you’ve got!”

Hulk did exactly that, running forward to meet Sauron in the middle of the arena. The two collided with a noise like thunder, instantly grabbing hold of each other and straining to push the other back. The arena was filled with the sound of two war machines grunting and grimacing as they both tried to gain dominance in the clinch. For Hulk this was something he was used to, having fought many fights like this, and he quickly sidled into the right position to generate maximum leverage, digging his feet in and tensing his arms so that they swelled into huge knotted lumps of muscle. Sauron on the other hand was so rarely challenged that he didn’t bother with this, and quickly he found that Hulk was actually able to push him back. It was a novel experience, being unable to move in the direction he wished, like trying some new food for the first time. He slipped out of the grab and fired off a vicious punch to Hulk’s side, sinking his fist in and causing Hulk to gasp in pain, but instead of reeling back he once again grabbed Sauron’s wrist and pulled him in close, letting the device go to work and slowly drain him of even more strength. Sauron could feel his muscle slipping away now, he could see Hulk slowly growing another foot taller, inch by inch swelling upwards. The drain was fastest around his arm, where he saw his bicep just fade away, literally sliding down his wrist and into the arm currently holding him in place. He watched as huge veins swung up on Hulk’s forearm, the flesh forced to its limit and then beyond as inch after inch of raw strength was forcibly jammed into his limb, his body a roaring tempest that only grew stronger with each breath. The grip that had once been neutral was now uncomfortable, and Sauron frowned as his arms began to tremble from the strain of holding Hulk back. He grunted as he pushed back as hard as he could, but there was simply no give, no movement to indicate he was making any sort of progress. Instead Hulk just grinned at him and pushed even harder, and all of a sudden it was Sauron on his knees, struggling just to keep himself from being ground into the floor by the sheer pressure.

“What’s the matter, having a bit of trouble?” Hulk grinned as Sauron’s smile disappeared, his confidence rising just as fast as Sauron’s was falling. “To be expected though, after all you’re so much weaker than me now. Holding back a real champion is a bit beyond your talents I think, hm?”

Sauron snarled but even he couldn’t deny Hulk was right. The hands he was holding were now twice the size of his own, and looking past them he could see Hulk’s arms glistening with stolen muscle, twice the size of his own and so thick they looked like tree trunks welded to his body, great hulking masses of pure strength that flexed and rippled in the light. He’d reached Sauron’s old height of 14ft now, and Sauron had taken Hulk’s initial height of 10ft in return for this. Sauron couldn’t free himself, and now he was starting to get worried. His experiment was supposed to even the playing field, but losing had never been an option in his mind. Now all of a sudden he was faced with the possibility, and he refused to entertain it any further.

He broke free of Hulk’s grip, getting some distance and taking a better look at the collar. For once he was forced to be tactical, circling his opponent and using the speed his smaller form afforded him, waiting for his moment to strike. It didn’t take long for Hulk to lunge for him, and he seized the opportunity to dodge the strike and clamber onto Hulk’s back. Bobbing left and right in order to dodge the hands trying to grab him, he jammed a claw into the collar’s control panel and ripped it off, quickly getting to work on the mechanics inside. He was looking to reverse the flow of energy, perhaps by inversing the polarity, and after a few seconds he let out a loud “YES!” as he pushed the wire into place. This was followed by an “URK!” as Hulk finally managed to grab him, wrapping meaty fingers around Sauron’s neck and holding him aloft in front of his face. Sauron struggled but for all his speed he was powerless when caught.

“Look at you. Oh, how easily I could snap you like a twig. I could stretch this fight out and slowly rip you limb from limb, and there’s not a thing you can do about it. You’re weak, Sauron. Always have been, relying on the strength of others to gain an advantage. Well now it’s my turn to watch you suffer.” Hulk grinned as he clenched his fist, watching Sauron’s eyes grow wide as he struggled for a breath that would not come. He didn’t even bother looking at the reptilian, instead holding him to the side and turning to the crowd, acknowledging their cheers.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

Hulk realised too late that the crowd weren’t cheering for him, and more importantly that his grip was not as tight as it had been a few seconds ago. He looked at Sauron and his eyes widened as he watched him grow right before his eyes. All the strength he had stolen, that he had flexed and enjoyed, now it was being returned, and returned with interest at that. The reversed device combined with Sauron’s natural absorption to violently rip the strength out of Hulk’s body, Sauron grinning as he exploded with strength. Hulk tried to drop his opponent but Sauron wasn’t going to let him go, bursting forwards with shocking speed and grabbing hold of Hulk’s arm. Even after just a few seconds they were already the same height again, one growing up to 12.5ft while the other shrunk down to it, quickly equalising in weight before Sauron started to return to his former glory.

“What was it you said? Holding back a champion is a bit beyond your talents?” Sauron’s chuckle was low and full of dark confidence. “How right you were.”

Hulk tried desperately to break free but Sauron’s grip was like iron, his claws thickening and spreading over more of Hulk’s wrist even while he tried to pry them loose. His hand, once barely able to close around Hulk’s bulging wrist, was now so large that he could have circled Hulk’s bicep with just a thumb and finger. He watched as the last few inches were pulled out, every 2 inches taken resulting in 4 inches gained for him, the transfer from one bicep to the other generating extra profit on the way. Hulk felt his feet leave the floor as once more he was eclipsed in height, Sauron already at least 3 feet taller and climbing, and worse still he had stolen almost 200 pounds of solid muscle from him.

“No! This isn’t possible, you can’t!” Hulk tried to break out again, but he was using the tactics that he would have used at the start of the fight, the movements of one much bigger than he was now. He’d been greatly diminished - gone was the thick, bulky build he had sported at the start of the fight, now he was shrinking down to his regular build, the musculature still toned but all of the mass just sucked out without mercy. His height was going all the way back down to 7ft tall, the strength taken from Abomination also taken back.Sauron meanwhile looked like about 5 bodybuilders all jammed together, mammoth 80 inch biceps shuddering as they swelled larger, pecs the size of beach balls only a thousand times harder surging outwards from his chest, 65 inches of thigh muscle pistoning his claws into the ground with obscene force. Everything about his body was overcharged and extreme, and the growth wasn’t stopping, not until he was almost 20ft tall and built like a tank on steroids. Sauron dropped him to the floor only when he had languidly finished draining every last drop of strength from his body, only when the fight was so mismatched it couldn’t even be called a fight anymore, calling it a massacre would have implied more resistance than Hulk could put up now.

“RRRRAGHHH, ILL KILL YOU!” Hulk gave a roar that was supposed to be impressive, but almost made Sauron burst out laughing from just how reedy and weak it was. His anger caused him to swell with renewed mass, adding another foot of height and a few hundred pounds of muscle in the time it took him to shout. On any other day this would have been impressive, but still next to Sauron it seemed like nothing, an ant evolving into a beetle. He charged forwards and drove his fist into Sauron’s abdomen, ignoring the painful crunch of his knuckles cracking against rock solid muscle. He didn’t even notice the slight pulse of size that Sauron received from the blow, his body swelling a little bit. Sauron for his part didn’t even bother to try and stop the blows - it was like watching an insect buzz around him, so small and puny as to be not worth the time it took to squash. Hulk didn’t care, he was so focused on the fight - again and again he punched Sauron in the gut, his hands a mess as he forced them into fists and smashed them into his body over and over. With each punch Sauron grew, muscle popping and throbbing as his whole body just swelled with incomprehensible amounts of power. Each punch was 20 pounds of muscle taken, plus an inch of height, and each one left Hulk weaker and weaker. They could have done this forever but eventually Hulk barely had the strength to lift his arms. He was back to his base size, stripped of all the strength he had taken and fatigued beyond belief - no, he was a little smaller actually. 6ft tall and definitely missing a bit of muscle, what he’d gained from fighting in the arena it looked like.. Any sense of vindication he had at this savage attack was snuffed out when he saw Sauron standing there, yawning and looking at him curiously. He was bigger than he should have been - his own powers must have amplified the growth, so that he grew a lot more than Hulk could with the same energy. 22ft tall and with what must have been over a thousand pounds of muscle wrapped around his body, Sauron had never looked stronger. The reptilian was completely unharmed, and with all threat of defeat wiped out he was growing bored of this fight.

“Well that was just embarrassing. I would give you points for trying, but you don’t even deserve those. I can’t believe I considered you a challenge once, what was I thinking? I mean look at the size difference here.” He held out an arm next to Hulk’s, and it was like looking at a tree trunk next to a toothpick. Sauron’s arm was at least 80 inches across compared to Hulk’s meagre 35 inches, and more than that the musculature of the reptile’s limb was utterly stacked, so much muscle wrapped around that it seemed to all fight for space on his limb. Hulk was muscular for sure, but Sauron was on another level entirely, one that Hulk couldn’t have reached even if he wanted to. No, this was a car engine compared to a space station, an impressive piece of art next to a doomsday weapon.

All Sauron had to do was take a step forward with the colossal multi ton mass of sinew and strength that was his body, that one step shaking the ground and causing Hulk to fall backwards.

“Oh how the mighty have fallen. Then again, maybe mighty is a bit optimistic.” Sauron laughed as he grabbed Hulk’s leg and held him up, showing him off to the crowd. “I have to say though, despite everything I’ve enjoyed this fight. You did at least put up a challenge, and for that I’m grateful.” Sauron chuckled as he dropped Hulk on the floor and raised his arms, grinning at the ensuing roar from the crowd. He felt unsatisfied though, as if he’d only begun to scratch the surface of his power. If Hulk wasn’t going to challenge him, then he’d have to make his own challenges.

“First things first, I’m going to need that.” Sauron grabbed the device and pulled it off Hulk, holding it up into the air. It was funny how such a simple design could bring so much complexity - he was wrestling with ideas he hadn’t even considered before, doors that had once been locked now opening via the skeleton key of overwhelming strength. He opened the panel at the back, fiddling around with it for a little bit in order to put it back to normal, and after some messing around he grinned and put it back together again. Putting it on felt like putting on a crown, a symbol of superiority and power, one of authority. With the device fixed he was able to fully control the flow of strength and he knew exactly what to do with it.

“Hulk! You have been a worthy challenger, and for that I offer you a chance to win something back. I will give you all the strength you desire, more than you could ever wish for. All you have to do is lift something for me, prove you’re worthy to wield such power.” As he talked Sauron slowly transferred some of his strength back to Hulk, bulking him back up to 10ft tall and with a sizeable amount of muscle. Sauron lost the same amount, dropping back down to 19ft, although the muscle loss was not as noticeable due to his overwhelming size. Hulk looked at himself in surprise, flexing an arm and smiling at the renewed strength in his bicep. “Just a taste of what I offer. All you need to do is lift…THE STADIUM!”

The crowd roared but Hulk took a step back, his eyes widening. “No way, that’s impossible!”

“There’s no harm in trying, is there?”

Reluctantly they both made their way to the outside wall of the arena, passing outside and going to where the outer wall met the ground. It was impossibly huge, but nevertheless Hulk dug his fingers into the earth and strained for all he was worth. Muscle exploded around his body, veins flashing as blood sprinted through every vein, that same blood trickling down his nose as he tried his utmost to move the stadium even an inch. But no, there was no chance of him managing it, and he was forced to give up after almost a solid minute of the hardest straining he’d done in his life.

“As expected. You need real strength to do something like this. I don’t even need that puny amount of power back from you either, think of it as a souvenir. You can cling to it while you watch what *real* strength looks like.”

Sauron pushed Hulk aside as he approached the stadium. Considering he was 19ft tall and 9ft wide at this point, watching him crouch down and dig his fingers into the ground was like watching a continent move, a rumbling shift of impossible proportions. He heaved, and there was a rumble followed by a cracking sound as the edge of the arena began to lift off the floor. Dirt showered as one side was pulled out the ground, but after just a metre progress halted. Sauron grimaced as he redoubled his efforts, his feet sinking into the ground as he put every last muscle fibre to work, but it just wasn’t enough to lift several thousand tons of metal and stone. He strained harder, but still he was just lifting one end, not the whole stadium out of the ground like he wanted to.

Suddenly something hit him, or at least it felt like it. It was actually the collar kicking into gear, pulling muscle out of those nearby and adding it to his own store. It had sensed the magnitude of what Sauron was trying to do, and as a result it had automatically located the source of the energy needed to lift it. That source was everything within a mile radius, every living thing that had strength to spare, including the thousands of people inside the arena itself. Sauron could feel their power rushing into him, a tidal wave of raw strength that filled him from the inside. It felt like boiling concrete, a thick sludge that hardened in his limbs as they were forced outwards by muscle so dense it could have cracked diamond. This was a new kind of strength, compressed from thousands of unwilling donors, granted to Sauron for the sole purpose of making him a living god. He roared as another 10ft of height was added on, the extra feet necessary in order to fit the absolutely staggering amount of muscle that he developed over the course of mere seconds. That roar echoed through the planet, shaking the trees across entire continents as the world bore witness to a god taking being born, a living deity with the strength to match. He felt the momentum of the stadium shift, everyone inside groaning as they all donated power, their bodies withering away until they all looked like they hadn’t eaten in weeks, every last drop of their strength pulled out. Sauron needed it all, and as it was forced into him he felt the telltale shift of weight. It was impossibly heavy, his body was screaming out at him to stop, to rest, but he would have none of it. He roared again and shifted his weight, the other side of the arena ripping from the ground as he did, and now the full weight of the arena rested on his arms. He grimaced at the obscene mass of the thing, but despite his body looking like it was about to explode, despite sinking almost 2 feet into the floor just trying to hold it, he slowly lifted the entire thing up. With all the strength nearby exhausted it was up to him, and he didn’t disappoint - with one final, almighty roar he hauled the entire stadium all the way above his head, tilting it at a crazy angle that had all the spectators clinging to their seats lest they fall out. Standing there with a stadium above his head and the strength of a thousand rippling across his body, Sauron felt like a god. It wasn’t enough, and he forced himself to hold it higher, to get his body fully underneath it until it was stable over his head. It was astonishing how quickly the stadium seemed to grow easier to handle - with this much muscle the effect of any sort of workout was amplified a thousandfold, and in mere seconds he went from struggling to lift it to holding it like any other weight.

“Rrrrgh, I could do this all day!” He grinned as slowly he brought the stadium into position, and then with his body looking like a living deity he gradually lowered the entire thing. It paused at the bottom while his arms shook with the strain, but after a second or two he managed to push it all the way up again.

“One.”

Again it went down, and this time the motion was smoother, the shakiness gone as his strength increased even more. It took him 4 reps before he was doing it like it weighed nothing, and then another 3 reps after that before he did the impossible - he lowered an arm and began to do reps with just the one hand. It was like watching a cartoon, it didn’t seem possible in real life, and yet there it was. Hulk could only watch in amazement as Sauron forced out rep after rep, making it look laughably easy.

“Hah! Like I said, hardly a challenge for strength of my calibre.” Sauron grinned as he tossed the arena into the air, letting it come crashing down with a cataclysmically powerful impact. It damn near cracked the continent as it slammed into the planet, a reminder that despite looking like it was made of foam in Sauron’s hands it was in fact still obscenely heavy. “Don’t think I can’t see you staring Hulk.”

“Oh, uh….” Hulk averted his eyes, but Sauron just laughed.

“I get it, strength is entrancing. You want to become like this?” He flexed an arm that could have shattered a moon, enough strength crammed into the bicep to level a city with one punch. Hulk stood 10ft tall but even he was dwarfed by the 30ft tall monster that was Sauron - the reptilian was apocalyptically powerful, a cacophony of insane numbers all in one place. You didn’t measure him in inches anymore, now you had to use feet to get an accurate idea. 4 foot wide biceps, pecs that were almost 8ft across, 7ft of thigh muscle pistoning into the ground. Just one of those titanic arms had more muscle in it than Hulk did in his entire body. Hulk looked like a toothpick in comparison, which was saying something considering he made most ordinary people look anorexic. Side by side with a god, he looked just like everyone else did when next to Sauron, utterly incomparable. The gap was so huge that to Sauron, Hulk didn’t look much different to any other weakling. Just another skinny guy to add to the crowd gawking at him, something he expected to tolerate a lot going forwards. “Come with me. I need new challenges to become stronger, and you can help me find them by my side.” He continued to flex one arm and held out his other hand, waiting for Hulk to take it, to seal the partnership and begin the ascension to godhood. “What do you say?”

Hulk smiled as he shook hands with Sauron. They were only just getting started.