

An Excerpt from “Unicorn Fall”

By

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*Full Circle*

“I fear the worst is yet to come, my friends.” Nectar stood atop the great mound at the center of the village of Dung-Haven. Rising a dozen feet above the smoldering remains of the wooden homes and other structures, the hill offered a view across the entire area, the forest beyond and the Great Northern Mountains to the west. There was no sign of the unicorn swarm that had wreaked such damage, but the evidence of their attack was everywhere.

“There will be more? We barely survived this!” Greg of the clan Greg, the spunky shortling who had started Nectar on this quest what seemed like years ago, but which was a mere week hence, stood next to him. Although the man barely came up to the barbarian’s buttocks, he had proven a stout warrior in battle and Nectar valued him as a companion-in-arms. Greg

adjusted his shiny golden helmet on his head and then motioned towards the destruction with a wave of one small but muscular arm.

Although most of the wooden hovels had been reduced to smoking rubble, several were still aflame. The survivors, a rag tag mix of peasants, refugee nobles and soldiers, all of whom seemed to have forgotten all class and status distinctions in light of their shared trauma, ignored these, labeling them as lost causes. The Rampant Warthog Inn, one of the larger structures, was a hollow shell, though most of its walls appeared intact. It was there that they had set up a makeshift morgue, stacking the dead, unicorns and citizens both, like cordwood. Not all had made it there yet. The survivors still struggled to clear the town in preparation for the next attack, which would surely come soon. Here and there, the occasional unicorn corpse, riddled with arrows and spears, lay atop a dead man, elf, dwarf or shortling. In some cases, their horse-like rear ends stuck up towards the sky from which they had rained their terrible homicidal vengeance.

Nectar shook his head, never allowing his gaze to linger too long on any one spot. His attention fell upon the town lodge, a stone building left over from the Empire of the Ancients who once ruled these lands. It stood virtually untouched in stark contrast to everything around it. It was within those halls that the injured had gone, though it was not nearly large enough for all of them. Dozens of wounded had spilled out of the structure and lay on blankets in front of it. Acidophilus, Nectar's oldest surviving friend, moved about them, his green robes spattered with blood, his floppy fish hat gone, revealing the curly black hair beneath. He waved a trout over several citizens in a row, calling upon the incredible healing powers of Poseidon. Again, Nectar felt glowing pride for his stalwart companion's faith and dedication.

A group of citizens milled about between the makeshift infirmary and Nectar's hill top. Covered with dirt, blood and grime, they appeared dejected, even beaten. Hope had fled their empty eyes and with it the only chance they had at surviving the next wave. Having seen what defeat could do to warriors, even those of the barbarous north, Nectar knew that they needed encouragement, compassion and a leader to inspire them. He adjusted his furs in such a way as to reveal his muscled chest, planted his hands on his hips and flexed his pectoral muscles in what he knew to be an impressive display. Surely, this would serve to revitalize their confidence in his ability to keep them all safe.

"My people!" he bellowed. "Spread the word to your fellow survivors to stay on guard. For the unicorns will be back!"

"Even though it was I who came to you about the foul sorcerer's plot to bring about the Unicorn Fall a dozen years too soon, I can scarcely believe it," Greg mused, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Indeed. His evil knows no bounds, but I promise you this, my short friend. Lactose the Intolerant shall pay for this outrage!" Nectar clenched his fists in unbridled rage.

A soft breeze whipped up the smell of unicorn sweat. It tickled Nectar's nostrils and he remembered...

The air had been cool and salty. Nectar, barely ten summers old, had spent the morning in the family rock pit where he had been lifting small boulders to strengthen his deltoids and biceps. His mother's battle roar had ripped through the peaceful quiet of the pit, nearly causing him to drop the massive stones. Instead, he had thrown them to the side and run towards the forest at the

end of the small granite ravine. His mother needed his help and even a youngling barbarian was a better warrior than most of the soldiers of the kingdoms to the south.

He sprinted through the woods, desperate to reach his mother even as her continued bellow echoed around him, louder now. An oddly fetid wind whipped up, blowing against his furred loincloth and making his flowing blond hair whip behind him.

“Somebody help us!” his mother yelled again, her fear-tinged voice chilling Nectar’s blood. He had never before heard such a sound. Nothing had ever frightened either of his impressively muscular parents. His knees wobbled and he nearly fell, but he could not and would not allow fear to stop him from reaching her. With what little attention he could spare, he wondered where his father was and why he was not helping her.

Sweat beaded on his body as he crashed down the rocky forest path. Branches clawed at him, one drawing a ragged gash on his left cheek, but he ignored it. Only his mother mattered. He pumped his ten-summer-old legs hard against the ground, moving faster than he had ever run before. And then he found them.

His father lay on his back in the center of a large, grass-covered clearing. A blood-spattered unicorn had impaled him with its horn. The unicorn had fallen from the sky with such force that the creature’s head had gone through the barbarian’s chest and the horn had driven into the ground beneath them both. The beast’s hindquarters were ramrod straight in the air, marking the direction from which it had come. The impact had broken the thing’s neck, for although its body twitched, it was surely dead.

Nectar’s mother, a short stocky woman who was nearly as broad as she was tall, stood next to them, holding his father’s hand. Her long grey hair had matted against her face and tears had streaked down her well-muscled cheeks. She looked at Nectar as he entered the clearing and

her mouth straightened out of its frown in newfound resolve. She reached a calloused elbow towards him.

“Come, my son. Stand with me and look upon this.”

Shaking, Nectar crossed the space, reached out and gripped her arm tightly. Looking down at his dead father brought a flood of uncontrollable moisture to his eyes. Tears slipped out, unstoppable, but he did not look away.

“Why? How?” It was all he could manage to say.

“It was the Unicorn Fall. It comes every thirty years.” She squeezed his hand tighter. “It will come again in your lifetime and you must be prepared...”

“Yeaaaaa!!!!” Ambrosia’s battle cry yanked Nectar back to the present.

Nectar spun around towards the source of his one true love’s melodic voice and spied her delicate form. She stood a dozen or so feet from him. She had removed her dark sorceress’s robes, leaving only her two piece furry undergarments below. With her oiled abdominal and leg muscles flexed taut, her biceps popping, she held a massive unicorn over her head. Her ample breasts heaved as she breathed heavily with the exertion, but she did not waver. Below her, four peasants pulled an injured noblewoman in a red dress away from where the beast had pinned her legs.

“Ambrosia?” Nectar made no move to aid her, not wishing to insult her honor, though he could not take his eyes off of her glorious form.

She winked at him, her blue eyes bright with love for him and offered a smile, but it faded almost instantly to a frown as she looked past Nectar towards the sun. The bright rays of

the golden orb dimmed against her face as a cloud no doubt had covered it. Her frown deepened; abruptly, her large eyes widened in alarm.

“Nectar...” she breathed.

Nectar whirled around, one hand dropping to the hilt of his massive sword and saw them. There was no cloud. The unicorn swarm had returned in such force and numbers that they had blotted out the very sun itself as they approached.

“To arms!” Nectar bellowed, flexing his pancreas in preparation.