

15. A Man And His Horse [Dedicated to Eliot De Roy]



Eliot De Roy, 2025 (with consent; Instagram:@st._ellie)

The black mud sucked at his steed's hooves, adding to the effort the poor animal had to endure over this shitty terrain in this abominable weather. Everywhere around them was desolate, ruined, a place you ought not lose your soul in. Thunn patted Liberation, his poor steed, 'I'm sure not a lot longer now, and then home, eh?', and Liberation snorted, his head bowed. 'No, Thunn, though you've said that for at least five plains now,' Liberation replied, ending with a half-hearted chuckle. They were both exhausted, it had been some time on this gods' forsaken planet, the months of fighting, then searching for a way to return home. Many of the portals had been destroyed.

Thunn and Liberation had to bury many of their comrades, so many! They were the last of the Empire's Demonic Dragoons, the Screaming 23rd, veterans honed through so many battles and wars across the cosmos. This turd of a planet was the site of their final, savage fight to the very last. Mere mortals so long ago in antiquity, created with magic *and* technology, by the very best of the Empire's Wiztechs, they swore allegiance to the Emperor's lineage across time and space. Thunn and Liberation were the last of their breed, and they both felt it.

They could feel proud of the 23rd, they and their comrades from the Gamma Quadrant had finally crushed the eight-legs, a vast horde of intelligent arachnid species which had swarmed across the known universe, destroying and crushing all opposition with an alien, evil lack of pity or remorse. The 23rd had given everything, as had so many in the Emperor's army, and the eight-legs vanquished. Thunn, Liberation and their comrades had fought evil with evil, the only way they could win. Liberation had stopped at the bottom of the mud slagpile, looking up at the small dwarf sun radiating a diminishing light as it advanced to an inevitable implosive death. The gravitational pull of it was enormous, even down here, and many had perished on both sides in that sun's gravity well even before landfall and battle. A desolate planet further devastated, a dead world hanging in a dying solar system with a sun in the throes of death. What a fucking place to end up.

It was several plains after that mud hill that Liberation snorted, 'I can smell one, a portal,' nodding his equine nose in its direction. 'We'll camp here and rest a bit, recuperate and gain some strength back,' replied Thunn. Both had exhausted their physical, as well as their astral selves, little if any effort or magic available. They needed to recharge for a few cycles of this dirtball's orbit. Thunn kept guard, Liberation bedding down first. Each was absorbed in their own thoughts, reliving the final battles with the eight-legs, the violence, destruction and deaths. Thunn released a little of his mostly spent Vril energy for strength, he wanted Liberation to rest. He dimmed his eyes in the incoming night.

Liberation nuzzled and nudged Thunn until he started waking up then jumping with a start. 'Holy Cassandra, I slept, I'm so sorry Libs,' Thunn apologised, but Liberation just shook his head with a slight grin, 'they're ain't much left living on this devil's rock, no worries!', ambling off to relieve himself. They had slept for two orbital cycles, the planet speeding through space due to the sun's gravity. Clearing their camp, they took stock, feeling marginally less dreadful than they did. Physically still exhausted, at least their astral selves recuperated quicker, supporting them in this realm using cosmic Vril. 'Let's get the fuck off this shitball,' Thunn said quietly as he jumped up on Liberation's back. They headed off to the portal. Very old, barely holding together, the portal's wormhole intact and rotating.

With a deep breath each, and neither looking back, they entered the portal's rim winking out. Bright daylight assailed their hooded eyes as they arrived instantaneously. They looked around at their homeland. Three thousand years of progress had altered much of the cityscape. Both blinked and looked at each other. 'Fucking gravity! Fucking time dilation! That fucking heavy sun!', Thunn exploded. 'Only about nine months for us,' Liberation responded. 'Yes, and fucking centuries here. Those bastards sent us on a suicide trip!', Thunn concluded. Both Demonic Dragoon and his steed, of the Screaming 23rd, stood aghast, thousands of years adrift.

Depending on the popularity of this story, we may return to Thunn and Liberation!