

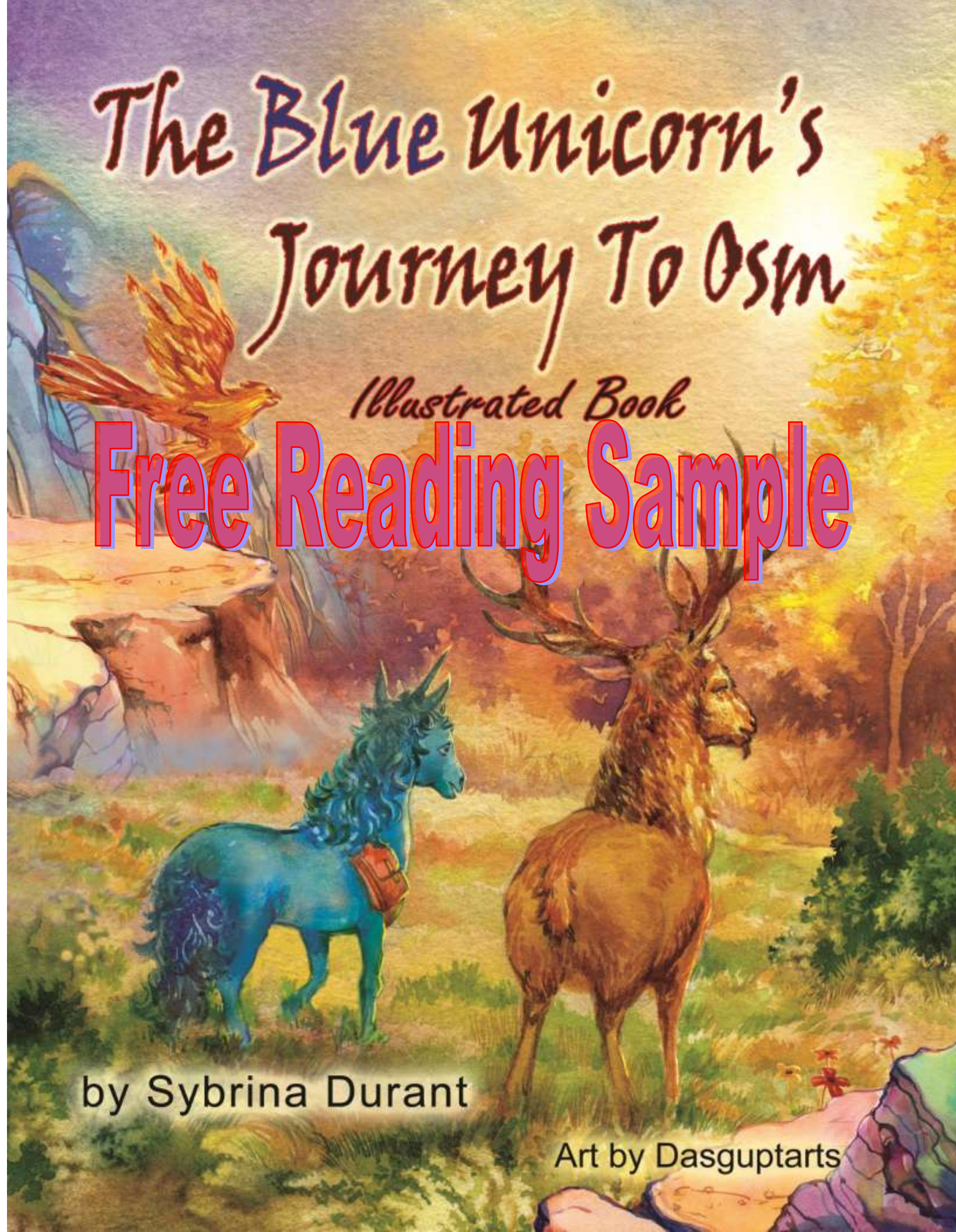
The Blue Unicorn's Journey To Osm

Illustrated Book

Free Reading Sample

by Sybrina Durant

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Illustrated Chapter Book

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“The Blue Unicorn’s Journey to Osm”

Illustrated Chapter Book

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Illustrated Chapter Book

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*This story takes
place in the land of
MarBryn which is
far, far away
from
Unimaise.*



Guarded Forest

Bugansville

Hedron Mountains



Ice Blink

Egada
Home of the
Cussers

Phlat Plains

7 Sided Heptagonos Valley

The Halstable

Manticore Domain
In Kinubalu Desert

Rainbow Colored Bands of Weita

Smul
Mountains

Ice
Falls

Ice Cold Lake

Elevator

Grove of Trees

Barricad
Mountains

Underground
Poroidal River

Lucky
Spout

Magh's City
of Kudos

Caulis
Caverns

Muzika
Woods

Nebulium
Circle

Land of MarBryn
Journey Legend

Blue Unicorn and Companions

Tribe of Metal Horned Unicorns

Lethian
Silva

Village
of
Jeribild

Smuthe River

PROLOGUE

No Metal... No Magic



Long
Ago

IN THE FARAWAY LAND OF MARBRYN, A MAGICAL creature was born.

The entire tribe of metal-horned unicorns gathered in the Halstable courtyard to see what his metal would be. They had been waiting for months to see his magic unfold.

Before his birth, it was foretold that this little unicorn would be their savior.

A savior! Only the most powerful unicorn could save them all from Magh. They had all wondered—What will his magic be? What powers might he have? Will he be strong enough to save us?

When he was presented to the tribe, their hopes were crushed. This baby unicorn was not what anyone expected. Instead of metal, his horn was covered in a plain blue hide. There was not a single glint of metal to be seen.

The first gasp rang out loudly around the courtyard. It was from Alumna, the aluminum-horned unicorn. She was the oracle of the tribe. She had received the prophecy. "This can't be!" she protested. "Why, he doesn't even have a metal horn!"

Outcries of disbelief now sounded from all the others. "No metal?" "No magic!" "No magic?"

Lauda lead-horn's fearful wailing was louder than all the rest when she cried out, "We're doomed!"

Were they really? Was it as bad as that?

Everyone knew no metal meant no magic. To have neither; made no sense. All the other unicorns came into the world with bright, shiny, magical metal horns and matching metal hooves.

The new foal's mother had an indium horn. Its mirrored surface showed the other unicorns their reflections. The magic of Miral's indium horn also let her

see if another creature was good or evil. Her heart ached for her sweet, innocent child's future. Life would be monstrously difficult for a unicorn without magic in the land of MarBryn. It had become such an unforgiving place since the evil sorcerer had risen to power.

Miral studied her son intently. Big teardrops blurred her vision so much that he could almost be mistaken for a metal-horned foal. She tapped his forehead with her indium horn, wishing she could transfer her own magic to him. She whispered tearfully, "Oh, my poor little Blue...you'll be defenseless without magic."

The gleaming surface of her horn captured silvery blue moonlight filtering through the clear dome of the Halstable for a brief instant. When a flickering image of a magnificent blue stallion flashed momentarily through her mind, her hopes rose up with a sudden swell. The blue unicorn she saw seemed strong and victorious. His horn shone with powerful magic. She quickly scanned the faces of the others to see if anyone else had seen it, too. From the looks on their faces, it was obvious no one had. "Will this really happen or is it just wishful thinking?" she wondered. There was no way to know when there was no change in her little one's hide-covered horn.

Disappointment weighed down the aluminum-horned oracle. As she examined the tiny newborn, she couldn't help thinking. "I expected a stronger looking foal. This one is a puny little thing. The Moon-Star Spirit never said our savior would be such a weakling or that he'd be born with no metal."

Alumna squinted, trying to see the strange little foal through a different perspective. It was hard to believe he would ever be anything but weak. "Did I misunderstand what the Numen was trying to show me?" she wondered. "This little unicorn could never save the tribe...could he?" To the wise oracle, it seemed unfair for the pitiful little runt to have to carry such a burden from birth. So many expectations had been placed on his small ordinary shoulders. Now, all hope was dashed.

The rose-colored unicorn watched regretfully as Miral lifted teary blue eyes up to the sky. Her heart ached for the young mother. She wondered, "How will he ever save the tribe without a magical power?"

Despite her own worries, Alumna tried to comfort her friend, "You mustn't give up hope, Miral. Maybe his magic will present itself later." The sorrowful new mother's eyes lit so brightly at the promising thought that it made Alumna wince. "Do you really think so, Alumna?"

Alumna could see how badly Miral wanted her words to be true. She desperately wanted to answer 'yes'. But how could she assure the young mother when even she was so filled with doubts. It seemed unlikely that the foal would ever grow up to have magic. Alumna was neither sure what to think nor say, so she kept quiet and watched silently as the new unicorn dam nuzzled her newborn foal.



A Forlorn Unicorn



Twenty
Years
Later

THE LITTLE FOAL HAD GROWN UP. HE WAS NO LONGER puny looking. In fact, he had become a strong, young stallion. But his horn was still covered with a plain blue hide and he had not yet received a magical power.

Nobody really gave much thought to him saving the tribe any longer. They accepted him for who he was. Just the same, Blue did not feel like he fit in with them. How could he when he felt so different? Over the years he had become such a loner. He did not usually hang out with the others but on this day he had fallen asleep under a Jughead bush in the little grove of trees where the tribe liked to sometimes go for fresh air.

"Ree-arrrrl!" The disturbing sound crashed into the scary dream he was trapped in. It was dark. He could see nothing but he heard the sound again as it whistled across his nose and then past his left ear.

"Aaarrrrl!" it screamed as it came back toward him at a frighteningly high speed. In his half-sleep state, Blue lunged forward trying to escape the strange and jarring noises but he could not move no matter how much he stretched out his legs to gallop. Something pushed him down into a dark pit and he could not fight back. Blinding light flashed from glowing hot sparks of sharp grinding teeth on a rough metal wheel. His final doom was only a few inches away when his blue eyes flew open.

Fully awake, he found himself eyeball to eyeball with a buzzy-biter. It yelled at him and shook its fist so hard its antenna trembled. The whining buzz brought back fearful memories of a past painful encounter with another flying insect. A trickle of fear traveled down Blue's spine making the hairs along it shake and tickle. He did not want to get stung again. Much to his surprise, the bug shook its fist at him one final time and flew off. Blue shivered in relief. He was glad to be rid of that particular unwanted company. Still, he was not alone. Other chattering voices in the grove drew his attention.

Straining his ears, he heard a cheerful tune. He recognized Silubhra's lovely voice. The silver-horned unicorn sang a lilting song as Cornum, the brass-horned unicorn accompanied her. That fellow's horn had the shape of a trumpet and it sounded like one, too. Its sound was always changing. Sometimes, it reminded the listener of sweet honey and other times, it reminded them of sour limes. The sour notes inspired Style, the steel-horned unicorn to decorate his mane with lemons and limes. Since Blue enjoyed their music, he

decided to stay under the bush to listen to the two unicorns in private. He thought no one could see him. If they could, they just ignored him and went about their business. As he listened, nectar from a small pitcher shaped flower of the jughead bush dripped onto his rump. He swished his tail to wipe it away but it stayed right where it was.

Annoyed, he peeked out from under the bush to see Iown, the black unicorn, with an eyeglass perched over one eye, touch his iron horn to some wilted flower buds. They suddenly stood at attention, all pink and pretty with perky green leaves. Blue smiled. He never tired of seeing that trick.

A little further off, Cuprum, a moss-green unicorn, dipped her copper horn into a slimy pond. The dirty water turned crystal clear. Tinam, the yellow unicorn chef, helped her fill some wooden canteens with fresh water to take back to the Halstable for lunch. Blue wished he had some water to wash the sticky flower juice from his hide. He was also thirsty. Before napping, he had worn himself out, climbing up and down the nearby mountainsides, using his cloven hooves to grip rocky ledges. He swished his tail again and more long blue hairs stuck to the jughead nectar in the shape of an "X".

Silubhra saw a flash of blue behind the bush. She went to investigate and whispered to the forlorn unicorn, "Why don't you come out and join us?" Blue stared into the coal-black eyes of the silver-horned unicorn, trying to think of a good answer but before he could reply, he heard Cornum ask, "Is our great unicorn savior hiding behind that bush?"

Those words stung. Blue flinched and gritted his teeth. "Why does Cornum have to be so mean?" he wondered, trying to shrink further into the bush in an effort to be invisible. Silubhra directed Cornum away from the bush and he had a temper tantrum. Lemons and limes fell, rolling everywhere as he stamped his feet and shook his mane hard. "Blatt, bleep, bloop!" he shrilled.

It was funny to everyone except for Nix Nickel Horn. Nix, the unicorn defender had had enough of Cornum's antics. He blasted a lemon into tiny pieces right in front of the bush Blue was hiding behind. "What the heck?" the surprised blue unicorn thought as he blew blackened leaf dust from his nose.

Style's purple eyes danced as she pranced over to Cornum. She adjusted her carnation-pink and purple striped leggings, then used her styling magic to replace the citrus fruits in his mane. The brass horned unicorn smiled grimly and said, "Thanks Style." He did not mean it. Those heavy fruits gave him a headache.

It was time for lunch so the other unicorns trotted away from the grove, heading back home to eat. When they did; the teensy-weensy bug came back to graze on the plump pistil of a sunny yellow jughead flower near Blue's backside. The unicorn accidentally swatted it with his tail and sent it sailing to the ground. That was a big mistake. Now, the buzzy-biter was really mad.



Buzzy-Biters



*"Stare,
Blue
Sighed,"*

LOWERING HIS HEAD SADLY. "THE TRIBE IS ALL together except for me. What is wrong with me? Why didn't I just get out from under these bushes and join them? Why do I feel like I don't belong? Oh yeah...no metal, no magic. That's why."

He sulked quietly, twitching his tail slowly back and forth, completely oblivious to the tiny insect on the ground.

"How rrr-ru-uuu-de," the angry buzzy-biter cried in disbelief. He could not believe he had been batted to the ground after having mercy on the unicorn. The big beast's hostile act was quite unexpected. It had invaded his home territory and now appeared to be initiating war. *No more mercy!* He shot up to the unicorn's ear yelling, "This is my bush, you big jerk! You've got to go!" Blue turned his head to see that the angry critter was back. He seemed to be raging at him again but all he heard was, "B-u-z-z-z-y b-i-t-e-r, b-u-z-z-z-y b-i-t-e-r!"

"Oh no!" Blue panicked upon hearing that war-cry sound. He turned his head to see the bug was making a bee-line for his backside. He flung his tail frantically back and forth across his unprotected rump. More hairs clung to the sticky jughead nectar with every swipe. The buzzy-biter zigged and zagged, neatly avoiding each tail swish. "You're not going to get me again with that thing," the irate bug retorted. "You want war? You got it."

Still, all Blue heard was "Buzzy-biter-buzzy-biter-buzzy-biter," as the insect's gaze zeroed in on the center point of two long blue hairs glued to the unicorn's rear-end. X marked the buzzy-biter's spot. Blue uttered a quiet "yeow" when he felt the needle's sting. It was all he could do to choke back a loud yelp.

Despite the painful sting, the thought of drawing Cornum's attention was enough to stop Blue from crying out. The pain was quickly becoming unbearable. Blue twisted his head around to see that the buzzy-biter was still attached to his flesh. Its barbed stinger had penetrated all the way through his hide. Its hook was sticking out the other side.

"I'm stuck. I'm stuck. I'm stuck," the buzzy-biter yelped. That was not supposed to happen. "I must break free!" the buzzy-biter screamed. Its wings batted violently against the air as it tried to escape, but the link between the hook and its body acted like a powerful spring. The bug's body snapped back viciously against Blue's rump, injecting even more venom into the unicorn. On the fifth

try, the buzzy-biter finally broke free but its hook-shaped stinger stayed behind.

On the trail heading home, Nix, the unicorn defender, felt a tingling from the tip of his horn all the way to the back of his neck. He looked back at the little grove of trees suspiciously. He saw nothing but a buzzy-biter greedily sucking up sweet nectar from the center of one of the many small pitcher-shaped flowers adorning the thickly-leaved jughead bush. "*No danger there,*" Nix thought wonderingly but he was not at ease for his horn never lied to him.

Of course, he had no way of knowing that Blue had just been stung. He simply could not detect when the blue unicorn was in danger because Blue did not have a metal horn like the others. The metal horns were the only parts that connected the magic of all the unicorns. It was through them that Nix could sense if they were in danger.

There was a lot of danger in the land of MarBryn, even if one could not see it. Magh, the evil sorcerer, was always on the lookout for the unicorns. He used their horns and hooves in his magic potions and spells which he then used to conquer more territories. No unicorn was ever safe for long when away from the Halstable. The nickel-horned unicorn quickly counted the number of unicorns with him. It was his duty to keep them safe. Everyone who had been in the little grove of trees was present so he hurried them all along the trail back to the safety of their home.

"Toodle-loodle-loo, toodle-loodle-loo," the fluting of Silubhra's song trailed back through the trees to the ears of the lonely unicorn.

As the silver-horned unicorn's beautiful voice faded away, the pain in Blue's rump became unbearable. He could feel the skin starting to swell into an ugly bump. No matter how hard he tried, his horn could not reach the tender spot where the buzzy-biter stinger was buried. There was no way he could remove the hook-shaped stinger himself. He needed help.

"I don't feel so good," he groaned as the trees began to swim around in circles in his eyes. He was getting dizzy with every passing second. He could barely walk but he knew he had to get back to the Halstable. His knees started to buckle and he struggled to regain his balance. He understood well enough the dangers of being stung by a buzzy-biter.

Anyone stung by a buzzy-biter needed quick medical attention. Someone with an allergy to the venom needed help even quicker. An allergic reaction could be lethal. Few unicorns were allergic to buzzy-biter venom. Blue was.

The sun was already blazing high in the sky. He had no magic and he was in serious danger. Blue was running out of time.



The Cussers



As
Soon As
The

OTHER UNICORNS WERE OUT OF SIGHT, BLUE BEGAN heading to the Halstable.

He had taken all but two steps when he saw three strange creatures on the road. There was something about them that made him want to hide. They seemed to be up to something. He stayed behind the bush to try to see if they were friend or

foe. "Two-leggers. . ." he whispered, lifting his hind leg off the ground to ease the throbbing that had set in. He studied them carefully. Slowly, he recognized them for what they were.

This group of travelers were called Cussers. They were from the town of Egada. Cussers were among many groups of two-leggers in the land of MarBryn. Besides them, there were Bugans from Bugansville, Letheans from the Silvan Forest, Ragamoffyns from the Red Band of Weita and many others. "What could they be up to?" he wondered as blood pounding the side of his neck made him more aware of the poison racing through his system.

Sadly, most two-leggers were no longer friends of unicorns. In the beginning, when the Halstable first came to MarBryn, nearly all two-leggers and other creatures— except for manticores— had welcomed them. But now many two-leggers worked for Magh. Some did it willingly while others had no choice. Those were under the sorcerer's binding spells.

Magh sent the two-leggers out across MarBryn to gather all of the unicorn horns and hooves that could be found. In the past, there had been hundreds of unicorns, but not anymore. The two-leggers had been so successful in taking their horns and hooves that now there were only twelve unicorns left. The unicorns were dangerously close to being completely wiped out.

Blue watched the Cussers closely. They were arguing and bonking each other on the head. Their voices were loud and angry. "Horsehocky!" one Cusser yelled at another. "Blast it all, if you'll talk to me that way!" the other yelled back.

Blue took a step back, trying to hide himself in the bushes. Cussers might be tiny but they were tough and he was not feeling strong enough to fend them off. He did not want them to notice he was there.

"Holy-Maroly, you two, cut it out!" their leader shouted, causing the curling mustache above his lips to shimmy. He was taller than the others and his ears

were a little pointier, too. He bopped both of them on the head with his staff to gain their attention. "Egads! That quite right hurt," one of the short stocky Cussers ranted. He had the beadiest eyes and a wart on his nose, too. Then, he slapped the shortest one on the back of the head. The leather gloves he wore made a "splat" sound where the material connected with the other's balding scalp.

When they got close to the Halstable, its magical security spell caused them to make an abrupt right turn leading them away from unicorn's home.

The Cussers were so confused about the change of direction, they began arguing even louder. "What'r we goin' this frazzlin' way fer? There's no reason fer changing' course," the shortest, Cusser whined.

The leader shouted, "Cause it's the way I want to go, dagnabit. Just keep moving, you buhdangled sluggard. We've been at it since dawn and we won't be finding any unicorns today."

"But Magh said we gotta keep lookin' til we find..." the whiner began.

The leader puffed up his chest, pretending to be brave. "I don't care what Magh wants," he shouted. "I want to get back to Egada before supptime." He raised his staff again threatening another head bop. That was reason enough for the other two Cussers to keep on moving. The town of Egada was still hours away. They did not want to miss supper, either.

The Cussers could not see the Halstable because it was magically hidden from all creatures except unicorns. "Whew, thank goodness the magical security alarms are still working," Blue thought, as the Cussers moved further and further away. Their voices rose and fell with each step they took. They seemed to have found a new topic to talk about. "Such angry sounding little fellows," Blue thought. He stayed hidden till their voices faded away.

The buzzy-biter poison surged through his system as he took careful steps toward his home. He felt very weak and it seemed to take forever to make the short trip to the Halstable. His eyes saw the smooth dusty red road as bumpy rolling hills. Pain shot through his rump with each step. "I will make it, I have to make it," he said to himself. "And I have to warn the others that the Cussers are now working for Magh."

Soon, he could see the door of the Halstable looming like a target ahead. It gave him a new surge of energy. He closed his eyes, gritted his teeth and trudged faster. When he finally reached the entrance to his home, he inserted his horn into an indentation where a door knob would normally be located. The outer double doors opened and he stumbled in calling, "Ghel..."

The golden-horned unicorn would know what to do about the buzzy-biter's stinger.



Great Google-ly- Moogle-ly



*Blue
And
Ghel*

SHARED A STALL MADE UP OF SEVERAL ROOMS.

When Magh killed Blue's sire and dam, Ghel's parents took him in. They treated him like he was their own son. He had been stable mates with Ghel since then.

Blue was only eight years old at the time. At that young age, he heard a rumor that Magh was using the magic of his mother's indium horn. It had been formed into a looking glass that the sorcerer used to keep his eye on all of MarBryn. Blue hated the thought that the sorcerer used his mother's magic to do evil. He swore to Ghel he would make Magh pay. She knew he meant it.

By the time he and Ghel turned twelve, Magh had taken the horns and hooves from her parents in the great unicorn massacre. After her loss their bond grew stronger. They became best friends, two orphans seeking comfort in the only thing that made sense...their friendship.

Blue and the golden-horned unicorn depended on each other for many things. They watched out for and took care of one another. They were the only family they had left. Ghel's magic allowed her to sense the feelings, hopes and dreams of other unicorns. She was an empath. Even though no one else thought so, she felt that Blue was meant for greatness, just as the Moon-Star Numen had shown Alumna before he was born.

The gold-horned unicorn had just finished writing a song about Blue when he stumbled into their stall. She raised up startled eyes when he burst through the door. She could tell something was not right and scrambled to her hooves.

"A buzzy-biter. . .the stinger. . ." was all he managed to say before collapsing. Ghel saw the stinger stuck in his rump. "Blue's allergic to buzzy-biter venom," she cried. "I have to act fast!" She carefully pushed at the stinger with the point of her golden horn, wiggling the little hook on the end around, until the sharp object finally came free. "All he needs now is some BB anti-venom," she said, jumping up to get the vial she kept for emergencies. Fear for Blue's life made her jerk too hard on the drawer it was stored in. The big wooden box came crashing out of its slot with a loud bang. Everything inside spilled onto the floor. Startled, Ghel jumped away from the mess and landed on the vial of anti-venom. It was crushed under her hoof. "Oh no!" she sobbed in anguish.

The commotion drew a low moan from Blue. Ghel rushed to his side. His normally blue muzzle was turning white. "Oh, Blue," she groaned, fearing he was

near death. She lowered her body to lay her head on his heart girth and concentrated on the sound of his faint heartbeat. Slowly, Ghel felt herself joining with Blue's unconscious mind. At first, all was dark. As the darkness brightened, she saw a multi-hued blue stallion rushing toward her. He reared up, pawing the air with his front leg. His face shone with victorious joy. "Blue. . ." the word whispered from her lips and then she was pushed back up into reality. She lifted her head and jumped to all fours. "The prophecy! It must be true." Yes, he had looked different but Ghel knew she had just seen a transformed Blue.

"I have to get Dr. Zinko. You have a destiny to fulfill," she told his unhearing ears. "You may be my world but the rest of the tribe needs you, too."

Lauda Lead Horn "tut-tutted" as she watched Dr. Zinko administer a magical cure to Blue's hind quarter. She was irritated. "Why did he go out into those bug infested bushes without using BB repellent first?" Dr. Zinko answered, "That stuff has a nasty smell, Lauda." He frowned thinking of the stinky odor.

Blue woke up to see the lead-horned unicorn glaring at him. In fact, Dr. Zinko and Ghel were looking at him very strangely, too. He croaked out with a dry, raspy voice, "Great Google-ly-moogly-ly. What happened? Why are you all looking at me like that?"

Lauda fussed at him, "You almost died, that's what happened, you nincompoop. You were so far gone, Dr. Zinko had to use his horn magic to revive you. Giving so much of his energy to you could have killed him," she fumed.

"Now, now, Lauda. It wasn't as bad as that," the magical medical unicorn said, although he was feeling a little weak. "But," he directed his gaze at Blue, "if it hadn't been for Ghel's quick action you wouldn't be talking to us right now!"

Blue felt so embarrassed. A little voice inside his head niggled at him, "*Nobody loves you, everybody hates you...you may as well go out and eat worms!*" He knew, deep down, it was not true but sometimes he just felt so out of place. It was hard not to feel like an outsider when he only had one true friend, no magic and no family to call his own. *Poor Ghel. . .it seemed she was always having to take up for him.*

"Lauda's just being a grumpy-wump," Ghel's reassuring voice filtered through his self-doubt. She kissed him on the cheek. "You rest now. I'll bring dinner to you later," she said with a smile. Ghel's kiss always comforted Blue so he relaxed enough for Dr. Zinko's magical remedy to work.

As soon as he started snoring, the other three unicorns left the room to dine on some of the goodies Chef Tinam had conjured up for lunch.

"I am glad that young unicorn made it home alive," Dr Zinko mumbled under his breath as they left. "He may not be our savior but he's still part of this tribe."



Groomane Salon



Dr. Zinko,
Ghel, and
Lauda

WALKED DOWN THE LONG WINDOWLESS HALL toward the Great Room. It was located on the opposite end of the Halstable. Dining on Tinam's mouth-watering delights was exactly what they needed.

Dr. Zinko had said that a good meal might help him get well more quickly so Ghel looked forward to getting something tasty to bring back to Blue. Delightful smells coming from the kitchen made them eager to eat.

Other unicorns smelled the delicious aromas and were headed to the kitchen, too. Two fillies rounded a corner, chit-chatting excitedly.

"I told you it would look great," Style, the steel-horned unicorn was saying to her friend as they strutted toward the trio.

"You were right as usual," Cuprum said with more excitement than she really felt. While she was happy with her new do, her encouraging tone was more to flatter Style than for any other reason. The steel horned unicorn could get a little annoyed if you did not act all excited about her magical styling efforts.

The copper-horned unicorn and Style were just leaving the Groomane Salon and Fitness Center together as the others walked up. This was the steel-horned unicorn's favorite place in the Halstable. Style liked to stay in shape so she worked out a lot. Although, she encouraged the other unicorns to exercise as much as possible, too, there were a few who had no interest in the fitness center at all. Some preferred running and jumping and climbing, over working out with machines; while others simply did not like to break a sweat at all.

Looking good was the most important thing to Style. She used her magic to create magnificent mane and tail styles for herself. She also did the same for the other mares and fillies. As a matter of fact, Style would use her styling magic on anyone who would sit still for a minute. She was the best at her craft. She also enjoyed her work very much. She had dreams about new ways she could style manes and tails. She referred to her styles as artworks. The fillies got excited every time she came up with a fantastic new design for manes, tails or nails.

They particularly loved her fabulous painted hoof designs. Style's salon was often filled with fillies who wanted a new look. She was always happy to conjure up beautiful and modern creations. Everyone looked much better when the steel-horned unicorn gave them pretty mane-dos and nail art. Sometimes, they

even felt better. Style's motto was: *When you look good, you feel good, too.*

Cuprum displayed her mane and tail proudly. They were now both decorated with dragonfly shaped barrettes. Rubies and emeralds hung loosely from her freshly brushed and shiny mane and tail. Her hooves were not left out. They were painted red with green outlines of dragonflies on top. The colors matched the jewels on her mane and tail perfectly.

Style, of course, had a new do, too. Topping it off was a butterfly shaped tiara. The tiara glowed with a bright purple shine from the amethysts studded in it. Her hoof nails were painted purple with white butterflies. The two fillies looked glorious. Style had worked her magic again.

"Style, you've outdone yourself this time," Ghel complimented. "I love that tiara."

"Yes, it is very pretty Style," Lauda said. "Those dragonfly barrettes are exquisite, too."

Everyone agreed the fillies looked fantastic.

The group entered the Great Room, where the tribe always gathered to eat delicious meals that the tin-horned unicorn chef conjured up.

Tinam's lemon-yellow eyes lit up like a happy child's when he saw his lovey-dovey, Cuprum. "Oh, you look scrumdilyumpcious, my little dumpling," he blurted joyfully.

The dolled-up filly twirled around on the very hoof-tip of her left hind leg. Her red and green mane went flying out into the air as she turned. "Don't I look a sight, though?" she laughed merrily, obviously loving the attention her new look brought. The other unicorns smiled fondly at the love-struck couple.

"You may look a sight but look at this spread Tinam has created for us," Style said eagerly. Her eyes widened as she admired all of the opened tins of yummy foods the unicorn chef had conjured up for lunch. Everything she loved to eat was spread out on the table just waiting for a bite. Style loved food as much as she loved looking good. She was a foodie and everyone knew it. But her love of food was no cause for worry for the steel horned unicorn. After a big meal, she would just work out twice as hard to get rid of the extra calories.

All unicorns got excited about food. While at Tinam's table, they felt true happiness and companionship. The dangers outside the Halstable were temporarily forgotten.

For that short brief time, none of them remembered or worried about Magh, the evil sorcerer. They all simply enjoyed the feast.



Tins, Tins and More Tins



*The Room
Was
Full*

OF DELICIOUS SCENTS THAT EASILY GAINED THE attention of each unicorn's nose. There was something on the table to please the taste buds of even the most finicky unicorn.

Tinam's magic gave him the ability to conjure meals from nothing. All he had to do was swirl his tin horn and whatever he imagined, appeared. The meals were contained within tin cans of several shapes. Some were rectangular and flat. Some were cylindrical and tall. When opened; delicious aromas were released from piping hot dishes fit for kings. This day, there were tins of spicy pink beans with the sharp bite of onion and the pungency of nightshade peppers.

These were served with tins of crunchy golden corn fritters sprinkled with decorative little green leaves. Tinam cared about the way his meals looked, but those refreshing sprigs of citrusy cilantro were not just for looks. Chomping on them, after eating, delightfully freshened breath, too. Most unicorns have a sweet tooth, so there was no lack of deserts. There were tins of sweet mace-laced potato haystack pancakes with maple syrup and containers of warm fragrant banana raisin bread. There were also tins filled with delicious cinnamon oatmeal cookies. Tinam never failed to please all of the unicorns.

Everyone sat comfortably on tall square stools, which were spaced evenly around the long table. They *oohed* and *ahhed*, plucking up bite-sized tid-bits with their cloven fore-hooves. They dropped them into delighted mouths, all enjoying the meal immensely.

All, except Ghel. She stared blankly at her food, pushing it around on the plate with a fork. She had to force every bite down past the lump of sadness in her throat. Nothing would taste good or be right until Blue fully recovered from the buzzy-biter's venom. If he hadn't been hiding under that bush, he might never have been stung. "*Life would be so much simpler if he didn't go off alone all the time,*" she thought. "*I wish he would spend more time with the rest of the tribe.*"

Ghel understood better than most why Blue was a loner. Still, she could not bring herself to accept that he had to be alone as often as he was.

The rickety old unicorn beside her sensed what was bothering the golden-horned filly. "Don't worry, Ghel. Most problems can be solved, given enough time," Iown said with his gentle voice. His dark grey eyes were filled

with kindness and understanding. Ghel looked at the older unicorn and managed a genuine smile. There was something about his words that made her feel like everything was going to be okay. She noted the dusky-gray bristles framing his muzzle and she smiled again. She knew Iown was right.

The magic of Iown's iron horn was multi-purpose. Not only did it return life to tired plants; a magical touch from it could also help disagreeing unicorns become friends again. If any of the tribe were having a hard time with their stable-mate or anyone else, they would simply go to see Iown. He would give each unicorn a soothing pat on their poll with his iron horn. That plus a little wise advice and their problems would be ironed out...at least for a while.

"Oh, I wish it was as easy as that," Ghel replied. She looked down the length of the table and indicated Style and Cornum with her golden horn. "But this isn't as simple as one of their ego-centered spats." Iown put on his best clown face, opening his eyes wide, drawing his lips into a tight, grimacing smile. He flattened his ears straight back, looking very silly.

"Oh-ho, nay would I mention you in the same breath with those two self-centered unicorns. No, no, never, my dear," he assured her. His actions and words made her feel better. In friendly silence, the young and the elderly unicorns watched the quarrelling couple a moment.

Cornum and Style were whispering, or at the very least they seemed to be attempting to whisper but their argument could clearly be heard. "Why lemons?" Cornum whined with a frown. Now that his belly was full and his food was digesting, his festive, merry mood was fading.

"Because you're such a sourpuss," Style snapped back, feeling a little gurgle in her stomach that felt as sour as her mood was becoming.

Iown looked back at Ghel with raised eyebrows and round eyes. He murmured reluctantly, "I'd better get down there. It looks as if they might need a little help ironing this one out." He crunched down on a stalk of celery, then slowly strolled to the opposite end of the table, chewing as he went.

Ghel gazed sadly at Blue's empty stool catty-cornered from her. It was almost always empty but this time she felt his absence like a sharp pain in her heart. She remembered how Blue had once said, *You're just wasting your life away with me. All I am is a pitiful excuse for a unicorn.* Those words had stabbed at her like a knife.

"Blue, a metal horn or magic could not make me love you more," she had responded angrily. To her, he was perfect just the way he was. But he could not see it. Now, she knew there was so much more to come. What she had seen when her mind was merged with Blue's convinced her that the prophecy of the Moon-Star Numen would one day come true. Someday, he would be that stallion in her vision. She just knew it.



The Oracle Sanctuary



Several
Days
Later,

ALUMNA WAS IN HER ORACLE'S SANCTUARY, GAZING once again into a big glass orb mounted on a three-legged metal stand. The color-swirled glass sphere could draw every unicorn eye into it but she was the only one who saw distinct words and pictures in the globe. She was the first unicorn who could communicate with the Moon-Star Numen in many generations.

No one was drawn to the room or the orb the way the aluminum-horned unicorn was. In fact, Alumna simply could not stay away. Over time, whenever anyone wondered where she had wandered off to, someone would say, *"She's probably in the Oracle's Sanctuary."*

At first, the unicorns thought Alumna must be an oracle because every time she came out of the room, she had some new piece of information that she insisted on sharing with the tribe . . . information that came from the big glass orb. They used to listen intently but ever since she had been wrong about Blue, they pretty much ignored what she had to say.

Despite their disinterest, Alumna continued trying to capture all of the images she saw in the orb in drawings and sketches. She was not a very good artist but she did not let her lack of skill stop her. Her drawings were simple lines and curves—sometimes splashed with a little paint.

Iown, her stablemate, would often come by to see what she had drawn. One time, he saw she had drawn a scene from a hilltop showing other buildings like their home. In the image, a wide river could be seen off in the distance. There seemed to be the head of a unicorn rising up out of the water. Beside one of the buildings were two unicorns with giant wings. Iown touched the picture with his iron horn, wondering, *"Could this be Unimaise?"*

Over the years, Alumna had learned a lot. The Numen had shown her many things, through faint, fast-changing images in the globe and countless brief incomplete conversations. It shocked her to learn the tribe was not originally from MarBryn. Their true home was a place far, far away called Unimaise. There were no two-leggers there; only unicorns. There were many different breeds of unicorns on Unimaise. There were Metal Horns, Peacorns, Watercorns, Unicus and others. It was a beautiful place, one like none of the unicorns of the Halstable had ever seen before. It was the place of birth of their ancestors.

Alumna had learned that each breed contained a variety of different herds. Numen told her she belonged to the metal-horned unicorn breed. Each breed consisted of many herds. She was a descendant of the Navigator herd. When he

said, "You are the only navigator left," she had asked, "What is a navigator?" "Ahh, they have the very special job of charting the courses for the jump ships," Numen told the very confused unicorn.

"Charting the courses for jump ships?" Alumna repeated the Moon-Star spirit's words wonderingly. The thought was too complicated for her. She did not understand what the Numen meant.

He told her the story of how the Halstable had come to be on MarBryn. The unicorns of Unimaise were magical creatures but they also knew a great deal about technology. They created the Nomadic Unicorn Magic Extender Network, otherwise known as the N.U.M.E.N. They filled this entity with all past and present unicorn knowledge, then placed the Numen in a satellite. This satellite was named "Moon-Star". The Moon-Star Numen revolved around Unimaise all the time. It kept an eye on their planet as well as other worlds.

Through it, they saw there were no unicorns anywhere but on Unimaise. Wanting to share their magic with others, they built a spacecraft, programmed by the Numen, to send the metal-horned unicorns out amongst the populated planets. Their craft was the Halstable. It brought the ancestors of the current tribe of metal-horned unicorns across space and time to MarBryn where it was thought that something in the ship's systems had failed and they were now trapped far from home.

The unicorns lived in peace with the inhabitants of MarBryn for a long time until Magh rose up and became more powerful than anyone had been before. Now, he was the cause of suffering across the entire land. The Numen had given hope when he told Alumna, "The last unicorn born will save the tribe." But that hope was short-lived. Sadly, the last unicorn born was Blue. Despite the Numen's prophecy, his lack of a metal horn made the idea of him ever saving the tribe seem hopeless. So much tragedy had fallen upon the metal-horn unicorns. And now that the fillies could no longer have foals, it would not be long before the tribe died out. They had to get back to the mother planet. It was the only thing that could save the surviving unicorns. But how? No one knew how to get them back home.

When Alumna heard she was a navigator, she hopefully offered, "Since I'm a navigator, maybe I can get us back to Unimaise." "No, Alumna. I'm afraid that would require a Pilot. There has been no one who could assume that role for the past century," Numen told the devastated unicorn. "Until now...maybe."

Alumna's face lit up at that piece of great news. There might be a way for them to get home. Far away from the evil clutches of the sorcerer who would kill them all if he got the chance. It had taken over a century but the Moon-Star spirit had finally come up with a plan to get the last of the metal-horned tribe back to Unimaise. The Numen had high hopes for it. If everything went as it should, the metal-horned unicorns would be home in no time. But, even he knew it was not perfect. Nothing ever is.

It was finally time to reveal his plan and the blue unicorn's role to Alumna.



Of Descendants and Ancestors



*Alumna
Entered
Blue's Stall*

CARRYING ONE OF HER DRAWINGS. IT WAS A VERY simple map of the land of MarBryn. The Numen had told her that Blue would reach his destiny in a place called Muzika Woods. He was to join with the Moon-Star there.

He did not hear her enter. He was just lying on the couch moping. She watched a moment, thinking of how disappointing life had been for him. Alumna felt some responsibility for that. After all, the prophecy about his destiny had not come true. . .yet. She hoped Blue would listen to Numen's new plan. She was afraid he would not take her words seriously. She sat next to him and took a deep breath. Then, she told Blue everything.

She was relieved when he leapt to his feet, excited by her words. Though the buzzy-biter wound was mostly healed, Blue still swayed a little from the sudden rush of blood to his head. He asked, "So, the prophecy is true? I'm to receive magic after all?" He just could not believe it. *Magic! After all these years . . . What would his magic power be? More importantly, would he finally have the opportunity to avenge the deaths of his parents and the rest of the tribe?*

The thought of joining with the Moon-Star gave him pause. Suddenly, his knees got weak. He was afraid at the thought of touching a star. "What if it burns me up?" he asked, like a scared little colt.

Alumna puffed out her breath in an annoyed whinny and said, "I doubt that will happen." She shook her head in dismay at the fear he displayed. "Now listen, Blue. This is important. The Moon-Star is coming." She pulled a rolled piece of parchment from a leather quiver on her back. Shaking the map she held in her split hoof at him, she said, "You must be in Muzika Woods when it appears from the other side of the moon. When it joins with you, the rest of the tribe may finally be safe from the threat of total extinction."

Then, she said, "Now, I must gather the rest of the tribe so we can go over this map together. Meet us in the courtyard in thirty minutes."

Alumna's stern tone reminded him of his encounter with the Cussers. He told her that they were now working for Magh. "Whatever happens, we must be very careful. Magh's informants and spies are everywhere," he finished. Alumna

unrolled the map and looked at it a long moment as if she could get it to tell her what to do. Of course, it had nothing to say. She rolled it back up, shoved it in its holder and jumped up from the couch. "We have a lot of things to go over as a tribe before leaving on this quest, Blue. When everyone is in the courtyard, we'll all go over this map and make our plans for the journey together," she said in a voice meaning 'I'm not in the mood to argue'.

"Yes, ma'am," Blue said. He watched her trot away with the tassel on her cap swinging right, left, and 'round and 'round like a pendulum on a frenzied clock.

Blue's life changed in an instant. Now that the chance to meet his destiny seemed to have finally arrived, he believed he was ready. Since learning about Magh's wicked use of his mother's horn, he had secretly been spending time preparing his body in anticipation of a difficult challenge.

Avenging her death was always at the top of his mind. He also knew he could not hope to face the sorcerer with the puny body he had been born with. Long ago, he determined to make himself stronger, swifter, more agile. Since he had no magic, he knew he would have to use his wits, too. The process took a long time. For years, he had run back and forth across the flat plains imagining Magh's warriors chasing close on his tail.

Gaiso, his friend and mentor from the Guarded Forest even sparred with him from time to time. Their meeting had been a stroke of luck for both. Blue had stumbled upon the buck in a battle for his life against a small manticore. The little unicorn drew the manticore's attention onto himself and Gaiso easily conquered the beast. Feeling indebted to Blue, the stag offered to teach him battle skills.

Because of the stag's mentoring, Blue's horn stroke grew swifter with each exercise. Due to the extra competition in training, his cloven hooves could now cling to the steepest cliff ledge without a fear of falling.

"I'm ready for this," Blue said confidently, as he shoved some ready-to-eat tins into a knapsack. Then, he thought about Ghel. Leaving her was the hardest thing. She was his best friend. He could not take her, though. He could not put her in harm's way. He decided to leave a gift of his affection for her, just in case he never returned home. The gold heart locket was the only physical reminder he still had of his mother. Now, it would be Ghel's.

He wrote a goodbye note and placed the locket on it feeling a tinge of worry about the adventure ahead of him. He finished loading up the knapsack with supplies and slung it over his head and across his shoulder. He took the time for a final, longing look about the room. Then, he left, galloping down the hall and through the gate, away from his home. The Guarded Forest would be his first destination. He hoped to find Gaiso there. He felt confident the stag would have his back. With a last look back at the Halstable, Blue galloped away. He forgot all about Alumna's warning and her map.



Nix That Needle



The
Entire
Tribe

WAS IN THE COURTYARD WAITING FOR BLUE. HE

should have already arrived. Now, he was twenty minutes late and they were getting restless. "What's so important anyway?" Cornum grouched. He looked across the room to where Alumna and Ghel stood alone. The oracle was whispering in hopes no one else would hear but all ears swiveled her way at,

"The Moon-star is coming." That was real news! All the others surrounded them, talking at once. Flustered, Alumna found a break in the questions being thrown at her to ask Ghel to go see what was taking Blue so long.

Upon entering their stall, the gold-horned unicorn noticed something fluttering on the desk. It was the letter for her from Blue. "Oh no," she cried, after reading it. "He's left alone!" She put on the necklace he had left her and raced out of the Halstable. "He can't be very far away yet. I'll find him and bring him back," she said to herself. She did not think it would take long so she left without alerting the others.

Ghel followed Blue's hoof tracks for many miles until they ended in the hard rocky dirt. Looking up, she realized she was completely lost. She moved forward, stretching her neck to look around and tripped on a sharp rock jutting from the ground. The sweet scent of blood flowing from a gash on her knee caught the attention of a very hungry manticore. He followed the smell until he came upon a natural land bridge right at the north-western point of the Kinubalu Desert. The bridge was a short-cut across a deep, wide canyon. It ended near the edge of the Guarded Forest.

On the other side of the canyon, the manticore saw a blue unicorn standing a few feet from a thick green wall made up of huge spiky vines. "There's my prey," the manticore grunted, thinking the unicorn was trapped. He dashed across the bridge, hoping to catch the unaware unicorn. Halfway across, he skidded to a stop. "What happened to the scent of blood?" he wondered. It was gone and he was confused. As he tried to figure it out, the vines loosened up and opened a space just big enough for the unicorn to step through. "Arrgh! Lost him," he groaned, as the thorned vines closed up tight. His empty belly rumbled. The blue unicorn was safe. The Guarded Forest would not let a predator like the manticore in.

Disappointed at losing his dinner, the beast turned back across the bridge. To his delight, the scent of blood reappeared. Just a few yards away was the gold-horned unicorn, head down, stumbling his direction. She was wounded,

paying no attention her surroundings. The manticore wetted his lips. This one would make a good meal and there was no way she could escape.

A shiver ran along Ghel's spine. She felt like someone or something was watching every stumbling step she took. Intense fear gripped her heart, making it beat faster. "Something dangerous is out there and it's close," she thought. She stopped and looked around, trying to find the source of the danger.

The manticore smiled to see how fear made her eyes glow white against her honey-colored coat. He smiled because fear gave the meat a better flavor. Abruptly, he asked, "Do you want a moment to say your prayers before I send you to your maker?"

Ghel's eyes snapped up to meet those of the ugly beast. The look she saw frightened her out of her wits. There was no way to escape. "Oh, where can Nix be?" she blurted out. "Doesn't he know I'm in serious danger?" Nix always arrived in the nick of time when a unicorn was in trouble. His powerful horn could detect a unicorn in distress from twenty miles away.

Indeed, Nix did detect that Ghel was in big trouble all the way from the crowded Great Room of the Halstable. A huge warning tingle forced Nix's head to swing abruptly around. His nickel horn aimed in the direction of Ghel like a compass needle. With a shake of his dark gray mane, he nodded a salute to Silubhra, saying, "Ghel is in danger but never fear, I will rescue her in the nick of time." A blaze of light filled the air with silvery sparkles as he disappeared into the brightness.

Upon hearing Ghel's words, the manticore twisted his neck around, trying to see who she was talking about. Seeing nothing, he thought, "The silly thing has taken leave of her senses!" Laughter boomed from his terrible throat. It stopped when he caught glimmers of light just behind the frightened filly.

When Nix fully materialized, he took note of the dangerous situation, saying, "Stand aside, Ghel, while I nix that needle!" The manticore had heard of Nix, the great unicorn defender. He skittered away in fright, trying to escape. Nix aimed a powerful blast from his nickel horn toward the brute. It was meant to destroy the scorpion stinger at the end of its tail but Nix missed his target. The land bridge was hit instead. It loudly crumbled away into the giant hole it had spanned. The short cut across the canyon was completely destroyed.

Nix was angry he had accidentally destroyed the only easy path to the Guarded Forest. He caught up to the manticore and tapped his stinger with his spiraled horn. To the manticore's horror, the tip of his tail completely disappeared. "Now beat it buster, before I nix your nose, too," Nix said, looking fierce.

The manticore answered meekly, "Thank-you, kind sir, thank-you," then ran away on jellied knees, with what remained of his tail tucked protectively between his legs.



Dance and Sing



The Nickel-horned Unicorn

WAS CALLED NIX BECAUSE HE COULD MAGICALLY appear to nix a disaster in the nick of time. A blast from his horn would quickly put an end to any danger threatening himself or another unicorn. Though he had saved many from Magh's soldiers in the past, he had not been able to save them all. He simply could not be

everywhere at once. That was one of the limitations of his magic. Another was that he could not get himself and Ghel back home in the same way he had arrived at the site of danger. They would have to hoof it back to the Halstable. It was nearly twenty miles away and the journey back would take a while.

Before turning back, Ghel pleaded with him to help her find Blue first. Nix sighed deeply and said, "It's not that I don't want to find him but he doesn't have a metal horn. You know I can't detect where he is without it, Ghel."

Nix felt bad for Ghel but he had to be realistic especially if she could not. "We don't even know which route he took."

"That's what frightens me so much," she insisted. "He could die out there all alone. We'd never know he'd even been in danger."

"Let's not think about things we can't control. Anyway, we can't go after him without the rest of the tribe. The best we can do right now is to go back to the Halstable to hear what Alumna has to say about her vision from the Numen."

It was near dawn when they got back home. The lights were still burning brightly in the Halstable. Everyone had waited up, anxious to see them home safe. Lauda examined Ghel's injuries while the golden unicorn talked about her close encounter with the manticore.

"Why, would you take off alone, Ghel?" Alumna asked. "You know how dangerous it is out there. You were almost a manticore's dinner."

It was obvious Alumna was angry. She tried to control her voice but it came out in sharp, short tones.

"Or worse," Lauda exclaimed, "you might have been captured by Magh's minions and had your hooves and horn taken." The hide on her back rippled fearfully.

Ghel shuddered, too. She had thought she was doomed when she first saw the manticore. She would have been if Nix had not arrived in the nick of time to

save her. All the other unicorns put on brave faces but the thought scared them, also. The seriousness of their situation was fully revealed when Alumna said, "The entire tribe is going to have to make a journey all the way across MarBryn to Muzika Woods." She showed them the map which she had wanted to show the entire tribe at the same time. Unfortunately, Blue never saw it. Even with the map, there was no way to know which direction he had taken. "All he knows is that he is supposed to get to Muzika Woods," Alumna said sadly. "The Numen told me Blue's destiny is to ensure the safety of our tribe. He said it is time for Blue to join with the Moon-Star."

No one tried to hide the shock they felt. They all spoke at once: "Join with the Moon-Star?"

"Corn feathers! Is he gonna sprout wings to do this trick?" Lauda exploded. "The Moon-Star's in the sky and Blue sure as heck can't fly." They all thought it sounded like nonsense. Unicorns cannot fly.

Alumna had more to say. She shifted her hooves, looking down at the ground for a moment before continuing, "Apparently, the Moon-Star will come down to meet him. At the moment of their joining, Blue will receive all of its knowledge and power."

That news was greeted with many protests. "He's not strong enough!" Style cried. "It will kill him," Cornum shouted. "He's just a plain blue unicorn," Nix insisted. "We're doomed, for sure," Lauda gasped.

Alumna was not finished. In fact, the worst was yet to come. She paused, waiting for them to settle down. "Blue knows he must get to Muzika Woods to meet the Moon-Star. What he doesn't know is the danger the entire tribe faces if we're not all together when it arrives. He knows he's the one who will receive the Numen's knowledge and power but he doesn't know it will take all of our horns to guide in the star. If we're not all horn-tip to horn-tip, when it touches him he will be killed."

All the serious talk totally stressed out the steel-horned unicorn stylist. To everyone's shock, Style burst into a crazy song and dance. She moved around the room dishing out new mane-dos and accessories to each filly. They were absurdly outrageous decorations for unicorns preparing for a difficult journey. There were shooting stars for Lauda—shiny glass balls for Cuprum—live butterflies for Silubhra—purple bubbles for herself. They all seemed ridiculous except the one she gave Ghel. Hers was a golden veil which would shine with an inner light until the entire tribe was safely together again.

lown watched the unicorn stylist's foolish actions as long as he could stand it, then said, "Style, we don't have time for this frilly-frilly." She cried out "This is serious business! When you look better. . ." He finished her thought, "you feel better too. Yes, we know. . ." They all knew. It was her way of contributing.

Though fearful about their fate, the tribe pulled together and left the Halstable for a journey to places unknown.



Forest Friends



*Blue
Entered
The*

GUARDED FOREST COMPLETELY CLUELESS ABOUT

how close the slobbering manticore had been to his hind quarters. He had no idea how much danger he had just left behind. Fortunately, no evil force could pass through the forest's outer edges, as the spirit that protected it had a way of moving heavy undergrowth into the path of any creature with bad intentions. As everyone knew, unicorns were good

creatures. They never caused harm on purpose, so the forest let them come and go at will. In fact, the metal-horned tribe was well known to the forest folk.

As the vines, twined themselves completely shut behind him, he could not help thinking, *"It's a shame the Halstable isn't in this forest. So many more lives might have been saved if it was."* It was a wish he had had many times.

His first order of business was to find Gaiso, his friend and mentor. He hoped he could convince the buck to travel with him to Muzika Woods. There was no better companion for such an important journey. Although he knew the stag well, he did not know where he lived in the forest.

Two small fairies with beautifully patterned butterfly wings stopped the game of tag they were playing midair to greet the blue unicorn. They knew who he was because he visited the brother and sister fairies in the Guarded Forest from time to time. "Hiya there, Blue! Been a long, long time!" Pido said in a thin but loud voice.

The fairies were not very big. They were about as tall as field mice standing upright on hind legs and half as wide. Pido's wings had markings that looked like ascending bubbles, decreasing in size as they rose. His sister, Fleoge's wings looked like colorful stained glass. Blue liked to play games of chase with them because it sharpened his abilities to zig and zag while running full speed through obstacle courses of trees. When they played hide and seek, the unicorn became skilled at catching glimpses of fluttering wings and flashes of color while peering through the tightly packed leaves.

Of course, the fairies could never be caught. It was all just a fun game for them. But for Blue it was so much more. It was a way to prepare for anything that might come at him. He was sure a sharp eye and fast reflexes would be useful for the task ahead.

He smiled at the fairies in greeting. "Do you know where Gaiso lives?" he asked. "Gaiso? We don't know any Gaiso!" Pido answered. Fleoge said, "Let's ask Waap.

He knows everything." They found the opossum hanging upside down by his tail from a tree limb. He was fast asleep. Pido flew quietly up and tickled Waap on the nose. The opossum did not want to be bothered so he swatted the brother fairy to the ground and went back to snoozing. Pido hit the hard dirt with a plop. A star with a tail flew back and forth between his antennae releasing a spatter of angry electrical charges. Sparks flew all over the fairy's head like tiny fireworks. Fleoge covered her mouth to stifle a giggle and said, "Ooh! I think we made Waap mad." Blue helped Pido to his feet. The little fairy was not discouraged. "Who needs his help anyway? I know just who to ask," he said cheerfully.

Fleoge clapped her hands delightedly. She knew who he meant, "Oh right, Oura and Olina will know." Pido hopped up and took off. "Follow me," he called. His antennas trembled madly as he zig-zagged away through the trees." The blue unicorn easily kept up with the zooming fairies in their curving path through the woods.

They came upon two squirrels who were known for keeping their paws on the pulse of the forest. "Ooh, look, Oura," one cute little squirrel with a big furry tail chattered to the other. "It's Pido and Fleoge. Have you come to play tag with us?" she called to the fairies. "Oh boy, Olina, they brought a unicorn to play with us, too," the other squealed happily.

"No, we didn't, you sillies," Pido replied, catching their remarks. "We're here on business, girls." Fleoge confirmed, landing gracefully on top of a big daisy with lovely white petals and a yellow center. It tipped forward a bit from her slight weight.

The blue unicorn asked if they knew the whereabouts of the big red buck. The gossipy little squirrels put their heads together to chitter-chatter privately for a moment. They took a while, giggling and gesturing to each other. The whole time, their fluffy tails whipped back and forth like conductors leading their own separate orchestras.

"Sure, we know exactly where Gaiso...and his sister, Springen live," Olina informed them. She dusted off an acorn, held in her tiny fingers. When it was clean enough, she popped it between her sharp teeth, cracking it expertly. "Anyone, care for some?" she asked, holding the nutmeat out in an open palm. No one did. "OK, then, more for me!" she shrugged and scarfed it all down. "Yum," she said with a satisfied smile.

"Do you think you might point me in the right direction? I'd very much like to visit with him." Blue hoped to see his sparring partner as soon as he could.

"Well, look at that! Aren't you in luck?" Oura quipped, pointing just ahead. There, just rounding a corner was Gaiso and his sister, Springen. They liked acorns almost as much as the squirrels did and were out foraging for some.

Finding Gaiso so quickly was indeed the stroke of luck Blue needed.



Sparing Partners



The Big Buck

WAS IMPRESSIVE. HIS COAT WAS A DEEP RUST AND HE had a long brown beard. His antlers had fifteen points and they were large. . .at least seven feet from endpoint to endpoint. 'Magnificent!' best described the stag, who taller than Blue. With him was a small spotted doe. Though she was no longer a fawn, the dainty little thing was less than half the size of the

stag. As the two deer approached the little group, the others were surprised to see the big buck shake his rack at the blue unicorn. Raising his mighty head, he speared Blue through with a look. "Hello, Sir Unicorn. Are you here to seek me out for another jousting lesson?" Gaiso asked. His voice was heavy with sarcasm.

Blue laughed at his friend's playfulness. He knew he did not mean him any harm. "Why, no. . .but I'm very happy to see you, Gaiso. It's been a while since our last lesson and a lot has happened."

Gaiso laughed loudly and grinned at his old friend. "Well, I am pleased to see you, too, Sir. What brings you to the Guarded Forest?"

Blue told the stag about his quest to join with the Moon-Star in Muzika Woods. He finished with, "I was hoping I might convince you to go with me."

Gaiso answered with the speed of galloping hoof beats, "Of course I'll go. I owe you my life."

Blue was a little embarrassed at his words. The stag had done all the fighting against the manticore, himself. "All I did was act as a distraction," he said, cheeks coloring. He was embarrassed that he had not done more to help. "I just happened to be at the right place at the right time," he protested.

"Good thing you were," Gaiso remembered, "or I wouldn't be here right now." He was ready to learn more of Blue's mission. The Guarded Forest could be boring and he wanted some adventure. "The sooner, the better," he thought. So, he turned the conversation back to the topic at hand, "Now, tell me about this quest. . .I must say I hope we see some action. Nothing is more exciting than facing an actual enemy in combat."

His sister, Springen spoke up proudly, "He does love combat. Why, not long ago, just south of the Guarded Forest, he fought a lynx. I was there. It was stalking us from behind. Gaiso heard a twig snap just in time and turned to catch it on a rack point. He speared its leg clean through. That cat won't be a threat to any of

us again." She smiled a bright, pretty smile. The blue unicorn could not help but smile right back. She reminded him of Ghel, who was also warm and friendly to everyone.

"That is something to be thankful for," Blue said. Springen's words made Blue feel certain he was picking the right travelling companion. It was good to such hear pride in his sister's voice. The stag was worthy of admiration.

The two little squirrels had been chomping on nuts the entire time Blue and Gaiso spoke. They enjoyed their meal so much that, watching them made Blue remember how hungry he was. His mouth watered and he did not even like acorns. "I am famished!" he thought. He had several of Chef Tinam's ready-to-eat meals in his backpack. With his cloven hoof, he pulled out two tins. One was labeled "Vegetable Barley Soup" and the other had "Sweet Red Beets sprinkled with Blueberries" printed on it in squiggly writing.

Tinam's to-go containers were designed so that anyone could easily open them with a touch of a stick, an antler, a finger or anything solid. Blue tapped the top of each can with his horn. The lids rolled back, releasing delicious aromas. The beets smelled like freshly turned up dirt after a light rain. They had been roasted just enough to make them taste slightly sweet. The blueberries smelled so tart that the back of Blue's tongue started tingling. This earthy chow smelled like home to the hungry unicorn.

Oura's eyes popped wide open with wonder. It amazed the squirrel to see food could be preserved by such a magical process. "Ooh, that smells wonderful. May I have a taste?" Blue was quick to reply, "Yes, please have some. Everyone. . .please have some. Tinam is a great chef." He was happy to share his magical feast with anyone who wanted a sample.

"Tinam certainly has a wonderful talent for preserving foods," Springen gushed. She was impressed. "Amazing," Gaiso said over a bite of warm chewy soup. It was spiced with several flavors he could not name but mixed together, it tasted awesome. He closed his eyes to fully enjoy it.

"Oh, this is divine," said Fleoge. "Just, one little barley pearl fills me to the brim." She fluttered to the ground and sat down to rest.

Pido agreed with a satisfied burp. He leaned back rubbing his full belly.

Although he had no magic of his own, Blue felt very proud of his magical tribe. A shy smile crept across his face as he accepted all the compliments on behalf of Tinam, the tin-horned unicorn chef.

Sharing his food with his friends made him happy. He had never really given it a lot of thought before then. But it now dawned on him like new news that some of the unicorns in the metal-horned tribe had some pretty special talents.



Don't Make The Little Squirrels Angry



After Dinner

BLUE AND GAISO TALKED SOME MORE ABOUT THE TRIP.

They considered all the possible routes and eventually decided on a starting point. They would follow the tallest mountain on the eastern horizon until they reached it. "Muzika Woods is in the south but I think it would be better to head east for a while

before turning that direction. I don't want to get anywhere near Magh's castle if we can avoid it," Gaiso said.

Blue agreed. He didn't want to get any closer to Magh than he had to, either. He had never been further from home than the Guarded Forest so he was curious about many things. "Do you know anything about the landscapes or the populations we might come across on our route," he asked.

"To be honest, most of my travels have been west of the forest. The foraging is better over there," the stag admitted. "This will all be new to me, too, but I'm excited. This will be a grand adventure."

The moon had risen to its highest point. Gaiso yawned and said, "Time to get some sleep. The earlier we turn in, the sooner our adventure can begin." With that, they decided to call it a night.

Bright rays of moonlight filtered through the thickly leaved trees making it hard for Blue to completely relax. He shifted around trying to find a comfortable spot to rest his head on the hard ground. He could not sleep. His mind kept wandering. He heaved a nervous sigh, thinking. "*I wonder what's out there. Will there be monsters? Will we have to fight for our lives? I've never been so far from home before. Will we make it to Muzika Woods in time? Will we make it there at all? I'm so glad I won't be going alone.*" He looked at Gaiso and a feeling of gratitude rushed through him. He lifted his head and said, "Thank you."

Gaiso was already halfway through the veil to dreamland when Blue's words pulled him back. "Are you talking to me?" he mumbled. His voice was heavy with sleep.

"Yes," Blue said, feeling slightly shy. He had not intended for Gaiso to hear what he said. He knew the stag did not like showing mushy feelings. Gaiso's confusion showed on his face when he asked, "Whatever for?"

"For being my friend," Blue said, humbly.

Gaiso snorted rather loudly and sputtered, "Why yes. . .of course. I'm glad you're mine, too. Now, get some sleep. Morning will come soon."

Morning arrived very quickly. An orange glow had spread across the entire sky by the time the young unicorn and the brave stag made their farewells to the others. "I have a bad feeling about this adventure, brother," Springen said, looking at Gaiso with large soulful eyes. "I wish you wouldn't go."

The macho male laughed off her worries. "It's your female nature that makes you worry, sister. I can take care of myself, have no fear. And you will be safe here in the Guarded Forest," he promised. He placed a brotherly kiss on her forehead before trotting off to meet his fate, with never a backward glance.

Oura gasped, "Female nature? What a pig. Can you believe that guy? . . .Thinks he's king of the forest or something." She aimed the unshelled nut in her hand right at the back of his head.

"Unh-unh-unh, that wouldn't be right, Oura," Olina chided her sister. But she absolutely agreed, "Poor Springen. . .to have to put up with such a clod. What a bunch of bunkum. I could never. . ."

Oura looked at the nut in her hand, thinking, "*Olina's right. Why waste a perfectly good nut on Mr. Fancy Antlers?*" She laughed, "I can see we need to teach that doe a thing or two while her big brother is off on his quest." She broke the shell open and popped the tasty meat into her mouth.

Olina jumped right on it; getting the doe's attention, "Springen, dear...why do you put up with such claptrap from your brother?"

"Gaiso's not so bad," she defended. "He has a very big heart, you know. Just look how he dropped everything to go off on this quest with Blue."

"Yes, and left you here to fend for yourself," the little squirrel huffed.

"You know I'm safe here, Olina," the little doe said in her brother's defense. "Gaiso would never forgive himself if the young stallion had taken off alone and come to harm. My brother has a big heart. He is a protector. He goes with those who need protecting the most."

"You're the one with the big heart, Springen," Oura told her as a tear escaped her eye. "Loving him in spite of his faults the way you do. . ."

Springen just smiled in reply, then sadly watched her brother's back until he was out of sight. Even though she spoke bravely in his defense, he was only flesh and blood. He could be beaten by a stronger opponent. She hoped he would return safely. He was the only family she had and losing him would be unbearable. "*Be safe, brother,*" she thought and turned back toward home.



Flaming Ball Of Fire



*I t Was
E asy
G oing* THROUGH THE GUARDED FOREST FOR THE NEXT TWO days. All the watering holes were full of fresh water, so Blue did not have to use up any of Cuprum's water purification pebbles. The copper-horned unicorn concentrated her magic into portable enchanted pellets for the other unicorns to use

when she was not with them. There were different colored pebbles to be used for different situations.

When picking the items he would need on his quest, Blue thought there might be a lot of places along the route to Muzika Woods where the water might not be of the highest quality. He had brought enough blue pebbles to remove salt from marsh water. There were some green ones which would extract water from thick mud. The red pellets removed harsh chemicals from water that looked safe to drink, but which might not really be. *"Better safe than sorry,"* he had thought when placing them in his pack.

"Once we leave the Guarded Forest, I'll use the red ones in any water source that looks clean. . . just in case it isn't," Blue had decided, nodding his head up and down in satisfaction. He thought he had planned for just about anything which might happen.

There were plenty of plants to graze on in the Guarded Forest, so he and Gaiso did not have to open any more of Tinam's tinned meals, either. On the third night, Blue had a strange dream. He watched from a distance as the entire tribe left the Halstable and turned to the south.

"Where are they headed?" he wondered. Then, he saw the black outline of a large castle on a hilltop. Something was wrong. He could feel pure malice coming from the tallest tower. He saw the tribe cross over a drawbridge to enter the town. The bridge was immediately raised up behind them. *"No, don't go there,"* he tried to scream but no words came out. In mid-scream, the sun peeked under his eyelids, forcing them open against his will. Blue's mouth felt really dry. He clamped his jaws shut and gulped twice before he finally had enough moisture to swallow easily. He wondered what his dream could mean. . . it had seemed so real. *Was the tribe really in danger?*

It was high noon when Blue and Gaiso burst through the trees at the northern arc of the Guarded Forest. By that time, the dream had nearly faded away. He briefly thought of it again and shivered. Way off in the distance the tip-top of

the tallest of the Hedron Mountains was visible. He and the stag were headed that direction. An hour out of the woods, the travelling companions stopped short seeing a strange burning streak in the sky.

"What is that?" Gaiso asked. He was so frightened that his eyes were big, round O's. An object fell rapidly toward them. It was surrounded by brilliant orange and scarlet colored streaks. It flew through the air with such high speed that fire flamed all around it.

As the fiery object rushed straight at them, Gaiso ducked behind a bush. Blue wondered, *"Does he think the leaves are flame proof?"* Gaiso yelled to Blue, *"Protect yourself!"*

Blue did not move. He knew right away, the flaming fireball was his friend, Girasol. Girasol was a Firebird and he was glad to see her. She could be very handy to have around for light and warmth and other reasons.

"Well, if it isn't the blue unicorn," she cheerfully greeted Blue. She landed on a rock and turned a fire-opal eye on him. *"Who's your friend?"* she asked, tilting her head to indicate the shaking buck. Gaiso gingerly stepped out from behind the bush, saying, *"Oh, I say, I was just looking for. . ."* He was embarrassed at his display of obvious fear.

Blue introduced his two friends to each other. *"Girasol, please give a warm greeting to my friend Gaiso. The stag shrank back at the thought of a warm welcome from her and the firebird 'tsk-tiskd' at Blue's poor attempt at humor. Blue then told her about the quest to Muzika Woods.*

"Muzika Woods, huh? You're in luck. I happen to know exactly where that is. I'll be happy to guide you there," she told the unicorn and the still shaken stag. Firebirds were always interested in a little adventure so without any further encouragement, she stretched her wings to the fullest extent of their five-foot span and leapt into the sky. A long trail of orangey fire and white smoke discharged as she rose up to the clouds.

"What are you waiting for?" she called back over her shoulder. *"Come on! You have to move now if you want to get to Muzika Woods in good time."*

"She sure jumped into this adventure quickly," Gaiso said, trying to keep an unexpected cough from the smoke down.

"That's the nature of her kind," Blue said. *"Firebirds have a difficult time sitting still for long periods of time. They have a lot of energy. If too much heat builds in their system without release, they get rather uncomfortable."*

"Hmmp! Too much of her heat aimed at us could be quite uncomfortable, too," Gaiso said, eyeing the trail of fire. He was relieved she was already way above them in the sky.



Pronunciations

Many names of characters and places in this story are somewhat complicated to pronounce. This list is not complete by any means but it lends insight into the author's thoughts.

Alumna—ah-luhm-nah

Osm—oz-um

Cornum—corn-umm

Oura—oor-rah

Cubose—cube-oze

Magh—mah-gh

Cuprum—cup-rum

MarBryn—mar-brihn

Fleoge—flue-zh

Muzika—mew-zee-kah

Gaiso—guy-so

Nebul—neh-bule

Ghel—hard g like gift and
rhymes with bell

Numen—new-men

Girasol—jeer-rah-sawl

Phlat Plains—flat planes

Halstable—hall-stah-bull

Pici—pee-cee

Icel—I-cell

Pido—pee-doe

Iown—I-own

Silubhra—sil-loo-bruh

Kata—kah-tah

Tinam—tin-um

Lauda—loud-ah

Unimaise—you-nih-maze

Olina—o-lee-nah

Introducing the Tribe of Metal Horned Unicorns

ALUMNA The Aluminum Horned Unicorn



Horn: Aluminum with Rubies
Mane & Tail: Dark Red
Hoof: Aluminum
Her Mate: Iown, the Iron Horned Unicorn
Alumna is the Unicorn Oracle and Navigator of the Tribe. She receives messages from the Nūnen in a crystal orb.

Iown The Iron Horned Unicorn



Horn: Iron with Diamonds
Mane & Tail: Black
Hoof: Iron
His Mate: Alumna, the Aluminum Horned Unicorn
Iown can iron out problems with the touch of his horn. And he can perk up wilted plants, too.

The Blue Unicorn



Horn: Plain Blue Hide Covered
Mane & Tail: Blue
Hoof: Blue Hide Covered
His Mate: Ghel, the Golden Horned Unicorn
Blue was born with no metal and no magic and yet it was prophesied he would save the tribe from the evil sorcerer, Magh.

Cornum The Brass Horned Unicorn



Horn: Brass
Mane & Tail: Lime Green
Hoof: Brass
His Mate: Style, the Steel Horned Unicorn
The tip of Cornum's horn is flared like a trumpet and it sounds like one, too. It can sound like any wind instrument.

Style The Steel Horned Unicorn



Horn: Steel with purple amethysts
Mane & Tail: Purple
Hoof: Steel
Her Mate: Cornum, the Brass Horned Unicorn
Style is the stylist of the tribe. She creates magical mane-dos, hoof nail art and decorative accessories with a touch of her horn.

Lauda The Lead Horned Unicorn



Horn: Lead
Mane & Tail: Gray
Hoof: Lead
Her Mate: Dr. Zinko, the Zinc Horned Unicorn
Lauda is the tribe's scientist. She creates potions and can melt metal with her horn.

Dr. Zinko The Zinc Horned Unicorn



Horn: Zinc
Mane & Tail: Indigo
Hoof: Zinc
His Mate: Lauda, the Lead Horned Unicorn
Dr. Zinko is the tribe's doctor. He gives healing energy blasts with his horn tip.

Cuprum The Copper Horned Unicorn



Horn: Copper with emeralds
Mane & Tail: Red and Green
Hoof: Copper
Her Mate: Tinam, the Tin Horned Unicorn
Cuprum purifies water for the tribe. She also creates water purification pebbles for them to use when she is not around.

Tinam The Tin Horned Unicorn



Horn: Tin
Mane & Tail: Yellow
Hoof: Tin
His Mate: Cuprum, the Copper Horned Unicorn
Tinam conjures delicious meals out of thin air and preserves them in all shapes of tin cans.

Ghel The Golden Horned Unicorn



Horn: Gold
Mane & Tail: Honey-Colored Beige
Hoof: Gold
Her Mate: Blue, the plain blue unicorn
Ghel is an empath. She senses the emotions of other unicorns and can make them feel better about themselves.

Nix The Nickel Horned Unicorn

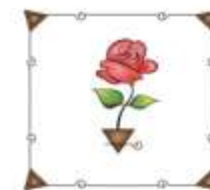


Horn: Nickel
Mane & Tail: Gray
Hoof: Nickel
His Mate: Silubhra, the Silver Horned Unicorn
Nix can detect when another unicorn is in danger. He can arrive in the nick of time to nix any disaster. He is the unicorn defender.

Silubhra The Silver Horned Unicorn



Horn: Silver with Diamonds
Mane & Tail: Platinum white
Hoof: Silver
Her Mate: Nix, the Nickel Horned Unicorn
Silubhra has beautiful silver-tongued singing voice that can persuade others to come around to her way of thinking.



Oxm The Oxmium Horned Unicorn



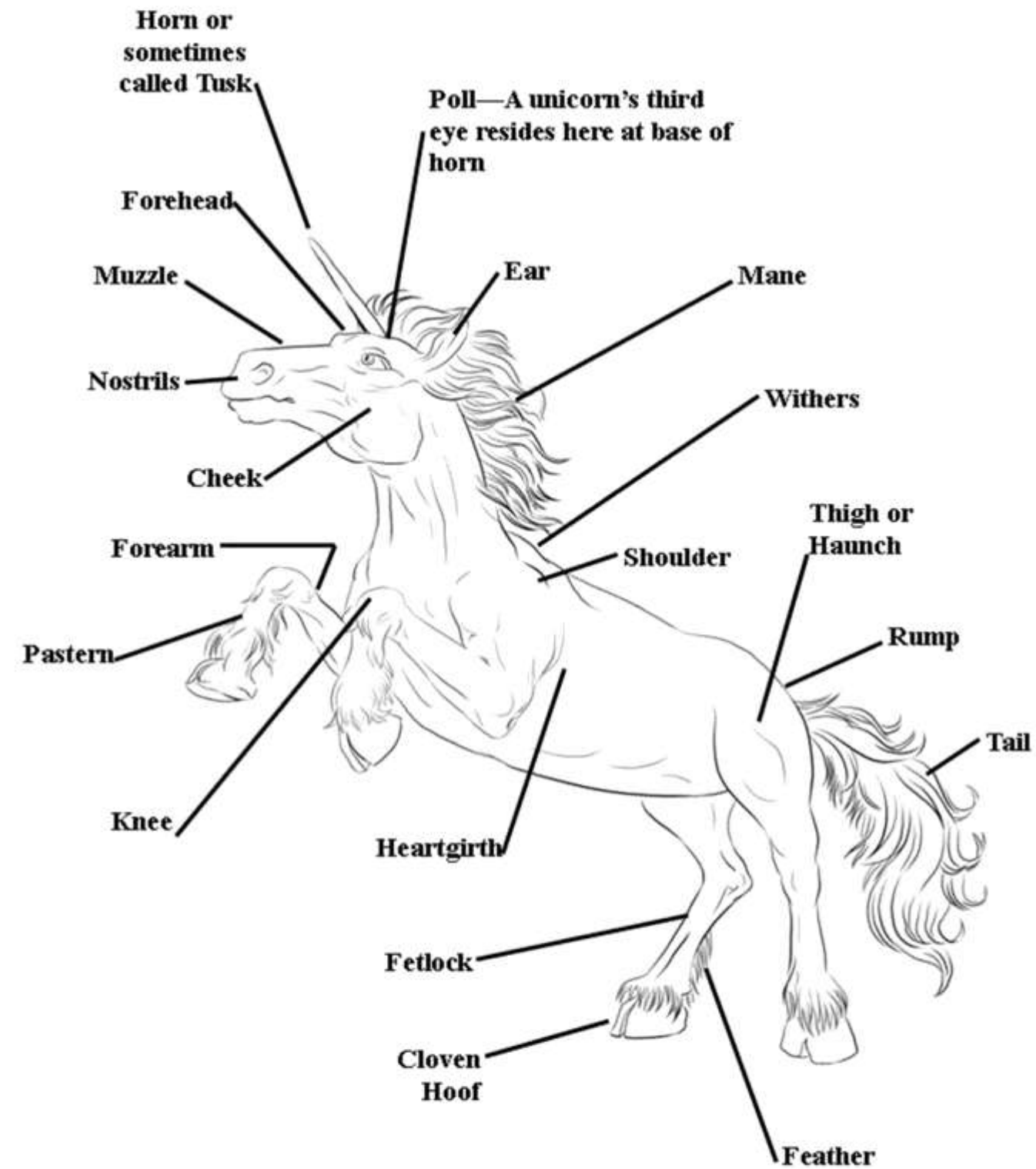
Horn: Multi-metal tipped with Oxmium
Mane & Tail: Multi-colored blue
Hoof: Platinum
His Mate: Ghel, the Gold Horned Unicorn
The blue unicorn becomes Oxm after joining with the Moon-Star Nūnen. He receives the metals and magic of all unicorns.



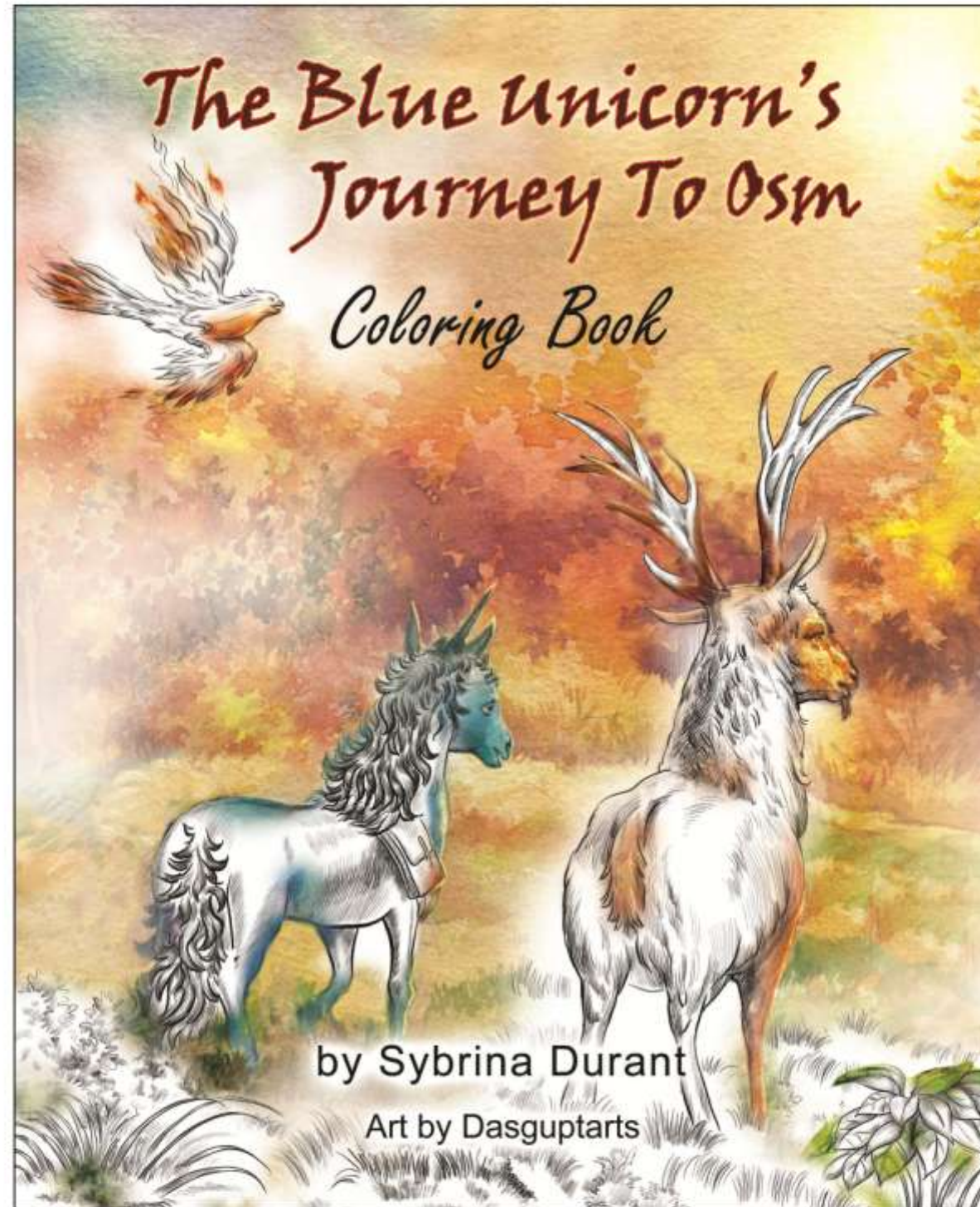
Match their Herd Crests to each unicorn.
Only one unicorn does not have one.

Parts of Unicorns Referred To In This Story – The following sketch shows parts of a unicorn anatomy that might be mentioned in this story.

Unicorn Anatomy



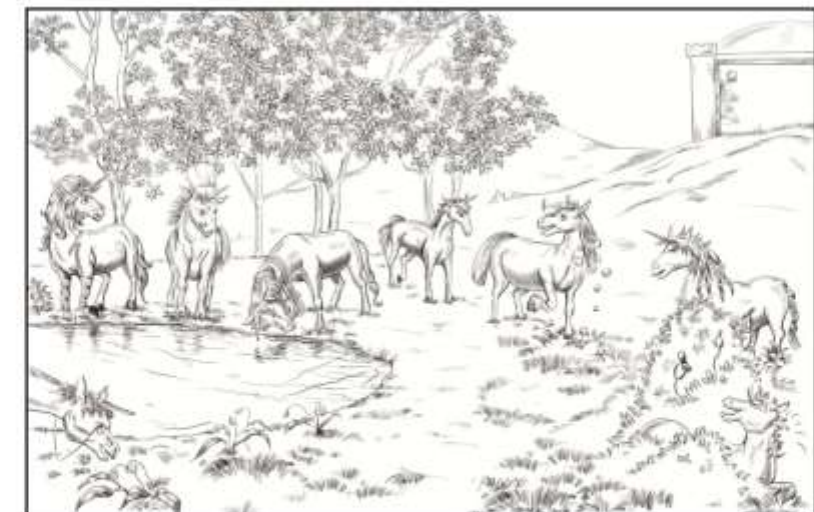
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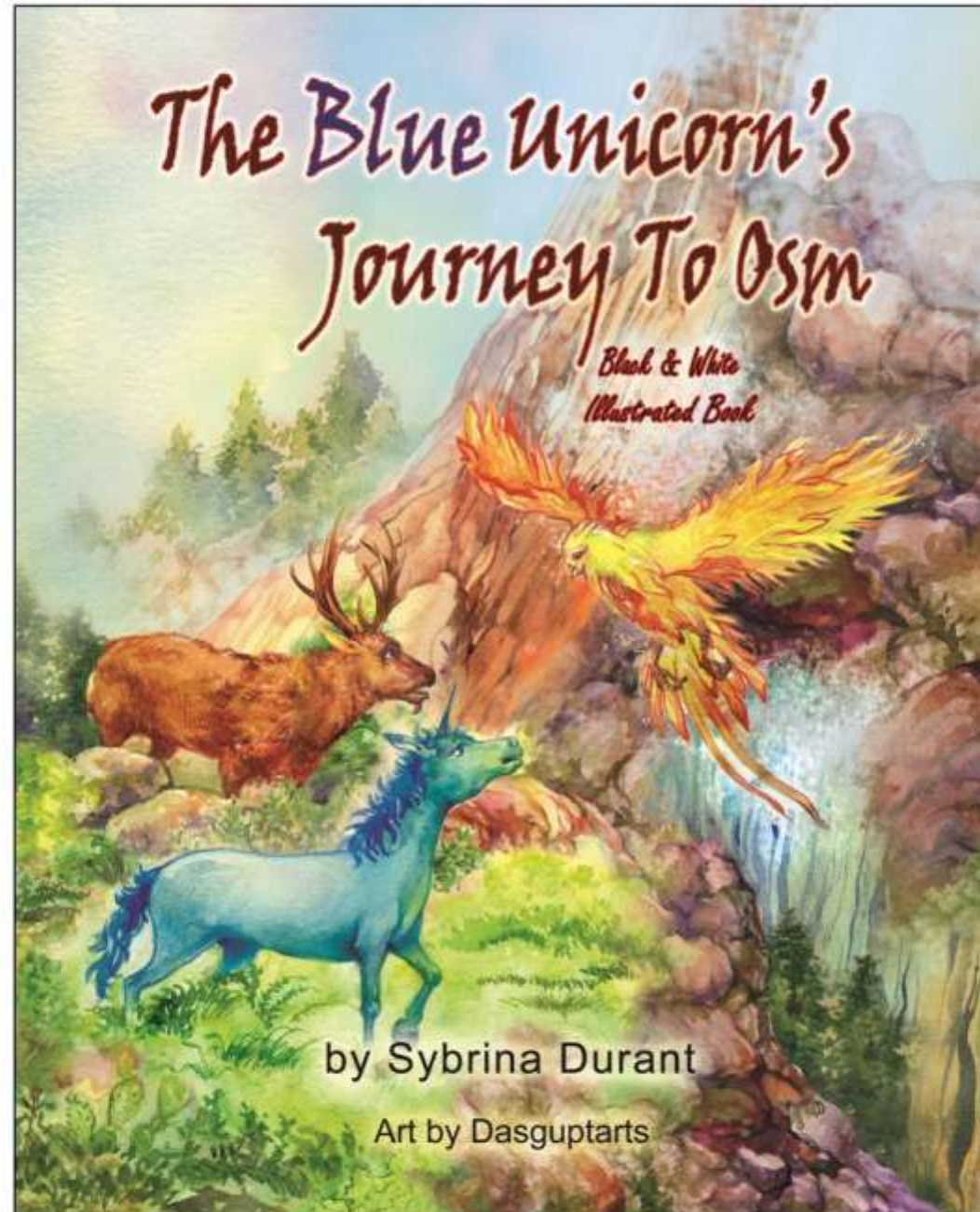
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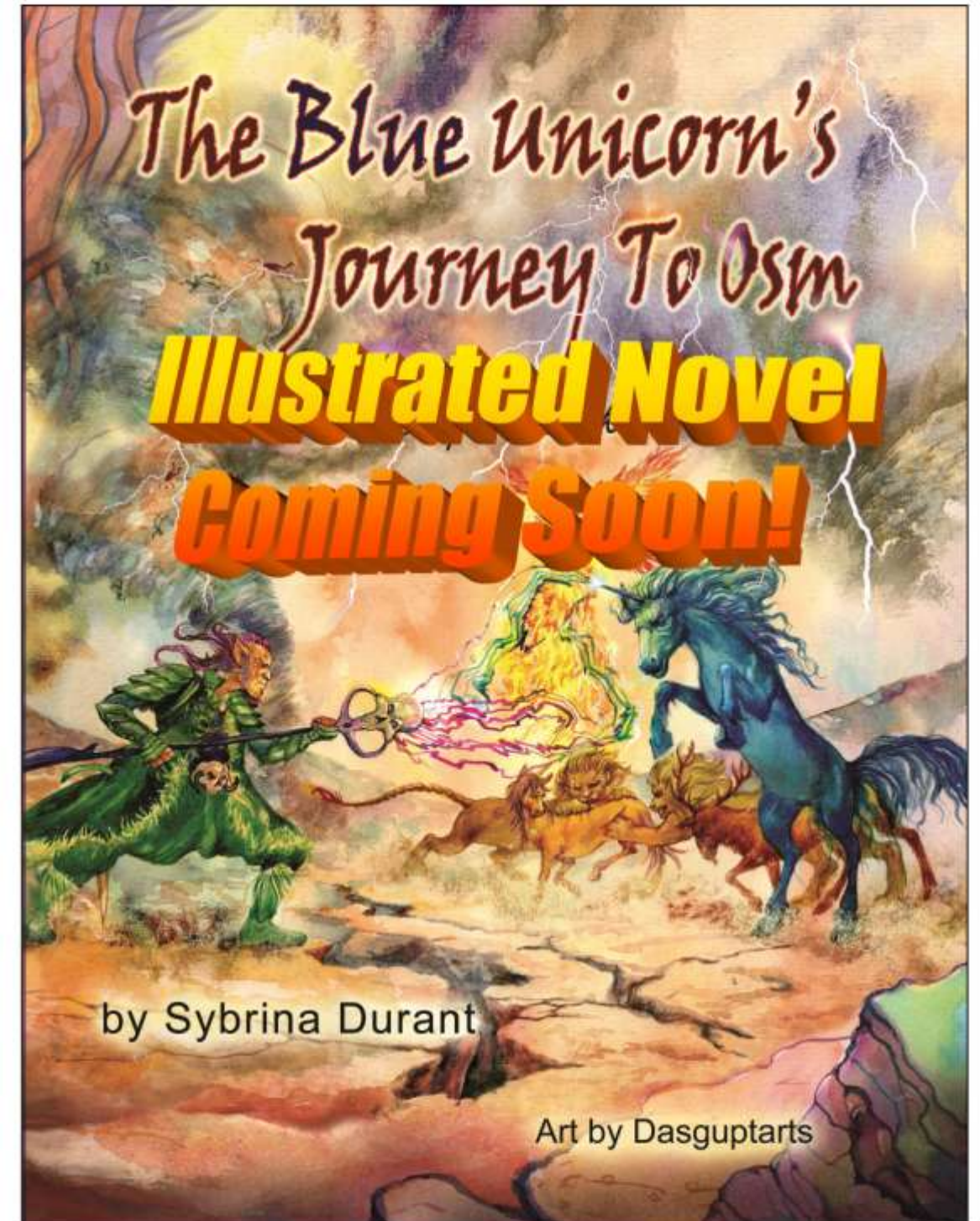
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*No metal means
no magic...*

“The metal horned unicorns are doomed!” That’s what Lauda Lead Horn wailed when she first saw the tribe’s new savior. OK, so his horn was not metal. . .and he did not have a magic power. . .and he was really a puny little runt. *But doomed? Were things really that bad?*

Well, things were pretty bad in the land of MarBryn. Magh, an evil sorcerer utilized unicorn horns and hooves to create his magical potions and spells. Those he used, to increase his power and to conquer everyone in his path. All of the unicorns from the Tribe of the Metal Horn were now gone . . . except for twelve survivors.

Before the blue unicorn was born, Numen told Alumna, the aluminum-horned oracle, that he had a plan to bring the tribe back home to Unimaise. His prophecy to Alumna was, “Only the blue unicorn can join with the Moon-Star. Until then, no new unicorns will be born.” Blue was the last unicorn born. Twenty years later, his horn was still covered with a plain blue colored hide. There was not a glint of metal to be seen on it or his hooves. Everyone knew no metal meant no magic.

But Blue had a mission and he meant to see it through. He was no longer scrawny and he had his wits. Though no one else in the tribe thought he had a chance of defeating the evil sorcerer, Blue felt ready to make Magh pay for his evil deeds. And he went off to do it alone. That was Blue’s first mistake. If the entire tribe was not standing horn-tip to horn-tip at the proper time and the exact place to help usher the Moon-Star Spirit into Blue’s horn, he would die. Then, the rest of the tribe really would be doomed.

Blue is joined in his travels by his mentor Gaiso, the Stag and his friend, Girasol the Firebird as they try to find their way across a danger-filled MarBryn to Muzika Woods. Will the rest of Blue’s tribe reach him before the Moon-Star arrives? Read this action packed adventure to learn about the blue unicorn’s quest to fulfill his destiny and to save his tribe.

This book, written by Sybrina Durant and illustrated by Dasguptarts, offers readers a visual feast of over forty beautiful water-color pictures that each span two pages. Forty-two - easy to digest two-page chapters are chock full of adventurous and entertaining morsels. This illustrated book will become a favorite of teen and older fantasy readers. A companion coloring/ character description book is also available at any online bookstore.



Sybrina Publishing