

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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Chapter 15

War and Order

*How Yahinni disposed of the mercenaries,
while a skirmish erupted on the streets of
Lopside: a fight that history will remember
as the first between human, Fairy and
their sympathisers in the era of The Three
Worlds War*

The squad in the leading van had witnessed the other crash behind them. Their squad leader instructed the driver to keep going while he communicated the incident to those above him.

When they reached the other side of town the tracking signal led them down a dirt track and into a small wood. An assortment of dumped items flanked the track, including a fridge, a mattress and some bags of cement that had long since turned solid.

Seeing a parked car ahead, the driver slowed the van down. The car met the description of the one the SGR operatives were reported to drive. He told his squad leader and brought the van to a halt.

Some distance away, hiding in the trees and keeping an eye on the scene, was Yahinni.

A few minutes earlier, having driven the four men here, she had broken the handles on the inside of the car in such a way that once the doors were locked they could not be opened from within. She loosened the men's bindings enough so that with a few moments struggle they could free themselves, though she warned them not to attempt such a thing while she was still there. The final part of her operation was to shoot the three living men with a dread gun.

Having slammed the door on their frenzied writhings she ran into the trees, only a moment before the van arrived.

The employees of EmSec jumped from the van into a pile of rusty paint cans. The wood was humid and smelly. Shouting and screaming came from the car. A gun was fired several times; one of the shots bursting a window.

The squad readied their weapons and moved carefully towards the vehicle.

A man leaned from the broken window as if about to climb out, but he spied the armed men approaching and screamed in terror. His arm quaked as he pointed his gun at the figures and fired.

The squad members crouched for cover and shot back. "The Fairy may be in there," shouted the squad leader, "and we can't let it get hurt."

Now a second man was firing at them from the car. A squad member yelled and fell to the ground with a bullet in him. On seeing this the rest of the squad fired upon the car without mercy. Its tires and windows exploded and its body, and those of its human occupants, were perforated by the relentless volley.

From behind her tree, Yahinni witnessed it all with a smug grin. Some of the mischievous glee of olden times returned to her. Humans were so easy to manipulate. She did not hear the figure that appeared so stealthily behind her.

Two cold, hard arms embraced her, lifting her kicking from the ground. The arms were cold and hard because they were made of gold.

When the gunfight was over Yahinni was carried out of the trees, past the wrecked car with its four dead bodies, past the open-mouthed EmSec squad, and to its leader beside the van.

“This one was watching you from the trees,” spoke the snatcher, in a very strange but female voice: a voice that seemed to emerge, not only from behind a golden mask, but also from the quivering of the grass and the creaking of the branches.

Only their leader recognised the figure, and he was surprised to see her. “Thank you,” he said, and he found himself bowing with respect and fear. “Take this woman off her,” he ordered two of his men. Warily, but firmly they took Yahinni, marvelling dumbfounded at her lilac skin.

Silently the golden figure strode back into the trees and disappeared from view. Being unable to recognise colours she had noticed nothing odd about the woman she had just handed over. If she knew her skin was lilac she might have had a few questions of her own to ask Yahinni.

For a moment Merry stood stiff with shock, staff clasped tight to her breast. Beneath her feet lay a small circle of clean road and

beyond it the tarmac sprinkled with glass and plastic. Then erupted a dizzying chorus of car alarms.

Merry's fingers and arms tingled with the aftershock and it was a few moments before she realised that the staff had saved her life.

The injured men and women of EmSec were crawling out of the van, getting their senses together. There were one or two broken bones and a lot of bruises. One of them took off his helmet, revealing a young man with a shaven head. He sat down shakily on the part of the garden wall that was still intact. This young man wore the number 1P218.

Meanwhile residents were emerging from their doors to discover the source of the noise.

"Go back inside," August Landfill told them all. "This is EmSec business."

The people obeyed. Emerald Securities were not an organisation to mess with. One by one the car alarms went silent. Front doors were closed and locked.

The new silence was quickly replaced with the wail of approaching police cars.

1P218 put his head in his hands and, while peering through his fingers at his surroundings, noticed a boy sitting on the floor just a few feet away. The boy was sweating from more than just the heat and he wore a dazed expression. The boy's hands were cupped close to his stomach, as if holding a baby chick.

But in fact, what he saw in the boy's hands was a tiny woman. 1P218 squinted because he thought it was a toy, but it looked so real, and he saw it move and swore it was looking right back at him. It was shaking the boy's thumb and saying something to him; this tiny black woman with blue hair and wings; wings like a fairy...

1P218's breath caught in his throat and he gesticulated to his squad-mates, trying to grab their attention.

Meanwhile, Ayina saw she had been spotted and was desperately trying to rouse Percy into activity. Her sprites were spinning around her frantically. Something about the people from

that van worried her and she was so anxious that she could not restrain her natural mode of speech:

“O Percy, on this path we can not stay,
For green garbed peril looms, scenting its prey.”

August Landfill came to 1P218 and saw what he was looking at. She returned quickly to the van while the remaining EmSec gathered and noticed the Fairy too.

“Again, logic burns in your eyes I see,
So on your feet! And with Merry now flee!”

Finally Percy responded; recognising reality and the situation they were in. Thanks to Ayina he saw the people of EmSec creeping towards them, panther-like.

Percy got to his feet, his legs wobbling as he backed slowly away.

“Stay where you are, lad, and give us the Fairy. We’ll look after her and find out what she wants.”

And suddenly they sprang forward, rushing at Percy before he could react. But not before Ayina, whose reactions were as swift as a dragonfly’s. She leapt from Percy’s hands and, with her healed wing still stiff and aching, flew at them like a drunken bee, treading the ground at one point.

When she reached 1P218 all Percy saw was a thin streak of rainbow and an instant later a thin mist of crimson filled the air on the man’s right side. He fell over, having lost the use of one leg, and lay clutching his right arm in pain.

Before the squad knew the Fairy was amongst them a second person lay useless on the ground.

The two remaining humans by the wall had just enough time to defend themselves from Ayina’s attack, which they did using the special weapons given to them that morning: long batons whose lengths fizzled with blue energy that would stun a Fairy if it flew too near.

Ayina had seen weapons like these before; used by the Jae-Mareeda when they fought the Fairies on Aeval. With these she

would be more cautious and so waited for them to make their move. Sunlight reflecting off her shiny wings, surrounding her like a halo.

August Landfill returned, holding in both arms a large, heavy gun with a wide barrel. It was like a large version of the dread guns; seemingly organic, its barrel mouth shaped like a fly's proboscis. Landfill aimed the weapon at the Fairy, almost dazzled by her radiant splendour, and fired.

What came from inside the gun moved too fast for human eyes to discern its shape, but to the Fairy it was like a ball of black tentacles. It was a shadow-urchin and it raced; a black whirlwind; to drown Ayina in its darkness.

Ayina dodged to one side, but she was not prepared for the long thin tendril that reached out of the thing as it passed. It wrapped round her waist and dragged her through the air, carrying her in a large loop back towards August Landfill.

Ayina resisted, beating her wings furiously. The two opposing forces sent the Fairy and the shadow-urchin spinning around each other. Cars and houses blurred around them as it sent more tendrils towards her. Ayina's halberd twirled and flashed; crystal sang and air whistled, as she cut each tendril clean away.

All that the onlookers could now see was a spinning mass of blue, purple, gold and black, riddled with rainbow flashes and shedding black strips in all directions.

Ayina might have reduced the shadow-urchin to nothing, had not August Landfill shot a second one at her. This one circled round the melee till it matched the orbit of Ayina. With the Fairy occupied it directed a mass of tendrils around her arm that held the halberd.

Unable to wield her weapon, Ayina was defenceless and could do nothing to stop the many tendrils that licked hungrily about her limbs. They furled her legs, wrapped her shoulders and bound her chest. She yelled and struggled to escape.

Her wings became obstructed. She faltered in mid-air and fell to the ground. The shadow-urchins fell with her, continuing to ravel themselves around her until Ayina was nothing but a ball of black.

August Landfill bounded over to where the Fairy had fallen.

In awe Merry had watched Ayina fight, but now, seeing her overcome and the smirking August Landfill running to get her, she filled with rage.

The world became silent, all sounds blocked by the pounding of blood past her ears. She felt her blood pump through her wrists and into the fist that clenched the staff.

Her arm jerked up straight like a robot's to point at August Landfill.

The staff winked at the woman and an invisible force punched her horizontally through the air. She flew backwards through a garden, coming to a stop inside a thick hedge.

Merry did not know if Ayina was alive or dead. She only knew that terrible bullies were trying to catch her or kill her. They thought they could just do what they liked, take her away without even asking. These brutes could not be more different from the beautiful and kind Fairy. And these people, she thought, these people caused misery in my town; did something to Dad and Aunty Rosemary.

"Put down whatever that is and come with us," called the voice of the police sergeant behind her. There were three police cars. How long had they been there?

"The creature belongs with responsible adults," continued the police voice. When Merry turned round to look at him he took a step back. The possessed look on her face, a look of great hatred and rage, was made the more terrible by belonging to such a young girl.

Merry's angry reply rang down the street, bouncing off the walls of the houses. "How do you know about Ayina, unless you work for THEM!?"

It was like a bomb going off, whose invisible blast travelled only in one direction, as the staff channelled all of Merry's emotions through it. If an eye could smile then that eye was surely smiling.

The policemen and their cars were flung back with the strength of a tornado.

Every object and living creature on that side of the road was thrown aside. Everything except one man, who had his back to Merry and seemed to be holding something protectively in his arms. He stood, legs bent, resisting the blast.

The eyes of every onlooker, which were now peeled wide with horror, came to rest on that man. His presence was unsettling, like that of an intruder wandering onto the set of a play.

The man turned around, placing the one he protected safely on the ground. And when Merry recognised Esme's face she became awash with gladness, but also shame as the apprehension on her best friend's face told Merry she'd nearly hurt her.

But when Merry smiled all fear and confusion was dispelled from Esme's mind and she ran to her.

"I've found the Everlaster," said Esme as she threw her arms around her friend.

"Really?" gasped Merry in disbelief, and then she felt the staff being pulled from her hand.

"I'll take this before someone gets hurt," said the Everlaster.

"No," Merry protested.

"The true damage this causes is hidden from the eye."

"Where's Ayina?" asked Esme.

Percy joined them, carrying a hard black sphere. "She's inside this."

"Who are you?" Merry asked the Everlaster.

"My name's Utnapishtim."

"Is she dead?" asked Esme, solemnly.

"No," replied the Everlaster, taking the sphere from Percy's hands and examining it, and for the first time Esme saw the look of boredom lift from his face, replaced by mild curiosity. "Who did this to the Fairy?"

"A woman with a weird weapon," Percy was saying till Merry interrupted with an angry exclamation. "Her!" She pointed past Percy to where August Landfill was now re-emerging onto the street.

The Everlaster saw the weapon she held, saw her EmSec uniform. He reflected on what Esme had told him about the encounter with Woe in the woods; the Fairy's mission; and what had happened to the adults of Tiverton Preedy. All this he considered in the space of one second, at the end of which he was sure he knew precisely what was going on. During the following second he formulated a plan and in the third second he described it to the children.

"Okay," he said. "Run!"

August Landfill ran across the road to the pavement down which the Everlaster and the children were running, too fast for her to catch up. She aimed her gun at them and fired.

A shadow-urchin hurtled towards them as Merry and the Everlaster disappeared round a corner. The shadow-urchin hit Esme in the leg, latching onto her calf. She fell as the thing pulled her leg back. Hearing her cry, Percy stopped and turned.

There was Esme sat on the floor, looking fearfully at the thing around her leg, too scared to touch it. He saw August Landfill down the path, coming towards them, and knew that if he ran he would get away. But he would not leave Esme alone a second time.

He fell to his knees and began to yank the black creature off of his friend. It felt rough and wet as he began to squeeze it between his hands. It gave up its grip on Esme's to place all its efforts into wrestling with Percy's hands. It yanked his arms left and right as he tried to crush the life out of it. Like squashed play-doe it leaked out between his fingers, and then began to reform itself on the outside of his hands.

At the moment it pulled clear of Percy's grip there was a cracking sound. The shadow-urchin dropped to the pavement, stunned by a sizzling blue stick in the hands of an EmSec guard. And then both Percy and Esme found themselves being dragged to their

feet by strong hands. They were taken by the guards into the custody of the police.

At least, thought Percy, Merry and the Everlaster have got away.

Back in Tiverton Preedy, a few moments earlier Trent was sitting in the old man's bungalow. After receiving Earth's instructions they had all thought long and hard about what exactly they should do.

It occurred to Trent that Earth would have been better off taking over Merry, as she'd probably figure stuff out better.

Someone suggested going to the library and using books and the internet to find out information about the environment. If they were going to stop environmental destruction they were going to have to know something about it.

While the others were conducting this research Trent came to wondering how Percy, Merry and Esme were getting on finding the Everlaster. And so he asked Earth.

"I want to see me friends."

"Then picture them in your mind and if they are in view I might recognise them."

"The Fairy's with 'em."

"Then I know where they are. I can sense all those from Aeval..." As she said these words Trent caught glimpses of far away places: a land of mountains where the air was thin; a city at night time. "...just as I can sense those from the third place."

"The third place?"

"There are four thinking beings and numerous dumb organisms that originate from my brain dead brother, Omaura."

"Brain dead brother?"

"I use such words to help you understand otherwise unknowable things. My brother has stopped thinking and approaches death. Assuming he is not dead already. It has been long since he spoke. But some of his are near the Fairy now."

Now a scene unfolded before Trent.
He looked down on a street from the viewpoint of a roof top.
Immediately he saw Percy and Esme being set upon by EmSec
men. Instinctively Trent tried to move but found himself frozen.
“You can only see,” said Earth.
The view changed as Earth showed from a different angle. He
saw Merry running with a man.
“The Fairy is there,” Earth informed him.
“What about the creatures you said?”
“There is one thinking-being nearby who comes from my
brother. But you will not see her. She is where the shadows are.”