

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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Chapter 22

Action and Reaction

*How the battle went between the youth of
Tiverton Preedy and the soldiers of the
Empire.*

After the disastrous results the dread guns had in Lopside, with four SGR agents killed, the use of the guns was banned until further review. August Landfill, however, was not going to let some pen-pusher in London headquarters limit her options.

She took out her dread gun and shot three slugs at the nearest fighters. She would have shot more had not the jaws of some yellow dog suddenly clamped around her hand. Landfill screamed and dropped the gun as the dog's fangs bit deeper.

The guards beside her zapped the dog with their sticks and it let go to vanish into the crowd.

Merry was attacking the guards with a rake that Roger Winstanley had handed her. She was trying just as much to avoid hurting herself or any other kid as she was hitting the henchmen of SGR. She felt no pity, only contempt and anger for the Emerald Security men: guardians of a firm who did business in misery and death.

By Merry's side appeared Gladice Gulchenrouz. "Merry, Ayina is free but she's fighting Woe. She told me they're on the verge of transporting the missiles. We have to stop them now."

In response Merry pulled Percy from the fray. "We've got to get in that warehouse right now."

"Then," said Percy, "some have to keep these guards occupied while the rest of us charge in there."

Gladice spoke. "I'll take care of these guards with the bigger kids. You two take all the rest," and the vampire ran off to Peter.

"Right," shouted Percy to the mass of children, "those not fighting come with us. Now."

"Come on to the warehouse," shouted Merry. She took a pair of younger children by the hands. Esme did too. They shouted some more to get the attention of all those not directly fighting the guards. Then they ran and the kids followed them. Pete and Gladice made sure enough stayed to keep the guards busy.

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“Is it ready yet,” Dahl asked the engineers in irritation.

“Everything’s in place,” replied one working by the input device. “We’ve almost locked on to dimensions eta and theta, but I’m having trouble with dimension iota. Woe’s much better than me at controlling the cosmic loom. The threads of iota are very tangled.”

Chandler Dahl shook his head at the techno-babble. “Once its ready start the shrinking immediately. Don’t wait for me.” And he strode to the exit.

Percy, Merry, Esme, Trent, and the children they led, were halfway across the grass to the warehouse the moment when, near its roof, part of the wall exploded and the Everlaster came flying out. He arced high over their heads, disappearing into the darkness beyond the grounds.

Everybody hesitated at this bizarre sight.

From the hole with the lorry in it emerged Chandler Dahl. Merry saw the obsidian staff in his hands and the sight filled her with fear.

Esme noticed it too, but Percy was not intimidated and the others followed him onwards. Hesitantly, Merry and Esme followed too.

‘What do they do with them at these schools’, thought Chandler Dahl in disgust when he saw the fighting and the small crowd of children coming towards him. His disgust turned quickly to anger and indignation, that all these brats and yobs were trespassing and disrupting such an important night.

He swung the obsidian staff, which unleashed a wave of energy at the children. Each child was carried off his or her feet as if a hurricane was blowing.

Esme got an eyeful of dust. She fell on her back and someone fell on top of her, crushing the wind out of her. Her stung eyes

streamed with tears as she pushed the person off and struggled to gain her breath back.

Esme heard moaning and crying all around. Some voices were inquiring and comforting others.

“We’ll never get past him,” she heard Percy say. In response came an anguished cry of “no!” and Esme recognised it as Merry, her voice distorted with desperation.

Esme crawled towards the sound of her friend, the dew making her hands and knees wet.

“Trent, no!” she heard Percy shout. “That thing can kill yer.”

“Get him, Trent,” cried Merry.

Esme found Merry with her hands and began to blink the dirt away.

Through a veil of tears Esme made out the orange fire of Merry’s hair, and then came the howling of police sirens.

Chandler recognised the boy from the photos in the report he’d received on the one who escaped from hospital: the boy with shadows on his brain.

And the boy stared at Dahl now, with eyes the colour of burning coals.

Via the psychical feelers left in his head by Woe in the woods, Earth was now speaking in Trent’s mind: “beware the staff he holds. It is a shard of the void.”

He looked at the staff and noticed a living eye at its top. The eye looked into his own and seemed to quiver with apprehension.

Images flashed through Trent’s mind, so strange he could hardly comprehend them. But they seemed of a time when Earth, and even the Sun, was very young: before the sky was blue.

He saw Earth in the form of a giant bird. And the only light came from her burning wings. Silently (for this was before the creation of sound) she fought the obsidian colossus and she slew him.

Suddenly Chandler Dahl thrust the staff forward. Or rather, the staff pulled his arm.

The eye blinked and such sound and sensation filled Trent's head that it seemed as if all reality itself was struck with a migraine.

Trent fell to his knees, crying in pain through gritted teeth. Blood trickled from his nose and gums. He could not look up. On all fours he resisted. Knowing that he would die if he let go of the ground.

As the police piled out of their cars and vans, dressed in full riot gear, the young stopped fighting and stepped back. The EmSec guards, believing that the situation was now subdued, stopped their attacks and waited for the police to take control

Three guards lay wounded on the floor, barely moving. Tracy Hudson and Todd Blanchflower sat with Tony Cunningham who lay unconscious, along with one of Trent's followers. Two more of Trent's were badly wounded and several more of the children sported cuts and bruises.

The two groups of children fell back into one mass as the police circled round.

There were thirty policemen, armed mostly with batons and shields but some wielded guns.

The children all huddled together for protection and waited. The police held their ground as a sergeant walked over to August Landfill, her hand bleeding from the dog bite. The two conferred.

Chadna began to sob from fear and from the aches the obsidian staff had caused her. "What's going to happen?" she murmured to Esme.

The sergeant yelled a command.

The children looked up as they heard a hissing sound above. A canister the size of a drink can arced beneath the stars to land amongst the children. The canister squirted white gas into the air, and people started to scream and choke.

“Tear gas!” someone shouted. The canister was thrown back but two more bounced in to replace it.

Children ran from the stinging chemicals, shouting each other’s names. They ran into the stoney arms of the police closing in. Some children fought and kicked, hoping to escape. Others pleaded not to be hurt.

Merry ran from the gas into the stomach of a security guard. The guard grabbed her by the shoulders and she wriggled and kicked to escape.

“Meredith, what the hell’s going on?!”

Merry looked up into the face of her father.

She threw her arms around him, weeping with relief; that everything would be alright now. But her father’s strong hands did not embrace her. They pushed Merry to arms length as he demanded to know why she and all these other kids were here causing such massive trouble.

As the tears and blood and gas mingled, fuel for the chaos, Merry told her Dad the truth of what was happening. He listened because she mentioned the suicide of her Mum. Her words were a kaleidoscope of nonsense and unspeakable truths. Of car crashes and Fairies, science experiments and nuclear weapons, alien women and alcohol.

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A few minutes earlier, from the force of the obsidian staff, the Everlaster landed in a field of oilseed rape .

“So much for my help,” he thought, standing up.

He heard police sirens heading towards the complex.

“I assume they’re not rushing to arrest the real criminals.” He looked up at the stars that hung over him. “O why should I bother?”

For a brief moment dark thoughts crossed his mind.

Thoughts that had occupied him for much longer at certain periods in the distant past. Like why should this keep going on, always the

powerful committing stupid acts, destroying and killing, yet never being any happier than those who don't.

Chandler Dahl thinks he's so modern, yet he's no different to Julius Caesar or Hernando Cortez.

The same crimes are committed time and time again. The world broken down by senselessness. He'd seen it all before so often.

But he remembered Merry's conversation amongst the trees. She has not seen all the things he has. The world is new to her.

And wasn't that the point?

Those children are fighting for the future, for lives they have yet to live. The mere promise of seeing a Fairy gives them hope.

The Everlaster pictured children in other parts of the world who were, right now, fighting adults. He saw children throwing stones at tanks. Children who believed a different world was possible; a world that was fair and where cruelty could be conquered.

A man like Chandler Dahl did not believe such worlds were possible, and he would send the soldiers in to crush the hopeful so he may never suffer the embarrassment of being proved wrong.

The Everlaster ran.

When the gates of SGR came back into view he was very surprised to see a hundred or more adults, who were not police or SGR, entering the grounds.

"That's interesting," he thought.

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When the children had been gathering earlier in Tiverton Preedy they had tried their best to be discreet. However, their tip-toed activity did not go entirely unnoticed.

Their efforts were betrayed by a gate left to slam or a ring tone too loud. The children's restrained commotion rocked sleeping Tiverton Preedy just enough to tip one or two adults into waking.

A curtain peeled back and eyes spied a group of six kids heading towards the canal. The peerer thought she recognised one of those children.

After a browse of the phonebook the parents of Janet Murphy were contacted. They discovered her bed empty.

Anxious enquiries to her friends' houses were made and more empty beds were found. Slowly the scale of the conspiracy was recognised. More and more adults were sucked into solving the mystery of why so many children were missing. They roamed the streets looking for them, waking even more people up.

At last they learnt the truth from one of those kids left behind. The brother of Patrick Owen had been left behind because of his broken leg. Hobbling on his crutch he told the adults their children had gone to SkweezumGrabaal&Runne.

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To the gates of SkweezumGrabaal&Runne came the gaggle of parents. And there were other adults; family and friends caught up in the drama. They brandished stern looks and seethed with indignation over the absent kids.

But the sight that met their eyes disarmed them.

Through a thinning white mist that stung the eyes they saw their children, 40 or more. And almost as many cops. The police were roughly grabbing boys and girls, putting handcuffs on the cut and crying.

But some kids were resisting. While some were being bundled into the back of a van, others were fighting furiously. Pockets of resistance were scattered across the car park.

Any respect or fear the mums and dads may have felt for the police evaporated at the sight of them man-handling the terrified children. And so they rushed in to defend them.

The adults pulled their children free of the police, crowded the van, and hauled the prisoners out. For this the parents and friends

became new targets for the coppers' head cracking, boot stomping, arm breaking lust for preserving order.

Across the car park a mass brawl spread. A chaotic swirl of blood and violence that consumed everyone. Those who knew why they were fighting were rendered forgetful by the passion of battle.

Amongst them came the Everlaster. The shouting and screaming echoed through his mind activating memories.

It was over thirty years since he'd witnessed such a scene. Then too he had seen police fighting workers. It was an event called the miner's strike. It had been on the news all over the world and he had seen the pictures. Even if he had not seen a television or read a newspaper he would still have come to Britain. For the Story was strong here, then. He could feel it drawing him from across the continents.

He felt that feeling now. He was in the centre of a vortex. A crucible of destiny. He had felt it in the trenches of world war one, the factories of Petrograd in 1917, and the streets and Parliament of London during the English Civil War.

Now fate was here in Tiverton Preedy, in all her glory, about to spread her threads across the world. A new tapestry taking shape. For better or for worse.

Amongst the skirmishers the Everlaster found Gladice Gulchenrouz. "Come on, Gladabayu. We're going in there now."

"OK, Immanuel Balthazar."

The Arab and the albino escaped the writhing throng. They could see Chandler Dahl wielding the obsidian staff against Trent.

The boy was in serious trouble. Yet, to the Everlaster's amazement, he was some how resisting. The Everlaster could feel the waves of force the staff was channelling onto Trent. Yet the child was surviving it. The boy was struggling on all fours, but by now he should have been nothing but a tiny ball of gristle.

"Some force protects him."

“He certainly smells human,” said Gladice.

“O this is novel,” said the Everlaster, intrigued. “But we’ve got to get that staff.”

“Come on then,” said Glad. She jumped into the air and turned into a bat. She approached Chandler Dahl from above and behind, out of his line of sight, then dove towards his head. Just before reaching him she turned back into a girl and landed on his head and shoulders.

Before Dahl had a chance to throw her off Gladice sank her teeth into his neck.

“Aaargh!” screamed Chandler, instinctively whacking Gladice with the obsidian staff.

The power that was oppressing Trent lifted.

As the Everlaster rushed in to help Gladice wrestle the staff from Chandler Dahl, the eye of the staff caught Gladice in its sight.

The staff blasted her from Chandler’s back.

Chandler Dahl immediately twisted to point the staff’s eye at the Everlaster. The Everlaster felt the staff begin to assault him. But the blast of energy never came. Trent had placed his hand over the staff’s eye. In Trent’s hand was a dollop of soil. The eye was blinded.

Before Chandler realised that the staff was now powerless he felt the Everlaster’s fist crash into his face. The staff slipped from his hand and he fell on his back, unconscious.

The Everlaster picked up the staff.

“Give that to me, Utnapishtim,” said Trent.

The Everlaster looked at him, saw the red glow of his eyes. “Who wants it?”

“Earth. She can destroy it.”

“Earth? Is that what happened to you, Trent, in the hospital?”

“How do you know about that?” the red glow died down at Trent’s surprise.

“We haven’t time now for stories. Here.” The Everlaster gave Trent the staff and then headed into the warehouse. Gladice followed him.

Meanwhile, Trent, his eyes glowing brightly, plunged the obsidian staff eye-first into the ground.