

# The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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**Chapter 24**  
**“Let Us Gather, And Tomorrow...”**

*In which the children get praised  
and the adults get done.*

“Put your hands up if you work at this place,” said the Everlaster. About 80 adults put up their hands.

“You’ve been working for her.” And he held Woe’s head up for everyone to see. “Which is awfully generous of you, considering she’s the reason you’ve all been feeling very bad lately.

“But you have good reason to feel bad. What has that Fairy, or her people, done to you that you would have them killed? You’ve been making missiles to be used against a world you didn’t even know existed.

“You are each a link in a chain of evil that stretches out of sight. But ignorance of what is at the end of that chain does not absolve you of guilt. You did not ask questions about the weapons you worked on as long as you were paid properly.

“If it wasn’t for the courage and imagination of your children, humanity itself might already be doomed.

“You must ask yourselves, do you want to make weapons for people who would destroy another world; for the people who develop secret ways to control your minds.

“The missiles weren’t the only weapons made here. In those science labs psychological weapons are forged. You and every adult in Tiverton Preedy were the guinea pigs for an experiment. An experiment that worked, because the day after Woe made you all unhappy you stopped your strike and went back to work. You must recognise now the changes that occurred to all your personalities. Your children noticed from the start.

“But now,” and he pointed at Ayina for emphasis, “you are no longer ignorant of the truth. Your children came here tonight to commit a great act of kindness and bravery. The same people who abused you had kidnapped that Fairy. Your children learned of this and of what Woe did to you. And risking their own safety they came to fight for that creature’s freedom. And to fight for you.

“Without their quick actions you’d be waking up this morning and every morning miserable and selfish, but good little employees who do everything SGR tell them.”

Merry's Dad interrupted, "my daughter says this Woe killed my wife. Are you saying SkweezumGrabaal&Runne are responsible? And those two suicides on Sunday?"

"If not for SkweezumGrabaal&Runne those people might still be alive."

Merry's Dad and the adults looked towards Chandler Dahl, hiding behind the guards, hiding behind the police.

Chandler Dahl shouted. "Why are we listening to this nonsense. All these people are trespassers, get them out of here or shoot them." The police obeyed Dahl's wishes. They readied their weapons, forming a line between Dahl and the angry crowd.

The police sergeant spoke. "There will be an investigation into what happened here. Any evidence of criminal acts will lead to prosecutions, but at this minute none of you should be here, and certainly not now that this is the scene of a criminal investigation. If you go now, and peacefully, no arrests will be made against you."

There were angry mutterings.

"Let us go," said the Everlaster to the townsfolk. "Take the Fairy to a safe place. There's nothing more to be done here."

Rather reluctantly everybody left the grounds. As the Everlaster led the crowd away Esme ran to him with Ayina. Children and adults closely followed her, crowding round for a close look at the Fairy.

"Everlaster," whispered Ayina, after she had leapt from Esme and landed on his shoulder, "the important question I need to ask: do you think the human race will help Aeval in our war?"

"You can ask them yourself, they are here around you. But before you do we should find a place more befitting than a road." The Everlaster shouted for others to hear. "Is there a place nearby where many can gather and hear what the Fairy has to say?"

"The parish hall?" someone suggested.

"Then people," shouted the Everlaster, "at 7.00am the Fairy will be speaking at the parish hall. I'm sure your curious to hear what she has to say. Go tell your friends and relatives who aren't here now

about it. But if some of you would be kind enough to stay with us for now and offer us some protection. Just in case.”

The Sun rose on the procession marching back to Tiverton Preedy, accompanied by a melody of birdsong.

Some of the people raced ahead to spread the news.

Trent approached the Everlaster. “Utnapishtim, you are the answerer of questions. I have some to ask you.”

“Hmm,” said the Everlaster. “We will speak soon. First there is something I must do. Has anybody got a phone on them?” he asked looking around.

“Yes,” someone replied.

“Can I borrow it a moment, please?”

“Who are you phoning?” asked Merry.

“The BBC.”

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The parish hall was crammed with people of all ages: mothers with babies, pensioners and students. Children perched on windowsills as every inch of space was filled. Faces crammed at the window and a crowd spilled out from the open doors and spread across the road.

The Fairy stood on a desk in the centre of a small stage. A microphone was at her feet so everyone could hear her.

Through the bodies at the doors squeezed a BBC journalist and cameraman, just as the Fairy began to speak.

“I am Ayina. I am a Fairy from a world called Aeval, which exists in alternative dimensions. I am the first of my kind to come to Earth for over 500 years.”

The cameraman zoomed in on Ayina and her speech was now being broadcast live across the country on every BBC channel. Millions of people waking up for breakfast and getting ready for work stopped everything they were doing as they saw Ayina on their TVs

with the message running across the bottom of the screen: Exclusive! 'Fairy' discovered in Yorkshire.

"I have been chosen to come to Earth and initiate contact with human beings. To make you aware of our existence.

"It is not only Fairy's that I represent, but also Trolls, Goblins, Dryads, Merfolk, Centaurs and Genies. I come on a mission of peace and friendship. Any preconceptions you may have about our people in your myths and stories should be forgotten.

"Having witnessed your internet I will be able to construct for you a special website for all on Earth to access which will give you basic information about my world and its many cultures. For now let it be known that our civilisations are far older than humanity's, our technology more advanced, our air cleaner and our habitats healthier.

"We hope you will prove to us a genuine desire for friendship and cooperation, in which case we will be happy to offer you advice and help in solving the problems your world may be facing. It is up to you whether you wish to take it. Even in ancient times, when the rulers of Aeval were sometimes tyrants, we only ever came to Earth as visitors, never as conquerors.

"You may be wondering why we have chosen now to make open contact with you. Circumstances have forced us. Our world has been invaded by alien creatures from a dying planet. Having carelessly wasted their own, they wish to take over ours. Having had no war on our world for centuries we were entirely unprepared for the attack. And so we suffered heavy losses before we could build up a resistance.

"So I was sent here to find out if humankind was prepared to help us. We know that if the Jae-Mareeda defeat us then they will eventually attack Earth.

"So, sons and daughters of Earth, I implore you to trust the news I bring. Believe that we Fairies are your friends. Great kindness has already been shown to me by these children. They met the monster Woe, who was from the Jae-Mareeda world, and they have witnessed for themselves the evil that these creatures represent. They and others among you saw what was happening amongst those you

call SkweezumGabaal&Runne. They know SkweezumGabaal&Runne have become involved with the Jae-Mareeda. The invaders of my own world are already amongst you.

“These children here saved my life and for that myself and my world are deeply grateful.”

This particularly pleased and excited the children.

“The masters of SkweezumGabaal&Runne want power and wealth. I know this because I have met one of them. But human beings are destined for more than that. Be our friends and you will know another world. A world without poverty, or jealousy, or superstition.

“You may think these are just dreams, but you have the science to make dreams come true. All you need is the will; the desire.

“My people must fight a war against others. For you, the battle is with yourselves.”

There was silence for a moment. “We should help the Fairies all we can,” Merry whispered to her Dad. Her Dad thought silently for a moment. He stood and addressed to the crowd:

“Five years ago my wife died of suicide. Her depression nearly destroyed my family... did destroy her. Today I found out that that creature, Woe, made my wife like that. And that that creature was working for SkweezumGabaal&Runne. Well, I'd rather be unemployed than work for them any more. They toy with people's lives. They wanted to use us all.

“If SGR are enemies of the Fairies, than I want to help the Fairies.

“With my own eyes I saw that Fairy kill my wife's murderer. If the Fairies ask us to be friends then I for one say 'aye', and any man or woman here would be a fool not to say 'aye' with me.” The children cheered their support and determination.

All the adults who witnessed Ayina fight Woe and who had heard the Everlaster speak shouted their agreement to Merry's Dad.

The enthusiasm spread to those who were seeing the Fairy for the first time.

Ernest Steer was present and he addressed the crowd. “The Fairy is asking us to be her allies. We must do this democratically and put the question to the vote. But first, does anybody offer an objection for us offering our solidarity to the peoples of Fairyland?”

“What if doing that provokes these aliens to attack Earth?”

“They’ve already attacked us,” implored Merry’s Dad. “Has tha not been listening. If the Fairy hadn’t come to Tiverton Preedy, we wouldn’t know about Woe and her race. They could be all over the place.”

“Any other objections?” asked Ernest Steer. There was a heavy silence. “Then we shall vote. Those who agree that the people of Tiverton Preedy, as representatives of humanity, should pledge their friendship and solidarity to the Fairy and her people; those who agree raise your hands.”

Every child instantly raised an arm, even those who had not gone to SGR last night. From them radiated a rising of adult hands. Everybody in the room raised their hands and even people outside.

“Then it is unanimous,” announced Steer. He turned to Ayina. “Ayina of the Fairies, we, the human race, extend our hand of friendship to you and your people. We offer you our support and solidarity.”

As Ayina thanked them all the hall filled with a great cheering and merriment.



## Epilogue

Cheering echoed from TV sets around the world, ousting the silence that had held it. No person listened to the Fairy's broadcast more keenly than the Prime Minister of Great Britain. As his breakfast toast stuck in his throat the phone rang. On TV the reporter at Tiverton Preedy was talking into the camera, describing what we had all just seen for ourselves.

"Hello," said the Prime Minister into the phone. "Yes, I'm watching it... I know... it's very awkward yes... I'll see you once you're back in London, Mr Dahl. Just come on over."

The Prime Minister finished getting ready and did not see the Arab man on TV being asked questions by the reporter.

"You are the man that discovered the Fairy. Is that right?"

"No, she discovered us. And the first people to meet her were four children. They're around here somewhere. But I played a part in freeing the Fairy from her kidnappers."

"The Fairy was kidnapped?"

"Yes. By SkweezumGabaal&Runne. You'll have to ask them for their reasons why. But the rescue resulted in the destruction of their facility just north of here. I suggest you send someone up to take a look."

"Oh. Umm, we will."

"Look," said the Everlaster, "I suggest you go ask Ayina herself a few questions while you still have the chance."

The Reporter pushed her way to the front and approached Ayina at the table. Now up close to the Fairy the reporter was overcome by the import of the moment. She held the microphone tightly in both hands, as if it was a lightsaber, and pushed it tentatively towards Ayina.

"So you *are* a Fairy?"

"That's right."

“And you’ve come to Earth from another world to make contact with us, erm, humans. Is that right?”

“Yes, to establish communications between humans and the people of Aeval.”

“Will you be meeting the Prime Minister, or any other world leaders.”

“Why would I want to meet them?”

“Well... to arrange diplomatic relations between our government and yours.”

“But I’ve already spoken to the human’s assembled here and to people around the world. You have been broadcasting this around Earth, haven’t you?”

“O yes,” said the reporter proudly.

“Then such a meeting can serve no purpose. In fact, I would find it personally distasteful. Perhaps you think that such a meeting would make proceedings ‘official’, but in my language there is no word for ‘official’. No word for politician either. Our governments died out centuries ago, our bureaucracies withered or were hacked away. And there are words in my language that you have no equivalent of, to describe how *we* do things. I must go soon. But when others of my kind come here, it will be to talk to the *people* of Earth, not their masters.”

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“I would ask you not to do anything rash. There is still time for change.”

“Is there, Everlaster? After all you’ve just said to me?”

Trent and the Everlaster were alone in a small room in the parish hall. They had been talking for half an hour. Trent’s eyes glowed red as he spoke.

“I will not become like my brother. I can see humanity now, through human eyes, and I will know what to do soon. You are beasts like any other, though you lay the fields with tar and rake the sky with planes. Before my power your civilisations are but saplings before a glacier. If I find the only way to preserve myself is by destroying humanity, then I shall not hesitate to plough you all back into the ground – to become food for the next cycle of life.”

The Everlaster pleaded. “I know we have... we *are* causing a lot of damage. Yes, with our technology we reap destruction, but with it we can sow creation. We can be your carers.”

“You would care for me? You do not even care for yourselves. I have touched the ones this child called ‘druggies’. Your species have fought wars since your infancy, and you are the only organisms to commit suicide for reasons other than the good of the species.”

“The races of Aeval had those faults too, long ago. We can change. We just need more time.”

“Time is what *you* no longer have, Everlaster. Why does that surprise you? After all these millennia have you still not learnt your true nature? O Infinite Story, yours will have an ending. By my permission you were created, and by my grace you last. You are not here by chance. If anything in this universe has purpose it is you.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It is time to stop hiding from destiny. You, and the species you champion, have woven an epic tale, but some masterworks remain, forever, unfinished. The end to your story is approaching. How it shall be written is down to you and each of the billions you represent.”

“Trent!”

The colour drained from the boys eyes and he turned towards the source of the voice. His expression softened completely.

“Mum!?... Dad!?”

Trent’s parents ran to him. “Oh, where have you been?” asked his mother, sobbing as she hugged him.

He hugged her back, and when he looked at her face he felt as though he was waking from a dream; that everything he had experienced in the past three days was unreal. Her smell and the sound of her voice brought tears to his eyes. “Mum?...” Only now did he realise what he had been on the verge of turning his back on.

“Where have you been?” his Mum asked again.

“I can’t remember,” he lied.

“We should get you back to hospital.”

“No! I’m okay. I just wanna go home.”

“Okay,” she replied. She looked up at the Everlaster for the first time, and recognised him from the TV report. He had been on the TV when she spotted Trent in the crowd. Without knowing why she smiled at him. The Everlaster nodded and then Trent and his parents left the room.

Deep in Cradleford forest stood Trent, his parents, Percy, Merry and her father, Aunty Rosemary, Esme, her brothers and sisters, the Everlaster, and dozens of others, child and adult. Pete was there too, though not Gladabayu, because the Sun was shining. She slept now in her child’s coffin, in the boot of Pete’s car filled with red earth. They had all come to see Ayina off, as she returned to her homeworld.

“That bunch had a load of machinery,” said Merry, “to open a way into their world. How are you going to get back, without any of your own?”

“I’m tiny compared to all those missiles, so it takes much less effort to shrink and transport me. But you are right, I do need machinery. That machinery is all around you, though it is camouflaged at the moment.”

Everyone looked around, trying to spot it.

Ayina flew into the air and turned to face them all, hovering in one precise spot:

“In minutes I return to Aeval’s care.  
Space and time will twist till I stand there.  
Dimensions turned; your point of view I’ll leave.  
With naught but frail mem’ries, should you believe  
That I was no more than a dream, well think  
But this and all is mended. Our worlds link:  
Like lover’s hearts that never touch yet feel,  
Like social bonds that selfish thoughts conceal.  
We thrive and rave in the shadows of your blood  
Midst cities furled in Earth’s smallest flower bud.  
If you could peer within yourselves you’d see  
The poet, the lover, the refugee.  
Your tales of Aeval doubters will claim dreams,  
But truth, like jewels, in just sunlight gleams.  
When you sleep, should fear come and doubt renew,  
Have hope, for we, your dreams, do fight for you.”

And even before her words were finished the colours returned, stripping like blistered paint from trees and stones and even the sky, where they had waited, camouflaged as Ayina said, for nearly four days. They came towards her, flowing like the water round a plug hole.

The spinning rainbow torrent engulfed Ayina. Like clay on a potter’s wheel being shaped by invisible hands, it formed the perfect sphere. The colours, now one, became white.

And then the shrinking process began.

While the sphere shrank down to a subatomic point, small enough to slip between the dimensions, Merry’s Dad said:

“I didn’t catch half o’ what she just said.”

“Dad!” cried Merry in embarrassment.

“One day,” said the Everlaster, “we will *all* understand.”