

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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Part II

Cry Havoc
And Let Slip The Dogs of War

Chapter 9

Train of Thought

*In which a series of revelations,
confessions and explanations occur as the
heroes ride to Lopside.*

The children sat at a table on the train, bored and with their chins on their folded arms. They had just crossed the border out of Yorkshire. They wanted to talk about their quest but felt they'd better not with all the people around them. Beyond the window England sped past in a panorama of fields, woods and towns. Sometimes the scenery came up close and it would go all blurry like the background of a cartoon when the characters are running.

The train was filled with a variety of people. There were business people; families going on holiday; and, sitting at the table opposite, a group of Drojies. Droj was a fashion amongst some teenagers and young people, and a small number of older people though it was frowned upon by many adults. The boys wore skirts and makeup and grew their hair long. The girls had short hair, wore trousers and shorts and other boy's clothes. Though these weren't hard and fast rules as most Drojies wore a mixture of male and female clothing.

Merry liked the Drojies because they didn't care what other people thought of them. Percy was always amused at how adults and non-Drojies gave Drojies funny looks, as though they were seeing aliens from outer space. Esme thought they looked silly, especially the boys (when she could tell they were boys).

"I want to go to the toilet," said Esme.

"OK," said Merry and she gave Esme her bag. They had agreed that they would take it in turns to go to the toilet at half hour intervals. This was because Ayina was inside Merry's bag and they thought it best that she should have a break from it every half hour. The only safe place to take her out was in the toilet, and by each going separately they avoided suspicion.

In the toilet Esme took out the box that held Ayina and lifted the lid.

"Are you OK," asked Esme.

"Yes. Are you?" asked Ayina in return.

"Yes, thankyou" said Esme as she placed Ayina on her lap.

"You are not worried about this journey."

“I am a little scared, but I’m sure we’ll be OK.”

“Do not feel that you owe me anything. If we come across any sign of danger you should go home. I can take care of myself, especially if I find the Everlaster.”

Ayina changed the subject and asked Esme to hold her up near the crack in the window so she could look out onto the world.

Ayina opened her pouch and out came the sprites, to record the sights of the town they were passing through.

“Are all towns in your world like this?”

“Yes. In this country, I think. But in some places there are big cities with tall skyscrapers. London has a few, like the Emerald tower. But Japan... we did about Japan at school.. they have lots of skyscrapers with millions of people all living together.”

“That is how Goblins like to live,” said Ayina. “All bunched up.”

“What are Fairy cities like,” asked Esme.

“I can show you,” said Ayina. The sprites moved from the window and arranged themselves into a square the size of a small telly. Ayina closed her eyes and a glowing image was projected between the sprites.

The image showed a forest of huge old trees. In the branches of the trees and carved into their trunks were thousands of tiny houses. Many houses were of wood though some seemed to be made like wasp nests. They were of all different shapes and colours.

The image moved, like a film, and Fairies could be seen flying about.

“Many Fairy towns and cities are like this, each with shops and schools...” As Ayina spoke the image changed to show the interiors of some buildings. Fairy’s could be seen going about many of the activities human beings would do. “...canteens, hospitals, workshops, clubs and meeting halls”.

In one scene large beetles carried piles of goods on their backs. Esme spotted some beings that looked neither Fairy or insect and appeared to be made of metal.

“What are those metal creatures,” she asked.

“Those are, what you would call, robots. They do the work that is boring and repetitive, work that no one wants to do.”

The sprites conjured up images of robots, of many interesting and elaborate designs, doing jobs. Some could be seen cleaning, waiting tables, giving out goods in shops. Some were shaped like insects, some like humanoids, and others like nothing Esme had ever seen before.

The image vanished.

“But come,” said Ayina. “We must return to the others.”

The sprites flew back into their pouch and Esme returned Ayina to the box and the bag.

Shortly after Esme had returned to the others the train passed through a long tunnel. The train’s horn blew as they sped into the throat of darkness. Outside the window lay pitch blackness; all that the kids could see was the reflection of the train’s interior. It rode alongside them like some phantom train, in which sat the faded double of every passenger.

For several minutes the train journeyed through that long shadow.

“You’re not so strong are you?”

“What is this? My little creature speaks.”

“I heard you tell him. I heard you tell him you got injured by a Fairy. A little Fairy from a children’s story.”

“She ambushed me. I was unarmed and garbed not for battle. As we speak my wounded flesh knits together and my strength returns. The next time, my vermin, I will decide when and where to fight. I will have the first move and one move is all I need to kill her.”

“I remember, he said catch her.”

“I remember very well what Chandler said, maggot. I will do as I please.”

“I hope you fail. I hope the Fairy kills you and rips your guts out.”

Laughter

“Like I did to your wife, my wretched rag of flesh.”

“No! No! You’re lying.”

“You still want to see them again. Even as you lie starving in the arms of Woe you dream of being with your family.”

“Why? Why do you keep me here?”

“Because you are a symbol. And you should find joy in that. While you are here with me you are like a god. You are experiencing personally what your entire species shall endure collectively. You are the first of the last humans. You are the beginning of the end of this world. And the start of a new one.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Your leaders, those whom you admire so much and allow to run your planet, have sold the soul of humanity to my people. But it is for your own benefit. We can look after you far better than you can look after yourselves. My people and I see potential in human beings; that we can work together in perfect efficiency.”

“How come you take orders from a human, then?”

“I do not take my orders from him. Though Chandler likes to think I do. I take my orders from the Lamia. In reality Chandler is as vulnerable to me as you are, he just does not know it yet. For you are the most powerful human on Earth, you sit at the centre and see everything.”

“The next time he comes I’ll tell him what you’ve just said.”

“No, I don’t think you will.” And Woe kissed her prisoner on the mouth.

The train emerged from the tunnel and its passengers met the sunlight with relief.

Soon it was Merry’s turn to go to the lavatory.

Merry stood in the toilet silent with a pained look on her face. She looked at Ayina. “Do Fairies ever commit suicide.”

For a short moment Ayina looked confused, but then thoughts seemed to flutter across her face and she understood. She thought a

moment and then spoke. “I’ve never heard of a Fairy ever killing themselves, even in olden times. We only live thirteen years so we have little time to think of death. But today, even amongst the long lasting races like the Trolls and Genies, there are no suicides anymore.”

“So once people did kill themselves on your world.”

“Yes. There was a time when no one knew their true place in the world. A person could not see the connections between themselves and everybody else. They lacked trust and would not admit that they’re own prosperousness and happiness depended on the millions of strangers they would never meet. They believed that everything good about their lives was a result only of their own individual endeavour and everything bad was down to other people. They only looked after themselves and their own immediate family.

“You see the ancients on Aeval used money. People did their work and got paid wages for it, with which they bought the things they needed to survive and find satisfaction. And so the strangest thing happened. People began to believe that money created things, when of course, only people can make things. If a person wanted a dress they would think how twenty sovereigns would get them a dress, but not for one moment did they consider the person who would make that dress. Whether the dressmaker received a fair share of those twenty sovereigns was of no concern to the buyer. But do you see? If you have no knowledge or concern for the dressmaker, the dressmaker will also care nothing for you if they ever buy something you make. What will they care if you are paid a pittance for cooking in a restaurant they eat at or for making their computer.”

Merry found this very interesting; “but what’s this to do wi’ suicide?”

“Well, when people think money produces goods and buildings and services, and forget the people involved in bringing such things into existence, they will care about money but not people; they will protect money but neglect people; they will save money but let people go to waste. Eventually they will love money and despise other

people, because they will see other people as opponents in their quest for wealth.

“Money blinded my ancestors to the true value of things, and it amazes us today to hear that people who did the jobs most vital to civilisation (like waste collectors, egg carers, farm labourers, nurses, insect handlers) were valued and paid the least. And people who are paid little may well believe society does not care about them. They feel ignored and unwanted.

“Paper and coins blinded the people of Aeval to the most important truth, which is that everybody depends on each other, and not themselves. That was always a true and constant fact, despite it being hidden for centuries. And the age in which people forgot that fact was the age of despair, of loneliness, of hatred and suspicion, when wars and murders were rife. Neighbour fought neighbour, never realising that they fought themselves.

“And in that age, when life was treated like some competition in which to be rich and successful, there were those who felt like giving up. And they committed suicide.

“Imagine you are in a family that loves you. On our world, society is that family. Now imagine that family, society, turns its back on you. How would you feel?”

Merry was silent a while, thinking. “But me and Dad didn’t turn our backs on Mum.”

“She was born into a broken family, as all humans are. You treat your fellow men and women as aliens, to be at best mistrusted, at worst despised. As long as your people remain broken in this way there will always be the pressures of uncertainty, of hopelessness, and of fear, pressing down on every individual. Suicide does not begin inside a person, it seeps into them like radiation from a society that is contaminated.”

“But why is it only some people kill themselves.”

“Why is it only some get cancer? There are various factors, but the individuals and their loved ones are not to blame. If you want to know the precise thoughts of your Mum that lead her to suicide, I

can not tell you. Though we share much in common I do not know what it is truly like to live as a human. The Everlaster, however, he has lived all lives. He will know far more than I what suicide is.”

Percy’s eyes followed phone lines that ran along the side of the railway line. It looked like a black line flying alongside the train, bobbing up and down like a magic carpet.

Hundreds of voices moved through that phone line at the speed of light. Amongst those voices two were having the following conversation:

“There was huge activity last night, Mr Dahl.”

“What do you mean, activity?”

“One of our Seers sensed a great intelligence. In Barnsley. Whatever it was it was the same thing they sensed the previous night and on the day the Fairy arrived.”

“You mean that thing they called ‘Terror’?”

“Yes, and more importantly, it turns out that there was a storm over the area where the Seer sensed the intelligence. A storm that the Met office say shouldn’t have happened. They said the conditions weren’t right for a storm. It just came out of nowhere.”

“Yes, well, the weathermen have been known to get these things wrong.”

“I know that, sir. The storm damaged a hospital. But apart from that no other damage was caused.”

“Send me a report of all the stuff the Seers have come up with. And do try to figure out what all of this means. That is what you are paid for, after all.”

“Yes, Mr Dahl.”

“If that’s all then goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Sir.”

As soon as Chandler Dahl put the phone down it started ringing again.

“Yes,”

“Hello, Mr Dahl. It’s Doctor Caliper. About that boy you asked me to keep an eye on.”

“What about him,”

“There was a storm last night and it seems a tree fell through the window of the room he was in. For some reason he ran out the window and he hasn’t been found. But that’s not the only thing. The brain scan we did has shown up something very strange. There are a number of shadows on his brain that we can’t explain the reason for. They could be some kind of tumours, but they are in such unnatural shapes. It’s very likely that these have caused his strange behaviour and his running away. He could be paranoid, hallucinating or anything.”

“Were any other people involved in his escape?”

“No. There were several witnesses. He just ran off on his own.”

“Thank you, doctor. Send me a report as soon as possible. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

He put the phone down and leant back in his chair, pondering for a few moments over the information he had received.

Percy was talking to Ayina, who he had placed in the sink while he tried desperately to pee in the toilet without getting it everywhere. The train’s rocking made it difficult to aim.

“Could you look the other way please,” said Percy. “It’s hard enough as it is.”

“Sorry,” said Ayina, and she averted her eyes.

“Thank you. What will happen if you don’t find this Everlaster guy, or if you don’t make it back to your world?”

“The war will continue and it will be very difficult. Very devastating. It is vital that I return to my people to tell them of the Jae-Mareeda’s presence on Earth, for it must have great bearing on the

war. The Jae-Mareeda would not expend resources on Earth while they are fighting us unless they believe it can benefit them greatly”.

“There’s something I’ve got to tell yer,” said Percy, zipping up his fly. “But you’ve got to promise not to mention it to anyone else.”

“I promise,” said Ayina.

“These men came to me yesterday. They knew about you. I mean, they knew a Fairy’d appeared in forest. They wanted me to hand you over to em. If I din’t they said they’d do something to me family.”

“You didn’t hand me over.”

“No. But I’ve got till 3 o’clock this afternoon to decide. But I’ve definitely decided now that I’m not going to.”

“Do you know who the men were?”

“No. But they did say something about being in a powerful organisation. They had loads of information about me, and they pretended to be police.”

“This is terrible,” said Ayina, and she put her face in her hands.

“What’s wrong?” asked Percy.

Ayina felt like crying. “It can mean only one thing.”

“What?”

“They could only have known about you and me through Woe. My sprites scanned that forest and there was nobody else present, nor was there any surveillance equipment.

“The Jae-Mareeda must be working with some of your people. And if, as you say, these people are powerful your world is at great risk. As long as there are humans with power over others, as long as there are power hungry men and women, your species will be vulnerable to the lure of the Jae-Mareeda.

“Your world is at great risk, not only from the Jae-Mareeda, but also from your own people. If humanity allies with them then my world is surely doomed. And your world too.”

Once again Percy didn’t feel too good. “You know,” he said, “I think I’ll have a poo now.”