

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

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Interlude

20 hours earlier...

Books surrounded Manutius Fluke like bricks around a prisoner. And in fact he *was* a captive, but only to his imagination.

The Sun rose and fell, families were made and marriages crumbled in the crescents and cul-de-sacs around his home; but for this old man, whether war or famine outside, each day meant only another new chapter in another old book.

By now his only contact with reality came through his wife: an ex-genie. Yahinni stood by his side now, a lilac hand upon his shoulder.

She helped him find new books, or rather, old ones. For he was always in search of old and rare items. His immense collection included the boyhood scrapbook of Leonardo Da Vinci; a first century manuscript alleged to be *the Book of Judas*; a first edition of the Encyclopaedia of Uqbar; Visvarkarman's blueprint for a new universe (aborted), and a love note written by Romeo to Juliet.

Upon his desk lay a parchment written in Latin by a 12th century monk. Manutius Fluke had translated it and he read a passage now, as he had done so many times before:

*Just as the Saracens looked as if to
fall and the Knights Templar make
their breakthrough he would
appear, walking as calm as an abbot
at mass, fearing no man or engine of
war. Our knights would fall
beneath his black blade like wheat
before the sickle-man at harvest*

[...]

I hēard ā cāptūrēd Sārācēn oncē
ēxplāin to his intērrogātōrs who
this mān wās. hē sāid “hē is oldēr
thān Christ, oldēr ēvēr thān
Bābylon. hē hās comē to expēl ēvil
from thē holy lānd. hē sāid, “thāt
thē fverlāstēr fights with thē
Mūsliḡs provēs thāt thēy ārē right
for thē fverlāstēr shall only hēlp
thē good.”

I bēliēvē thāt this fverlāstēr wās
Lūcifer, who in his dēspērātion hās
comē to ēārth to stānd in his lāst
bāttlē āgāinst God ānd his childrēn,
ānd so oūr crūsādē to sāvē
Jērūsālēm from thē hēāthēns is
sūrēly rightēōūs.

Manutius Fluke had come across two other separate eyewitness accounts from the Third Crusade that mentioned the Everlaster. On first reading these he had regarded this ‘Everlaster’ as an interesting legend; a myth created by the Saracens to boost their morale. One day, however, his opinion was changed when he came across a 16th century book called *The Republic of the Faeries, the Trolls and other Fantastic Races*, by Henry Beckett.

In it Beckett tells of being taken by three Goblins to a world called Aeval. There he sees wondrous cities. Creatures, who people would regard as monsters, living civilised with governments based on reason, and with fabulous technologies that seem magical.

There is a brief account of Aeval's long history and in it the following sentence:

The Forty-Ninth Gloriana, Queen of Faery, was stolen and eventually killed by an Earth man calling himself Tyrius D'Avernon but whom the Faeries discovered to be the Everlaster; so did end the reign of the last monarch upon Aeval.

This book is regarded by scholars as a work of fiction but it seemed a strange coincidence to Manutius Fluke that such a strange term as 'the Everlaster' should be used in two different times and places and both referring to an extraordinary human being.

From then on Fluke devoted all his time and energies to searching for more references to the Everlaster. He scoured the globe, accumulating books, folktales, and ancient artefacts. It was on this journey that he found proof, not only of the Everlaster's existence, but also that the world of Aeval is real.

That proof was Yahinni and she owned a curiosity shop in Hong Kong.

As a Genie Yahinni came to Earth from Aeval to torment men and women for sport. A jury of fellow Genii found her guilty of crimes against humanity (this was at a time when human beings were newly regarded as having rights, after many centuries of being considered animals). As punishment she was made corporeal, that is, made flesh like a human woman. So she lived on Earth, vulnerable to disease, injury and death, but aging far slower than we do.

Over the centuries she had amassed a great collection of fantastical objects and artistic curiosities. These included Robin Hood's own bow and quiver (that Yahinni had, herself, stolen from the Prince of Thieves); a bottle of black dust taken from the Horsehead Nebula (a god only knows how this came to Earth); an

entire set of teeth from one head of a seven headed hydra; and a small glass globe containing the complete dreams of a long dead child.

Manutius & Yahinni found a mutual attraction through their passions for collecting. They married and combined their expertise in the search for the Everlaster.

The Everlaster had lived under many names which made their search all the more difficult as they slowly followed a trail of clues and leads, visiting places the immortal had been and the people he had met.

Their search took them slowly round the world until eventually they came to an old town in England called Lopside, but there the trail of clues dried up. They knew the Everlaster had been here but when and where he had gone next they had no idea.

It was round about this time that Manutius began to develop symptoms of a disease he has not yet been able to diagnose. It took a toll on his body, making travel a struggle. The couple decided to settle down in Lopside, though they never fully abandoned their search for the Everlaster.

They had lived there now 15 years.

Since making their home here Yahinni's hobby had taken on a new form. No longer obsessed with seeking objects, she instead sought information. Not scientific or philosophical knowledge. She already knew more about those than any single human being.

What she sought was knowledge of the world and those who ruled it. Knowledge that could not be found in the dusty old tomes that Manutius now fingered.

Yahinni left her husband in his mire of words and entered a door that led into the heart of her own mania. She walked down steps into the basement.

A jungle of technology.

Like a snake pit, cords and wires spilled across the floor. Yahinni reflected brown ten times over in dusty monitors huddled like the eyes of a spider. Ten Yahinnis crossed that room, stepping

tentatively over and ducking through the overgrowth of metal, plastic and rubber.

Tiny lights blinked red and green, computer fans hummed and CPUs hubble-bubbled electronic magic.

With this great collection of computer parts Yahinni hacked. She could gain access to virtually any system in the world that was connected directly or indirectly to the global network.

The findings of groundbreaking and top secret research were at her fingertips. She read the reports that newspapers refused to print. She knew the true thoughts of prime ministers and the ambitions of generals.

With the technology of the humans and her own intellect she was finally beginning to compensate for the powers she had lost so many years ago.

In the search for the Everlaster she had developed artificial intelligence programs she called drones. These drones travelled the global network, bypassing security systems and infiltrating databases, sifting through everything from university research to military communications. They searched for any reference or mention of the Everlaster.

Yahinni sat in her chair and turned her monitors on and one screen immediately caught her notice. A blinking alert box told her that something had been found.

There spans across our planet a top secret surveillance system, created by the governments of the English speaking countries. It is called Echelon 2.0, and it monitors every email, fax, text message and phone call made, across the entire world. The information captured by Echelon 2.0 is available to those organisations wealthy enough to purchase access and who are friendly with the US or UK secret services. One such privileged organisation is SkweezumGabaal&Runne.

Yahinni did not need wealth or government contacts. Her drones attached themselves like parasites to the massive Echelon 2.0 database, entirely undetected.

Echelon 2.0 monitors us. Yahinni monitors Echelon 2.0.

With it the ex-genie discovered the following:

That morning, at 09:23, a phone conversation was held in which the term 'the Everlaster' had been used once and, interestingly to Yahinni (though ignored by the Echelon 2.0 software), so too had the word 'Fairy'.

Both phones involved were located in a place called Tiverton Preedy. One phone was billed to a Mr Glendenning and the other to a Mr O'Connell. Voice pattern analysis suggested both speakers were female children.