

Praise for *Evernight*:

Nominated for the Carnegie Medal
Shortlisted for the Scottish Teenage Book Prize

'A story to devour, & then savour. *Evernight* is alive with thrilling darkness and vivid magic'
Kiran Millwood Hargrave

'Darkly brilliant, wonderfully imagined . . . A fantastic adventure with a cracking heroine at its helm'
Abi Elphinstone

'Ross MacKenzie is a wizard with words. *Evernight* is an artfully spun story, vividly conjuring a complex and convincing world of witches and magic unlike any other. Gripping from the first line, this book will thrill and delight in equal measure. A triumph of the imagination'
M.G. Leonard

'A darkly magical story set in a brilliantly realised, hugely imaginative world that's perfect for fans of *Nevermoor*'
Anna James

'A wild and unique adventure full to the brim with friendship and magic'
Peter Bunzl

'A refreshingly original, thoroughly bewitching read'
Catherine Doyle

‘Fresh and exciting. This is dark fantasy
world-building at its creative best’
Joseph Delaney

‘There’s epic good-versus-evil fantasy in *Evernight*,
an assured and atmospheric novel’
Guardian

‘A vivid imaginative world, dripping with genuine
menace, violence and rich, complex characters.
You’ll be breathless by the end’
Daily Mail

‘Themes of loyalty, bravery and the abuse of power are riven
through a fast-paced plot set in a richly textured world’
The i

‘With its heart-in-mouth chases, evil witch and two
brave friends, it’s compellingly scary’
New Statesman

‘A fast paced and gripping thriller, laced with
superb world building’
Scotsman

‘Full of magic, wonder and deliciously dark moments,
Evernight is a rocking yarn that is impossible to resist’
BookTrust

‘A really gripping read’
Books For Keeps

FEAST OF THE EVERNIGHT

ROSS MACKENZIE

With illustrations by Amy Grimes



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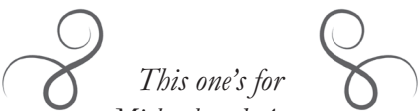
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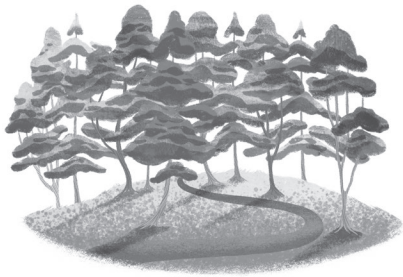
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This one's for
Michael and Amy



Monsters

Sam Hushby's gun glistened silver in the light of the moon as he rode his horse along the rocky path from the city of Lake End to the Veil.

His new partner was waiting, just as the orders had said. Sam saw her from a fair distance, ghostly smoke drifting from the cigar in her mouth. When he drew closer, he heard her mutter a curse. By the time he pulled up alongside her she was shaking her head at the sight of him.

She sat high on an ironheart, a huge metal horse, and he could hear the whirr-click of its enchanted clockwork heart. They said that it could run for ever, the horse and the clockwork.

'Well look at you, boy,' she said, flicking the glowing butt of her cigar to the ground. 'All shined up like a new penny. How long you been outta the academy? A week?'

Sam tried to hide the flush in his cheeks. He knew he looked like the textbook rookie, perched on his flesh-and-blood horse; there were no scratches on his gun or his blade,

no scuffs on his leather boots. The leather of his long coat was stiff and it creaked as he rode.

'Three days,' he mumbled. 'Arrived on the sunset steamer.' He snuck a glance at her. She was beautiful, in an angry kind of way. She shook her head again, tucked a curl of hair back behind her ear.

'What's your name again? Hushby?'

'Yeah. Sam Hushby.'

'Well, Sam, I'm Annalise. Annalise Francco. Now listen up: I didn't sign up to become a babysitter, you hear me? If I had wanted to be a nanny, I'd have gone to work for a rich northern family in King's Haven, like my mama wanted. You do as I say, and only as I say, and we'll get along just fine.'

Sam's face flushed. 'I ain't a child. And you can't be more'n twenty years old yourself.'

Annalise leaned forward in her saddle. 'I'm a deputy, third class. I'm your senior. And I've fired my gun at something with a heartbeat. Can you say that? You will address me as ma'am. Clear?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

She gave him another appraising look. 'You look frightened half to death, Hushby. Well, don't worry – you ain't gonna see too much action out here. Not the sort you're frightened of anyway.'

'But it's the Veil,' said Sam. 'I've heard . . .'

'You've heard the same stories every recruit's heard,' said Annalise. 'You've heard the war of the Old Gods ended

here, right? That the Veil Forest sits on that ancient final battleground.' Her voice grew quiet and slow and deliberate. 'You've heard the trees grew up from the bones of the fallen, and that their whispering dead voices call out to all sorts of night creatures. You've heard the place is a-teemin' with monsters . . .' She gave a sudden, loud clap, and Sam almost fell off his horse, making Annalise snort with laughter and cry out, 'Ha! Well, if that's true, those monsters must be awful shy, because I ain't ever seen none of 'em. As far as I'm concerned, the only thing we need to look out for on this trail is bandits. The trees make perfect cover for thieves.'

Before them, the Veil was silent and dark, and the breeze coming from the forest seemed like the breath of a living thing.

'Come on,' said Annalise. 'We'd best get movin'.'

The edge of the forest was darker than the night and stretched as far as the eye could see, running alongside Giant's Foot Lake, which itself was so huge it reached beyond the horizon. Out in that vast darkness, Sam saw the flickering lamps on fishing boats.

The rangers rode in silence for a time, Sam listening to the click and whirr of the gears and cogs and machinery inside the shining body of Annalise's ironheart. The border of the Veil was marked by the white-hot flames of dragon-breath lamps. The warm breeze carried a sweet, damp scent from the thick forest.

'How long you been a southern ranger?' Sam asked.

'Since I was fifteen.'

'You like it?'

She laughed. 'Most of the time, yeah – when I'm not chasing shadows out here.'

Sam found himself glancing to his right, into the thick black tangle of branches and trunks and thorns. 'You said you've shot your gun at living things?'

Annalise shrugged. 'The occasional wolf. Shot a bear once – a real beast, he was too. Came a-chargin' out the shadows like an angry demon. I barely had time to—' Without warning, she stopped, listening intently.

Deep in the trees, something cracked.

Sam's eyes grew wide. 'What was that? Bandits?'

'Simmer down. Bandits work farther up the trail, away from the city. Probably just a fox caught the scent of your dirty diaper and came to investigate, is all.'

Another snap. This one closer.

Sam made to reach for his gun, but Annalise held up a hand.

'No. There's always the chance it's kids messin' around. Last thing we need is a rookie planting bullets in some nitwit who's entered the forest on a stupid dare. You stay here. If I need you, I'll call you.'

She climbed down effortlessly from the great metal horse, dropping six feet to the ground and landing with barely a sound. Then she walked towards the edge of the forest.

'Hey!' she called. 'Southern rangers. Is there someone in the forest?'

The sound of a snapping branch from somewhere else now, in the nearby thicket.

Sam shifted in his saddle. His heart was a wet hammer in his throat. He considered that maybe he should've just stayed in King's Haven and joined his dad's crab-fishing crew, like his parents had wanted.

Annalise's hand was hovering over the grip of her gun. She crept from the rocky trail into the first shadows of the forest. 'Stop messin' around, whoever's in there. Step into the open.'

The night was suddenly filled with a creaking groan, and several loud cracks. A tree toppled over, falling to the ground with a rushing crash, so near Annalise that she had to dive out of the way. She picked herself up, shaken and panting, and this time she did draw her gun.

'I think maybe I could use that help after all, rookie.'

Sam scrambled from his horse, half fell to the ground and made towards her, unholstering his gun with shaking hands.

'Wait! Annalise . . . ma'am . . . wait!'

But she had already moved deeper into the Veil, disappearing among the shadowy trees and vines and tangles of thorns.

Sam reached the fallen tree, scouted around. Saw nothing but the gloom of the night forest. 'Ma'am? Where are you?'

There was no answer. Sam cursed under his breath and took a few steps forward. 'Ranger? I've entered the Veil. Give me a signal to let me know you're all right!'

Blackness cloaked everything, coiled around him, squeezed him.

Cold fingers caressed his neck, and he gasped and spun around, gun drawn, to find that it had only been a hanging branch.

'Stop there!' That was Annalise. Was she talking to *Sam*?

'Ma'am? Ranger?'

'I said stop! Don't come any closer!'

'Annalise!'

'Sam?'

A gunshot sent him diving for cover. Then another, and another.

After that, silence.

Sam used a tree to drag himself up with one hand, the other still pointing the gun. His eyes flicked from one shadow to the next. He felt that he was trapped in every nightmare he'd ever had, that if he could only force himself to wake up, he'd be back in his warm bed in King's Haven.

He moved forward, staying low, darting from tree to tree. Here and there, the moonlight made it through the thick canopy of foliage and shattered in diamond splinters on the forest floor. The air was still as death, heavy with the earthy smells of the forest. And . . . something else.

Sam sniffed.

Blood. There was no mistaking it, that coppery smell. A strange sound began to drift into his ears; it was a wet sound, like slurping, or *sucking* . . .

Sam Hushby took a deep breath, and stepped out from behind the tree.

What he saw would haunt his thoughts for the rest of his life.

Annalise was sprawled on the floor, arms and legs splayed awkwardly. Her face lay in one of those splinters of fallen moonlight, deep brown eyes wide with shock, expression halfway between surprise and terror. She was dead. One side of her neck was ripped wide open. A hunched figure kneeled over her body. It was drinking her blood.

Later, Sam would not remember how long he stood and watched this gruesome sight. He was completely frozen with fear and horror. And then a spark flared in his heart, caught light, and he remembered that he was a southern ranger, and that he had a duty. He raised his gun, and his hand was shaking not only because he was frightened, but because he was angry.

'Stay very still,' he said, and he was amazed to find that his voice was strong and calm, 'and I won't shoot.'

At his words, the hunched creature stopped feeding. It went very still, the way some animals will go still when they feel that they are in grave danger.

'Now, I don't know if you can understand me,' Sam

went on, trying not to look at Annalise's face, 'but if you can, I want you to stand up very slowly and raise your hands. If you have a weapon, I want you to leave it on the ground.'

The thing did not move.

'Did you hear me?'

It turned its head.

An involuntary scream burst from Sam's throat.

A pale face stared at him from beneath a ragged black hood and a greasy curtain of dark hair. The face – that of a nightmarish young man – looked unfinished, puffy, like dough. The eyes were sunken, and the lips and surrounding waxy skin glistened with smears of fresh blood from Annalise's throat. The young man – not quite a boy, thought Sam – stood up in a slow, lumbering movement. Yet when he lunged, he moved with such quickness that Sam took a panicked step back and missed with a wild pistol shot.

The creature was upon Sam before he could regroup; it took Sam down with shocking force, knocking the gun from his hand, and began scratching and tearing at Sam's face with long, filthy fingernails. Frightened, desperate sounds escaped Sam's mouth, and he fought and kicked and pushed the creature off. He reached for his gun, grabbed it, fired, this time missing by just a whisker. The creature hissed at him and spun away, and Sam fired again, but the thing was lost to the forest shadows.

Sam shambled through the trees, stumbling back out to the trail, his breath coming in heaving gasps. He could taste

his own blood, metallic as it ran from the deep scratches the attacker had left on his face. Sam's thoughts were a spinning blur. He rushed to his horse, hoisted himself into the saddle, and rode off towards the city as fast as he could manage.

An hour later, after Sam had raised the alarm and led a group of fellow rangers back to the forest, they found Annalise's ironheart standing on the trail. When they entered the Veil, however, Annalise's body was gone. The only sign she had been there at all was a spattering of blood on some rocks near the spot where she had been lying.



Betrayal

Back on the outskirts of the city of Lake End, Sam sat alone in an empty office in the ranger station and waited. The events of the night repeated over and over in his mind. He could not unsee the terrible image of Annalise sprawled on the woodland floor, could not wipe from his mind the wet, ravenous slurping sounds the creature had made as it feasted on her blood.

If he had been quicker off his horse . . . if he had got to her faster . . . would she still be alive? Or would he be dead now too?

The office door opened. Sam jumped up and stood to attention as Station Chief Barker entered the room, his big, bear-like body filling the doorway.

'Siddown, Hushby.'

Sam followed the order. Chief Barker walked around to the other side of the desk and sat on the chair, which creaked under his weight. He clasped his big hands and rested them on the desk. His grey eyes were ringed with dark shadows

and deep crow's feet etched the skin near the corner of his eyelids.

'There was no attack.'

Sam stared blankly.

'Sir?'

Chief Barker shifted in his chair. 'Your partner . . . Ranger Annalise Francco . . . is a deserter. She has run away.'

Sam shook his head. 'No, sir. That's not what happened. Annalise loved being a ranger. She'd never run . . .'

'Maybe you didn't understand me,' said Barker, and his eyes flashed dangerously. 'Deputy Francco had been struggling for a while. She had talked about getting out of the ranger service once her seven-year contract was up. Obviously, she could not handle the thought of another two years, and took matters into her own hands. That is the story we will tell.'

'But, sir . . .' Sam could not take this in. 'She died in the line of duty. I saw her body myself – and the thing that killed her! We can't let her family think she upped and ran away! She's a hero!'

Chief Barker leaned over the desk.

'Hushby,' said Chief Barker, 'let me make this very clear: there was no monster. No attack. People round here have been livin' on their nerves since the Evernight came last year. Somethin' like your story could cause panic – and panic is the last thing we need, with tens of thousands of folks arriving here in Lake End for the Silver King's Evernight Feast in a couple of weeks.'

Sam glared at the chief. He knew that speaking up might land him in serious bother, but he was too exhausted and frightened to care very much. 'So you're just going to ignore what's happened, sir?'

A hesitation.

'There *is* another option,' said the chief. He pointed to Sam's face. 'Some nasty scratches you've got there, Hushby. Looks like fingernail marks. Would be awful easy to convince people that Annalise was the one who made those scratches on your face . . . in self-defence.'

Sam's head shot up. 'What?'

'You say somethin' attacked her, Hushby, and yet you can offer no proof. Now, the ranger in me hears about a missing young woman and sees you turning up with those scratches on your face, and to me it's more likely *you* attacked Deputy Francco and disposed of her body, than some phantom out there in the woods. I don't think a jury would take much convincin' at all. So, you have two options: either you go along with my story – that your partner ran away . . . or you speak up, and end your days dangling from a rope.'

Sam sat back in the chair. Beads of sweat were forming on his forehead. It felt like the chief had punched him in the guts. How had he ended up *here*? A few short hours ago he had been on horseback, making his way to start a shift patrolling the Veil, and now his partner was dead, and the chief ranger was threatening to pin the blame on him.

'Do we have an understanding?' asked Chief Barker.

Very slowly, Sam looked up from the floor. He nodded.

'Very good.' The chief stood up and wiped a speck from one of the buttons on his jacket. 'You've made the right choice, Hushby. For everyone's sake.' He clapped Sam on the shoulder with a heavy hand.

Not for everyone, Sam thought, as he watched Barker leave the room. *And sure not for Annalise.*



A Test

Far away, beyond the furthest-reaching boundaries of the Silver Kingdom, north-west across the Pewter Sea, was Westerly Witch, the great city of the Witches. Most of the city was built upon a tree the size of a mountain – the Mother Tree – buildings and streets and alleyways crammed on countless criss-crossing platforms and rigs, and in the nooks and crannies and holes of the unimaginably huge trunk and branches.

Somewhere in the mid-levels of the city, in a sparse office waiting room, Larabelle Fox, Witch-in-training, sat fidgeting in her chair.

'Calm down,' said her friend Joe Littlefoot, a small, wiry boy with messy hair.

Lara swivelled around and fixed him with her large eyes. She had grown quite a bit taller in her time in Westerly Witch, and the dark brown skin of her face was dotted with a few pimples. 'Yeah, easy for you to say – you're not a Witch. You don't have to take the bleedin' exam!'

'Well, I wish I *was* a Witch,' said Joe, folding his arms. 'Then I'd pass the test and go back to the Silver Kingdom and take care of the king myself.' He gritted his teeth at the mere thought of the Silver King. A year ago, Mrs Hester, the head of the king's White Witches, had unleashed an ancient darkness known as the Evernight on the world. When things had spiralled out of control, the king and his army had run away, trapping the poor in the slums as they went, sacrificing the people there to the Evernight – Joe and his granny included. Joe had survived, but Granny had been too weak.

'Sorry,' said Lara. 'I didn't mean to make it sound like my problems are so much worse than yours. I know that's not true. I'm just really nervous. Hell's teeth, look!' She held out her hands, which were trembling badly.

'You know you're a good Witch,' he told her. 'You're one of them really annoying people who's good at everything. It's so irritating.'

Lara raised her eyebrows.

'It's true,' Joe went on. 'You've already passed all the other steps with distinction. Double Eight said you're naturally better at spell-making than him – and *he* passed. So stop worrying.'

From the office beyond the waiting room came a loud yelp and a low rumble. Putrid brown smoke poured out from under the door, sending Lara and Joe scurrying for the window, heaving and retching. The office door flew

open, and a young man came staggering out, wide-eyed, the tip of his wand spewing the offensive smoke. He was closely followed by an examiner, a tall man with slick black hair who was scribbling madly in a notebook.

'I would advise you,' said the man, 'to go home and rethink your choice of career. There are plenty of jobs in Westerly Witch for those without the talent to obtain a licence to practise magic in the wider world.' He ripped the page out of his book and stuck it to the young man's back. It read:

Failed

The young man had stuffed his wand into his trousers in a desperate attempt to smother his failed spell, but this only resulted in the brown smoke puffing out of his trouser legs. 'But I want to travel!' he said, his bottom lip quivering. 'I want to go all over the world and find new potion ingredients and invent new spells.'

The tall man sniffed. 'And I want just one day to pass when I can go to work free of the dread that some eager-to-please student will turn me into a cabbage or make my office smell like a burst lavatory. But I fear neither of our dreams will come true. Good day.' And with that he pushed the young man out of his office onto the busy wooden walkway, and closed the door. Wiping his hands on his handkerchief, he turned to observe Lara and Joe.

'Miss Larabelle . . .' He flicked a page in his book and raised an eyebrow. '. . . Fox?'

Lara nodded.

'Come with me.'

He led her to his office and ushered her inside. Lara shot a glance back out to the waiting room where Joe gave her a thumbs-up, then the door closed, and she was alone.

'Take your place, please,' said the examiner. He indicated a workbench in the middle of the room, upon which sat a cauldron for mixing spells. Lara walked to the bench, her legs feeling shaky. There was still a faint whiff of whatever spell had gone so badly wrong for the previous candidate.

'Smells like the sewers under King's Haven in here,' said Lara. 'And I should know. I used to be a tosher, see. So was my mate Joe, out in the waiting room. We'd search through the muck down in the tunnels for lost treasure, and you wouldn't believe, mister, some of the stuff we found down . . .' The sentence withered away: she realised he was staring at her.

'You're rambling,' he said, and he noted something down. 'Don't ramble.'

'Right. Sorry. I'm just nervous.'

The examiner reached into his pocket, then opened out his hand. Lara peered at his palm. There, nestled among the folds and lines of the examiner's skin, was something tiny and dark and shining. A seed.

'I'm a little peckish,' the examiner said.

Lara looked up from the seed.

'You what?'

The examiner widened his eyes and flicked them towards the seed in his hand. 'I'm *hungry*, Miss Fox. I was wondering if you'd perhaps be able to help me remedy that.'

Lara looked first at the seed, then back to the examiner.

'Oh! Oh, I see! Right! Oh, yes, mister. I'll see what I can do. Right away.'

She took the seed from his hand with great care. He wanted her to grow a plant from this seed using magic, that much was clear.

'This is a tricky one,' said Lara, her heart speeding up.

'Of course it is,' said the examiner. 'You are applying for the licence to practise magic in the wider world. Magic can be dangerous, Miss Fox. We must ensure that we are not sending dunderheads out there with free rein to accidentally blow things up. We don't want any incidents, do we?'

'No. No we don't.'

'Then please proceed.'

Lara nodded. She had been training for moons for this moment, under the watchful eye of Bernie Whitecrow, the High Witch. 'You'll make a fine Witch, Lara,' Bernie had been telling her every day. Everyone seemed to think so: Bernie, Joe, and especially Double Eight – Lara's friend, who'd been one of the king's White Witches, before he escaped and helped Lara defeat the Evernight. He'd already

passed the exam and gone off to continue his studies in the field. Lara missed him dreadfully. It seemed the only person who did not really believe in Lara was Lara herself.

She looked at the cauldron, and at the book of witch paper, pencil and empty glass spell bottle on the desk next to it.

'Right. Here goes, I suppose.'

Taking up the quill, Lara tapped it thoughtfully on the end of her nose. She wanted to make this seed grow – to produce a tree bearing fruit – so what ingredients would go into a spell to make that happen? *Life*. That's the first word that came to mind. Now, what symbols might make a person think of life?

She touched the nib of the quill to the witch paper and drew, with a scritch-scratching sound, the shape of a heart. Next to the heart she drew a droplet of water, and after that a simple, shining sun. She drew a tree, and a leaf, and an apple. As she worked, her teeth worried her bottom lip and it came to her again just how wondrous the act of spell-making was. Spells were as unique as the people who made them. Every spell – every single spell that ever was – was one of a kind, woven from the imagination and the mind and the soul of the Witch who wrote it down.

Lara clutched the quill in her hands and studied her spell carefully, her eyes tracing every line of ink, every irregular stroke, trying to imagine as she did so the feel of tree bark, the tart taste of a crisp apple, the warmth of the

afternoon sun on her skin. She imagined the feeling of raindrops on her face, the smell of the world after a rainstorm.

Hoping more than anything that her spell would work, she set the quill down, took up the witch paper and popped it into the flames inside the cauldron.

Next came the words that brought every spell to life. The Witch's Chant.

'Born of mind, born of fire,
Born of Mother Earth's desire,
Use it wisely, use it well,
My heart, my blood, my gift, my spell.'

Within the cauldron, the flames licked higher, and shifted through changes of colour. The paper curled and blackened, and from the fire shot sparks and fizzing pops of light. Then the crystalline, sweet melody of magic, ever-present for Witches, grew more intense, and Lara's newly made spell came drifting out of the cauldron in lazy, glowing tendrils of purple blue.

Lara grabbed the spell bottle, unstoppered it, and held it towards the spell, scooping up the glowing curls. Then she placed the stopper back on and examined the contents of the bottle. It looked like a good-enough spell; the colour was dazzling bright, and the way it fizzed and moved suggested that it was a lively one.

'There,' said Lara, holding the spell out towards the examiner.

He took it from her open palm, held it close to his face, and peered at the contents. He noted something down. Lara was trying to stay calm, but the nerves were eating up her insides like carnivorous insects. The examiner gave the tiny spell bottle a shake, and then, as the spell spun around in its glass home, he gave Lara a long, appraising look.

Her heart almost came to a stop as he reached into his jacket, brought out his wand, and proceeded to load her spell bottle into the metal revolver chamber. With a click, Lara's spell was live in the wand, glowing bright in the bottle. Next he took the seed and placed it on the floor.

'Are you ready, Miss Fox?' he asked her, and this time she sensed a softening in the hard edges of his voice.

Lara could not speak. She nodded.

'Very well,' he said. 'Best stand back, I think.'

As Lara stepped back, the examiner pointed his wand towards the floor, and pressed the trigger.

Lara's spell blazed in the chamber. With a crack, a short sharp jet of purple light blasted from the wand tip and hit the seed, which leaped high into the air. Lara gasped, and stepped further back, watching as the seed spun and arced and landed with a soft tick.

The seed vibrated. It began to glow, and as it glowed, it seemed to burn through the floor, disappearing with a hiss.

Lara stared at the smoking hole in the floorboards.

'Has it . . . did I? Have I failed?' she managed to say in a small voice as dry as a dead twig.

The examiner continued to gaze at the ground. He held up a finger to quiet Lara.

'Give it time, Miss Fox. Give it time.'

Out in the waiting room, Joe Littlefoot fidgeted with the books in an old bookcase. He wondered how Lara was doing. A year ago he'd seen her face the all-powerful darkness of the Evernight and an army of tattooed monsters, and yet she seemed more frightened of this test than she'd been of any of that other stuff. Joe knew Lara better than anyone, knew that despite her toughness and bravado and her uncanny ability to jut out her bottom lip and not give in during any argument, she was secretly worried that she would not make a very good Witch.

After all, her mother had been a great Witch, a member of the Doomsday Coven that had looked after the most powerful spell in the world for centuries. And despite the fact Lara had taken that spell and used it to defeat the Evernight, she had confided in Joe that she still did not entirely believe that she belonged among the Witches, or deserved the praise others gave her.

A rumble from the office interrupted his thoughts, and he stood up as the walls trembled. The shaking lasted for half a minute, and then there was quiet. After that, nothing happened for the longest time. Joe began to wonder if Lara's

spell had gone wrong. He crept towards the door and was almost close enough to reach for the handle when it creaked open, and out came Lara with a face like thunder.

'So?' said Joe. 'How . . . did you? Is it good news?'

Lara glared at him. 'No. It's not good news at all.'

'Oh, Lara. Don't you think on it too much. You can always try again . . .'

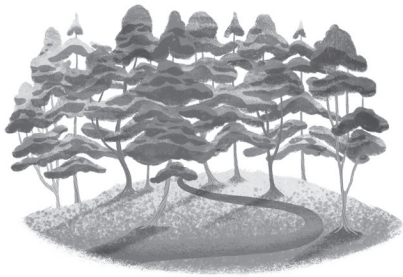
'It's not good news,' repeated Lara. Then her frown vanished, and her face lit up with a huge smile. 'It's GREAT news. I passed!'

'You did? I knew you would!'

The examiner, still munching on the crisp apple he'd picked from the tree Lara had managed to grow in his office, signed his paperwork with a flourish.

'Larabelle Fox,' he said. 'I hereby declare, by the power of the High Witch and the Council of the Mother Tree, that you are licensed to practise magic anywhere in the world, provided you adhere to the laws of the Witches. Congratulations.'

Lara danced a jig, and Joe laughed and joined in, and soon they were shooed out of the examiner's office into the glorious summer morning among the branches and streets and platforms of the great Mother Tree.



Ginny Adder

The night after Ranger Annalise Francco met her terrible fate, a lonely shadow rode a horse along the trail between Giant's Foot Lake and the Veil Forest.

The shadow wore a long coat of fine black silken material, and her boots were heavy and worn. She wore a headscarf of midnight blue. Above, the sky was clear and awash with the milky light of the constellations, and the night was bursting with the scent of wild summer flowers. In the near distance, the lights of Lake End, the sprawling second city of the Empire, twinkled like stars.

'Whoa, girl, whoa.'

Ginny Adder stopped her horse and sat stock-still in the saddle, sniffing at the air. A short, stocky black woman with a big cloud of grey-white hair struggling to escape the headscarf, Ginny was old enough to remember this part of the world before the Silver Kingdom had swallowed it up. She groaned with effort when she dismounted, but when she touched down, her feet were light and silent on the dusty

ground. She rubbed her horse's muzzle and it lowered its big head so that she could kiss it between the eyes.

'You stay here,' she said, and she turned and stared hard into the Veil, that tangled mass of trees and thickets and thorny tendrils. As she took her first steps towards the edge of the forest, Ginny Adder drew her wand, and double-checked the revolver chamber, where six spells were loaded and ready, glowing different colours in the dark.

Her wand half raised, Ginny pushed through the brush, the long grass reaching up to her waist, and then, with a look back at her horse, she ducked into the forest.

She'd been here before, of course; most folks stayed well clear of the Veil, but Ginny was a Witch; she knew the best spots to collect wild mushrooms and berries – and so long as you didn't stray too far in, the worst you were likely to encounter was a hungry wolf or maybe a fire-tail lizard. She knew the smells and the sounds, the feel of the air on her skin.

But tonight . . .

Tonight it was different.

Tonight, she could sense something rotten had been here, leaving a stain on reality. She could feel the aftershock of terrible magic.

Ginny spun the revolver of her wand so that the locator spell was loaded. When she pressed the trigger, a warm orange glow burst to life at the wand tip, and from the glow burst a hare made of orange light, leaping to the ground, nose

twitching. The spell hare sat upright, and then spun away, hopping over fallen trees until it stopped and looked back.

'All right,' said Ginny. 'I'm comin'.' She moved between the trees, following the light of the spell hare deeper into the forest than she'd ever gone before. The trees were thick and gnarled and knotted, so closely packed together that their highest branches interlocked, blocking out all but the smallest glimpses of starry sky.

Wild eyes watched her from the darkness; she could feel them. Her hand shook a little, but the spell light held them back, and she pushed on, tripping on roots and snaring on thorns, until the spell hare stopped beneath a thorny tree and glowed blazing bright. This was the spot.

The body was still quite fresh, and the sight of it made Ginny's breath catch in her throat.

She kneeled beside it, reached for the ranger badge shining on the young woman's coat in the wand light.

'*Annalise Francco*,' Ginny read. She reached out and touched the place on the young ranger's neck where something had ripped and torn at the flesh. She stroked Annalise's cold face and closed her unseeing eyes with a gentle touch. 'You rest now, my dear. Be at peace. I'm gonna find who's doin' this. I'm gonna stop 'em.'

Ginny stood up, her knees groaning, and gazed down at the young woman's body one more time. She left Annalise and came back out of the Veil, happy to see her horse, to feel the warmth of its breath on her hand.

‘Bad business, girl,’ she said. ‘Bad, bad business. I reckon we’ll need help.’

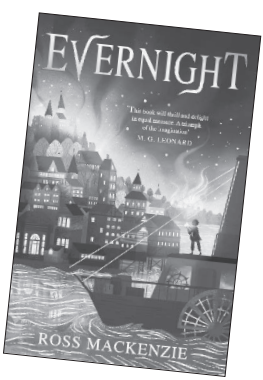
Ginny reached into the saddlebag and brought out a sheet of witch paper and a quill and some ink. She wrote a hurried message, and when she was done, the paper folded itself up, becoming a paper bird, and flew off into the night.

EVERNIGHT

ROSS MACKENZIE

THE EVERNIGHT
HAS BEEN UNLEASHED . . .

As far back as she can remember, orphan Larabelle Fox has scraped together a living treasure-hunting in the sewers. In a city where emotionless White Witches march through the streets and fear of Hag magic is rife, Lara keeps her head down. But when she stumbles upon a mysterious little box in the sewers, Lara finds herself catapulted into a world of wild magic – facing adventure, mortal danger and a man who casts no shadow.



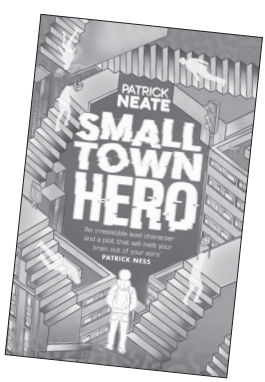
'Epic good-versus-evil fantasy'
Guardian

'Beautifully cinematic, *Evernight* is a spellbinding tale'
The Scotsman

PATRICK NEATE

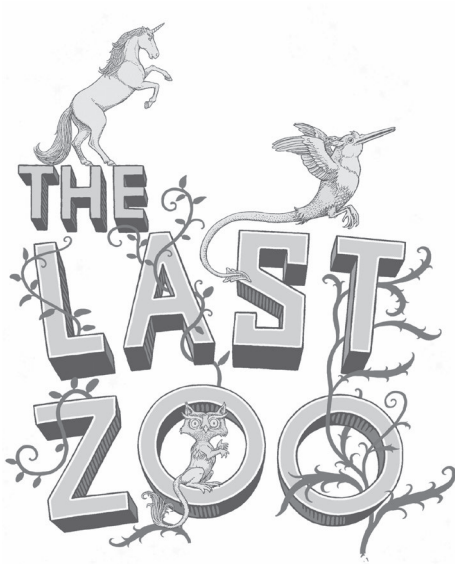
SMALL TOWN HERO

Ever since his dad died in a shock accident, thirteen-year-old Gabe's world has been turned upside-down and back to front. Literally: Gabe has discovered the ability to tell stories which take him into the past, or imagine an impossible version of the present or future that seems as real as real. Gabe has no clue what is going on. But the answers may lie with his mysterious uncle Jesse, an online game called *Small Town Hero* which seems to mirror Gabe's own life, a long-lost grandmother, and the very fabric of time and the universe.



'An irresistible lead character and a plot that will melt your brain out of your ears (in the best way)'
Patrick Ness

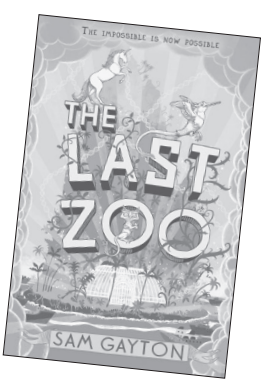
'Gripping'
Guardian



SAM GAYTON

Pia lives in a zoo with her parents (both ghosts), several old and cranky genies, a devil, and two young angels. She spends her days trimming genie-beards, trying to avoid being tricked into selling her soul, and waiting for the angels to make a miracle big enough to save the world.

Then the angels go missing. Can she solve the riddles of the mysterious haloes the angels have left behind? Is the zoo's devil really trying to help her? And what does this all have to do with her best friends, the Rekkers? Pia needs to solve the mystery fast, because everything around her seems to be ending: her friendships, her childhood, and maybe even the world itself.



'An incredible fantasy fiction book full of humour' *The Sun*

'Mind-stretching, moving and explosive' *TLS*

