

The Rise and Fall of Chaz Oregano
2021

Note:

Set about ten years prior to *The Ballad of Tumelun Tombs*, *The Rise and Fall of Chaz Oregano* follows an anarchist uprising in Devonport, Tasmania. Eilex Turen, a very minor character in *Tombs*, writes her memoir in the self-published zine of anarchist commune. This excerpt is the opening scene.

This novella, however, is not directly lifted from that zine. Rather, it's 're-printed' in a book analyzing the anarchism of Turen's commune, and this story, chronicling the heyday of Chaz Oregano, a now-wanted fugitive, which therefore makes the memoir noteworthy to the unnamed 'editor', who corrects Turen's narration with square brackets and adds context in footnotes. Therefore, Turen wrote this story many years ago, attempting to obscure details, and 'the editor' is reprinting it ten years after the events, expounding on where Turen took liberties.

The Rise and Fall of Chaz Oregano will be included in a forthcoming collection of short fiction, set within *The Mongolian Book of the Sky*. That collection is still in progress. It is thus far unnamed.

There he was, that Nazi bastard.

He was armed to the teeth – an ankle dagger, high-powered bow, sword on his back, enough arrows to take on a battalion. He was huge – towering above most people, barrel-chested and massive arms. His racist insignia, the former flag of the British Isles all in black, was emblazoned across his shirt.

As I squinted, I also saw the number fifty-nine stitched into his shirt sleeve. [Prince Ochir] should have had the bastard arrested then and there. He was openly proclaiming his allegiance to a monarch that never existed; Tsar Michael of Great Britain, a racist conspiracy theory that Edward X's long lost (and fictitious) heir is still out there, an encampment somewhere in Melanesia.

The fascist's name was [Millard Denbigh].* He stood arrogantly on the side of the road, thirty of his buddies with him, all armed and menacing.

"You fascist pigs!" Elisabeth shouted beside me, screeching at them.

One of them smiled and waved at her mockingly.

Coming up the road was a carriage towed by four horses. [Brock Weaver], who stood on the opposite side of me, rushed out into the road and hurled a milkshake at the approaching carriage. "Yeah, come on, you reactionary scum!" he barked.

The milkshake landed just shy of the first horse. The driver pulled the reins. [Millard Denbigh] remained where he was, but one of his tough-guy mates stormed out to confront [Brock], a collapsible nightstick extending in his hand. "Oi! Bring it, snotbag."

[Brock] didn't back down. Four or five of his broseph buddies rushed out to assist, but this encouraged more of the militarized Old Boys to leave [Denbigh's] side and charge into the street.

Goddamned [Brock]. Not everything is about merely provoking a fight. The Old Boys, though outnumbered, were each armed with heavy bows, swords, nightsticks. On this side of the road, not a single one of us could afford a bow like that. And they had the backing of the State. If and when the coppers showed up, [Denbigh] and his cohorts would melt away and it would be us who were arrested.

Someone threw a punch, and then a nightstick slammed into a shin and sent [Brock] to the ground.

Before I knew it, it was a full-on street brawl. Some of us in Anarcha had steel-mesh gloves, but it was sheer restraint on the part of the racists that we weren't pumped full of arrows.

I got shoved, I backed away. I weighed sixty kilos and didn't have anything besides pepper spray. Elisabeth and I came here for a demonstration, not a brawl.

All of a sudden I was surrounded. [Brock] and a mate were in front of me, an Old Boy swinging a nightstick wildly. Behind me was a scrapper of a woman in black, whipping around another fascist. He had his fists up, and barked, "I ain't afraid to hit a girl!"

Elisabeth blasted her pepper spray to my right, and I heard a garbled grunt as her target backed up, eyes closed. As he fell back, he dropped his nightstick near my feet. Another Old Boy came at Elisabeth, wrapped his beefy arms around her.

I reacted. Without knowing what I was doing, I picked up the nightstick and slammed the guy in the back. I hit again and again, and he didn't seem to react. I realized he had some sort of armour on beneath his vest.

To my left, I heard [Brock] yelp. Whipping my head around, I saw him holding his arm and stumbling away from his assailant. Goddamned [Brock] – if you're going to attack a fascist, you need to coordinate it, swarm them in overwhelming numbers, not just individualistically stride in there like some sort of macho hero.

I turned back to Elisabeth and the man bear-hugging her. A guy beside me got shoved and slammed into me. My facial bandana fell down around my neck. Struggling to maintain my footing, my feet moved quickly. Whirling around, I slammed face-first into a hard chestplate.

* Mr Denbigh is currently serving a ten-year sentence at Brush Island in New South Wales, for 'aiding and abetting an insurrectionist plot'. The details of his plea bargain not publicly available, it's believed he turned state's evidence in the Berkeley Case.

Pushing myself back, I saw it was [Millard Denbigh], who still stood at the side of the skirmish, observing coolly. He was a beast – massive, square-jawed, crew cut, glaring eyes.

I spit at him, my saliva erupting from me and drenching his face.

“Why, you slag!”

But I was already dashing back through the fray, yanking back up my bandana. I found Elisabeth, smashed her assailant in the back of the leg. He grunted, lost balance and released her.

I grabbed my mate by the arm. “We need to get out of here!”

She turned to me, grinning wildly. “Come on!”

Suddenly she was gone. I was following. She was heading for the carriage, which was trying to do an about-face.

Elisabeth shouted, “Horatio Lancaster, you *Nazi scuuuum!*”^{*}

On the one hand, I was petrified. I hadn’t come for a riot. It all happened so fast. And now these militarized thugs were beating us bloody in broad daylight.

Elisabeth reached the carriage and bounded up the steps. The driver whirled, lurched back, tumbled to the ground. Something possessing me, I lunged at the horses, loosed them from their reins so Lancaster wasn’t getting away.

Elisabeth threw open the door–

Horatio Lancaster was gone. He must have slipped out the side as soon as he saw [Brock] rush into the street. Coward.

Breathing heavy, Elisabeth growled, a guttural sound. She was furious Lancaster wasn’t here. Her hair was frazzled, the bandana covering her scalp lost somewhere in the brawl. Even her facial bandana had fallen to her neck. Spittle dripping from her open mouth, she roared, “*Where are you, bastard?*”

Hearing the driver on the ground, trying to crawl away, she turned to the snivelling man. Her fury focused on him.

She said, “Moa!”

This was my codename. I actually thought this was dumb, but it seems the obscuring of our real names was a prescient forethought. Elisabeth was named Red, while she gave me the moniker Moa; the name came from the giant moa I’d had tattooed on my butt since a drunken night when I was seventeen.[†]

I blinked. I realized with a start she had her hand out, palm open. She wanted the nightstick. And she was glowering at the driver.

Before anything could happen, however, air horns blew. The State was here.

With a start, Elisabeth suddenly realized the wrath that had possessed her, and it fell away almost instantly. Now was the time to flee. She quickly pulled her bandana back over her nose and hopped down from the carriage. I chucked the nightstick. Taking her hand, we fled overland, through a field and onto a parallel street. We could hear sirens now, and weren’t sure where they were.

Emerging into a commercial area, I briefly saw two police horses careen by – I yanked Elisabeth’s arm and shoved her beside a rubbish bin.

They were gone. We scurried out, unbuttoning our shirts as we went.

Across the way we saw [Johnny Buxton] and [Hannah Valleau].

“[Kanunnah!]” [Hannah] erupted, a huge grin on her face. Her own mask was gone and she was struggling to get her arm out of her black jumper.

Elisabeth nearly fell flat on her face as she hopped about, her pants half-off. When at last she got them down, she adjusted the skirt she’d worn underneath. I realized I’d torn a button on my green blouse when I’d ripped off my black jumper.

[Johnny] offered up a cloth bag, and us three girls tossed in our assorted dark clothes, filling the bag like an overdue load of laundry. He was about to synch it up, when I barked, “Hat, hat!”

He leaped. Snatching the beanie off his head, he chucked it in with the rest, and we disposed of it in the next rubbish bin.

No sooner had we done that, than we went around a corner and were nearly bowled over by two towering police horses. The coppers were in riot gear, helmets and vests, with clubs and canisters of tear gas.

“Oh, dear Lord!” gasped [Hannah] melodramatically.

The one copper yanked back on the reins. Then he leaned down and said, “You ladies should get inside, for your own safety.”

The other one quickly swerved his horse around us, and then they were gone.

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* I’m not sure who this character is supposed to be. I recall from conversations with the author during the story’s writing that this brawl took place outside the University of Tasmania Burnie, and the man in the carriage was likely a right-wing speaker or author, though I cannot say who.

† She’s switched details regarding her tattoo, and, I’m led to believe, the subsequent codename. The tattoo on her behind was of a thylacine, or Tasmanian tiger, which some Palawa people had called *kanunnah* prior to European arrival. During my years with the author, she had written many poems which used the name Kanunnah was used. I believe this to be her true codename.

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