

New York Times #1 Best-Selling Author of ARTEMIS FOWL

EOIN COLFER

THE
FOWL
TWINs

GET WHAT THEY DESERVE



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THE
TWINS

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*To Seamus and Matt,
the internet Vikings*

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PROLOGUE

THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT TRUE LOVE is humankind's greatest motivator.

Those people are sweet but completely wrong.

Certainly, true love is a powerful force, but the actual greatest motivator of all is undoubtedly revenge. Humans will climb the highest tower for love, but then murder everyone inside that tower for revenge.

And then possibly demolish the tower.

Once someone commits to a course of vengeance, the changes inside begin: their heart becomes petrified so that love may not enter. Their senses of reason and perspective are cauterised so that good judgement shall never prevail. And any code of decency that they may have lived by is replaced by a single commandment: *Thou shalt do whatsoever needs to be done.*

This is the story of one such revenger and the children he would cheerfully go to the ends of the earth to have his revenge upon. It is also the story of what those children were up to that summer, as these were not the kind of youngsters to simply laze around, waiting for vengeance to be visited upon them.

The man was Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, the Duke of Scilly, and the children, you may be less than surprised to learn, were the Fowl Twins.

It may seem unlikely that a peer of the British realm would devote his precious time to the killing of twelve-year-old Irish twins, but these particular boys had grievously wronged the duke, and Lord Teddy was determined to repay them in kind, by which he meant slay them in a convoluted and epic manner.

For decades, Lord Teddy had been consumed by two objectives:

1. Live as long as possible (one hundred and fifty years plus so far). And ...
2. Mount a claim to the British throne. But for this he would need the Lionheart ring, which we shall come to later.

And now Teddy had developed a third obsession: killing those blasted twins.

It may also occur, if a person is at all familiar with the notorious Fowl Twins, that the duke's chances of putting one over on Myles and Beckett were slim at best. But Lord Bleedham-Drye was something of a specialist in the art of vengeance. This was not, as American humans might say, his first rodeo.

In point of fact, Lord Teddy considered the Fowl crusade to be the third epic revenge campaign in his one-hundred-and-fifty-year life. His first was hunting the border-fens fox to extinction simply because one had stolen a salmon sandwich from Queen Victoria's fingers at a picnic he was hosting, which was simply devastating for the duke, as it put the brakes on his plan to become her second husband, the most direct route to the crown.

The second quest for vengeance is quite famous in the annals of American crime history, as there was quite a gruesome spate of homicides of snake-oil salesmen in the western states during the mid-twentieth century. Lord Teddy had visited such a salesman in California and purchased a life-extending elixir. The concoction had brought on a series of catastrophic bowel movements while he was attending an opera at the governor's mansion. So outraged was the duke by this public humiliation that he did away with the entire network of salesmen over the following season.

Of course, Teddy had dealt many other swift retributions, but he did not count these as proper revenges, as the duke agreed with Charles Dickens, who wrote: *Vengeance and retribution require a long time; it is the rule.*

Lord Teddy considered the Fowls worthy of a campaign because he could honestly say that no human beings living or dead had infuriated him more

than the twins. Not only had they avoided being permanently murdered, but they had also utterly ruined Lord Teddy's birth body, thus forcing the duke to have his living brain transferred into a cloned host. To cap it all, they put a rather big hole in his front lawn. And, as every royal correspondent knows, nothing matters more to a duke than his daffodils.

No, Teddy old boy, the duke told himself, the Fowl blighters simply have to go, and that's all there is to it.

And so Lord Teddy laid his elaborate and unnecessarily complicated plans, resolving that on this occasion he would take pains not to underestimate the Irish boys as he had in the past.

Ishi Myishi, Lord Teddy's closest friend and arms dealer to the world's criminal masterminds, had once told him, 'He who commits his life to revenge is already dead,' but this did not deter the duke from his course in the least, because his plan actually depended on him being dead.

I will be completely and undeniably deceased, thought Teddy as he reclined in the brass bathtub of electric eels where he did the lion's share of his plotting. *And that will be my advantage.*

1 CORPSE

THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE,
LONDON

MYLES FOWL HAD TRAVELLED TO LONDON TO present a lecture to the Coroners' and Pathologists' Association of Southern England, or CORPSE, in London's Southbank Centre on the river. Beckett had tagged along because he thought CORPSE was a fabulous name for a group, plus he instinctively felt that a coroners' convention in London was exactly the sort of setting where a classic Fowl Adventure might kick off, and he would be simply devastated to miss the initial stages.

Also, Myles had promised that he could wear a disguise.

Beckett was absolutely right to tag along, for a Fowl Adventure did in fact *kick off* in the Southbank Centre. However, it was not to be a classic Fowl Adventure, as those generally tended to ramp up towards an explosive climax, whereas the Fowl Phantom Solution (as the affair would be named in fairy Lower Elements Police files) started with a big bang, followed by a series of smaller bangs, then another big bang.

Myles Fowl stood front and centre on the lacquered wood of the Southbank main stage in an auditorium that was packed with the cream of Europe's coroners and pathologists. For even though CORPSE was a British organisation, doctors had flown in from all over the world to hear the Fowl prodigy speak, and Myles had not disappointed. Unless one were disappointed by the fact that the pompous twelve-year-old dressed in a formal tuxedo, bow tie and gleaming patent-leather loafers had not tripped

over his own inflated ego and fallen flat on his smug face. Myles had expertly covered molecular pathology, computational pathology and the clear advantages of medicological investigators being recognised as first responders, and he was finishing up with some coroner-related puns.

‘And so my *examination* is over,’ he said, deactivating the laser pointer in his eyeglass frames. ‘And, while I am certain there will be many *postmortems* in the bar, unless there is an *inquest*, this twelve-year-old body must be released.’

Not exactly hilarious stuff, but the members of CORPSE were not expecting stand-up comedy and so, for the most part, they were content to applaud politely. But not everyone was content. A hand shot up from the clumped gloom of the audience.

‘Before you go and hang out with your amazing and much more interesting brother ...’ said the short man attached to the hand. He wore thick glasses and sported a bushy moustache. ‘Maybe I can ask you a question, *Master Fowl*?’

Myles appeared to fall for the bait. ‘I hate to stand on ceremony,’ he said, ‘but I do prefer to be addressed as *Dr Fowl* when the occasion calls for it, or even *Professor Fowl* in specialist situations like this.’

The man stood, his head jutting into the beam of Myles’s spotlight, and read his question from a card. ‘That’s just it, isn’t it, *Master Fowl*? I’ve done a bit of digging, and you may have doctorates in other areas, but it seems that your PhD in criminal pathology does not exist. It seems very much like you are here under false pretences.’

‘Oh, that,’ said Myles, as though misrepresenting himself were nothing. ‘I can explain that.’

This admission was met with gasps and chatter. Could it be that Myles Fowl was, in fact, a charlatan? A fake?

The questioner flicked to a second card and read the statement written there: ‘I think we would all very much like to hear you try.’

Myles gave his full attention to the moustachioed man who had dared to question him. ‘It is true,’ he said, ‘that earlier this morning I had no *official*

qualification in pathology. But if you'll allow me a moment to check my email ...' Myles switched his focus to the lenses of his graphene smart glasses and refreshed his mail feed. 'Ah yes, here we are. As promised by University College London, my doctorate was conferred several minutes ago. I think you'll find that I actually achieved an unprecedented perfect score.'

With a series of blink commands, Myles cast the email to the large screen behind him. The attendees saw a copy of Myles's latest doctorate along with an animation of a digital Myles in a cap and gown, this supplied by NANNI, the Nano Artificial Neural Network Intelligence system that lived in his spectacles.

The questioner was melodramatically aghast. 'Are you telling us that you qualified *during* your lecture?'

'That is true,' conceded Myles.

'What kind of poopy-headed move was that?'

Myles frowned. 'Poopy-headed move? Is that the question you were instructed ... I mean, is that the question you wanted to ask?'

The moustachioed man cleared his throat and tried another question. 'So you began the lecture unqualified?'

'Technically, perhaps, but actually no,' retorted Myles. 'I began the lecture without an email from the university. That is all. There was never any doubt I would graduate – after all, I spent three whole weeks on this doctorate. Your quibble should really be addressed to the university's communications department, as I was promised my degree several hours ago.'

This was met with murmurs of sympathy from the audience members, who had been forced to deal with university communications offices themselves over the years.

'It is historically true that progress is hindered not by lack of ideas, but by the slow grind of bureaucracy,' concluded Myles. This actually won him a second round of applause, which did not surprise him, as this entire mini inquisition had been part of his plan, the supposed interrogator being, in fact, his twin, Beckett, in the promised disguise.

‘Thank you, lesser academics,’ said Myles. ‘That concludes my lecture, but just as every killer signs his own kills, and every artist signs his own work, I will sign bound copies of my thesis in the foyer. I have instructed my AI to unblock your phones shortly so that you may tell your children that you listened excitedly to a Myles Fowl presentation.’

And indeed that would have been the most exciting moment in many of the audience members’ lives had there not been a loud echoing *bang* as the roof peeled back. This was a surprising enough development in and of itself, as this particular auditorium did not have a retractable roof, but it was eclipsed by the appearance of an ultralight aircraft in the space where there had, until recently, been a ceiling. This aircraft dipped inside the theatre itself, hovering at the rear of the hall, and Myles could not help noticing that the craft’s stubby wings were adorned with mini machine guns.

‘Well now,’ said Myles, seemingly to himself but actually to NANNI. ‘That is unexpected.’

This was something Myles rarely admitted, as he prided himself on considering all the eventualities in any situation.

‘What next? I wonder.’

What next was that the light aircraft opened fire with its portside machine gun, obliterating Myles with multiple rounds. Not the actual Myles, but rather the image of Myles on the screen behind him. Still, the message was clear. Myles Fowl was the target here.

Most people would have been petrified by this development, but Myles Fowl was not most people. In fact, he was not even *some* people – he was unique among twelve-year-olds and grasped the psychology of the moment. If the pilot had wished to kill him immediately, then Myles would be dead. Therefore, this attack was personal.

‘Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, I presume,’ said Myles, though it was not really a presumption. It was a deduction, if one considered the facts:

1. The pilot was an ace.
2. The duke held a grudge against the twins in general and Myles in particular.

3. The flying machine now hovering before him was the very same Myishi Skyblade that Myles had once been suspended beneath.

In conclusion, if it flew like a duke and shot like a duke, then it was probably a duke.

Knowing Lord Teddy as I do, he will grandstand for a while, thought Myles. *And then he will kill me.*

But, if it was Teddy in that cockpit, then there were a few things his lordship was unaware of.

First, Beckett had shed his disguise and was fashioning a lasso from his shirt and trousers, probably intending to assault an aluminium fighter plane with everyday items of clothing.

And, second, the LEP Fowl liaison officer, Specialist Lazuli Heitz, had been observing the lecture from the stage gantry and had activated her suit's wing system, obviously intending to disobey the *under no circumstances involve the Lower Elements Police in human disputes* directive.

Myles should not have been able to see Specialist Heitz, as she was wearing an advanced shimmer suit, but he had developed a very sneaky workaround. (More on that situation later, as it will play a bigger part in his life than even Myles could have envisioned. For now, all we need to know is that Myles had a few more advantages in this situation than others believed him to have but not as many as he thought he had.)

Even so, Myles was a tad anxious because, after all, even Beck and Lazuli could not outrun bullets.

Yet, in spite of the grim nature of his current circumstances, Myles was also nurturing a spark of hope. He was confident that Teddy would indulge himself in a triumphant villain's rant, thus providing Myles's Regrettables teammates the seconds they would need to come to his rescue.

They have rescued me from more hazardous situations, he realised. But he had to admit, if only to himself, that his life had, in all probability, entered its final hundred heartbeats.

The audience's reaction to the jet's arrival was mixed. At the extreme ends of the behaviour spectrum, there were hysterics, who ran screaming for the exits, and deniers, who remained absolutely calm as though nothing whatsoever were awry. In between these two poles, Myles noted some interesting activity. The lighting technician helpfully trained several spotlights on the hovering aircraft. Two visiting Swedish professors engaged in a fistfight, probably believing that this would be their last chance to settle whatever score existed between them. And several eminent pathologists whipped out phones and snapped selfies with the aircraft in the background.

Come on, Your Lordship, Myles beamed at the Skyblade. *Tell me exactly why I deserve to die.*

The plane dipped its wings, its engines blasting air on the seats below, and Myles saw that the forward windscreen was fogged up.

Show me that royal face, thought Myles. *Give Laz some time to work.*

And it is a measure of Myles's stress levels that he shortened Lazuli's name, as he mostly avoided abbreviations, though he did use *Beck* on occasion to please his twin.

It seemed almost as if Lord Teddy had received Myles's thought-cast, for the glass defogged and the duke's ancient figure appeared hunched over the controls. He opened his mouth to speak, but Myles beat him to it.

'Lord Teddy,' he said, his voice still amplified over the house system, 'so kind of you to attend. Perhaps you had a question for the speaker. The speaker being myself, of course.'

Sometime later, when the twins were summoned back to London for an inquiry about the Southbank affair, a hostage negotiator who had reviewed the tapes set down his Earl Grey tea and said to Myles, 'You do know that provocation is absolutely the wrong course of action to take in these situations. It might have pushed the hostage-taker towards violent action.'

To which Myles said, 'Three things, Mr Earl Grey. First, to label Lord Teddy a hostage-taker gives him all the power in this situation and, as we subsequently found out, the duke was not the one with the power.'

‘Second, I am reasonably certain, given the battle plane and the dozens of shots fired, that Teddy had already been pushed irreversibly towards violent action.

‘And, third, if you want to talk about the wrong course of action, perhaps you should look in a mirror and ask yourself whether that wispy moustache fluttering below your nostrils might have been the wrong course of action for you personally.’

And that was the end of the conversation.

This little flash-forward tells us that Myles survived the duke’s attack, and now we shall find out just how he did it.

By the time Teddy could get a word in, he was so incensed that he spattered spittle on the inside of the windscreen as he spoke.

‘We meet again, Myles Fowl!’ he wheezed through his ancient slit of a mouth, the shrunken lips drawn back from the teeth. ‘Fowl by name, foul by nature!’

Myles winced. How reduced was the once magnificent duke that he would trot out such a hackneyed insult and spit on the glass while doing it?

‘Is that all you can muster, Lord Teddy?’ he asked. “‘Fowl by name, foul by nature’? You do know this is being recorded? You could have referred to me as a *Naegleria fowleri*, which is a brain-eating amoeba. That would have been something. When are you going to realise that you can never beat me and it would be easier on your self-esteem if you simply stopped trying?’

Lord Teddy’s face twisted until it was ninety per cent scowl. ‘I was going to drag it out, you impertinent, ridiculous boy, but I can stomach your jabber no longer.’

And the duke’s bony fingers tightened on the trigger controlling the machine guns, which really should have been the end of the great game for Myles Fowl and yet another trophy for the mighty hunter Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye. But somehow it was not the end, as Myles’s goose was spared a cooking thanks to the Trojan efforts of his twin, Beckett, and their mutual friend Specialist Lazuli Heitz of the Lower Elements Police.

Lazuli and Beckett, being essentially creatures of action, had realised moments earlier that the immediate threat to Myles was not so much the ranting peer with his finger on the trigger, but the machine guns slung on pivots below the Myishi Skyblade's swept-back wings. And so each Regrettable targeted one of these weapons. Beckett could not actually see the shielded Lazuli, but he trusted that, since he was closer to the starboard weapon, she would take care of the port. And that is exactly what happened, though possibly not exactly as planned.

Beckett quickly stripped down to the gold-thread tie that represented his deceased goldfish, Gloop (*#firstpetsforever*), and his underpants, which were actually a sumo loincloth or mawashi. He found that the loincloth afforded him the most mobility in the event a stripped-down engagement was called for, something that happened to Beckett at a minimum of twice a week. He tied his trousers and shirt together and scanned the nearby audience members for a launchpad, settling almost immediately on the quarrelling Swedish professors, who were locked together in an accidental base-level grip of a human triangle.

Thanks, guys, thought Beckett, and he made his approach.

He skipped along a row of seatbacks, scuttled up one professor's back and springboarded from the crown of the other's head, achieving a vertical lift that could be matched only by Maasai warrior jumpers. Beckett flung his makeshift lasso upwards in what might have seemed like a last-ditch effort, given he was in mid-air when he made the throw, but it was not desperate, as Beckett Fowl was a savant in all things physical and could easily have competed in human or fairy games on an international level. In fact, Lazuli had given him maybe three lessons in the fairy martial art of *Cos T'apa*, and he had already achieved red slipper level, equalling Lazuli herself, who had been studying the art for decades and was more than a little envious of the human boy's lightning-fast progress. So Beckett's lasso-toss landed neatly over the Skyblade's starboard ski, and Beckett swung himself upwards, hooking both legs over the machine-gun barrel.

‘Hello, Mr Nasty Gun,’ said Beckett, who sincerely disliked guns and most of the people who wielded them. ‘Let’s see if I can’t throw a spanner in your works.’ And then he told the gun, ‘That’s just a figure of speech. I don’t actually have a spanner.’

Lazuli, meanwhile, took a less eventful path to the gun she intended to disable. There was no cobbling-together of ad hoc tightrope equipment. Instead, Lazuli simply nudged the throttle of her shimmer suit’s flight wings so that she lifted off from the stage’s gantry and hovered directly in front of her target weapon. That might seem a reckless place to hover, but Specialist Heitz figured she could shield the human boy with her own fairy body armour, which she had been assured by Foaly could withstand multiple direct hits from anything the humans could throw at it, short of an armour-piercing shell.

Regarding Lazuli’s aim, what she planned to aim was her oxalis pistol, which was a considerable upgrade from the previous model. Nearly all her equipment had been upgraded since the affair known in LEP files as the ACRONYM Convergence (see LEP file: *The Fowl Twins Deny All Charges*), and, in fact, the centaur Foaly had made her something of a test case for new technology, so she was equipped to the tips of her pointy ears with his latest updates, versions and breakthroughs.

There were those in the corridors of LEP Police Plaza who whispered that the tech-genius Foaly was obsessed with trumping the Fowls’ technological advancements, especially since Artemis Fowl had outshone him comprehensively in previous engagements (see any of the LEP Artemis Fowl files). Foaly denied this, red-faced, but he did not help his case by wearing a lab T-shirt bearing the legend:

FOWL ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU.

FOWL ME TWICE, SHAME ON ME.

The oxalis organic pistols had superseded the Neutrinos and were named for the weed that ejects its seeds using a ballistichoric system that operates by drying out the fruit walls and getting the layers to pull against each other. The pistols were genetically modified and grown in hydroponic racks, and they could actually be eaten in an emergency. Lazuli's pistol was third generation and shot seeds rather than bullets or rays. She had a range of seed types to choose from, and for this particular task she selected *gumshot* from her visor menu. Gumshots were similar to human rubber bullets except they splatted on impact.

The perfect way to block a machine gun, she thought, and to put a slug down Lord Teddy's port barrel without waiting for aim-assist to lock in on her visor. Her own aim was true, and her seed did not even rattle the sides on its way in. Now she could only pray that the seed had a nanosecond to splat before Lord Teddy had time to pull the trigger.

Lazuli could not know this, but Teddy had already pulled the trigger, and the electronic signal was travelling from the cockpit to the machine gun. It was now a very short race against time to see which projectile would do its work first.

And what was Myles Fowl doing while all this was going on? Surely the boy was petrified with fear and, even if he did have motor-function command, there wasn't enough time for him to actually do anything. But Myles had been in worse fixes and had trained himself to react quickly – mentally, at least. While Lord Teddy was still monologuing, Myles had sent NANNI's electronic fingers probing the Skyblade to see if he could penetrate the duke's defences. Unfortunately, they had been rebuffed by one of the famous Myishi closed systems. Simultaneously, Myles initiated Operation Trapdoor, which was a pretty self-explanatory name. Myles knew Beckett and Lazuli were on the job, but, even so, he judged it prudent to remove himself from the line of fire so that he might remain alive and be of some use to his friends.