

THE FAE OF DARKWOOD

BEN M^cQUEENEY

BEN MCQUEENEY

The Fae of Darkwood

A Tellusm Tale

Copyright © 2020 by Ben McQueeney

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Ben McQueeney asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Ben McQueeney has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iv
1 Barber	1
2 Fist	7
3 Specimen	10
4 Fae	15
5 Death	17
6 Power	20
7 Doctor	23
8 Name	29
<i>Continue your travels in Tellusm...</i>	31
<i>About the Author</i>	41
<i>Also by Ben McQueeney</i>	42

Foreword

The land of Tellusm is a huge and varied place. From the Elphen in the north with their Treesteads in ancient Araj trees, to the cursed Faeries lurking at Goblo's Pass in the south. From the Hume dominated fortress city of Kyne to the Trollems living the simple life within carved mountain homes in Eenii.

It's a place where atop of three-headed serpents, wizards will use magic to battle each other in a game of Portare. A place where a giant storm reaching the sky cuts Tellusm off what from lies beyond. A place where the three gods and Spirits play their little games at the expense of all its inhabitants.

A land where life has reached all its corners and buried it's stake deep in the ground.

This is the story of the Killswitch.



Barber

“Sir! Would you be careful with that blade around my neckline?” The Nobleman twitched in the old well-used barber’s chair. The sound of his bottom wriggling on worn leather made a squeak as he twitched. “Also, sir, please make sure that my beard is perfectly symmetrical. I cannot afford for the common folk to see a single hair out of place. I must maintain a pristine visual standard.” The seated gentleman was attired in finely-made, expensive-looking clothes. His burgundy and gold striped tunic alone must have been worth at least a dozen Estrazian sovereigns.

Rehan the barber was taking care to cater to his client’s very specific requirements. The finely attired gentleman had done nothing but complain about his Mist farms since he sat down. He had a terrible problem with Goblo pests that infested the condensers. He said something along the lines of in the future the whole of Tellusm would be powered by burning liquid Mist refined from his farms. Also that he would be known as the man who made it so. He punctuated his self-inflated speech with how his facial hair arrangement should appear and why it was

important for Rehan to be precise when trimming it.

“Okay, M’lord, a complete mirror image on both sides,” Rehan answered, speaking softly as he glided the blade over the Nobleman’s throat. He paused briefly to wipe the excess soap on the towel hung over his arm.

“My Lord? Oh, heavens no, my boy. Call me Galahad... The great inventor.” He wriggled in the chair, inspecting his reflection in the mirror, pouting.

Rehan noticed Galahad obviously admiring the reflection of himself staring back at him.

“Yes, I suppose I am noble, but nevertheless I am off to Kyne tomorrow to speak to the king and some of the other notable Humes from around Tellusm.”

Rehan’s thoughts kept drifting off the task at hand like a leaf floating randomly down a stream. His mind kept presenting interesting questions to him like, ‘How does the intestine smooth muscle contract, forcing food through one’s digestive system if there is an internal blockage?’ Or ‘How would the brain respond if the spinal cord was exposed to the outside world while its owner was still alive?’

It occurred to Rehan that these were certainly interesting questions and would need to be jotted down. He put the blade down carefully and pulled out the notebook he had stored snugly in a secret inside pocket, out of view. Rehan had an incredibly large appetite for concealed pockets. He wasn’t entirely sure why. Perhaps it was the knowing he had something concealed and the outside world knowing nothing of it. He had always had an affinity with all things secret. He grabbed a large quill from the table opposite, dipped it generously and jotted his thoughts down in a swirl of black ink.

Rehan was not only one of Erstaz’s best barbers, but he also

was ‘a bit of a surgeon’ as a hobby. It was well known among the locals that if you had a toothache and needed the tooth pulled, Rehan could do that with ease, for a copper penny, leaving a gummy smile afterwards. If someone had an awful pus-filled infection, Rehan could cure this in a matter of days with his famed maggot therapy. It was something he had developed himself after noticing the tendency of maggots to only eat necrotic flesh.

Rehan’s Barbershop kept him in enough coin to keep a roof over his head and a science laboratory in his basement. His lab was stocked to the gills with remedies, potions and elixirs. Not to mention all manner of little creatures to help with any particular ailments. Leeches for bad blood, maggots for bad flesh, worms for bad guts. He also had an extensive collection of specimens housed in jars. It looked like a shrine to body parts. He had a great relationship with the mortician at the bottom of the street. Any spare corpses that weren’t claimed by a family within a couple of days were given to Rehan in exchange for a free haircut. His basement lab even had a wet room too, where he could bring fresh test specimens home and dismember them or disembowel easily with all the mess contained.

Very handy.

All his facilities, including his extensive documentation, results and drawings, gave Rehan the assurance that his lab would rival any research facility in all of Tellusm. He was in pursuit of knowledge. All he had ever wanted was to know how living beasts worked and if there was a problem how he could fix it. All Rehan really cared about were his experiments.

And Gwyneth.

Gwyneth was the daughter of the old fishmonger big Frank. For years, Rehan and Gwyneth had been the best of friends.

Recently, though, this had changed to something more. He had felt a tug at his heartstrings and the tightening of love in his stomach when he was around her. Rehan knew that he loved this girl and that she could be the one for him.

Unfortunately though, he wasn't sure how she felt. Especially since her father had taken quite a disliking to Rehan at an early age. Gwyneth had always been different from the other girls Rehan had been previously interested in. She was a fishmonger's daughter so she was used to having her elbows deep in fish guts all day. She didn't mind Rehan's gruesome scientific studies. She understood his desire to cut things up to understand them. It was all in the name of knowledge.

As Rehan placed his note pad down, and still deep in thought, he noticed that Galahad had propped up a rapier style sword against the wall and it looked to have seen some action recently. There was dried blood covering the sheath that hadn't oxidised too much yet and gone black. Meaning it was fresh.

Fresh is good...

This focused Rehan's mind. The idea that there could be some fresh corpses to take samples from had Rehan dizzy with excitement. He quickly moved back behind Galahad. This time the pompous gentleman was inspecting his pearly white teeth in his reflection.

"Oh dear, have I had this kale in my teeth since this morning? How awful. Thank the Gods I came straight here," he mumbled to himself.

Rehan interrupted. "Can I just ask, M'lord... I mean Galahad, sorry, I noticed your sword, and well, it looks recently used and I would like to..."

"Yes! It was my boy. What of it? I used it to cut down a pack of horrible little Goblos. Awful little blighters they are. Saved

a couple of lovely young ladies too. Unfortunately, for them, their husbands had already died trying to defend them. A little later on I will be checking on them, if you catch my meaning.” Galahad let a proud laugh echo into the room.

Rehan just stared at the man as he winked at him arrogantly.
Freshly dead Goblos? And Hume males?

This was Rehan’s lucky day. He knew exactly what saws he would need to bring to carve himself some samples.

Galahad shook Rehan after a long moment. “Excuse me, my boy? Are you okay? You look a little dazed? Are you frightful of blood and gore?”

No... I crave it.

“Yes. That’s it,” Rehan lied. “Where did this take place? I want to make sure I won’t go anywhere near.”

Galahad frowned at Rehan, like he was trying to figure him out. “Okay, it was about half a mile up the north path to the fork. Then bear left, past the Lovers rock and you can see the forest ahead of you. Yes, a good idea to stay away.”

“That’s Darkwood,” Rehan said, holding back a smile.

“Well, it wasn’t that dark when I was there, however, I did leave it rather red when I left.” Galahad’s loud arrogant laugh could have been heard in the pub three streets away.

Red...

Rehan’s enthusiasm suddenly tripled. He worked with precision and haste, finishing the job in a quarter of the time it would have taken usually.

On the way out Galahad tossed him a bag of silver.

“A job well done, my boy. Now on to becoming a legend for me.” He stood in the doorway, holding his rapier in hand and took a prideful deep breath.

Rehan just wanted him to leave.

Galahad gave a sickeningly arrogant smile.

“Perhaps I will check up on those poor ladies. They will need some comfort for sure.” And with that he left, the bell above the door ringing for a moment and then disappearing into the silence.

Rehan, like a raged Behemoth, immediately rushed down to his lab. He threw off his barbers’ clothes and wrapped himself in thick stained leather. His ‘corpse chopping’ outfit. It had the benefit of being easy to clean. The blood came right off. It was also warm for a cold winter’s night. It was unfortunate though, that it had started to smell quite bad, like rotten meat. He put it out of his mind and put on his over robe and put the hood up. Lastly, he snatched up his toolkit which already conveniently had the twelve-inch hacksaw, a few empty sacks and hand axe within.

That’s all I’ll need.

Fist

Rehan locked the front door to the shop as quickly as he could, turning the old iron key in the mechanism with a clink. He was full of liquid fight, something he had experimented with on rats recently, he mused to himself. The rodents could survive full submersion in water longer if they had been extensively exposed to a tormentor first. It was interesting. Something to explore later.

The afternoon sun lay mid-way to the west in the sky. Rehan knew he would have to run to the Darkwood to make sure he had plenty of time to gather specimens before the sun dipped below the horizon. He turned swiftly on his thick booted heel.

Shouldn't take too long to get to the dark forest if I keep my head down.

Just as he was about to spring into a full sprint...

THUD

The fist in his stomach knocked the air right out of him. His knees buckled and he hit the floor like a sack of spuds at a Mon-dahian crop market. The strike felt like he had been punched by an angry Trollem who hadn't eaten for the last rotation. Rehan

looked up confused at the silhouette towering over him. It was difficult to make out as the sun was inconveniently shining directly into Rehan's bright blue eyes. His ears didn't fail him, though.

"You little runt! What are you doing?" The voice was loud and heavy with anger.

Rehan was still keeled over in pain. Trying to get his breath back, he couldn't get an answer out quick enough.

"I said, what do you think you are doing, son?"

A sharp pain registered in Rehan's stomach from the boot of the attacker. Rehan finally managed to take a breath and with it, a putrid fragrance of rotten fish filled his lungs. Suddenly, Rehan realised who it was.

It was big Frank. Gwyneth's dad.

"I...What? I'm going out for specimens. Why did you hit me? You crazy old man." Rehan was confused by his confidence. He was the little guy who had just been punched to the floor by a man much bigger than him.

Ah yes, of course, there's probably still liquid fight in my blood.

He braced himself for another punch, but nothing came thankfully.

"I don't care about your stupid experiments, boy, just stay away from my daughter. She doesn't need you and your weird science games you play. You little freak. Now listen here. She is all I have left and some stupid little runt isn't gonna spoil that. Do you hear me, son?" His last sentence was almost screamed.

Big Frank had been through a lot during his life. Gwyneth had told Rehan that her mother had died a decade earlier of a rare disease that wastes away the body and mind. Then years later, her older brother Sebastian had fled Erstaz in pursuit of becoming a Cleric bound for Verad. But he never returned. Likely

he had been caught in Goblos' pass. No one would dare venture through there without a large group and a lot of arrows. It was clear then that big Frank only had his daughter left now and it didn't look like he was going to share her with Rehan anytime soon.

"Yes, Frank, I hear you," Rehan said eventually, lying through his teeth which he realised now he was lucky to still be the proud owner of. He knew that regardless of big Frank's pathetic bullying efforts, he and Gwyneth would still see each other.

Like we always have. We are meant to be together.

The fishmonger, seemingly happy with his warning and left Rehan lying in the mud outside his barbershop. Luckily, his leather gear had offered some protection from the punch and kick to the gut. He got up painfully and tried to shake it off. His stomach felt bruised and swollen. He would have to look at that later. But first, he had some corpses to hack up.

I need to run.

Specimen

The air was starting to chill when Rehan finally made it to where Galahad had slain the Goblos and saved the women. He was glad now of the warmth from the heavy leathers. Darkwood was the largest forest in Tellusm. It earned its name for a few reasons. The most obvious though was because it was dark. Regardless of whether it was day or night, the canopy was so thick it restricted the light into the great wood. As a result, underneath the trees the only thing that really grew on the ground was Elez and Witches' Fingers. Both of these plants had huge razor-sharp thorns. One carrying a poison that would kill in a matter of hours. The other, if given the chance, would trap a person, squeeze them until they died and then slowly digest them over the course of a rotation. It was said that both deaths from these Biennials presented as a curtain of darkness that bled into your vision. Like the dark had finally got you.

It was true. Darkwood wasn't the safest nor the most welcoming place on Tellusm. The very sort of place that childhood ghost tales are set. But all of this didn't seem to bother Rehan

too much. Especially when there were some new specimens up for grabs.

It hadn't been difficult to find where Galahad's violent encounter had all played out. All Rehan had to do was follow his nose. The smell of blood hung heavy in the air, thick and metallic. He had come to recognise it easily, something he was actually quite proud of.

Close to where he was standing, a dark pool was gathering. To begin with, Rehan assumed it was a puddle. He knelt to inspect it carefully. It was blood, thick and sticky. He rubbed it in between his gloves, recognising the feel immediately. He traced a little stream supplying the pool up a small bank. At the top, he found what he was looking for and it was exactly how Galahad had described.

There was red everywhere.

It covered the leaves of some nearby bushes. It had been sprayed up the trunk of a tree and the bodies strewn about. It appeared like they were floating in it. Rehan was so excited, he didn't know where to start. He looked around and made a quick count. Two Hume males in good condition, eight maybe eight and a half Goblos scattered about.

Rehan didn't have many Goblo specimens. The cursed faery was a very interesting creature. Warped by the Behemoth Curse, the thigh high creatures were known for violence and the single focus to feed. However, recent observations suggested that they were not just the mindless little monsters they had always traditionally been made out to be. Apparently as their prevalence had grown in Darkwood and the Goblos' Pass, they had learnt to live in little communities and even use basic tools and weapons to protect their young. Which was interesting. The main concern Rehan had was the risk of contracting the Behemoth Curse from

the Goblos' blood. But he had covered himself, including his hands in thick leather to prevent this so would be perfectly safe. He didn't want to pass up this opportunity to learn more about the little monsters.

Fascinating creatures.

Rehan reviewed the tools in his bag and immediately regretted not bringing the large axe.

Damn the gods. I knew I would forget something.

The hand axe he had in his sack was easy to swing, but it was going to take some time to cut through these bodies and he didn't want to stay in the forest any longer than was absolutely required. He would have to get back soon before any of the nocturnal beasts lurking within the dark decided to pay him a visit.

This find is too good to run away from.

He picked up the arm of a half chopped Goblo close to him. It was very interesting how loose its skin was and it didn't feel like skin at all. Rehan would have described it as the texture of a sharpening stone. He quickly wrote up his observation and without a second thought slammed the hand axe into the dead creature's limb above the elbow, pulling it free. He inspected the hand attached to the arm. He was interested in the petite bones within it.

I wonder if they are the same as a Hume hand? Perhaps take a comparison?

Rehan immediately hopped over to the first of the two unfortunate Humes. With a few brutal and crunching swipes, he had his Hume arm too.

"Into the bag, you go, you two little beauties," he spoke into the silence of the forest.

Rehan couldn't help let out a little chuckle here and there.

These prime specimens were going to keep him busy for weeks.

He noticed that the dead man whom he had just hacked up had two different colour eyes.

“How interesting! I must have your eyes too, young sir.” Within moments, a small scalpel appeared from Rehan’s tool bag and a minute later Rehan had dug himself out two new eyeballs which he placed in a jar.

Rehan was starting to build up a thirst. But he put the feeling aside. He had specimens to collect. He knew he didn’t have much time before it would be fully dark in the forest. The light from the three moons didn’t help much in Darkwood. So Rehan quickly hacked off a Goblo foot, all the fingers off the other Hume male and dug deep and pulled out his heart too.

Covered in blood, and breathing quite heavily, suddenly it occurred to Rehan.

I can take these men’s faces. I’ve wanted some face specimens for rotations.

He made the incision at the chin and sliced down until he hit the mandible. With ease, he sliced upwards to the ear along the jaw line. Then he repeated on the other side.

As he worked, the forest suddenly became even darker.

He continued regardless. This face was nearly done. Rehan traced the hairline on the forehead and got his fingers underneath the flap of skin. He started to pull gently and like a shell of a hard-boiled egg, the face came off in his hands with a sloppy sound. It left behind only a bloody skull, eyes just staring lifeless into the canopy above.

“Sorry, mate, I will make better use of this face than you will now.” Rehan quickly placed it in his sack and slung the bag of body parts over his shoulder.

There was a change in the air. Like a void had occurred where

the air had once been. It almost choked Rehan. Then from it came a sound that turned his stomach.

“Ahhhwhat do Ahhhhhave here?” The voice was brittle and seemingly carved out of thin air. It came from behind him.

He turned to look.

Fae

He couldn't see anything. There was nothing there. Just the ever expanding dark.

"Ahhhyou can not see Ahhhhif I don't permit it."

Rehan's heart started to beat uncontrollably with liquid fight. He did what any barber with an urge to collect body parts would. He ran as fast as he could. He didn't even know which direction he took off in.

"Ahhhyes a runner we do have. Ahhhthis isn't good."

Rehan heard the voice loud and clear even as he was sprinting, trying to dodge thorns left and right. He got to the edge of the bank and tripped, tumbling face first into the pool of blood from earlier. He managed to avoid getting any in his mouth, barely. He stood up, shaken, covered all the way up to the chest in dark red. He picked up his bag of specimens that he'd dropped and continued to run desperately.

"Ahhhhhthis is getting boring. Ahhhhhstop," the voice said, scraping its sound into his mind. Then Rehan felt from nowhere his legs get swept out from underneath him. He hit the floor, smacking his skull off the earth and landing on his specimen

bag. He blacked out for a short moment.

When he awoke, he saw two eyes of pure red hovering over him. They were bright and burning like the sun. There was nothing as terrible as those eyes. The creature was on top of him, pinning him down, its body a mass of branches wrapped in shadows.

“Get off me! You demon!” Rehan struggled, but the creature didn’t budge as it held him down with ease.

“AhhhhI’m hungry, Ahhhhtime to die stupid Hume.” The creature put a hand on Rehan’s face. It was like it was made from thorns itself. The feeling of burning immediately took over his whole body as if he was on fire. He could feel his blood being pulled to the surface of his skin like it was trying to escape. He felt himself becoming lighter like he was being drained.

“Ahhhnot long now. Ahhhyour life is mine.”

Rehan felt the veil of never ending night descending in front of him.

Is this death? I didn’t even get to say goodbye to Gwyneth.

He closed his eyes, helpless. But inside his head he found help.

Death

Rehan was suddenly in a large green field. It looked like there was a forest all around the space. There was a giant sun in the sky, beating down on his skin. There was no wind and the only sound he could hear was his own strained breathing.

Is this death? Did I die?

“Hello,” came the voice of a young girl.

Rehan looked down to the left in front of him to see a girl in a white flowing gown with long black hair. To him, she looked like she couldn’t have been older than six rotations.

“Hello, little girl,” Rehan heard himself reply. Except his voice had changed now, which was strange. Like it had become heavy with the weight of something elusive.

“You are not dead yet, Rehan.” The little girl jumped up and looked at him. “You are still there being pinned by that Dark Fae.” Her eyes were as black as night itself and her skin was completely white.

“It’s part tree. I can feel the branches,” Rehan said, putting his hand up to his face where the Fae had placed its hand moments

ago.

The child laughed. "It's an Acacia warrior tree. These Fae are ancient protectors of the forest. They are known to attack intruders. However, unfortunately for you, this one is particularly evil and has gone crazy with power."

Rehan frowned. "What is it doing to me?"

The girl picked a daisy and held it in front of her face. Rehan watched as the flower shrivelled before going black and eventually turning into dust. The child rubbed her fingers, allowing the dust to fall to the ground.

"It is absorbing the life from you as I have just done to this poor flower. It's quite addictive, unfortunately." She smiled. "Don't worry, Rehan."

Rehan couldn't stop worrying especially now he was about to be turned into dust by a crazed Acacia Warrior Tree.

"I am inside this Acacia. I am reaching out to you. I can come across into your body. I need to leave this crazy bundle of branches behind. If I do, it will save your life." She started to skip around Rehan, disorientating him.

"But what are you? Are you a demon?" Rehan asked, trying to keep an eye on the girl but finding his feet were now planted in place.

"No, I am the Mother's safety net." She started to hum to herself.

"What does that mean?" Rehan questioned.

"I am here to remove everything. If it fails." She started to skip faster.

"Remove everything? If what fails?" Rehan didn't understand what she was getting at.

She stopped skipping in front of him and looked upon his blue eyes with her black ones.

“Remove all life. If it fails.” She started to giggle like a child, which scared him down to his core before she continued. “You are interested in me. You seek to understand me, don’t you, Rehan? Together we can do great things. But don’t go mad like this one.”

Rehan could feel himself changing as if her presence was infecting him.

“I know who you are.” Rehan said as he felt himself return back into his body.

“I am death,” she replied tunefully.

Power

In an instant Rehan was dropped back into his body. The pain was unbearable, but he was alive.

“Ahhhhhhow?” Rehan could see the Acacia limping away injured. Something had happened, the Fae had tried to suck the life out of him and it had failed. Rehan had heard about the Acacia of Darkwood but never had encountered one until now. He sat down and took a moment to rest. He felt different as if he had a heightened sense of existence after his encounter with Death in his mind.

Now he could feel life all around him. As present as the wind itself. He sensed the movements of the worms within the earth below his feet. He was suddenly aware of the life in the trees as birds slept in their nests.

What a peculiar feeling?

His knee under the leather seemed to be twisted badly, probably from the first fall. He had some rags in his bag that he could use to support it until he got back to the lab. He turned around to grab the bag but was surprised to discover that the sack seemed to be moving.

“What in Tellusm?” Rehan said while slowly opening it. Maybe it was a rat or some other forest creature in there feasting on his corpse specimens. He opened the bag slowly and peered inside. He couldn’t quite believe his eyes. The specimens were alive.

The severed foot’s toes and the fingers were wriggling, the Goblo’s and Hume’s arm looked like they were attacking each other. Rehan dropped the bag in shock at what he had just seen and the contents spilled out in front of him. The eyeballs rolled out of the jar and hit Rehan’s boot. He bent down to give the different coloured irises a closer look. He noticed that both the eyeballs were responding to him moving. Like they were focusing on him.

What in the gods’ names is going on?

He nudged the eyeballs away with the toe of his boot and moved closer to his bag. He managed to pick it back up with his tools within. He opened the bag and pulled out the heart that now was beating as if it were still in the man’s chest.

Rehan hypothesised that he must have serious brain damage from when he hit his head on the floor earlier. But he knew the truth of it. These body pieces were alive. He could feel the life running through them. He squeezed the heart experimentally and a dark aura surrounded it. The aura moved the life within the reanimated heart straight into Rehan’s hands. He could feel himself absorb the organ’s life force.

After an intoxicating second, he was left holding a dead organ and nothing more. He felt slightly better. Less fuzzy-headed. Like the life in the heart had rejuvenated him. He felt the pain in his twisted knee disappear.

“How can that be?” he said softly.

That Fae has given me its power? Death’s powers are in me now?

I have control of them? Did some of the Acacia's life force transfer into these dead pieces of flesh?

Rehan repeated the experiment with each of the moving body parts, absorbing the life from them and after each piece he felt more and more healed. Like he was becoming stronger and more powerful.

He drained the peeled Hume face, slightly amused at it, trying to draw breath without the use of intact muscles or bones or even lungs for that matter. He realised his new healing abilities hadn't completely healed the twist in his knee.

He widened his awareness using his new powers.

He could feel a life source close.

Very close.

He sneaked up to where he could sense the life. It was a rabbit hole. Without a second thought, he placed his hand in front of him and willed the life into his hand. A stream of energy transferred from the rabbit hole straight into him.

Immediately the creatures in the hole darted out in fear but Rehan had them in his grasp. He drained one after another, each time becoming more satisfied with the power inside of him. He noticed baby rabbits then. They were trying to escape.

Baby rabbits?

Rehan looked down at his knee which had healed. "Maybe just a bit more to make sure, I just need a bit more." He absorbed the baby rabbits' life. It felt wonderfully refreshing. There were little balls of dead fur left strewn about the forest floor.

He laughed manically into the dark.

"I will do great things with this power!" he screamed.

He picked up his specimens and started walking back towards Erstaz. He was confident that no other Darkwood creatures wouldn't dare stop him now.

Doctor

Rehan got back to his shop late. The three moons were looking down at him. Something was different about them. He wasn't sure what it was. But at this point he didn't care. There were alcohol lamps lit inside the windows. Was someone in his shop? He reached out with his awareness and could feel their life inside.

A thief perhaps? This isn't their lucky day.

He burst in the door confidently, ready to use his new powers.

There sitting in his barber's chair was Gwyneth. The podgy little lady was wearing her hay sun hat and green apron like she always did. The very same she would wear while gutting fish for her father's stall. Her hair was a dark chestnut which made her green eyes stand out. By her side was her faithful companion, Aggy the dog. The black mongrel was never too far from her side. Gwyneth was stroking her pet's head as she looked up at Rehan

I really love her, I must tell her.

"Gwyneth! I thought you were coming tomorrow. I must tell you, something has happened," Rehan said excitedly.

She stopped him. "My dear Rehan, I have come to tell you

that I cannot be with you. It will not work. I don't want to hurt you. I care about you too much." She looked away, avoiding eye contact.

Rehan was confused. "It's big Frank, isn't it? He's corrupted you against me." Rehan could feel anger bubbling up in his stomach and his skin was starting to burn with rage.

Gwyneth jumped off the chair and made her way over to Rehan. "My skinny lad. You need fattening up." She hugged him so tight he nearly dropped his bag of body parts on the floor.

"I am dying, Rehan," she said softly into his ear.

Rehan felt a stab of pain worse than he had ever felt surge through his body. It wasn't physical pain, it was emotional. All he had ever wanted was to be with her and now this. "What? What's wrong with you? I can fix you, I CAN!" he screamed.

"You can't, no one can. There isn't a leech you can put on me or a potion that will take this away." She squeezed him hard again.

"You don't understand. I can heal you, my love. I have changed," Rehan urged.

"It runs in the family. My mother had it and now so do I. The process has already started. By the winter, I will be dead. It starts with blindness." She started to cry heavily. "I can't see you anymore, Rehan. My vision has degraded like the rest of my body will, just like my mother."

Rehan felt like he was on the brink of insanity. "I can heal you! I can!" He sat Gwyneth down on the chair and explained what had happened to him in the forest and how he got his new abilities.

She stared blindly ahead, unable to see him.

"You really think you can heal me? My love," she said as she closed her eyes and he lowered the back of the chair down so she

was laid nearly flat.

“Yes,” he replied.

Without a second thought, he raised a hand towards the dog and pulled the life from it. The dog was confused at first, barking and running in panicked circles as the life force was sapped from it. The dog’s life was stronger than the rabbits and held on tighter and it was starting to burn Rehan’s hand.

Thicker gloves in future.

Gwyneth jumped up.

“What are you doing? What are you doing to Aggy? Don’t kill him. Leave him alone!” she screamed in the direction of the dying pet.

“No, I must use the dog. I am sorry. A dog for a Hume life is acceptable!” Rehan continued to squeeze the dog with power until it fell to the floor.

BANG.

Suddenly Rehan was on the floor. Gwyneth had hit him with his tool bag. He tried to get up but she straddled him, scraping at his face blindly with her nails, tearing his flesh deep.

“It’s for your own good!” Rehan grabbed the woman and put her back on the chair, tying and gagging her with the straps of her own green apron. She didn’t put up much of a struggle. Rehan was stronger than her.

He moved back to the dog and continued to drain the last bit of life. What was left was just a corpse. Immediately, Rehan transferred the life he had absorbed onto the woman strapped to his chair. She shook violently and unexpectedly.

Maybe it doesn’t work this way?

The thought suddenly had Rehan in a blind panic. He ran over to her and removed her gag. She went still and then slowly opened her eyes.

“I... I can see! I think I am cured!”

The relief washed over Rehan like a warm wave of water, which was cut short when he felt a cold blade dig into his back and come out through his stomach suddenly. He turned around in shock to find big Frank staring at him.

“You tie my daughter to a chair to experiment on her. I told you, boy. Now you have a sword in your belly. Good luck with that.”

Rehan dropped to the floor as blood spilled out from his stomach onto the wooden slatted floor.

Frank released his daughter from the chair. “Say your good-byes to the skinny runt, Gwyn. He’ll have bled out in five minutes. I’ll wait for you in the tavern.” The big man left through the smashed door he had just kicked in. He’d been attracted by all the shouting.

There was a long moment of silence.

Gwyneth knelt by Rehan, crying into her hands. “I am so sorry, my love. I didn’t realise you could actually heal. I loved that dog. I was confused. I am sorry, my love. Please don’t die.” She pulled the sword from him slowly.

The pain was unbearable. Rehan could feel himself losing consciousness. “There... There could be a way....” Rehan gurgled as blood leaked from his mouth.

“Anything Rehan, anything,” Gwyneth replied through snot and tears.

Rehan held up his hand

I just need to borrow some life.

He started to pull life from the girl. The energy was strong, so very strong and intoxicating. Its power was consuming his mind and healing his body.

Gwyneth fell to the floor, her body convulsing. “Okay, Rehan.

Please, that's enough!"

Rehan didn't stop. He kept pulling. He felt the wounds in his stomach closing. He was returning.

The girl's face was beginning to darken and the shaking had stopped now as she was getting towards the end.

Rehan felt the rips in his face heal. He was nearly there. He shouted, "Nearly there!" and then abruptly, there wasn't any life left. He looked over at Gwyneth. She lay there sapped dry, her skin gone dark grey like a corpse, her bright green eyes now just white and cloudy.

"My love? Gwyneth?" Rehan had just come back from the brink of death and realised he had had killed Gwyneth. He tried to cry but he couldn't. He wasn't sure if he actually cared anymore.

He had changed. Rehan felt like he had been reborn. Like this gift needed to be used for the greater good, where he could get easy access to many more test specimens. His abilities needed to be harnessed in the name of science. He tapped Gwyneth's body with his boot. It moved like one that had been dead for weeks. She was gone now and the peculiar thing was that Rehan was more excited to practise his abilities than mourn the death of her.

How strange?

He looked at himself in the barber's mirror. He had major scarring all over his face where he had just healed from the deep scratches that Gwyneth had given him. His brilliant blue eyes had gone. Now all that looked back at him were completely black eyes. Like the shark that big Frank used to boast about catching. Maybe he was a shark now? Or a monster.

He laughed a terrible and frightening laugh. It amused him that he looked like a freak.

He ransacked his lab, grabbing what he could, leeches, maggots, potions, tools and notes. Put them all in his big sack. Lastly, he picked up a 'duck nose', a mask which he had used to filter out infectious mould spores from the air when he was experimenting on fungal infections in sheep. He put the mask on to cover the scars.

"So silly," he said to his dead girlfriend and her dead dog while looking at his reflection.

"It just needs something... else."

He took the straw sun hat off the dead girl and placed it on his head. Lastly, he added his writing quill in the brim of the hat.

He looked at his complete ensemble. He looked terrifying. Like a nightmare itself.

"Perfect. Time to do some good."

He didn't even close the door behind him when he left.

Name

It didn't take long for Rehan to reach the great city of Kyne. The gathering of Notable Humes was said to be in a day. Rehan found it a surprisingly nice trip. It was amazing how much distance you could make when you could drain any creature of its life. Rehan found his way into a public house where the nobility frequented. The place was packed. He got more than just a few strange looks from the punters. He was the only one wearing thick leathers, a sunhat and a duck nose mask so that was to be expected at least.

Rehan spotted the man who he had searched for. Galahad was propping up the bar next to a beautiful woman. Rehan made his way over, his heavy boots on the wooden floor startling the pair. Rehan spoke as formal as he could. "Galahad sir, I am a healer and would love to offer you my services."

Galahad turned to Rehan revealing a massive bruised eye. "Oh, really my duck nosed friend?" he said skeptically. While looking Rehan up and down. The gentleman started to laugh before continuing. "Well, I have had a bit of trouble recently as you can see. Why don't you help me heal this thing on my face and I may

consider taking you into my service.”

That should be easy enough.

Rehan pulled an insignificant amount of life off the woman who stood next to him. It was only enough to give her a headache and possibly a fever but immediately it healed the nobleman's face. Galahad looked into the mirror opposite the bar and frowned utterly astonished at the healing feat Rehan had just pulled off.

“Yes, boy. Perfect! That is the best Sapience I have ever witnessed. You are hired. Who are you?”

Rehan took a moment to think. This wasn't Sapience. At least he didn't think it was. This was something else. It wasn't just any magic. It was something that sat inside the gap between spirits and the gods. He could feel her inside him she was trapped. Just like she had been inside the Acacia in the Darkwood. She didn't pull the strings he did. He knew then that he had changed and what he was now. No longer a skinny Hume Barber from Erstaz. Now with the eyes of a shark, the aura of darkness and the power of death itself buried within him.

He responded to Galahad with a cold grim smile hidden beneath his duck nose mask.

“I am the Fae of Darkwood.”

Continue your travels in Tellusm...

In “The Spirit of Things” a Gripping Coming of Age Fantasy
Book.

THE FAE OF DARKWOOD



Read the first chapter for **FREE** below!!

The Spirit of Things

By Ben McQueeney

Chapter 1 - Hume

The library was surprisingly dark this morning. The large shutters shielding the old structure's windows were still drawn, only allowing a glimpse of the bright summer's day. The air inside was stale and smelled old, like many of the leather-bound books stacked on the shelves, ceiling-high. Many of the timeworn racks, arranged in a seemingly random order, had a blanket of dust covering them which added to the dingy appearance of the place.

Fulco stopped in the doorway and allowed the gloom to wrap around him. He took a deep breath and the dust, thick in the room, nearly brought him to cough. He cleared his throat and decided it would be wise not to take any more. He had woken in a great mood today surprisingly, even though he had gotten up at the crack of day. He didn't much want to run this errand for his father, it was somewhat annoying. The library was in the middle of nowhere at the wrong end of the village and every time Fulco came here, he had trouble with the staff. He had managed to wriggle out of the dreary task on the last three occasions but couldn't avoid it this time. Even after he said he would do his brother and sister's washing for the next couple of days in exchange.

Scattered around sporadically were a few library users, lurking in the shadows or shuffling down the aisles. They all looked as old as the ancient tomes they were reviewing. Many of them carried a walking cane or moved with the air of a person in their twilight years. Fulco squinted to see if he could recognise anyone

there but it was too hard due to the lack of light. He wondered why the library shutters hadn't been opened yet. It was likely because it was only minutes after the old facility had opened its doors, but it irritated him anyway. He headed towards the counter and as he walked, the wooden floorboards made an unusually loud, and irritating creak which alerted the handful of beings in the vicinity. The way they reacted was as if Fulco had blown a brass horn with a full breath.

"Apologies, I didn't realise these old boards creaked," Fulco said to the room with a degree of hesitancy in his tone. The words bounced around the room and seemed to be even louder and more annoying than the wood screeching beneath his feet.

The old man standing in front of him, thumbing a thick book, frowned and shook his head disapprovingly.

"I'm sorry," Fulco repeated.

The old man's eyes thinned, and he glanced Fulco up and down, calculating. He took a strained breath that must have filled his belly before replying, "Don't talk to me, Hume." He turned his back on Fulco and moved down the aisle, vanishing into the void of the library's darkness.

Fulco swallowed hard, irritated by the man's response. What difference did it make that he was a Hume? An Elphen would have made the exact same sound when walking over this old floor. The older generation were the worst for always pointing out that he wasn't Elphen. He took a moment to compose himself before turning back towards the librarian's counter. While waiting to be served, he placed his hands on the large slab of wood and felt the old knots in the grain. It could have been many hundreds of rotations old. Fulco appreciated its carpentry, it was well made and would certainly last many rotations more if looked after correctly. His admiration for the piece was broken

then by the librarian who had appeared out of nowhere.

Today it was the librarian who seemed to hunch over like she was being pulled to the floor by an invisible force. Likely it was due to the passage of time rather than a physical flaw. She wore an all in one black hooded robe, tied about the waist. Her eyes were wrinkled and dark with black circles surrounding them. She looked tired as if she hadn't slept properly for weeks. When she spoke, it was raspy and with an air of arrogance.

"Why are you here? What do you want?" she said, sniffing. She pulled out a handkerchief from a hidden pocket within her robes and blew her nose hard but respectfully trying to minimise the sound. She was Elphen like everyone who lived in the village. The sharp points of his ears couldn't be missed. When she spoke, her sharp teeth could be seen clearly, and her mouth was sticky with saliva. If she had been younger, likely she would have been very tall. As a result of her hunch, she equalled Fulco's height and they could make eye contact easily.

Fulco found the old librarians questioning rude but tried his best to be as polite as possible. His father had asked specifically to ensure that he was polite when requesting the plans from the librarian. Fulco was not one to go against the will of his father so he kept his tone neutral and the volume of his voice low when responding.

"Hello, Librarian. I have been sent here by my father, to collect the structural plans to the Lavender's Treestead."

The librarian's expression was as if she were eating a lemon. "You have, have you? Well, I am afraid Humes are not allowed access to the plans for the village buildings, only the Elphen." She casually broke eye contact and went about sorting some parchment on the desk.

Fulco squeezed his fists into a ball and could feel them tight-

ening with frustration. He glanced down at them on the counter and could see the whites of the knuckles starting to appear. He remained calm and took extra care not to raise the volume of his voice. "My father is Garum. All I need is the plans so he can add an extra room for the Lavenders. The plans are all stored here. My brother and my sister come here often and have no issues borrowing the plans for my father."

The librarian stopped shuffling her parchment and looked back at Fulco, anger spreading across her face. "Understand, Hume, Garum isn't your father, he is your keeper. He looks after you. Isn't it about time you made your way south to join your own people now? Kyne is certainly the best place for you to go."

The words burned into Fulco. He could feel his heart rate starting to race. He wanted nothing more than to shout at this decrepit old git but while holding eye contact, and with a fair amount of self-restraint, Fulco responded calmly, "I am aware I am not an Elphen. But you will find if you ask my father or any of my family, they will all confirm I am very much a part of their family and they do not keep me. You must also realise that the Aqueduct supplying nearly all the Elphen Treesteads was designed and installed by me. Myself and my family also look after them, ensuring all Treesteads get a constant flow of clean water. I wouldn't want to stop maintaining certain areas of them due to a simple misunderstanding now, would I?"

The old woman's demeanour changed then like a switch had been flicked in her subconscious, all her anger fading away like ripples on a pond. She moved over to a large set of drawers just behind her and pulled a drawer open, causing a plume of dust to escape into the air, saturating it. She used a clawed finger to look through the index until she found the blackened tab she was after. She pulled out the large bound file and opened it. After

what seemed like an eternity, she reversed the process slowly and eventually wandered back over to Fulco at the counter. “The plans are in aisle ninety-eight, shelf sixteen, area forty-one. Under Lavender. Bring them back on the morrow and say hello to Garum for me.” The librarian then disappeared into a back room as quickly as she had appeared, shutting the door behind her, causing another echo in the vast library.

Fulco had held his teeth together while he had been given the location of the plans and was relieved, having managed to control a potential outburst. The last thing his family needed was him losing his temper and proving the Hume-haters in the village right. He decided to keep his head down while searching for the aisle where the plans lived. Luckily, it was on the outside edge of the library where there was plenty of light from a nearby window. Fulco took a moment to open the shutter fully so he could see all the plan locations. Each document was rolled up and bound by a blue ribbon to keep it tight. The shelves were meticulously organised which was a relief. It took him seconds to find the parchment he needed. It was a detailed plan of the Lavender’s Treestead showing the structure from different perspectives. It also had the sizes and exact locations of the support struts. This was exactly what his father needed to create an extension to the family home.

Fulco rolled up the parchment and was excited but also slightly amazed he had found it this swiftly. If he was quick, he would still have time to get some breakfast at home before heading out for the real job of the day.

He placed the scroll in his pocket and headed to the top of the aisle towards the library’s exit. He heard some rushed footsteps approach from behind and a hard hand grab his shoulder. He turned to face who had stopped him. It was an Elphen about the

same age as Fulco but much taller. He had a cold expression and freckles covering most of his face. He was flanked by two other Elphen who also wore a look of pure distaste. Fulco thought he recognised the freckled Elphen from his last term in school over a rotation ago, but he could have been mistaken.

“What do you think you’re doing in here, Hume?” The Elphen’s voice was high pitched and hollow. It didn’t match his threatening size. “Your kind are not permitted outside of the market square or Ministry Road. Are you lost? You can’t be here in the Phenii Library.” He shoved Fulco with a flat palm against his chest, sending him staggering back a step.

Fulco took a quick second to compose himself. He was about to relay the same speech he had said a thousand times before throughout his life about him being an adopted Hume in an Elphen family at the top end of the village when freckles started to speak, this time a little louder and clearly more annoyed.

“Well? You’re as deaf as you are ugly, aren’t you? You stupid little Hume. Isn’t he, lads?” The two either side of the whining bully started laughing in unison. It was as if Freckles had commanded them to do it and they had been slow to understand.

Fulco spoke over them. “I have been granted permission by the librarian. If you have a problem, then go speak to her.” He pushed past the group and decided to keep walking quickly to just get out of there. He had a feeling this wasn’t going to end well, and he had almost managed to achieve the task his father had given him without incident. He almost got to the exit by the counter when he felt a heavy push from behind. It caught him mid-stride and the force of the blow sent him flying forwards, hitting the floorboards hard. He heard a rip from his trouser, where it had caught on a raised nail from one of the loose floorboards. He lay on the floor for a second and tried to

restrain himself once more. He could feel the anger in his blood bubbling to the surface. He controlled it, just barely, and got back to his feet slowly. He didn't turn around to face the three tormentors. He just started walking again, calmly, towards the exit. His parents always told Fulco that although he was different it didn't matter. He was still brought up with respect. Today in this library it would be disrespectful to start a fight. The best course of action was to just head to the exit in front of him and go about the rest of his day.

"That's right, go back to your pathetic owners, Hume. If it were me, I would have got a dog, they are more intelligent, and have got more balls than you lot," Freckles said and there was an eruption of laughter from the lads beside him.

Another thing his family had taught him was to stand up for himself and to protect himself and his family to the best of his ability.

Fulco could see from the corner of his eye that the little room where the librarian had retreated earlier was now open and she too was enjoying the show at Fulco's expense. His wide smile showed his ageing yellow teeth. Even that old man was taking a great amount of pleasure in these Elphen making a show of him.

The rage inside Fulco's gut took control. He felt a storm of emotion take over like a crazed beast. He spun around as quickly as he could and felt his face contort in sheer anger as he pulled his arm back and raised a balled fist in the air. He exploded towards the freckled Elphen. Fulco may have screamed, he wasn't sure as the rage had taken him now. He jumped up in the air towards Freckles. Fulco took immediate pleasure in the expression on the Elphen's face. It was hilarious, a mixture of pure surprise and fear as Fulco's fist flew towards his jaw.

Liked this? Go check out the whole book [HERE](#)



About the Author

Once one of the UK's top theatrical lecturers in Microbiology, Ben is now a balding middle-aged dad who is trying desperately to claw back some of his youth with a variety of interesting pursuits. He published his first fantasy novel "The Spirit of Things" in 2020 after a creative awakening a couple of years prior. When Ben's not running about after his three amazing kids and lovely Mrs, he tries to best men fifteen years younger in functional fitness competitions for validation. He also plays the drums in an above-average dad rock band and has two Chihuahuas that sleep 22 hours a day.

You can connect with me on:

 <https://www.benmcqueeney.com>

 <https://www.twitter.com/beyondhorizon>

 <https://www.facebook.com/beyondhorizon>

 <https://www.instagram.com/beyondhorizon>

Subscribe to my newsletter:

 <https://www.benmcqueeney.com/subscribe>

Also by Ben McQueeney



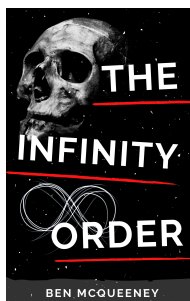
The Spirit of Things

He's a human that has been raised in a society of elves. Except humans are considered a plague upon the land. What's the worst that could happen? He discovers magic.

"A Brilliant read from cover to cover"

"Highly recommend!"

"Fantastic!"



The Infinity Order

He woke up in a cell with only a rotten corpse and a heavy stench to keep him company. Can his day get any worse?

"Great twist!"

"Brilliant Short Read"

"Amazing plot, fast read"