NEED TO KNOW

Most fairies are familiar with the name Artemis Fowl. In fact, the young human's exploits are referenced in a cautionary nursery rhyme taught in fairy preschools. The most famous version of the rhyme goes like this:

Never fall foul
Of Artemis Fowl,
For wise as an owl
Is he.

He wrestled a troll
And stole fairy gold,
Then frightened
The LEP.

Commander Trouble Kelp of the Lower Elements Police once petitioned, at an education summit, to have this rhyme removed from the curriculum on the grounds that:

1. It had not, in fact, been Artemis Fowl who'd wrestled the troll, but rather his bodyguard, Butler (see LEP file: *Artemis Fowl*).
2. There was only anecdotal evidence to support the claim that the LEP had been *frightened* at the Fowl Manor siege. Some of the operatives had been slightly anxious perhaps, but hardly frightened, and (Trouble was really grasping at straws here) . . .
3. According to zoologists, owls are really not so wise, and are actually less trainable than common pigeons, so it is factually incorrect to present the owl as a symbol of wisdom.

This argument drew, appropriately enough, hoots of laughter from the assembly.

Unfortunately for Commander Kelp, he himself was obliged to recite the rhyme as part of his petition, and by the second line the entire congress was reciting it along with him. Shortly thereafter, much to the commander's irritation, a show of hands dictated that the Artemis Fowl nursery rhyme remain on the school syllabus.

And, while it was true that Artemis Fowl's first

interaction with the fairy folk had been less than auspicious, it had at least prompted the Council to push through updates to their security protocols, including the lifting of a centuries-old hex forbidding fairies to enter human dwellings uninvited, and the striking of a law requiring them to carry a copy of the Fairy Book at all times. Even so, there was many a relieved mutter when Artemis and his bodyguard, Butler, embarked on a five-year scientific expedition to Mars, with one indiscreet Council member (who forgot to turn off her microphone after an interview) quipping that she felt 'sorry for any aliens out there who might cross the Fowl boy's path', which was a little harsh considering Artemis had saved the entire world from the megalomaniacal pixie, Opal Koboi, temporarily sacrificing his own life in the process.

But, as is often the case when one criminal mastermind launches himself into space, there is another ready to take his place, and in this instance the replacement mastermind was Artemis's own younger brother Myles, who was, if anything, even more condescending towards the world than Artemis had been when he lived in it. On Myles's blog, *Myles to Go*, he regularly disparaged noted scientists with comments like:

Leonardo knew about as much about flying machines as I know about boy bands.

Or:

Regarding Einstein's devotion to the big-bang theory, please. His version of the theory has more hypotheticals than the televisual show of the same name and is almost as funny.

This comment did not endear him to Albert Einstein's legions of fans.

He also skewered humanity in general on the blog, through a series of editorials, including the scathing 'Dear Internet: One Billion Hysterical Opinions Do Not Carry the Weight of a Single Fact'.

The comments following this article ran into the tens of thousands, without one smiley face in the bunch.

Fortunately for social media's blood pressure, Myles's acerbic nature was tempered somewhat by the presence of his twin brother, Beckett, who was of a sunnier disposition. Or, as Myles often put it: 'Where I see the dispersion of light in water droplets, Beck sees a rainbow.' Though he could never stop himself from

qualifying this remark with, 'Although anyone who has so much as flipped through a meteorology text can tell you that there is no bow involved.' This remark demonstrated that Myles Fowl had about as much of a sense of humour as a Vulcan, and that he was possibly in the top five per cent of smug people on the planet and in the top one per cent of smug twelve-year-olds overall.

Beckett was, in many respects, his sibling's total opposite and, had they not been related, it seemed unlikely that they would have enjoyed each other's company, but in the way of twins the boys loved and protected each other even unto death, and occasionally beyond.

For Beckett's part, he safeguarded Myles using his physicality, a sphere in which Myles had about as much prowess as a piece of sod; he was forever tripping over footpaths and falling *up* stairs, which is almost a skill. On one occasion, a group of Albert Einstein devotees rushed Myles at the school gate, brandishing hardback copies of *The Meaning of Relativity*, and Beckett dispatched them by stuffing several sticks of gum into his mouth and cartwheeling towards them while chewing noisily. He did this because Myles had once

told him that people with high IQs tend to suffer from misophonia, which is a visceral reaction to certain sounds, the number-one culprit being loud chewing. Beckett's gum trick sent the Einstein disciples packing, but it also disoriented Myles, who walked into a gate and had to have stitches in his forehead as a result. So a mixed outcome all in all.

Beckett was an inherent optimist and saw the good in every person and the beauty in every blade of grass. He was also somewhat of a savant when it came to acrobatics and could easily have led a circus troupe, had he so wished. This skill translated neatly to combat situations. For instance, Beckett had mastered the infamous cluster punch, which most martial-arts masters did not even believe existed. The beauty of the cluster punch was that it temporarily paralysed the victim without causing any real pain. This particular talent was one that Beckett could expect to use often, considering the family to which he belonged. In fact, the Fowl twin kept a tally of his victories, and by his reckoning he had, to date, incapacitated twenty-seven special-forces officers, eleven burglars, a small carful of clowns, six drunken Dublin men who had swum out to the Fowls' Dalkey Island residence after a stag night,

five bullies whom he caught picking on smaller children, three big-game poachers and, in a display of cosmic humour, an intrusive journalist named Partridge who had concealed himself in a pear tree.

Myles, on the other hand, had never actually landed a real blow on an enemy, though he did once manage to punch himself in the buttock during a wrestling session with his brother and had been known to accidentally tie his own shoelaces together. Myles solved the shoelace problem simply by wearing leather loafers whenever possible, which nicely complemented his trademark black suits, and he solved the buttock problem by resolving never to throw a punch again, unless Beckett's life depended on it.

In the past year, the Fowl Twins had initiated what had come to be known in LEP files as the Second Cycle of Modern Fowl Adventures. *Modern* because the archives did contain several mentions of Myles and Beckett's ancestors and their People-related shenanigans. So far, the twins had managed to rescue a miniature troll named Whistle Blower from a certain Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, the Duke of Scilly, who intended to extract the troll's venom, which, under strict laboratory conditions, could be used to extend a human's life span.

(More on that reprehensible individual later.) The boys were also instrumental in the partial crippling of ACRONYM, a shadowy intergovernmental organisation whose mission was to hunt down fairies using any possible means, the less humane the better, and in doing so Myles and Beckett put themselves squarely in the sights of the fairy Lower Elements Police, who had assigned Lazuli Heitz, a pixie-elf hybrid, or pixel, as Fowl Ambassador. Myles was perfectly aware that the pixel actually served as a parole officer of sorts, whereas Beckett didn't care what Lazuli's job was; he was simply delighted to have a new blue friend.

As we join the twins, it is the summer of their thirteenth year; that is to say they are twelve, and the boys have completed their primary-education cycle. Myles has also recently been conferred a doctorate in biology from University College Dublin, writing his thesis on the theory that the womb's amniotic fluid can act as a shared brain between multiple babies, which would go some way towards explaining the bonds between many twins, while Beckett has finally managed to finish reading his first chapter book, entitled *Alien Pooping Boy*. Beckett admired this alien boy's ability to poop through his finger, a talent that cracked up the

blond twin each time he read about it. Beckett had sworn a vow that *Alien Pooping Boy* was the only book he would ever read unless the publisher released a sequel. He had even written an email to the publishing house in which he suggested the title for any second book should be *Alien Pooping Boy Goes Number Two*, which Myles had to admit was in keeping with the spirit of the first novel.

It would seem to the casual or even deliberate observer of LEP surveillance logs that the Fowl Twins had been following predictable behaviour patterns for the past several months with only minor deviations from their submitted timetables. These deviations could easily be explained by various family-related or after-school activities. For instance, the logs showed that Myles gave lectures at a coding dojo on the mainland, while Beckett attended an actual dojo, where he quickly rose to the top of the student heap. That is not a metaphor: Beckett piled the other students in a wriggling heap, then climbed to the top while singing 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough', which was one of his mother's favourite songs.

But, even though the twins strayed from their daily paths occasionally, not once did they try to insert

themselves in fairy affairs, nor did they ever miss a FaceTime debriefing with their fairy parole officer. Lazuli Heitz was so happy with their behaviour that she even arranged for a magical healing of the handprint scar tissue on Myles's chest that she had accidentally inflicted on him. It was the least she could do, as in many ways Myles and Beckett were model prisoners.

Because, in fact, that is exactly what Myles and Beckett were: models.