

# Majickal

by C. J. Connelly



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**VAMPIRES VRS. ZOMBIES VRS. FAIRIES VRS.  
WEREWOLVES VRS. GODS VRS. PIRATES VRS.  
ALIENS VRS. WIZARDS VRS. PRINCESSES VRS.  
GAY UNICORNS!**

**THE SUPER-MEGA-ARMAGEDDON  
ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN!**

AS PRESENTED IN NEW HIGH RESOLUTION 1-D BOOK FORMAT, WITH  
DAZZLING BLACK AND WHITE PAGES

BY

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fact that he was very tiny and strapped head to toe with every edged weapon known to exist, giving him a definite “bristly” appearance.

That alone was surprising. Camouflage wasn’t included in the spring pastels colour palette, edged weaponry wasn’t a trending fashion accessory and overall, fairies were very firm about their designer clothing being correct for the season. Practicality always gave way to ‘the look’.

He was followed by another fairy officer, this time in designer-uniforming with a snazzy zebra-striped belt, a large hairdryer and a maxx-hold aerosol hairspray can shoved in his belt loop, in case any flyaway hairs got unruly. Both men were winged and only a quarter of an inch tall, as all fairies were, which was why they were so hard to spot until they stepped (or flew) out into the open.

The vampire smirked. *A hairdryer and an aerosol can.* Yes, that looked much more like what he expected from traditional fairy law enforcement.

“Spread um, corpse-bag! You’re under arrest!” the tiny fairy in camouflage ordered. The vampire just blinked at him, puzzled.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Captain –mumble, mumble— and you’re under arrest, I said,” the fairy captain whipped a pair of handcuffs out too small to fit the vampire’s pinkie finger off his belt as he prattled Fairyland’s official legal rights.

*“You have the right to dress fashionably! Any clothing out of season may be used against you in the Royal Fairyland Court! You have the right to a manicure, and a pedicure may be offered at the Court’s own expense! You have the right to consult a*

*stylist; if you cannot afford a stylist, the Court may at its discretion, appoint a stylist for you—*

"I'm sorry?" the vampire interrupted, bewildered by rapidly changing events. "Why am I being arrested? And I didn't quite catch your name, Captain."

The fairy glared at him, "I'm CAPTAIN—*mumble!* And under Fairyland law, I don't need to press charges to arrest you beyond the fact that you are openly wearing a black opera cloak during daylight hours —*you'll be lucky if they don't hang you—* but give me a minute and I'll think up some other charges to add to the docket."

"His name is FOO-Belle," his partner supplied helpfully. The vampire smirked.

"Foo—*BELLE?*"

The fairy captain rolled his eyes. "I've told you before Dum-Belle, it's F.U.-Belle! Not foo! *F! U!*—as in—uh," the fairy captain now identified as F.U. paused and hunted for a suitable illustration but none came to his rescue.

"Actually his name used to be Twinkle-Belle— isn't that charming?" Dum-Belle continued cheerfully, "It's those "twinkly eyes" he has you know—but he had it legally changed. I can't imagine why he changed such a nice name?"

"Yeah, like no one ever bullies a 1/4-inch-tall fairy named *Twink,*" Fu muttered under his breath.

In fact, Fu's problems stemmed from being originally born as a human infant. His fairy parents were dotting traditionalists and lovingly stole him out of his human baby cradle at birth and replaced him with a brick which naturally is the *proper method* of fairy consummation. They always claimed later it was a very attractive brick.

Still, it took 3 days before Fu-Belle's biological human parents even noticed their baby was missing or the brick in his cradle and called the police so it can be successfully argued that he wasn't too badly off for being stolen away by the fairies.

As traditionalists, Fu-Belle's parents named their new son "Twinkle-Belle" in the proper manner of fairies. The "-Belle" extension was compulsory to tack on every name under Fairyland Law, *male or female*, and Fu-Belle felt he'd dodged a partial bullet because it was only traditional for *fairy girls* to be named after flora. Boys on the other hand, were named either for a pleasant attribute or, in a pinch, the shrubbery. "That-Damn-Leaf-Belle" was a popular name in his neighborhood.

Actually, he came out semi-*okay* with Twinkle-Belle because apparently he also possessed, as an infant, a very small butt which fit inside his Mum's hand and was frequently joked about at dinner parties—so his given name could be *a lot worse!*

But his human side eventually kicked in and objected to the indignity—so, as soon as he was of age, Fu had his name legally-changed from "Twinkle" (but there wasn't much he could do about the "-Belle").

It was supposed to be "F.U." but the congenial 900-hundred-year-old clerk at Pixietown City Hall hadn't the best hearing nor, it appeared, had he understood what Fu was going for (and the old geezer hadn't been helped much by Fu's demonstrative hand-gestures either. He thought Fu had a weird method of pointing his finger).

"Dum-Belle, let me handle the interrogation please," the fairy captain snapped, focusing his attention on their vampire

prisoner. "My name isn't the point, sir. Back to the point, *why* is a vampire raiding our fairy magic caches? I don't get it."

"What? I'm not a vampire! What makes you think that?" the vampire asked, crossing his arms against his tuxedoed chest, and defensively tugging his opera cloak around his shoulders. "Actually, I'm—uh, one of your tall, fairy cousins just visiting from—uh, NORTH FAIRYLAND!"

"Are you fu—" Fu checked himself, "*funning around* with me, sir?" Fairyland had a zero tolerance policy against public vulgarity from its officers while on duty. Also, legwarmers.

"There is no North Fairyland. And it's clear you are *a vampire*, sir. Opera cloak, widow's peak, Transylvanian accent and—what's that other thing?" Fu snapped his fingers. "Oh yeah—the *fangs*. It's rather the *undead giveaway*, pardon my levity."

"Fangs—*me*? Uh—those are just so I can look, a-ha, "sharp" at all times," the vampire replied nervously.

"Oh—how clever," Dum-Belle clapped his hands enthusiastically. "He does look rather sharp at that. I wonder if fangs will make a fashion comeback? I must write to the editor of the Fairyland Times."

Fu-Belle glared, resisting the urge to do something violent with his collapsible club to help this interrogation along. He had a few unresolved (some might call them psychotic) issues with his rage bubbling beneath his itty-bitty surface.

The mandatory addition of "-Belle" led to outbreaks of rebellion and misapplied rage for young fairy males, including bullying of any magical race which didn't have a mandatory "-Belle" tacked on the end of their name.

Fairy men were small in stature with a lot to prove, especially after they'd had a few drinks. Also, the tights—

*traditional fairy breeches, dammit!*—and the little glittery wings didn't help. Fairy men were the first to vehemently insist not everything about them was, er, *little*.

After years spent in anger-management therapy (*unsuccessful*), meditation classes (*even less successful*), and finally, advanced martial arts where they had to invent a new level of belt advancement just for him, Fu-Belle joined the Fairy Peace Corp, figuring he could channel his well-trained fists of fury and still-not-quite-managed fits of unbridled murderous rage to use. The denizens of Fairyland didn't whine as much about his sociopathic violent tendencies so long as he was out killing other magical races on their behalf.

Plus, legally he got to carry weapons "on the job" though Fu's weapon selection included more variety and imagination than standard Fairyland issue (although standard Fairyland issue only included an industrial hairdryer and oversized cuticle snippers). Fu favored pretty much everything he could strap to his body without collapsing beneath the weight.

"If I were a vampire, could I be standing here in the middle of the afternoon beneath open sunlight steal—uh, I mean, *doing nothing* much of importance?" the vampire coughed guiltily. "I was just, um, looking around for some fashion magazines. This is all an innocent mix-up, officers."

Both fairy men regarded the vampire critically. True, there was a significant lack of the screaming and bursting into wild, leaping flames that usually characterized vampires being caught in broad daylight. There was a valid reason why vampires inhabited the wild and desolate mountain terrain of Transylvania, official motto: "*The blizzard just ended, now time for some snowfall.*"

"You could be wearing very strong sunscreen," Fu pointed out without much conviction, "Look pal, why are you vampires stealing OUR magic anyway? Crackle is fairy magic and we need it on the go for our dealings with humans. Vampires can't wield it, you don't have the right spells or charms."

"Anyway, don't you have some kind of *bat-related magic* of your own? *Batmen* are very popular in the Human World. I've heard rumors."

"Well the *"dark and stormy castle, creatures of the night"* routine isn't working for us anymore," the vampire whined. "Strange but humans don't want to explore spooky old castles or dusty coffins. It's almost as if *they expect* something *bad* to happen."

"Um—"

"But King Armando found out on Majick-Book that sparkling vampires were the new thing! *Humans like that now!* We just rub some of your sparkling fairy crackle on our skin and *viola!* The humans actually come running to us!"

"The sunlight doesn't hurt us and we don't burst into piles of smoking ash! The magic makes our skin sparkle like a diamond, while reflecting the natural sunlight back on itself. It's like—like—" the vampire waved expressive "jazz hands" as he sought for the right word, "*—majickal!* Or something! So Armando has been sending us back for more—there's one young vampire in particular it works especially well on. *Howard, or Leonard*— something like that. Can't recall."

*Ah yes. Well that explained it.* Armando Wingsfield Pentagram the 23rd, the King of all Vampires (the other 22 "Armandos" were him too. He wasn't just the last of his line, he was *his own entire lineage*) never heard of such a thing in all his

23 generations (nor had any of his forefathers which were, in point of fact, *him* once removed).

Fresh, young food that *came of its own accord* to present itself to his Transylvanian doorstep? It was a never-ending, all-the-blood-you-can-drink buffet! Clearly King Armando was intrigued that fairy crackle made all vampires *utterly irresistible* to humans, a siren call that had the chattel mooing and snorting and throwing large wads of money to the wind just to get closer to Mother Nature's fang-bearing human predator. It was like millions of cows seeking out the nearest barbeque pit, voluntarily smearing steak sauce on themselves, then lining up to be next on the grill.

Besides, it was very chic and sophisticated, sparkling like a jewel in the open sun and that was just the type of thing to appeal to vampires, a vain *-excuse me, "vein"*— and stylized breed of monster. Let alone that they could actually "walk in the open daylight again without consequences" bit.

To exemplify his point, the vampire smeared fairy crackle dust across his bare white expanse of chest, tearing open his black silk shirt to get the full effect. The midday sun refracted against the shimmer, throwing off a million diamond facets like hitting a prism or fractured mirror. It didn't appear to touch the vampire however; he was protected from the sun rays by the magical dust.

Both fairies stared, feeling a loss for words. While fairy men in general were no strangers to body glitter, no one would ever consider using fairy crackle for this purpose due to its many odd and curious side-effects.

Too much crackle exposure without appropriate safety precautions and you began trying to teach British children how

to fly using only their happy thoughts and harboring insane jealousy against any humans named Wendy.

"The humans *like that*? Glittery, bare vampire skin *attracts them*?"

The vampire shrugged loosely, "Well humans, you know. Fickle species. Who can account for their tastes? But King Armando is very clever to take advantage of their fascination."

"Not at *our expense* though," Fu objected dryly. "How did you vampires discover our magic? It's not like common knowledge where we keep it."

"Well Captain," Dum-Belle piped up, "naturally you're aware that I posted the secret locations of all our crackle caches to Majick-Book. Treasure maps are always so complicated and hard to follow—I didn't want us to lose track of any of them, you know," he beamed with pride and efficiency of a job well done, sure his fellow officer would be falling all over himself with praise.

Fu just gaped at his partner, "YOU—WHAT? You mean ALL OF MAJICK-BOOK knows where our hidden caches of FAIRY CRACKLE are?!"

"No, of course not. That's utterly impossible, Captain," Dum-Belle insisted, "My profile security was set to "Top Secret Mage" and the post itself marked "Do Not Display This Post on Other Majick-Books" so no one else could see it, naturally."

"And Majick-Book has the best security cause all you have to do is click one button and it makes you, like, totally invisible and you can post whatever you want! You should try it, Captain. In fact, I go on there and post my credit card information as soon as the new cards come in. It's such a handy place to keep it, especially since I have to change card numbers often—they keep getting stolen somehow."

Fu-Belle darted a look at their vampire captive who looked suspiciously guilty, then whipped out his iFairy device and pulled up Dum-Belle's profile on Majick-Book. Sure enough, there were all the secret locations posted on his timeline, with handy-dandy hyperlinks stating: "*Lost? Map this location in Fairyland now*" next to them.

No wonder the vampires seemed to have this sixth sense about where those "secret caches" were and their raids were so remarkably consistent. Mysterious, wasn't it? Equally mysterious how 5,328,566 vampires "Liked" Dum-Belle's post.

*Well, fine.* Fu-Belle could choose to make a big deal about this but he'd just as soon avoid an international incident that could put Fairyland at risk. Simply put, the vampires were immortal and very dangerous if crossed, and the two mystic races had successfully remained at peace for centuries. The last thing Fu wanted was to cause friction between the two.

"Okay look, we could take you in and hold you for traveling across Fairyland borders with intent to commit a crime on our soil—but we won't arrest you if you will return to Transylvania and inform King Armando that no more thefts by vampires will be tolerated. I'm sorry, but he's just going to have to figure something else out."

"His Majesty will never stand for this insolence from you fairies," the vampire fumed, "he was just voted *the Sexiest Vampire on Majick-Book*, you know."

"Didn't he vote for himself?"

"Yeah—and—?"

"No point. I was just curious." Fu concentrated very hard on keeping his face as straight as a board but unfortunately it didn't quite work. The vampire could sense he was laughing internally.

"This is an act of *treason!* You can't press charges against me! I have full *diplomatic immunity* under King Armando's directive."

"Not when you've crossed Fairyland borders under false pretenses and stolen our magic, sir. I'm afraid we cannot allow that."

"You'll see," the vampire huffed. "Just wait until I blog about this! I have a huge following on Majick-Book! It will go viral and then you'll be sorry! You'll see! Transylvania declares war on Fairyland!"

"Right, sure." Fu didn't believe him and released the vampire to return to his homeland—but as it turned out, he should have listened. For only two weeks later, King Armando officially declared a state of war with Fairyland!

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## Bad Year for a World War

Fu-Belle found himself at the “First Annual Fairyland Council of War” which began at exactly half-past two in the Palatial Gardens on a beautiful mid-spring afternoon.

It was expected to be the highlight of the Spring Season and naturally, all the A-list fairy celebrities were in attendance, strolling up the rose-petal carpet in their spring finery amidst the “ooh’s and ahh’s” of the starstruck guests.

A light aperitif was served on the lawn, and the War Council was even expected to stretch into supper which would be served promptly at half-past six. A thirteen-course menu was prepared, with main entrée of poached salmon glazed with lemon-honey and dill, served with capers and paired with one’s choice of over twenty-two types of handbrewed ale.

With clear skies and such an excellent meal in store, it was assumed by all that the War Council was going well.

“I’m afraid it’s impossible,” King Clarion of the Fairies declared, delicately waving a pale, thin hand.

“I don’t care if Armando announced it already. He’s very presumptive in that respect and I’m afraid a war with the vampires can’t even *be considered* for the upcoming social season. There’s just no time to work it into the schedule this late.” The way he pronounced “schedule” made it sound like there were about 3 extra syllables.

"Between our Midsummer's Eve Annual Dance-a-Thon and the Evening Out with the Silk Worms and let's not forget, Queen Bee's Ostentatious Honey Bee Ball—well clearly, the vampires should have *registered early* if they wanted a timeslot for a war with us."

"But DAAHHHHling," interjected his wife, Queen Ding-Aling. The fairy king and queen had gotten around the mandatory "-Belle" name extension law by naming themselves after musical sounds instead. No one else really wanted to argue the point.

"I think the thing is, my Virile Stallion, that we're officially at war with Transylvania whether it was prior scheduled or no. Anyway, one might expect *vampires* to be too boorish to plan in advance. I've heard a ghastly rumor that they can't even use a mirror properly."

"No, my Honey Blossom, it can't be done." King Clarion insisted, flipping back his glorious shiny blond locks, because "he's worth it", and again waving a dramatic hand, more to show off his exquisite manicure ("the shade is called *Moondrop*, oh do you like it?") than any genuine display of emotion.

"Ding-Aling, you know how I love a good war! I've always said it's perfect for exfoliation, all that fresh air and screaming—it really opens up the pores but alas, no! We simply *can't* host, we haven't the space in Fairyland and besides the catering alone would take weeks to plan! And you know how difficult it is to feed vampires! They make such a fuss when we arrange a vegan, nut-free, gluten-free menu," Clarion frowned, though he was careful not to crease his face and make wrinkles.

"I don't know when we'll have an opening. Perhaps we can squeeze them in post-autumn once the Golden Leaf Feast and

Festival ends. There's a bit of downtime in there before Winter Solstice Shopping Season begins."

"How true, my Brave Samurai," Queen Ding-Aling praised, "But alas, the vampires may not wait so long. I'm afraid this war may end up—" she shuddered delicately "—becoming an "impromptu" affair."

As one, the Fairy Court took a collective gasp and several women fainted. *Impromptu! Say it isn't so!*

There hadn't been an impromptu gathering of the fairies since the field mouse arranged that quickie marriage between little Thumbelina and her neighbor, the rich but very ugly Mole—and even then, the field mouse still managed engraved invitations. They were on cheap cardstock mind you, but it being impromptu and all, no one had the heart to criticize.

The wedding was later called off and Thumbelina was married to the Flower Prince instead, presumably not because of the inferior invitations to her first wedding although that couldn't have helped matters.

"Ding-Aling," Clarion said in a tone of reproach. "I hadn't thought you even knew such a disreputable word! I'm *sure we're not barbarians!* It horrifies me that my own wife would—" he broke off in dismay.

"Next, you'll be saying for this war, we should skip the party favor bags!"

Another collective gasp rose and Ding-Aling meekly lowered her head.

"Of course not, my Robust Quadruped," she blushed and delicately tapped her mouth. "Do pardon my Elvish—darling, all I meant was this war with the vampires may not be avoidable."

"But we could hire a war planner, I suppose, to sort out the catering, invitations, favor bags and make sure all the militia

uniforms are in style with this season's colors. Obviously we have a reputation to protect. It's the details that count."

"I s-u-p-p-o-s-e so," Clarion drawled out the word in a tone that clearly indicated no war planner could conceivably hold up to his standards,

"But where will we host, Ding-Aling? Not in Transylvania—there's no suitable venues there. And we can't have it here either. Vampires do leave such large messes behind when they ravage and pillage."

"Well—" Ding-Aling thought hard—"why don't we host the war in the Human Realm? Don't those human beings have lots of—I *don't know*—free space they aren't taking up with their grotesque, mortal, aging and dying bodies?"

"You'd think so, wouldn't you? Their world is so very large and all. I've tried to get on the books over there for months but there isn't any space available."

Clarion huffed. "That stupid *Zombie Apocalypse* affair is already on the books, and the Immutable Forces of Fate and Destiny claim that every event venue in the Human Realm is pre-booked by the zombies, paid out in advance through their year-3000 while they're eating and decimating the humans. They've been advertising that stupid *Apocalypse* of theirs for years, you know—they must have a tremendous budget!"

"There's no way we'll get the zombies to trade dates with us now. We'll never get a space booking this late, Ding-Aling. We'll just have to wait until next millennia and see if something opens up. Maybe someone will cancel?"

He looked a bit smug as he finished, "See? This is what comes of *impromptu* planning!"

He waved at the Chief Scribe of the Fairies to dictate a letter. "Send a polite but firm RSVP response to King Armando

of the Vampires that we respectfully decline their war invitation. Do invite us again if they should find another time more suitable and we look forward to warring with them some time next century. Cordially yours, etc, etc."

"Marvelous, my Sexy Monkey, that was so brilliantly done," Ding-Aling beamed. "I knew you'd find the right solution. And, what IS that nail color you're wearing, darling? It's simply FABULOUS!"

Clarion beamed. "Isn't it just? I think I'll have it for my next pedicure, what do you think?"

With that, the conversation transitioned naturally into a discussion of nail shades with all the important Fairyland dignitaries weighing in. Supper was served and it was delicious, all agreed.

With the excellent catering and wine selection and the party bags handed out by their Majesties being top-label Fairy Designer, everyone unanimously felt it was the finest War Council they'd ever attended and it should be made into an annual affair going forward—but with less unpleasant, appetite-ruining conversation about strategy and warfare at the next one. It simply ruined the ambiance of a War Council to discuss war.

Although he was Captain of the Fairy Peace Corps and therefore entirely relevant to any discussion concerning the outbreak of war, Fu-Belle hadn't been asked for his opinion. He and the rest of his disgracefully-attired regiment were ushered to the back of the lawn where they received cold scraps leftover from the kitchen and no wine list at all. Fu was just barely able to hear what the king and queen said from their oak feasting table upfront.

Had he been asked for his opinion which he hadn't, since he was surprisingly pragmatic for a fairy (but perhaps his human origins had something to do with it) he'd have said that Queen Ding-Aling was correct! War with the vampires was unavoidable now! The vampires would raid Fairyland soon.

It was time for the fairies to set aside their party plans, take up arms, be prepared and nix the catering idea. The ugly truth was that the situation would escalate to far worse before it got better.

Bearers of bad news weren't looked on fondly by the fairies. Naturally they wouldn't listen, not without a wardrobe upgrade on Fu-Belle's part and it was a shame really. As was the case with most pragmatic people, Fu-Belle also was correct.



## We're Team Vampyr!

**T**wo weeks earlier, Armando Wingsfield Pentegram the 23rd, King of the Vampires, was feeling very pleased with himself. Not just because his name was voted “Sexiest Vampire Name” on Majick-Book which, hold for applause, *he totally WON by a landslide!* Armando voted for himself the maximum allowable times then made it mandatory under Transylvanian law under penalty of wooden stake for all his vampire subjects to vote for him on his current Majick-Book status.

But he didn't see this as cheating because “Armando” was, in fact, the sexiest name of any vampire ever—“*eat your heart and liver and kidneys and pulmonary arteries out, Alucard!*”

But what also pleased Armando was that vampire snacking became easy and carefree. When he felt hungry, he tossed that skinny vampire out—*what was his name? Howard? Leonard?* It was something like that. Armando didn't have a good memory for vampire names—save for *Armando*, but that was the only name *worth* remembering!

Anyway, so they just sprayed him down with fairy—*sparkly magic dust*, whatever that stuff was called, and watched as without fail, a group of teen girls would appear and madly cluster around the sparkly vampire idol, groping and tossing their panties at him amongst high-pitched calls of “omg!” and

“squee!”—this part, Armando didn’t understand but it appeared to be a strange human mating ritual.

Regardless, the lustful frenzy never took notice when Armando picked out one or two girls that looked juicy and had a light lunch. They just went on giggling and groping and panty-tossing until Armando locked the sparkly vampire up until the next meal. You know, that fellow *Howard*. Or *Leonard*. Whatever that vampire’s name was, the one the human girls liked, it was on the tip of Armando’s tongue really.

*But it was so simple that it was almost like magic!* Rubbing some sparkly fairy dust, uh, that crackle stuff, on a gaunt, pale, sunken-eyed vampire sporting so much hair gel his head would snap off in a strong tailwind, and suddenly beautiful young girls were *lining up by droves*, begging to be his entrée!

Although Armando wasn’t sure why this siren song was especially strong on virginal, young women or for that matter, why they all wore matching pink baby doll “Team Vampyr” t-shirts instead of flattering lacy nightgowns and sleeping with their windows open as tradition dictated, but it was alright with him. Other humans came along making for a buffet line of sorts and Armando felt he could adapt with the rapidly changing modern times.

*Please do come right in! Transylvania is a friendly, family-oriented place just dying, a-ha, pardon me, to entertain you for, a-ha, dinner, yesss!* Armando liked plenty of variety in his diet.

Anyway, the whole system was working perfectly therefore it surprised King Armando when he received a notice from the Fairy Court, once he arose from his coffin for the new night.

It was addressed to him in a pink envelope, marked S.W.A.L.K. and covered top-to-bottom with Scratch ‘n Sniff stickers —“*Oh, for the Love of Arteries!*”— politely declining the

invitation to begin a war that King Armando himself hadn't bothered to issue. Well, that was the underlying message once he decrypted the ornate and embossed calligraphy utilized by the Chief Fairy Scribe and figured out the content of the letter. It began as a lengthy sonnet about "*a clear blue sky and summertime's young lovers*"—47 pages later, "*the fairies were sorry but they couldn't make the war at this time*".

Actually, it didn't occur to Armando that it was necessary get involved in an interspecies war with the fairies. They were family to a point—although fairies were more the "batty uncle" in the supernatural family tree than a "blood brother" of the vampires.

Sure, Armando had heard the rumors flying around social media about the fairies and vampires being at war. Some vampire apparently vlogged it, then it went viral with "#gotta lose 20 lbs by VampFair War, lol" but Armando himself hadn't paid much attention, expecting the ruckus to die down when nothing came of it.

He was much too busy to worry about urban legends at the time, locked as he was in a VITAL DEATH MATCH for the "Sexiest Name" title on Majick-Book with *Count Alucard!*

*HE SO DIDN'T!* It was just *stupid*, you know—spelling your name backward didn't make it SEXY! That stupid Count was going down in flames if Armando had anything to do with it. Why did that guy even have a book named after him anyway, Armando could never understand.

As Armando already knew all the locations of the, ahem, *secret fairy crackle caches* and also knew it wouldn't occur to the fairies to *move* said hiding places after they'd been discovered (their planning skills didn't go beyond matching their accessories to their shoes) he saw no need to waste time

or resources fighting over it. Swiping what he needed as he needed it was working out fine.

None of his spies were even caught until the last raid. They snuck into Fairyland under such clever guises as looking and dressing *exactly like vampires* and assuring the fairies they were visiting cousins who were unusually tall—*unfortunately* tall even. They were so tall in fact, that they looked almost human but the fairies didn't like to mention this aloud. It might hurt their poor visiting cousin feelings to find out they were so tall and ugly and badly dressed.

A notation even made it into the spring edition of the "Fairyland Chronicle" that their tall, pale, unfortunately ugly cousins had come from abroad to visit and should be warmly welcomed by all, "straight from Transylv—uh, I mean, we travelled here from NORTH Fairyland to visit you! VERY NORTH Fairyland!" The fact that there was no North Fairyland just made this accomplishment all the more impressive.

Anyway, dead fairies were no good to the vampires. They couldn't make that "sparkly dust stuff" if they were dead and it wasn't like they were edible. Fairies were very, very chewy and sticky like saltwater taffy that came in nauseating colors and tasted like pencil erasers. Everyone knew when a newly-turned vampire tried eating a fairy for the first time—you never needed to experience it twice! You had to pick bits of leftover fairy out of your fangs for weeks and there was always some stuck in your hair (impossible to disentangle, you had to cut the stickiness out) or on the bottom of your shoe—sticky fairy bits got *everywhere!*

Plus, where would they host a war? Zombies had the entire Human World booked out and the fairies wouldn't travel to Transylvania! They griped the journey was treacherous and

fraught with danger—*well duh! OF COURSE IT WAS!* There were *standards* to uphold!

Armando had the wild packs of hungry, ravaging wolves shipped in special and lets not even discuss how much it'd cost to have those jagged peaks and sharp outcroppings sculpted in the high mountains! Think building "narrow ledges that broke free at just the critical moment when the hero was hanging on for dear life" was *easy*, did you? What was the world coming to? There was no respect for craftsmanship or pride in one's villainous reputation these days!

It took careful planning and prior arrangements with the weather gods to make everything in Transylvania run efficiently. Armando tried for a dark, stormy night each time they had out-of-town guests to frighten but at times he was embarrassed to admit he had to fall back on a bright flashlight, some water being poured through a sieve off the roof and sheet metal pounded at significant intervals when all the appropriately portentous thunderstorms were already taken.

You couldn't have a good, bloody war in Fairyland—it was like trying to set the chainsaw massacre in Who-Ville. The landscape was perpetually bright and cheerful, it looked like the backdrop for a children's animated feature film. Though the initial thought of littering Fairyland with dead fairy corpses was appealing, the overall effect would be spoiled when cuddly, talking animals burst into a lively spontaneous tune promoting touchy-feely virtues. Or when a staff-bearing white wizard appeared to inform everyone that two little people passed this way and were now in the care of a kindly tree herder.

Fairyland was *that sort of place*, yes.

Armando shuddered again. Thinking about all this fairy cheerfulness and gaiety, gross! Now he needed something to

wash out his mouth and mind, and make him feel better. Where was *Orlando*—or, *Leonard*? He was needed to draw the human girls out of hiding so Armando could nab a midnight pick-me-up.

"Your Highness? Sorry to disturb you." Breaking the silence, the butler waited until Armando made a gesture to advance. Vampires were sticklers about protocol and they wrote the book on it, literally.

"The leader of the zombies, 'oops-i-forgot-my-name-cause-i-ate-my-own-brain' is here to see you, my lord."

"Repugnant," Armando said brightly in the same tone one might've said "what a delight". "I'm utterly disgusted. Do show him in and fetch some cold brain for our guest would you, Simons?"

After the zombie was shown in, Armando sat as far across the room as he could get and tried not to hold his overly sensitive nose,

"Right. Can I get you some preservatives? Formaldehyde? A chemical peel?"

"No, thank yer lordship," the zombie replied, smiling with green teeth at him. "I'm jist droppin in to—uh—uh—"

"Let me guess," Armando made a bored gesture, "This has something to do with your "apocalypse" . . ." he made sarcastic air quotes. Since the leader of the zombies looked blank, he sighed.

"Came to ask for money did you, or advice on how to duck shotgun shells?"

"Yo—yo drink da blood, right?"

Armando paused. "Um, yes. Human blood, yes. Er, with caveats," he added quickly. "NOT blood with high toxicity

levels," he dropped to an undertone, "Like yours. Can't stand the hangovers."

"Well—we eat brains and flesh," the zombie just looked at him like there was connection he hoped Armando would get. "*Human* flesh," he added hopefully.

"Yes—well—yes—I know that," Armando waved a hand. "There's no accounting for some people's tastes, present company accepted."

"Der humans—dey come all put together," the zombie pointed out. "Der bits all attached like so."

Armando just looked at him.

"What I bin tinkin—" the zombie paused and scratched the large hole in his cranial cavity where his brain used to be. "What I bin tinkin is this—humans has lotsa bits. We only eat some bits see, and yo—yo—eat odder bits, see. So—so—I bin tinkin—yo va—bats, and der us z—z—what we is, we—bot eat human bits, see?"

"Wait," Armando paused. "Are you suggesting a mutually beneficial partnership in which we combine our forces and divide the war spoils equally, each taking our own portion of the limited nutritional resource known as humans for the betterment of our respective species?"

The zombie stopped, pausing for a very long moment. "I bin tinkin dat, yah," he said finally.

Armando drummed his fingers on the armrest of his wingback, a-ha, BAT wingback chair, actually.

"And in return, I suppose you want the help of the vampires to win your little apocalypse—party, thing, whatever it is you're doing," he huffed.

The zombie pointed to his chest where, albeit blood-stained, ripped and very bedraggled, he was clearly and

proudly wearing a pink baby-doll T-shirt which read: "Team Vampyr".

"I'll admit, I do hate the thought of all that fresh blood going to waste," Armando mused. "I suppose I could just send along a few boys and some mops and Dixon jars for the storehouse but—oh, very well."

He stood and began to pace. "You zombies will need looking after, I can see. An administration committee qualified to oversee the situation with a firm hand and make the difficult decisions you zombies aren't equipped to make. We can't have you wiping out ALL the future generations of our #1 food source naturally—but we can allow perhaps a little pruning the hedges, some light weeding out of the unfavorable or weak human genes. Good for flourishing, making the garden grow back stronger."

"Den yo—yo be "Team Zombie" next," the zombie declared, smiling his gray-greenish-missing-toothed smile again. "We get yo shirts like dis too."

"Oh alright," Armando agreed crossly. "Anything to keep you from slowly disintegrating on my couch, it'll stain. It was left to me by the King of France right after I ate him. I'm very fond of it."

"And we help yo, yo gonna go kill dem—dem—bells—fings, what?"

"The fairies," Armando laughed. "Oh that, no. Just a silly rumor. We're not at war with the fairies."

"Oh. I dun heard wrong den. I heard dey captured yo spy and all dat! Thought yous was mad at dem cuz the fairies dun moved all dem—shiny bits dey haz."

Armando froze in mid-chuckle. "They did—*what?*"

"Yeah. I done heard dem fairies moved it cause yo—yo dun stole dere shiny. So dey dun hid it and now yo dun know where to get some mo."

"How DARE they?" Armando nearly shook with rage. "After thousands of years of complacent idiocy, how dare the fairies actually MOVE something because we took it without permission?"

"The nerve, the utter gall! They EXIST to make that "shiny, um—gunk" so that WE can STEAL IT at our leisure and WE were certainly doing OUR PART of the bargain—how dare they MOVE IT without our say so! That is JUST going TOO FAR! I'm just—so ANGRY NOW—"

The vampire king broke off and whipped out a glossy, black iBat phone (yes, it was actually shaped like a bat) from his opera cloak, pulled up the app and started composing himself a Majick-Book rant post until he felt calm again.

The zombie paused, needing time to work this out in his clearly-missing brain. "Uh—you—kill dis fairies? Or, yous no kill dis fairies?"

"WE KILL DIS FAIRIES," Armando huffed. "Those little winged insects, they're nothing more than glorified bugs—we'll squish them like mosquitoes!

The WAR is SO ON NOW and then I'm gonna stuff their snotty ridiculous sonnet, all 47 pages of it, up Clarion's tiny nose—" he fumbled with his phone again, his attention diverted from the zombie,

"—I'm making the official declaration right now, that Transylvania is at a state of war with Fairyland. But first I have to BaTwingg the news to my vampire bros on BaTwingger! This is SO being tagged, "#ohnotheydidnt!" . . ."

He kept poking his touch screen and getting replies because he kept bursting out with, "I KNOW RIGHT?" and "CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?" apparently not directed at his zombie guest, though he seemed to realize after that only the zombie could hear his vocal outbursts and BaTwingg-ed them instead.

Had he been paying the slightest attention to the zombie emissary, he'd have noticed his guest smiling that gray-green toothed smile again, as if he were unusually pleased by the turn of events. Like the guy holding the smoking gun after a murder had just been committed, that wasn't the least bit suspicious.

Why no, not at all.

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## Superhero Wanted: Apply Within (No Capes!)

**K**ent Clark (no relation) awoke to find himself floating midair above his bed while he slept. *Oh no! Not again!* He hated when that alien flying power took him unexpectedly while he slept. Last time, he dropped too quickly and broke his bed apart with the force of impact.

"KENT CLARK (no relation)! Get down here, it's time for breakfast!"

Kent Clark (no relation) woke up all over again, this time to the sound of his mother's voice yelling. *Oh. It was the flying dream again, wasn't it?*

Honestly, that dream was becoming annoying though not near as annoying as the one about the frozen cave full of glowing, talking crystals insisting it was his father.

His dreams were getting stranger all the time. It was a wonder he ever got any sleep at all.

By the time Kent Clark (no relation) got down to breakfast in their quaint, shiny yellow farmhouse, his mother and father were both waiting for him. That wasn't a good sign.

"To be honest son, we're worried about you!" Joshua Clark (also no relation) took his pipe out of his mouth to frown.

"I know we found you in a cornfield next to a suspicious smoking crater and rather than take our chances with legal child adoption, we kept you on the spot and knew we'd be asking for some trouble keeping a kid that just fell out of the sky."

"Course, we don't really know you fell from the sky," Marta Clark (not even remotely related) inserted, "But it seemed likely, given the crater."

"Yes, but you're 38 and still in high school," Joshua Clark (still no relation) complained. "That's not *normal*, son! People are starting to talk! You've been attending Tinyville High for the past ten years and even though no one seems to really have noticed that you're the oldest senior on campus, your mother and I want you to get out there and see the world!"

"Or at least be admitted to a psychiatric ward because of a weird genetic mutation caused by the glowing green rocks like the rest of your student body was! They all graduated on time! They all have murderous disorders and rare psychoses for their parents to proudly brag about at dinner parties!"

Kent Clark (no relation) only nodded. When a kid fell mysteriously out of the sky and had flight dreams and a spaceship-shaped cradle, it was widely assumed the future had big plans for him. He rather expected to have big plans for himself.

It was just—well, all the right pieces seemed to be there, right? Yet Kent Clark (no relation) was depressingly ordinary. He

had no budding superpowers whatsoever, besides his weird dreams at night but frankly those he blamed on the footie pajamas and red cape he still slept in at 38 years old, because they were lovingly hand-knitted by Marta for him. He was so utterly boring and mild-mannered as a man that he bored himself!

Oh sure, his folks went on and on about how he caught the car when it was about to fall and crush his adopted father—Kent Clark (no relation) hadn't the heart to tell them it because he just happened to be standing next to the hydraulic jack. He wasn't super-powered, just quick thinking.

"No matter what, your mother and I love you," Joshua said supportively. "Son, we just want you to get past high school and go on to lead a successful and productive life. Move to a big city, dress like a hunky nerd, hide your face behind horn-rimmed glasses, be castrated by an emancipated reporter, learn to undress in a phone booth. You'll grow into those superpowers of yours, believe me, son."

"Dad, I'm 38," Kent Clark (no relation) pointed out as gently as he could. Marta beamed.

"And still *super*," she kissed his cheek. "By the way, I'm knitting you a new cape honey. It should be finished by the time you graduate—" there was an embarrassed gap of silence before she rallied positively with, "—and your Dad and I, we're so proud of you, Kent Clark (no relation)!"

"Group hug," Joshua pronounced cheerfully and likewise beaming, he reached to engulf his large son and wife in his arms before adding jovially, "Careful there, my boy! You might just crush me with your super strength."

"Well then, he'll just have to rush you to the hospital with his super speed," Marta happily replied and the two laughed loudly.

"Dad, I don't have super strength—or super speed. I keep telling you, I'm not an alien super hero with special powers," Kent Clark (no relation) wailed. "I'm just an ordinary guy with a personal spaceship. It's really not all that weird."

Fine, it was a little weird. But despite aging, he'd remained consistently not-super. What the hell, world? *Everyone knew* if you were found in a cornfield and apparently an alien, *you were supposed to have superpowers from the alien sun* and a strong allergy to glowing green rocks from your birth planet. Kent Clark (no relation) had neither.

Short of fitting the hand-knitted superhero costume his mother made for him to eye-popping proportions (that's when Mom suggested it, wear the underwear on the OUTSIDE of the tights! Brilliant idea!) he'd shown no signs of manifesting special powers, ever.

Joshua chuckled. "Now son, you lifted a car off me when you were just twelve years old—"

"—oh god—"

"—and you saved your very best friend, billionaire-with-Daddy-issues Les Lytheryn, from driving off that bridge—"

"—I just switched on his parking brake for him, Dad. He's rich so he didn't know how to work it for himself—"

"Now son, you know you don't need any superpowers to be special to your Mom and me," Joshua continued proudly. "You're super special just being Kent Clark (no relation). But we're always here for you to help with your problems be they super—" he nudged his son with a wink, "—or regular sized."

"Thanks, Dad," Kent Clark (no relation) capitulated with a sigh. No matter what he said, no matter what he did, his parents optimistically believed a souped-up hero lived under the skin of their ordinary little alien kid.

Well, there was nothing for it then. He hid out in Tinyville High as long as he could but now he had to face up to facts. If he hadn't grown into his powers by the time he was 38 well . . . they . . . probably didn't exist. He was running out of options.

He'd already tried venturing out in a thunderstorm with a kite and key. Everyone knew a good lightning strike could transfer or imbue supernatural powers.

It hadn't worked. All it managed for Kent Clark (no relation) was turning his hair jet black and curly, including that one persistent, annoying curl that always fell in the exact middle of his forehead no matter how much gel he used to slick back the rest. Sigh.

So all he had left was to head out on some mysterious quest, disguising himself with only his black, horn-rimmed nerd spectacles, in hopes of stumbling across some supernatural artifact with power transference or discovering a mystic portal which would transform him into a hero since genetics didn't have the decency to let him inherit superpowers the easy way, like *that guy* he was no relation to.

Anyway, everyone also knew that's how you met a pretty girl and saved her life and had some encounter with a deranged megalomaniac and it ended up with you and the pretty girl making out.

Plus, special powers often materialized from nowhere just in the nick of time as you needed them to aid you through some perilous, life-threatening situation, bonus. Turns out you

had them all along, they were just dormant until the last five seconds of the bomb countdown. Everyone knew that.

So it was settled then. Kent Clark (no relation) needed to go out and leave Tinyville, while possibly graduating from high school first (but *no rush*) and find a noble, heroic quest to join up with.

If the anthem here was, "Somebody Saaaaave Meeee" (for about *ten seasons* but who's counting), then he was that "somebody" doing the saving.

Word.