

Excerpt from 'The Felantia Files'

Freekia stared intently at a dense black cube on her worktop. It was so dark that its shape was barely discernible, despite the glow of her work light mounted nearby. Using a pipette, she released a bead of purple liquid over it, then with one finger held like a claw, she spoke. Her hair crackled slightly, and ripples of darkness swirled into the liquid.

Freekia leaned back, her crooked mouth stretching into a smile of satisfaction. That should do it – but it needed to be tested one last time. She turned to the tank behind her and extracted a single mosquito from the swarm, delicately manoeuvring it into a phial before transferring it to a separate chamber. The enchanted bead of liquid was introduced, and she watched as the mosquito inserted its proboscis and sucked the contents smoothly into its body.

“There, my little treasure,” she crooned, her eyes large as she peered through the glass. “I hope you still have room for more. Let’s see what you can do.”

In a far corner of the lab, a small pix boy was crouched on the floor of a suspended cage. His eyes widened as she approached. “What are you going to do?” he asked, his voice trembling.

“Hardly a thing,” she murmured, “you will be released soon enough. Here, give me your arm.” The eyeball that she wore as an earring turned to stare at him.

“I don’t want to,” he whimpered.

“That’s too bad,” she shrugged, then reached in, and grabbed him with hands like pincers. She pushed his hand and lower arm into the glass chamber with the mosquito and watched intently as the insect injected his skin.

“Ow, Ow!” cried the boy “What are you doing?”

“If you stop struggling, I won’t have to hold you so tightly,” she snapped. He stopped wriggling, but continued to pull away from her as hard as he could. As soon as the bloated mosquito rose in the air, she released her hold and he quickly withdrew his arm, hugging it to his chest.

“There now,” she crooned in mock sympathy. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

The boy pulled a face and rubbed at the itchy bite.

“Don’t scratch,” she said. “You’ll only make it worse. Now you sit there quietly for a bit, and I’ll come back for you shortly.” She left the room and sat down comfortably at her desk. At a brief command, a section of the wall in front of her became transparent, giving her a clear view of the boy in the cage. She leaned back, tapping the desk gently with her pen as she watched and waited patiently. The boy sat quietly for a little while, and then his features displayed a more concentrated expression as if he had just thought of something.

He tilted his head and bit his lip before appearing to come to a decision. The room was carefully assessed in every direction, and having assured himself that he was alone, he spoke a few words in a low voice. The door of the cage creaked open. The boy's eyes widened in initial disbelief, and then after a quick glance around the room, he jumped down and ran out the door.

Perfect. Freekia straightened the notes on her desk in satisfaction. The dosage had been accurately assessed, and there were no adverse reactions. As she expected, Carcawrass was pleased with the result. She always made sure that she described her work with as much technological jargon as she could, emphasising the extremes that were often employed to achieve good results.

Carcawrass, well aware of her tactics, had decided not to discourage it. It flattered his ego that she was devoted to his cause, and so keen to impress him whenever she could. She was the only person in the world capable of this level of bio-sciiegic (considerably more capable than he himself), but he was not worried about the danger of insurrection. He would always lord it over her as the instigator of dark magic. It was his will and his words that ruled Iyr Koshek.

Freekia stood before him in her stained lab-coat, almost his equal in height, but with a skinny frame that gave her a deceptively frail look. Pale hair fluffed out from her mottled crown like mould, and her large, mismatched eyes glowed slightly in the subdued light.

"I administered a simple command," she said. "Words that told him how to open his cage and escape. It took him less than five minutes to process the idea, and he acted on it perfectly."

"No side effects this time?"

"None - but I will follow up on his progress for the next few days just to be sure." She took the black cube out of her satchel and handed it to him. "Next time it will be your creed - in all its infinite perfection - that will be administered."

Carcawrass nodded and placed the cube carefully on a podium by his chair. "We are an unconquerable team you and I," he commended her smoothly. "Converting words of darkness to liquid form was a major achievement on my part - and now you have succeeded in transferring it to the mind of a faerie in working order. I recall Ras being so proud of his sciiegic inventions, but bio-sciiegic was not something he was ever brave enough to venture into. You are greater than he ever was."

Praise indeed. The discovery of Ras's files had been foundational to everything they did, but perhaps there was a time ahead when they would be obsolete?