



## The Druid Next Door

*E.J. Russell*

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## **The Druid Next Door** E.J. Russell

Professor Bryce MacLeod has devoted his entire life to environmentalism. But how effective can he be in saving the planet when he can't even get his surly neighbor to separate his recycling?

Former Queen's Enforcer Mal Kendrick doesn't think his life could get any worse: he's been exiled from Faerie with a cursed and useless right hand. When he's not dodging random fae assassins in the Outer World, he's going toe-to-toe with his tree-hugging neighbor. And when he discovers that the tree-hugger is really a druid, he's certain the gods have it in for him—after all, there's *always* a catch with druids. Then he's magically shackled to the man and expected to instruct him in Supernatural 101.

All right, *now* things couldn't possibly get worse.

Until a mysterious stranger offers a drunken Mal the chance to gain back all he's lost—for a price. After Mal accepts, he discovers the *real* catch: an ancient secret that will change his and Bryce's life forever.

*Ah, what the hells.* Odds are they won't survive the week anyway.

## **The Druid Next Door Details**

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# From Reader Review The Druid Next Door for online ebook

## M'rella says

2.5 Reasons later.

Reasons:

- Mal, who is an established character (see book 1), does an uncomfortable 180° personality flip topped with an insta hate-to-love somersault. Yeah, I felt dizzy, too.
- Bryce. A new character who starts as geeky and shy and adorable, but turns into insufferable control freak, when he decides that Mal should not lie to him. like EVAH. Excuse me? Mal has had a long life, not to mention he is literally not of this world. I think he is eligible for a secret or two, plus a few that are not his own. MCs have only known each other for a *couple of days* before Bryce turns into a manipulative, truth-demanding bastard. What the hell? Bryce does not appeal to me at all. Hope he falls off his high horse and breaks something sensitive. Twice.
- Steve. Also a secretive, manipulative bastard, but on a new whole level. I loved Steve.
- Cassie. A meddling, inconsiderate witch. Someone needs to take her down a notch.

I did love the world. Will read book 3.

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## All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review courtesy of All Things Urban Fantasy

You know a book is good when you start slowing down your reading speed and putting the book down because you're not ready to leave the world of the story. You're not ready to leave behind the characters you've grown to care for, even if this could be their happily ever after. THE DRUID NEXT DOOR is that kind of story and I'm so glad that it lives up to the first book in the series, CUTIE AND THE BEAST.

Mal and Bryce are both so endearing, if a bit infuriating (in a fun way). They've noticed each other, but Mal is trying to recover from a crippling injury from the last book and isn't in the right headspace to be nice to anyone, no matter how attractive they may be. This injury causes him to do some pretty desperate things; without his sword hand he feels useless and doesn't see what he has to offer both a potential partner and the world of the Fae. This desperation pushes him to do pretty stupid things, and Bryce gets dragged into (a little druid curse makes sure of that!)

I enjoyed how the events of the first book directly influenced the second without either drowning in recaps or losing focus. The Fae Out of Water series is serious enough to have a world that stands up to change, and silly enough that it can subtly make fun of the genre.

With strong themes of accepting change and being able to forgive yourself, this series manages to humanize characters who aren't even human to begin with. The bad guys are not always bad, the serious moments are

sprinkled with wit and the sex is super hot. I cannot wait for BAD BOY'S BARD next month.

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### **Didi says**

3.25 stars

Sort of cute meet mixed with D/S between nerd professor and a disabled hunky Fae. Somewhat jumpy sequence, too many agenda (and background story) to solve in one go. I don't find Mal as attractive here as he struck me a bit whiny. Professor Bryce is an entertaining character, though. XP

Now I'm dreading for Gareth's story as he appears to be (a lot more) judgier than the first bookshows. Whelp!

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### **Sadie Forsythe says**

This was cute in much the same way as book one of the series, but this one I had a hard time liking. In fact, I didn't. There is a real dominance and submission theme in it that I never got comfortable with. I considered it coerced. Period. Russell tried to dress it up as something else, but I couldn't get comfortable with the power dynamic. I considered it essentially slavery and was basically disgusted with it. I totally see that Russell was going for something else, but I never got there. Plus, it required about a 180 degree shift in one character's personality that I didn't at all feel believable and the second character I didn't feel I got to know well enough to judge, but it didn't feel right for him either. So, fail for me.

Outside of that issue, there is no romance (just coerced lust, IMO). The quest/mystery was amusing and I enjoyed that aspect of the book. But it was the smaller portion, to be sure. The writing and editing were fine, as far as I was concerned. I'm sure others will like it. I just couldn't.

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### **Veronica of V's Reads says**

4.5 Stars for this second book in the Fae Out of Water series.

Mal Kendrick was cursed while saving his brother's life. He lopped off the hand of the Fae Seelie Queen's consort--rotten though he was--and won't gain the use of his own hand until he's restored the Queen's consort in full--not that she wants him back. So, he's cut off from Faerie in the human realm, and feeling rather sorry for himself. Plus, he's having the devil of a time fending off the lesser Unseelie Fae who seem to delight in tormenting him, the former Enforcer of the Queen, now that he's got a bum right hand.

Bryce MacLeod has devoted his life to caring for the earth and building sustainable living spaces that allow development to accentuate nature, not obliterate it. Thus, he's right torqued off when he sees his attractive but surly neighbor, Mal, tossing a bottle at the coyote taking refuge in the wetland that borders the gardens at the rear of the properties. What he doesn't know is that the "coyote" was a glamour-sporting Unseelie polluting their land, and Mal's about to open Bryce's eyes in more ways than one. Turns out Bryce is an undiscovered druid, unknowingly raised in the arts by his grandmother, who passed several years before. When Mal's brother-in-law David, from CUTIE AND THE BEAST, gets word of Bryce's latent powers he

enlists his dear friend, a Druid priestess, to help train Bryce.

And these life lessons are necessary because it seems the Unseelie and the Queen's consort are now after the both of them. To hasten Bryce's learning in all things supernatural, he and Mal are magically tethered to stay in close proximity. This makes things both awkward and sexy. For example, they got to share a bed, because the distance from the sofa to the bed exceeds their tether length. When they do that, well, it hurts, bad. Awkward because Mal's been recruited to aid another Fae in gaining his freedom from a different curse--and this dude, let's call him Steve, claims to have he'll have the power to undo Mal's curse once his own curse is lifted. But, Mal's sworn to secrecy over this opportunity, and he needs to connive and convince Bryce to walk into Faerie with him to complete Steve's tasks.

So, it's complicated, as is the attraction between Bryce and Mal. Mal's usually a dominant lover, but Bryce has Druid Voice which can compel most any person to do his bidding. Is their kinky-times the result of true desire, or compulsion? That was a real dilemma and one that both Mal and Bryce faced together and alone. They seem to burn the sheets up, but neither man wants to continue if it's not a real connection. Though, Mal's super charmed by Bryce's Mr. Fix-it nature, and how he helps Mal gain the ability to defend himself, and protect them both, from the Unseelie invaders. Their adventures to gain Steve's tokens are dangerous and revelatory; Bryce gains a lot of power and insight when he steps into Faerie. His mission to stave off the pollution in his world and the rot growing in Faerie seem to be linked through the Queen, and he's afraid Mal's chicanery on behalf of Steve will lead to destruction of both realms. Yet, he can't not trust Mal. He's developed a real rapport over the course of their adventures, and he wants to see Mal returned to his uncursed state, even if it means Mal walks away.

For me, this second book really brought a lot more of the supernatural and lore into the world-building. The first book was fun and quirky, but Faerie was a realm to avoid. This time we're in Faerie at least half of the book, so we get to understand the politics of the space, and the inter-relatedness of the human and Faerie realms. I did see the path the ending would take rather early, and was gratified that it came together in the manner I was anticipating. Mal and Bryce have some real discussions that lead to a strong bond, and a mutually beneficial relationship in the end. This book has more sexytimes than the first, and they were pretty randy. O.O I'm a fan, and I needed a fan. Speaking of fans, the third book features the third Kendrick brother, a revered bard of Faerie who sings in a band in the Human realm. Looking forward to seeing that stalwart soul find a new mate. I read a review copy provided by NetGalley.

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## **Ije the Devourer of Books says**

This was fun. I didn't enjoy it as much as book one but I do think this is shaping up to be a good series. This book focuses on the second of the fae brothers, Mal, who has been banished from the fae lands because of his assault on the Queen's consort. Never mind that the consort was about to kill David, Mal's brother in law, but there is always a price to pay for breaking fae law and now Mal has lost the use of his left hand and is in exile.

He isn't suffering too much. His brother Alun and his brother in law David keep him well fed and cared for. He has his own house in an eco friendly housing development, but it isn't where he wants to be and he wants the use of his hand back. Meanwhile he eats, drinks and walks around the wetlands near his eco friendly house and he also watches his hot but very weird environmental scientist neighbour Bryce.

And it is while watching Bryce go about his work in the wetlands that Mal notices that creatures from the fae

lands are meddling in the wetlands. He doesn't know what they are doing but he won't have them here poisoning the environment and so he chases them.

Bryce is rather surprised to find his handsome but laid back neighbour lobbing missiles at coyotes in the wetlands. He is rather annoyed to then discover that the missile is a beer bottle, but Bryce is about to get the shock of his life because Bryce is actually a Druid, but he doesn't know it yet. His meeting his neighbour leads to an encounter with a local Druid and he begins to see the whole world in a new light. He is excited and delighted to be able to experience the wetlands in this new way and he hopes it will enable him to stop the blight that seems to be happening, even if it does mean he is tethered to his new hot neighbour by an invisible link. A link that joins them together.

When Mal suggests that the two of them visit the unseelie kingdom to do a little snooping Bryce is excited. This is an opportunity to experience the world beyond science, the world of magic. What Bryce doesn't realise is that Mal is on a kind of quest, going into the unseelie to steal something requested by the mysterious Steven who claims that if Mal does this he will recover full use of his hand.

This was enjoyable and a good book two in the trilogy. Mal is the bad boy of the three brothers and with the loss of his hand his life is now on go slow, but there are still adventures to be had and it means he will get his hand back even if he has to drag his neighbour along with him. But Mal is surprised to find out that Bryce is more than meets the eye. Bryce is a Druid after all but he is also other things, adventurous, compassionate, fun, knowledgeable and really good looking.

It isn't long before Mal and Bryce are closer than the invisible link that binds them and as they explore who is poisoning the wetlands it is clear that the two of them have no intention of letting go.

This is an enjoyable story with a lot of humour. Both men have a snarky sense of humour and this leads to witty and fast dialogues between them. Both men have a sense of adventure and as they rush into tricky situations the reader gets to experience their adrenaline as they hunt down talismans and avoid being hunted themselves

There is a smooth continuity with book one which makes reading this a thoroughly enjoyable experience and a great series to follow. I think the stories should be read in order because there is an overarching story thread about the three brothers that seems to be emerging.

The author has written an imaginative and entertaining series with characters that are just so real, each one with a distinctive voice which comes to life as you read. Anyone who enjoys urban fantasy or paranormal mm fiction will enjoy this series and having read the first two books I am really looking forward to book three.

Copy provided by Riptide Publishing via Netgalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

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## **Book Gannet says**

2.5 stars.

The absolute joy of the first book in this series (Cutie and the Beast) for me was David. He was such a great character – fun, quirky and endearing – that it was impossible not to love the book. I liked Alun too, and the

plot was interesting, but it was really David that won me over. Alas, although this book does feature David in small doses, sadly, neither Bryce nor Mal come anywhere close to having his personality.

Bryce is okay. He's an eco-warrior of the strongest kind, he's caring about nature and firm in his opinions, but I never really warmed to him. Possibly because he doesn't know who he really is, so spends much of the book off-balance. He thinks he's meek and mild mannered, but when his inner druid is unleashed, he is anything but. He's strong and commanding and... I don't know, it didn't quite work for me.

Mal is a major jerk. Yes, he's railing at fate at the beginning, but he's spent most of his life skating by on charm and so isn't willing to work for anything, even now, when a little bit of effort might win him some of his life back. He'd rather lie and mostly cheat his way home. There were times I wanted to feel sympathetic towards him, but it was a struggle. Yeah, he has middle child syndrome and has lost a lot of his life, but he's also an ass.

There was also a big old dollop of D/s thrown in to serve as a sexy romance, and to be honest I found it uncomfortable. Mostly because it went against everything we'd ever known about Mal, colouring everything with a hefty dose of dubious consent and general unpleasantness. Bryce's own reaction when he found out what was going on helped a lot, but if there'd been maybe even the smallest hint of a weariness of always being in control from Mal before this point, I might have been able to accept it better. As such, since his issues only come up after the druid stuff appears, it just felt forced and never quite right.

Which is a shame, because the rest of the plot was actually pretty good. In fact, I found "Steve" far more interesting and his quest more compelling than Mal and Bryce. It was great to find out a little more about Faerie, the queen and the Unseelie court. I also liked seeing more of David and his forceful Aunt Cassie too. However, Gareth managed to be even more of a dick than Mal, which is saying something, and has left me kind of hesitant about the last book in this series. I'm not sure I want to read about Gareth getting a HEA, because I'm not sure he deserves it. Then again, it'll be interesting to be proved wrong.

So in all, this was a little disappointing, not nearly as cute, fun or enjoyable as the first and with a romance I'm still a little unhappy about. I do like the wider world, though I wish we'd learnt a bit more about Bryce's druid training, so I'll be keeping an eye out for more from this author in the future.

(ARC provided by the publisher via NetGalley.)

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## **Georgie says**

Fantasy is tough. You've got to give readers enough world-building to convince, but too much - as here - ruins the illusion. I think the best authors (Amy Rae Durreson or K.J. Charles) set up a very few immutable rules, and then weave & bounce the story round them. What lets TDND down is that, here, every "rule" turns out to have exceptions, or variations so that they become pointless after a while. The rules end up flexing to serve the "plot", not driving it.

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## **Eric says**

Thank you to NetGalley and Riptide for the ARC.

This is the second in the series *Fae Out of Water*. I enjoyed the first, *Cutie and the Beast*, very much, despite the cover and the title. I did not enjoy this one as much.

Firstly, I prefer it if series books work as stand-alones and I think it would be difficult to enjoy this book without first reading *Cutie*. Certainly I would have struggled with a lot of aspects of *The Druid Next Door* if I had not read the first in the series.

Secondly, I was uneasy about the underlying theme of domination and control. Although this was dressed up in the guise of the bond created between Mal and Bryce I thought it gave an unpleasant feel to their relationship.

Thirdly, I found a lot of the fae aspects very complicated and not all that interesting or entertaining although I did enjoy them in the previous book where they were less obtrusive.

The actual romance in this was pretty thin, sort of enemies to lovers, sort of opposites attract, sort of action man meets geek: but apart from the magical bond, what really was there between Bryce and Mal but Mal's sudden need to be dominated? I was not convinced.

This was easy to read and reasonably well-written, apart from overuse of the term "mate". However, it felt very long.

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## ? Todd says

**I absolutely loved this second book in the "*Fae Out of Water*" series**, even more so than book 1.

"*The Druid Next Door*" was chock full of **intrigue, humor, banter and several steamy bits**.

The world building groundwork laid in the first story allowed this story to be a bit **more complex** than the first, which mainly focused on the survival of the Achubyddion race. David, in particular.

However, in this book, **the fate of all of Faerie**, as well as the Outer World, was at stake.

As he was not previously part of the Fae world, environmental studies professor **Bryce MacLeod** was able to bring a fresh, new perspective to the story in regards to **balance, trust and control**.

Can there be light without dark? Good without evil? Trust without a healthy dose of self-doubt? Faith that the person you love will, ultimately, do the right thing?

The story also touched on **Mal's need to feel in control**, but also sometimes allow someone else to shoulder that burden, allowing him to **relinquish control**, at least for a little while.

When that subject came up, you've never heard someone chant so adamantly "**No BDSM, no BDSM, no BDSM, for the love of God, PLEASE!**" in your life, but that's exactly what I did. Thankfully, the book **didn't really go there**, though, for which I am eternally grateful.

I also very much enjoyed seeing the main cast of characters from the first book making appearances



throughout the story. They were present, without being omni-present and distracting from the new story.

The only genuine niggle about the story line was where, toward the end of the book, when the shit was well and truly hitting the fan, there was one part **Mal got truly cruel and nasty with Bryce**, which felt very out of place and uncharacteristic for him. I didn't feel that it added anything to the story, but diminished him a bit in my eyes.

As I mentioned, this book did rely heavily on the world building from the previous story, so **I would definitely not suggest attempting to read this one as a standalone**, which wasn't a hardship, as I enjoyed them both.

"The Druid Next Door" was **extremely entertaining, well-thought-out and action packed**, so I'd highly recommend it and rate it at around **4.5 stars**.

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*My ARC copy of the book was provided by the publisher through NetGalley in exchange for a fair, unbiased review.*

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## Calila says

Enjoyable for the most part. But I never fully engaged in the story. At least not as much as the first book. I enjoyed the dynamic between the MCs, but the quest aspect was a little meh. I'm happy with how it ended up though. I liked Steve for all his mysteriousness. Happy to see David/Alun/Granny again. Most heartbreaking thing was the poor creature who was separated from it's young. That alone earned Roderick a special place on my most hated book characters list.

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## Lisa The Novel Approach says

In the second novel of E.J. Russell's Fae Out of Water series, The Druid Next Door, we focus our attention on the bad boy of the three fae brothers, Mal. Now an outcast with a useless sword hand, Mal is indeed adrift and trying desperately to figure out who he really is, if not the Fae Queen's number one enforcer—a job which his brother Alun took back when he was restored from his curse in the first novel. Now Mal is the cursed one, having attacked the Queen's consort—an admittedly bad guy, but still not allowed—and Mal cannot be restored until he makes it right. So, without the use of his sword hand, and no longer allowed inside the fae kingdom, Mal has been set up in an eco-friendly house and, surprise-surprise, he hates it.

Those familiar with the first novel, Cutie and the Beast, will be happy to see David, Alun's husband, featured in this story as well, but it's really Mal who steals the show, as he should. Not only does he hate being crippled and cursed but also his neighbor is an uptight professor who takes his recycling and carbon footprint very seriously—oh, and he's a druid as well. Those familiar with these books will already be shaking their

heads, for we all know a druid is never to be trusted; it has something to do with the fact that they can push another to do their bidding by simply commanding them.

In a delicious twist that was both unexpected and so wonderfully written, tough guy Mal discovers a whole new side to himself and ends up liking the uptight druid way more than he ever expected. But all is not well in the Fae kingdom, and when a mysterious stranger offers Mal a bargain he cannot say no to, both he and his druid, Bryce, will need all their wits about them to stay alive and fulfill Mal's hasty promise before all is lost.

I am a real fan of this series. I find the humor spot on, and the brothers just delightfully full of themselves and yet oddly humble when they are taken down a peg or two by the most unlikely of lovers. I loved how Bryce was continually second guessing himself. Much like the character of David in the first novel in this series, Bryce is an unassuming man, one not used to being the focus of a gorgeous bad boy like Mal, and it's that bit of shyness that make these two work so well. Once again much of the action takes place in the alternate world of the Fae, this time introducing us to the Unseelie court and its seedy underbelly and unusual creatures.

What made this novel work was the growing realization Mal has that he never really meant to be just a tough guy. Running underneath that persona is a real need to throw off all that control and be a more submissive man. The real trick is for Mal to both understand that this has always been a deep-seated need of his, and to accept it as a strength and not a weakness. With anyone less gentle than Bryce, this self-discovery could have been crushing and overwhelming for Mal. As it is, both men must navigate a path neither has ever really been on before while combating the evil threatening to take over the fae world—no small task.

What didn't work so well was the glut of other world history that happened a few times in this story. Between the unusual language and names and places, the history lesson itself was rather dry and felt forced into the story, which slowed the pacing and had me nearly gnashing my teeth and saying "move on already" under my breath. I understood the need for Bryce to be educated about the world in which he suddenly found himself a key player, but I wish the author had somehow managed to weave it into the story a bit better rather than give us this sudden history dump. Other than that small glitch, I really had no complaints about this story—it's clever, exciting and sexy and, overall, a worthy addition to the series.

The Druid Next Door was an entertaining sequel and I look forward to the third story in this series.

Reviewed by Sammy for The Novel Approach

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## **JR says**

### **More Antics In The Fae World**

This story revolves around Mal Kendrick and his adventures with a Druid named Bryce. While this story did not have as much comedy as the first in the series, it was a fine rip roaring tale.

I really enjoy the world building. The characters are fascinating, and fun. I had a hard time putting it down.

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## Adrian Fridge says

I haven't read the first book, and I don't feel like I missed out. *The Druid Next Door* is a case of super interesting world building, great character dynamics, but lackluster romantic arc. I can't put my finger on *why* the romance didn't work for me, but I found myself skimming the sex scenes in order to get to the plot again. It's possibly due to the pacing because a lot of the sexy bits came immediately on the coattails of plot points that I was far more invested in. And the D/s element (which is awesome in its subversiveness) got marred by not having enough build-up, kinda like "surprise!" to both the characters and the reader, followed by bursts of exposition to explain where it came from. Really, the pacing of everything felt a bit off even though I still enjoyed the overall plot.

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## Nancy Wightman says

"The Druid Next Door" has some issues surrounding choice in the story, but my choice to read D/s stuff or not was removed since there was no warning about that plot element.

Not explaining why a two thousand year old is suddenly and inexplicably a slave to subservience is problematic. Mal is either acting because of a compulsion, or the logic behind his reactions is nonexistent. So on the one side, noncon and on the other, insta-slave!

The two MCs, Bryan and Mal, get to brush up on their manipulation skills, which Bryan will need since he's evidently a druid and will be manipulating people forever more. Mal "forgets" to mention a very important occasion to Bryan. Aunt Cassie appears as deus ex machina to manipulate Bryan and Mal into doing something. In this universe, manipulation appears to be the primary method for dealing with others. I dislike manipulative people, so not a very enjoyable read for me.

David and Alun, introduced in the first book of the series, remain likeable. Mal, is OK. Bryan is a prick. Aunt Cassie is a prick also. Must be the whole druid thing.

I won't be jumping to buy the third book

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