

PROLOGUE

How does one describe Artemis Fowl? Various psychiatrists have tried and failed. The main problem is Artemis's own intelligence. He bamboozles every test thrown at him. He has puzzled the greatest medical minds and sent many of them gibbering to their own hospitals.

There is no doubt that Artemis is a child prodigy. But why does someone of such brilliance dedicate himself to criminal activities? This is a question that can be answered by only one person. And he delights in not talking.

Perhaps the best way to create an accurate picture of Artemis is to tell the by now famous account of his first villainous venture. I have put together this report from first-hand interviews with the victims, and as the tale unfolds you will realize that this was not easy.

The story began several years ago at the dawn of

the twenty-first century. Artemis Fowl had devised a plan to restore his family's fortune. A plan that could topple civilizations and plunge the planet into a cross-species war.

He was twelve years old at the time ...

CHAPTER I: THE BOOK



H Chi Minh City in the summer. Sweltering by anyone's standards. Needless to say, Artemis Fowl would not have been willing to put up with such discomfort if something extremely important had not been at stake. Important to the plan.

Sun did not suit Artemis. He did not look well in it. Long hours indoors in front of the monitor had bleached the glow from his skin. He was white as a vampire and almost as testy in the light of day.

'I hope this isn't another wild-goose chase, Butler,' he said, his voice soft and clipped. 'Especially after Cairo.'

It was a gentle rebuke. They had travelled to Egypt on the word of Butler's informant.

'No, sir. I'm certain this time. Nguyen is a good man.'
'Hmm,' droned Artemis, unconvinced.

Passers-by would have been amazed to hear the large Eurasian refer to the boy as *sir*. This was, after all, the third



millennium. But this was no ordinary relationship, and these were no ordinary tourists.

They were sitting outside a kerbside cafe on Dong Khai Street, watching the local teenagers circle the square on mopeds.

Nguyen was late, and the pathetic patch of shade provided by the umbrella was doing little to improve Artemis's mood. But this was just his daily pessimism. Beneath the sulk was a spark of hope. Could this trip actually yield results? Would they find the Book? It was too much to hope for.

A waiter scurried to their table.

'More tea, sirs?' he asked, head bobbing furiously.

Artemis sighed. 'Spare me the theatrics and sit down.'

The waiter turned instinctively to Butler, who was, after all, the adult.

'But, sir, I am the waiter.'

Artemis tapped the table for attention.

'You are wearing handmade loafers, a silk shirt and three gold signet rings. Your English has a tinge of Oxford about it and your nails have the soft sheen of the recently manicured. You are not a waiter. You are our contact, Nguyen Xuan, and you have adopted this pathetic disguise to discreetly check for weaponry.'

Nguyen's shoulders sagged. 'It is true. Amazing.'

'Hardly. A ragged apron does not a waiter make.'

Nguyen sat, pouring some mint tea into a tiny china cup.



‘Let me fill you in on the weapons status,’ continued Artemis. ‘I am unarmed. But Butler here, my ... ah ... butler, has a Sig Sauer in his shoulder holster, two shrike throwing knives in his boots, a derringer two-shot up his sleeve, garrotte wire in his watch and three stun grenades concealed in various pockets. Anything else, Butler?’

‘The cosh, sir.’

‘Oh yes. A good old ball-bearing cosh stuffed down his shirt.’

Nguyen brought the cup trembling to his lips.

‘Don’t be alarmed, Mister Xuan,’ smiled Artemis. ‘The weapons will not be used on you.’

Nguyen didn’t seem reassured.

‘No,’ continued Artemis. ‘Butler could kill you a hundred different ways without the use of his armoury. Though I’m sure one would be quite sufficient.’

Nguyen was by now thoroughly spooked. Artemis generally had that effect on people. A pale adolescent speaking with the authority and vocabulary of a powerful adult. Nguyen had heard the name Fowl before – who hadn’t in the international underworld? – but he’d assumed he’d be dealing with Artemis Senior, not this boy. Though the word ‘boy’ hardly seemed to do this gaunt individual justice. And the giant, Butler. It was obvious that he could snap a man’s backbone like a twig with those mammoth hands. Nguyen was starting to think that no amount of money was worth another



minute in this strange company.

‘And now to business,’ said Artemis, placing a micro recorder on the table. ‘You answered our web advertisement.’

Nguyen nodded, suddenly praying his information was accurate.

‘Yes, Mister ... Master Fowl. What you’re looking for ... I know where it is.’

‘Really? And am I supposed to take your word for this? You could be walking me straight into an ambush. My family is not without enemies.’

Butler snatched a mosquito out of the air beside his employer’s ear.

‘No, no,’ said Nguyen, reaching for his wallet. ‘Here, look.’

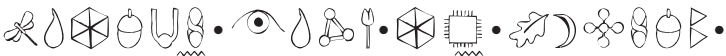
Artemis studied the Polaroid. He willed his heart to maintain a calm beat. It seemed promising, but anything could be faked these days with a PC and flatbed scanner. The picture showed a hand reaching from layered shadows. A mottled green hand.

‘Hmm,’ he murmured. ‘Explain.’

‘This woman. She is a healer, near Tu Do Street. She works in exchange for rice wine. All the time, drunk.’

Artemis nodded. It made sense. The drinking. One of the few consistent facts his research had unearthed. He stood, smoothing the creases from his white polo shirt.

‘Very well. Lead on, Mister Nguyen.’



Nguyen wiped the sweat from his stringy moustache.

‘Information only. That was the agreement. I don’t want any curses on my head.’

Butler expertly gripped the informant behind the neck.

‘I’m sorry, Mister Nguyen, but the time when you had a choice in matters is long past.’

Butler steered the protesting Vietnamese to a rented four-wheel drive that was hardly necessary on the flat streets of Ho Chi Minh City, or Saigon as the locals still called it, but Artemis preferred to be as insulated from civilians as possible.

The jeep inched forward at a painfully slow rate, made all the more excruciating by the anticipation building in Artemis’s chest. He could suppress it no longer. Could they at last be at the end of their quest? After six false alarms across three continents, could this wine-sodden healer be the gold at the end of the rainbow? Artemis almost chuckled. Gold at the end of the rainbow. He’d made a joke. Now there’s something that didn’t happen every day.

The mopeds parted like fish in a giant shoal. There seemed to be no end to the crowds. Even the alleyways were full to bursting with vendors and hagglers. Cooks dropped fish heads into woks of hissing oil, and urchins threaded their way underfoot, searching for unguarded valuables. Others sat in the shade, wearing out their thumbs on Gameboys.



Nguyen was sweating right through his khaki top. It wasn't the humidity, he was used to that. It was this whole cursed situation. He should've known better than to mix magic and crime. He made a silent promise that if he got out of this, he would change his ways. No more answering shady Internet requests, and certainly no more consorting with the sons of European crime lords.

The jeep could go only so far. Eventually the side streets grew too narrow for the four-wheel drive. Artemis turned to Nguyen. 'It seems we must proceed on foot, Mister Nguyen. Run if you like, but expect a sharp and fatal pain between your shoulder blades.'

Nguyen glanced into Butler's eyes. They were a deep blue, almost black. There was no mercy in those eyes. 'Don't worry,' he said. 'I won't run.'

They climbed down from the vehicle. A thousand suspicious eyes followed their progress along the steaming alley. An unfortunate pickpocket attempted to steal Butler's wallet. The manservant broke the man's fingers without looking down. They were given a wide berth after that.

The alley narrowed to a rutted lane. Sewage and drainpipes fed directly on to the muddy surface. Cripples and beggars huddled on rice-mat islands. Most of the residents of this lane had nothing to spare, with the exception of three.

'Well?' demanded Artemis. 'Where is she?'



Nguyen jabbed a finger towards a black triangle beneath a rusted fire escape.

‘There. Under there. She never comes out. Even to buy rice spirits, she sends a runner. Now, can I go?’

Artemis didn’t bother answering. Instead he picked his way across the puddled lane to the lee of the fire escape. He could discern furtive movements in the shadows.

‘Butler, could you hand me the goggles?’

Butler plucked a set of night-vision glasses from his belt and placed them in Artemis’s outstretched hand. The focus motor buzzed to suit the light.

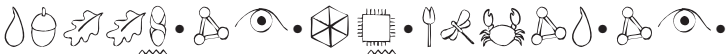
Artemis fixed the glasses to his face. Everything became radioactive green. Taking a deep breath, he turned his gaze to the squirming shadows. Something squatted on a raffia mat, shifting uneasily in the almost non-existent light. Artemis fine-tuned the focus. The figure was small, abnormally so, and wrapped in a filthy shawl. Empty spirit jugs were half-buried in the mud around her. One forearm poked from the material. It seemed green. But then, so did everything else.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I have a proposition for you.’

The figure’s head wobbled sleepily.

‘Wine,’ she rasped, her voice like nails on a school board. ‘Wine, English.’

Artemis smiled. The gift of tongues, aversion to light. Check, check.



‘Irish, actually. Now, about my proposition?’

The healer shook a bony finger craftily. ‘Wine first. Then talk.’

‘Butler?’

The bodyguard reached into a pocket and drew out a half-pint of the finest Irish whiskey. Artemis took the bottle and held it teasingly beyond the shadows. He barely had time to remove his goggles when the claw-like hand darted from the gloom to snatch the whiskey. A mottled green hand. There was no doubt.

Artemis swallowed a triumphant grin.

‘Pay our friend, Butler. In full. Remember, Mister Nguyen, this is between us. You don’t want Butler to come back, do you?’

‘No, no, Master Fowl. My lips are sealed.’

‘They had better be. Or Butler will seal them permanently.’

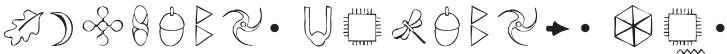
Nguyen skipped off down the alley, so relieved to be alive that he didn’t even bother counting the sheaf of US currency. Most unlike him. In any event, it was all there. All twenty thousand dollars. Not bad for half an hour’s work.

Artemis turned back to the healer.

‘Now, madam, you have something that I want.’

The healer’s tongue caught a drop of alcohol at the corner of her mouth.

‘Yes, Irish. Sore head. Bad tooth. I heal.’



Artemis replaced the night-vision goggles and squatted to her level.

‘I am perfectly healthy, madam, apart from a slight dust-mite allergy, and I don’t think even you can do anything about that. No. What I want from you is your Book.’

The hag froze. Bright eyes glinted from beneath the shawl.

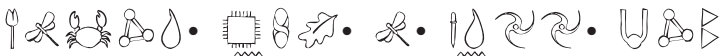
‘Book?’ she said cautiously. ‘I don’t know about no book. I am healer. You want book, go to library.’

Artemis sighed with exaggerated patience. ‘You are no healer. You are a sprite, p’shóg, fairy, ka-dalun. Whichever language you prefer to use. And I want your Book.’

For a long moment the creature said nothing, then she threw back the shawl from her forehead. In the green glow of the night-vision goggles, her features leaped at Artemis like a Hallowe’en mask. The fairy’s nose was long and hooked under two slitted golden eyes. Her ears were pointed, and the alcohol addiction had melted her skin like putty.

‘If you know about the Book, human,’ she said slowly, fighting the numbing effects of the whiskey, ‘then you know about the magic I have in my fist. I can kill you with a snap of my fingers!’

Artemis shrugged. ‘I think not. Look at you. You are near dead. The rice wine has dulled your senses. Reduced to healing warts. Pathetic. I am here to save you, in return for the Book.’



‘What could a human want with our Book?’

‘That is no concern of yours. All you need to know are your options.’

The sprite’s pointed ears quivered. Options?

‘One, you refuse to give us the Book and we go home, leaving you to rot in this sewer.’

‘Yes,’ said the fairy. ‘I choose this option.’

‘Ah no. Don’t be so eager. If we leave without the Book, you will be dead in a day.’

‘A day! A day!’ The healer laughed. ‘I will outlive you by a century. Even fairies tethered to the human realm can survive the ages.’

‘Not with half a pint of holy water inside them,’ said Artemis, tapping the now empty whiskey bottle.

The fairy blanched, then screamed, a high keening horrible sound.

‘Holy water! You have murdered me, human.’

‘True,’ admitted Artemis. ‘It should start to burn any minute now.’

The fairy poked her stomach tentatively. ‘The second option?’

‘Listening now, are we? Very well then. Option two. You give me the Book for thirty minutes only. Then I return your magic to you.’

The sprite’s jaw dropped. ‘Return my magic? Not possible.’

‘Oh but it is. I have in my possession two ampoules.



One, a vial of spring water from the fairy well sixty metres below the ring of Tara – possibly the most magical place on earth. This will counteract the holy water.’

‘And the other?’

‘The other is a little shot of man-made magic. A virus that feeds on alcohol, mixed with a growth reagent. It will flush every drop of rice wine from your body, remove the dependence and even bolster your failing liver. It’ll be messy, but after a day you’ll be zipping around as though you were a thousand years old again.’

The sprite licked her lips. To be able to rejoin the People? Tempting.

‘How do I know to trust you, human? You have tricked me once already.’

‘Good point. Here’s the deal. I give you the water on faith. Then, after I’ve had a look at the Book, you get the booster. Take it or leave it.’

The fairy considered. The pain was already curling around her abdomen. She thrust out her wrist.

‘I take it.’

‘I thought you might. Butler?’

The giant manservant unwrapped a soft Velcroed case containing a syringe gun and two vials. He loaded the clear one, shooting it into the sprite’s clammy arm. The fairy stiffened momentarily, and then relaxed.

‘Strong magic,’ she breathed.

‘Yes. But not as strong as your own will be when I give



you the second injection. Now, the Book.'

The sprite reached into the folds of her filthy robe, rummaging for an age. Artemis held his breath. This was it. Soon the Fowls would be great again. A new empire would rise, with Artemis Fowl the Second at its head.

The fairy woman withdrew a closed fist.

'No use to you anyway. Written in the old tongue.'

Artemis nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

She opened her knobby fingers. Lying in her palm was a tiny golden volume the size of a matchbox.

'Here, human. Thirty of your minutes. No more.'

Butler took the tiny tome reverentially. The bodyguard activated a compact digital camera and began photographing each wafer-thin page of the Book. The process took several minutes. When he was finished, the entire volume was stored on the camera's chip. Artemis preferred not to take chances with information. Airport security equipment had been known to wipe many a vital disk. So he instructed his aide to transfer the file to his portable phone and from there e-mail it to Fowl Manor in Dublin. Before the thirty minutes were up, the file containing every symbol in the Fairy Book was sitting safely in the Fowl server.

Artemis returned the tiny volume to its owner.

'Nice doing business with you.'

The sprite lurched to her knees. 'The other potion, human?'



marksmanship, a customized blend of martial arts, emergency medicine and information technology. If, at the end of their training, there was not a Fowl to guard, then the Butlers were eagerly snapped up as bodyguards for various royal personages, generally in Monaco or Saudi Arabia.

Once a Fowl and a Butler were put together, they were paired for life. It was a demanding job, and lonely, but the rewards were handsome if you survived to enjoy them. If not, then your family received a six-figure settlement plus a monthly pension.

The current Butler had been guarding young Master Artemis for twelve years, since the moment of his birth. And, though they adhered to the age-old formalities, they were much more than master and servant. Artemis was the closest thing Butler had to a friend, and Butler was the closest Artemis had to a father, albeit one who obeyed orders.

Butler held his tongue until they were aboard the Heathrow connection from Bangkok, then he had to ask.

‘Artemis?’

Artemis looked up from the screen of his PowerBook. He was getting a head start on the translation.

‘Yes?’

‘The sprite. Why didn’t we simply keep the Book and leave her to die?’

‘A corpse is evidence, Butler. My way, the People will



have no reason to be suspicious.’

‘But the sprite?’

‘I hardly think she will confess to showing humans the Book. In any case, I mixed a slight amnesiac into her second injection. When she finally wakes up, the last week will be a blur.’

Butler nodded appreciatively. Always two steps ahead, that was Master Artemis. People said he was a chip off the old block. They were wrong. Master Artemis was a brand-new block, the likes of which had never been seen before.

Doubts assuaged, Butler returned to his copy of *Guns and Ammo*, leaving his employer to unravel the secrets of the universe.

