

Coming from Eoin Colfer

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The Fowl Twins

## Prologue

There are things to know about the world.

Surely you realize that what you know is not everything there is to know. In spite of humankind's ingenuity, there are shadows too dark for your kind to fully illuminate. The very mantle of our planet is one example; the ocean floor is another. And in these shadows we live. The Hidden Ones. The magical creatures who have removed ourselves from the destructive human orbit. Once, we fairies ruled the surface as humans do now, as bacteria will in the future, but for now, we are content for the most part to exist in our underground civilization. For ten thousand years, fairies have used our magics and technology to shield ourselves from prying eyes, and to heal the beleaguered earth mother, Danu. We fairies have a saying that is writ large in golden tiles on the altar mosaic of the Hey Hey Temple, and the saying is this: WE DIG DEEP AND WE ENDURE.

But there is always one maverick who does not care a fig for fairy mosaics and is hell bent on reaching the surface. Usually this maverick is a troll. And specifically in this case, the maverick is a troll who will shortly and for a ridiculous reason be named Whistle Blower.

For here begins the second documented cycle of Fowl Adventures.

## Chapter 1

### Meet the Antagonists

The Baddie: Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye. The Duke of Scilly.

If a person wants to murder the head of a family, then it is very important that the entire family also be done away with, or the distraught survivors might very well decide to take bloody revenge or at least make a detailed report at the local police station. There is, in fact, an entire chapter on this exact subject in *The Criminal Mastermind's Almanac*, an infamous guidebook for aspiring ruthless criminals by Professor Wulf Bane, which was turned down by every reputable publisher but is available on demand from the author. The actual chapter name is: *Kill Them All. Even the Pets*. A gruesome title that would put most normal people off from reading it, but Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, Duke of Scilly, was not a normal person, and the juiciest phrases in his copy of *The Criminal Mastermind's Almanac* were marked in pink highlighter, and the book itself was dedicated as follows:

*To Teddy*

*From one criminal mastermind to another*

*Don't be a stranger*

*Wulfy*

Lord Bleedham-Drye had dedicated most of his one hundred and fifty years on this green earth to staying *on* this green earth as long as possible as opposed to being buried beneath it. In television interviews he credited his youthful appearance to yoga and fish oil, but in actual fact, Lord Teddy had spent much of his inherited fortune traveling the globe in

search of any potions and pills, legal or not, that would extend his lifespan. As a roving ambassador for the Crown, Lord Teddy could easily find an excuse to visit the most far-flung corners of the planet in the name of culture, when in fact he was keeping his eyes open for anything that grew, swam, waddled, or crawled that would help him stay alive for even a minute longer than his allotted four score and ten.

So far in his quest, Lord Teddy had tried every so-called *eternal youth therapy* for which there was even the flimsiest of supporting evidence. He had, among other things, ingested tons of willow bark extract, swallowed millions of antioxidant tablets, slurped gallons of therapeutic arsenic, injected the cerebrospinal fluid of the endangered Madagascan lemur, devoured countless helpings of Southeast Asian liver fluke spaghetti, and spent almost a month suspended over an active volcanic rift in Iceland, funneling the restorative volcanic gas up the leg holes of his linen shorts. These and other extreme practices, never ever to be tried at home, had indeed kept Bleedham-Drye breathing and vital thus far, but there had been side effects. The lemur fluid had caused his forearms to elongate so that his hands dangled below his knees. The arsenic had paralyzed the left corner of his mouth so that it was forever curled in a sardonic sneer, and the volcanic embers had scalded his bottom, forcing Teddy to walk in a slightly bow-legged manner as though trying to keep his balance in rough seas. Bleedham-Drye considered these secondary effects a small price to pay for his wrinkle-free complexion, luxuriant mane of hair, and spade of black beard, and of course the vigor that helped him endure lengthy treks and safaris in the hunt for any rumored life-extenders.

But Lord Teddy was all too aware that he had yet to hit the jackpot, therapeutically speaking, regarding his quest for an unreasonably extended life. It was true that he had eked out a few extra decades, but what was that in the face of eternity? There were jellyfish that, as a matter of course, lived longer than he had. Jellyfish! They didn't even have brains, for heaven's sake.

Teddy found himself frustrated, which he hated, because stress gave a fellow wrinkles.

A new direction was called for.

No more penny-ante half measures, cribbing a year here and a season there.

*I must find the fountain of youth*, he resolved one evening while lying in his brass tub of electric eels, which he had heard did wonders for a chap's circulation.

As it turned out, Lord Bleedham-Drye did find the fountain of youth, but it was not a fountain in the traditional sense of the word, as the life-giving liquid was contained in the venom of a mythological creature. And the family he would possibly have to murder to access it was none other than the Fowls of Dublin, Ireland, who were not overly fond of being murdered.

This is how the entire regrettable episode kicked off:

Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye reasoned that the time-honored way of doing a thing was to ask the fellows who had already done the thing how they had managed to do it, and so he set out to interview the oldest people on earth. This was not as easy as it might sound, even in the era of worldwide webbery and marvelous miniature communication devices, for many aged folks do not advertise the fact that they have passed the century mark lest they be plagued by health magazine journalists or telegrams from various queens. But nevertheless, over the course of five years, Lord Teddy managed to track down several of these elusive oldsters, finding them all to be either tediously virtuous, which was of little use to him, or lucky, which could neither be counted on nor stolen. And such was the way of it until he located an Irish monk who was working in an elephant sanctuary in California, of all places, having long since given up on helping humans. Brother Colman looked not a day over fifty, and was, in fact, in remarkable shape for a man who claimed to almost five hundred years old.

Once Lord Teddy had slipped a liberal dose of sodium pentothal into the Irishman's tea, Brother Colman told a very interesting story of how the holy well on Dalkey Island had come by its healing waters when he was a monk there in the fifteenth century.

Teddy did not believe a word of it, but the name *Dalkey* did sound an alarm bell somewhere in the back of his mind. A bell he muted for the present.

*The fool is raving, he thought. I gave him too much truth serum.*

With the so-called monk in a chemical daze, Bleedham-Drye performed a couple of simple verification checks, not really expecting anything exciting.

First he unbuttoned the man's shirt, and found to his surprise that Brother Colman's chest was latticed with ugly scars, which would be consistent with the man's story but was nothing like proof.

*The idiot might have been gored by one of his own elephants,* Teddy realized, but Lord Bleedham-Drye had seen many wounds in his time and never anything this dreadful on a living body.

*There ain't no fooling my second test,* thought Teddy, and with a flash of his pruning shears snipped off Brother Colman's left pinky. After all, radiocarbon dating never lied.

It would be several weeks before the results came back from the Advanced Accelerator Mass Spectrometer laboratory, and by that time Teddy was back in England once again, lounging dejectedly in his bath of electric eels in the family seat: Childerblaine House, on the island of St. George in the Scilly Isles. Interestingly enough, the island had been so named because in one of the various versions of the St. George legend, the beheaded dragon's body had been dumped into Cornish waters and drifted out to the Scilly Isles, where it settled on a submerged rock and fossilized, which provided a romantic explanation for the small island's curved spine of ridges.

When Lord Teddy came upon the envelope from AAMS in his pile of mail, he sliced it open listlessly, fully expecting that the Brother Colman excursion had been a big waste of precious time and shrinking fortune.

But the results on that single page made Teddy sit up so quickly that several eels were slopped from the tub.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed, his halo of dark hair curled and vibrating from the eel charge. “I’m off to Dalkey Island, begorrah.”

The laboratory report was brief and cursory in the way of scientists:

*The supplied specimen, it read, is in the four-hundred- to five-hundred-year-old age range.*

Lord Teddy outfitted himself in his standard apparel of high boots, riding breeches, and a tweed hunting jacket, all topped off with his old commando beret. And he loaded up his wooden speedboat for what the police these days like to call a stakeout. It was only when he was halfway across the Irish Sea in the Juventas that Lord Teddy realized why the name Dalkey sounded so familiar. The Fowl fellow hung his hat there.

Artemis Fowl.

A force to be reckoned with. Teddy had heard a few stories about Artemis Fowl, and even more about his son Artemis II.

*Rumors, he thought now. Rumors, hearsay, and balderdash.*

And even if the stories were true, the Duke of Scilly’s determination never wavered.

*I shall have that troll’s venom, he thought, opening the V12 throttles wide. And I shall live forever.*

The Goodies (relatively speaking)

Dalkey Island, Dublin, Ireland. Three Weeks Later.

Behold Myles and Beckett Fowl, passing a late summer evening on the family's private beach. If you look past the superficial differences: wardrobe, spectacles, hairstyle, and so on, you will notice that the boys' facial features are very similar but not absolutely identical. This is because they are dizygotic twins, and were, in fact, the first recorded non-identical twins to be born conjoined, albeit only from wrist to little finger. The attending surgeon separated them with a flash of her scalpel, and neither twin suffered any ill-effect, apart from matching pink scars that run along the outside of their palms. Myles and Beckett often touch scars to comfort each other. It is their version of a high-five, which they call a wrist bump. This habit is both touching and slightly gross.

Apart from their features, the paternal twins are, as one tutor noted, "very different animals." Myles has an IQ of 170 and is fanatically neat, while Beckett's IQ is a mystery, because he chewed the test into pulpy blobs from which he made a sculpture of a hamster in a bad mood, which he titled *Angry Hamster*.

Also, Beckett is far from neat. In fact, his parents were forced to take up Mindfulness just to calm themselves down whenever they attempted to put some order on his catastrophically untidy side of the bedroom.

It was obvious from their early days in a double cradle that the twins did not share similar personalities. When they were teething, Beckett would chew pacifiers ragged, while Myles chose to nibble thoughtfully on the eraser end of a pencil. As a toddler, Myles liked to emulate his big brother Artemis by wearing tiny black suits that had to be custom made. Beckett preferred to run free as nature intended, and when he finally did agree to wear something, it was plastic training pants in which he used to store his pet goldfish, Gloop (named for the sound it made, or at least the goldfish was blamed for the sound).



As the brothers grew older, the differences between them became more obvious. Myles became ever more fastidious, 3D-printing a fresh suit every day and taming the wild, jet black Fowl hair with a seaweed-based gel that both moisturized the scalp and nourished the brain, while Beckett made zero attempt to tame the wild blond curls that he had inherited from his mother's side of the family and sulked when he was forced to wear any clothes, with the exception of the only article he never removed, which was the golden necktie that had once been his fish Gloop. Myles had cured and laminated the goldfish when it passed away, and Beckett wore it always as a keepsake. This habit was both touching and extremely gross.

Perhaps you have heard of the Fowl family of Ireland? They are quite notorious in certain shadowy circles. The twins' father was once the world's pre-eminent crime lord, but he had a change of heart and reinvented himself as a champion of the environment. Myles and Beckett's older brother, Artemis 2<sup>nd</sup>, had also been quite the criminal virtuoso, hatching schemes involving massive amounts of gold bullion, fairy police forces, and time travel, to name but a few. Fortunately for more or less everyone except aliens, Artemis had recently turned his attention to outer space, and was currently six months into a five-year mission to Mars in a revolutionary self-winding rocket ship that he had built in the barn. By the time the world's various authorities, including NASA, ASCO, ALR, CSNA and UKSA, had caught wind of the project and were marshaling their objections, Artemis had already passed by the moon.

The twins themselves were to have many adventures, some of which would kill them (though not permanently), but this particular episode began a week after their eleventh birthday. Myles and Beckett were walking along the stony beach of Dalkey Island, where the Fowl family had recently moved to Villa Éco, a newly built, state-of-the art, environmentally-friendly house attached to a renovated Martello tower. The twins' father had donated Fowl

Manor, the rambling ancestral home, to a co-operative of organic farmers, declaring, *It is time for the Fowls to embrace planet Earth.*

On this summer evening, the twins' mother was delivering a lecture in Dublin's National Library with her husband in attendance. Some years previously, Angeline had suffered from what Shakespeare called *the grief that does not speak*, and, in an effort to understand her depression, had completed a mental health doctorate at Trinity College and now spoke at conferences around the world. The twins were being watched over by the house itself, which had an Artemis-designed Nano Artificial Neural Network Intelligence system, or NANNI, to keep an electronic eye on them.

Myles was collecting seaweed for his homemade hair gel, and Beckett was trying to learn seal language from a dolphin.

"We must be away, brother," Myles said. "Bedtime. Our young bodies require ten hours of sleep to ensure proper brain development."

Beckett lay on a rock and clapped his hands. "Arf," he said. "Arf."

Myles tugged at his suit jacket and frowned behind the frames of his thick-rimmed glasses. "Beck, are you attempting to speak in seal language?"

"Arf," said Beckett, who was wearing knee-length cargo shorts and his gold necktie.

"That is not even a seal. That is a dolphin."

"Dolphins are smart," said Beckett. "They know things."

"That is true, brother, but a dolphin's vocal chords make it impossible for them to speak in the language of a seal. Why don't you simply learn the dolphin's language?"

Beckett beamed. "Yes! You are a genius, brother. Step one, swap barks for whistles."

Myles sighed. Now his twin was whistling at a dolphin, and they would once again fail get to bed on time.

Myles stuffed a handful of seaweed into his bucket. “Please, brother. My brain will never reach optimum productivity if we don’t leave now.” He tapped an earpiece in his right ear. “NANNI, help me out. Please send a dro-bot to carry my brother home.”

“Negative,” said the house system in a strangely accented female voice, which Beckett instinctively trusted for some reason. “No flying Beckett home. Mother’s orders.”

Myles could not understand why his mother refused to authorize short-range flights for Beckett. In tests, the drone/robots had only dropped the dummy Becketts twice, but his mother insisted the drobots were for emergencies only.

“Beckett!” he called. “If you agree to come back to the house, I will tell you a story before bed.”

Beckett flipped over on the rock. “Which story?” he asked.

“How about the thrilling discovery of the Schwarzschild radius, which led directly to the identification of black holes?” suggested Myles.

Beckett was not impressed. “How about the adventures of Gloop and Angry Hamster in the Dimension of Fire?”

Now it was Myles’s turn to be unimpressed. “Beck, that’s preposterous. Fish and hamsters do not even share the same environment. And neither could survive in a dimension of fire.”

“You’re preposterous,” said Beckett and went back to his whistling.

*The crown of Beck’s head will be burned by the evening UV rays,* thought Myles.

“Very well,” he said. “Gloop and Angry Hamster it is.”

“And dolphin,” said Beckett. “He wants to be in the story, too.”

Myles sighed. “Dolphin, too.”

“Hooray!” said Beckett skipping across the rocks. “Story time. Wrist bump?”

Myles raised his palm for a bump and thought, *If I'm the smart one, why do we always do exactly what Beck wants us to?*

Myles asked himself this question a lot.

“Now, brother,” he said, “please say goodnight to your friend and let us be off.”

Beckett turned to do as he was told, but only because it suited him.

If Beckett had not turned to bid the dolphin farewell, then perhaps the entire series of increasingly bizarre events that followed might have been avoided. There would have been no nefarious villain, no ridiculously named trolls, no shadowy organizations, no interrogations by a nun (which are known in the intelligence community as nunterrogations, believe it or not), and a definite lack of imaginary head lice. But Myles did turn, precisely two seconds after a troll had surged upward through the loose shale at the water's edge and collapsed onto the beach.

Fairies are defined as being: *small, humanoid, supernatural creatures possessed of magical powers*. A definition that applies neatly to elves, gnomes, sprites, and pixies. It is, however, a human definition, and therefore as incomplete as human knowledge on the subject. The fairy definition of themselves is more concise can be found in the fairy *Book*, which is their constitution, so to speak, the original of which is behind crystal in the Hey Hey Temple in Haven City, the subterranean fairy capitol. It states:

Fairy, faerie, or faery: *A creature of the earth. Often magical. Never wilfully destructive.*

No mention of small or humanoid. It may surprise humans to know that they themselves were once considered fairies and did indeed possess some magics until many of them stepped off the path and became extremely wilfully destructive, and so magic was bred

out of humans over the centuries, until there was nothing left but an empath here and there, and the occasional telekinetic.

Trolls are classed as fairies by fairies themselves but would not be so categorized by the human definition as they are not magical, unless their longevity can be considered supernatural. They are, however, quite feral and only slightly more sentient than the average hound. Another interesting point about trolls is that fairy scholars of their pathologies have realized that trolls are highly susceptible to chemical-induced psychoses, while also tending to nest in chemically polluted sites, in much the same way as humans are attracted to the sugar that poisons them. The toxins ingested by trolls often results in uncharacteristically aggressive behavior and uncontrollable rage. Again, similar to humans experiencing sugar deprivation.

But this troll was not sick, sluggish, or aggressive—in fact, he was in remarkable physical health, all pumping limbs and scything tusks, as he followed his second most powerful instinct:

*REACH THE SURFACE.*

Trolls' most powerful instinct being *EAT GOBBLE DEVOUR.*

This particular troll's bloodstream was clear because he had never swum across a chromium-saturated lake, and he had never carved out his burrow in mercury-rich soil. Nevertheless, healthy or not, this specimen would never have made it to the surface had the Earth's crust under Dalkey Island not been exceptionally thin, a mere mile and a quarter, in fact. This troll was able to squeeze himself into fissures that would have made a claustrophobe faint, and wriggle his way to the open air. It took the creature four sun cycles of agonizingly slow progress to break through, and you might think the cosmos would grant the fellow a little good fortune after such Herculean efforts, but no, he had to pop out right between the Fowl Twins and Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye, who was lurking on a mainland balcony and spying on Dalkey Island through a telescopic monocular, thus providing the third

corner of an irresistible triangular vortex of fate, which, considering the personalities and intellects involved, could not result in anything but skullduggery.

So, the troll emerged, joint by joint, reborn to the atmosphere, gnashing and clawing. And in spite of his almost utter exhaustion, some spark of triumph drove him to his feet for a celebratory howl, which was when Lord Teddy, for diabolical reasons that shall presently be explored, shot him.

Once the shot had been fired, the entire troll-related rigmarole really got rigmarolling, because the microsecond that NANNI's sensors detected the bullet's sonic boom, she upgraded her alert status from BEIGE to RED, sounded the alarm klaxon, and set the security system to SIEGE mode. Two armored drobots were dispatched from their charging plates to extract the twins, and forty decoy flares were launched from mini-mortar ports in the roof as countermeasures to any infrared guided missiles that may or may not be inbound.

This left the twins with approximately twenty seconds of earthbound liberty before they would be whisked into the evening sky and secured in the eco-house's ultra-secret safe room, blueprints of which did not appear on any set of plans.

A lot can happen in twenty seconds. And a lot did happen.

Firstly, let us discuss the marksman. When I say Lord Teddy shot the troll, this is possibly misleading, even though it is accurate. He did shoot the troll, but not with the usual explosive variety of bullet, which would have penetrated the troll's hide and quite possibly killed the beast through sheer shock trauma. That was the absolute last thing Lord Teddy wanted, as it would void his entire plan. This particular bullet was a gas-powered cellophane virus slug that was being developed by the Japanese munitions company Myishi and was not yet officially on the market. Known as "shrink wrappers" by the development team, the CV bullet released its virus on impact and effectively wrapped the target in a coating of

cellophane that was porous enough to allow shallow breathing but had been known to crack a rib or two, and did, in fact, crack four of the troll's ribs and both his femurs.

And then there is the physicality of the troll itself. There are many breeds of troll. From the ten-foot tall behemoth, Antarctic Blue, to the silent jungle killer, the Amazon Heel Claw. The troll on Dalkey Island beach was a one-in-a-million anomaly. In form and proportion he was the perfect Ridgeback, with the distinctive thick comb of spiked hair that ran from brow to tail bone, and the blue-veined gray fur on his chest and arms all present and correct. But this creature was no massive predator. In fact, he was a rather tiny one. Standing at barely eight inches high, the troll was one of a relatively new variety that had begun to pop up in recent millennia since fairies were forced deep into the earth's mantle. Much in the same way as Schnauzer dogs had miniature counterparts known as Toy Schnauzers, some troll breeds also had their shrunken version, and this troll was one of perhaps half a dozen Toy Ridgebacks in existence and the first to ever reach the surface.

Not at all what Lord Teddy had been expecting. Having seen Brother Colman's scars, the duke had imagined his quarry to be somewhat larger.

When the little troll's heat signature had popped up in his eyepiece like an oversized Jelly Baby, the duke had exclaimed, "Good heavens! Could that little fellow be my troll?"

It certainly matched Brother Colman's description, except for the dimensions. In truth, the duke couldn't help feeling a little let down. He had been expecting something more substantial. That diminutive creature didn't look like it could manufacture enough venom to keep a hamster alive.

"Nevertheless," muttered the duke, "since I've come all this way . . ."

And he squeezed the trigger on his sniper's rifle.

The supersonic cellophane slug made a distinctive warbling noise as it sped through the air, sounding like a juvenile Swiss yodeler, and impacted the Toy Ridgeback square in the

solar plexus, releasing its payload in a sparkling globule that quickly sprawled over the tiny creature, wrapping it in a restrictive layer of cellophane before it could do much more than squeak in indignation.

Beckett Fowl spotted the cartwheeling toy troll and his first impressions were of fur and teeth, and so, consequently, his first thought was *Angry Hamster!*

But the boy chided himself, remembered that Angry Hamster was a sculpture that he himself had constructed from chewed paper and bodily fluids and therefore not a living thing, and so he would have to revise his guess as to what this tumbling figure might be.

But by this time the troll had come to rest at his feet, and Beckett was able to snatch it up and scrutinize it closely, so there was no need for guessing.

*Not alive*, he realized then. *Doll, maybe.*

Beckett had thought the figure moved of its own accord, perhaps even made a squealing noise of some kind, but now he could see it was a fantasy action figure with a protective plastic coating.

“I shall call you Whistle Blower, little chap,” he whispered into the troll’s pointed ear. The boy had chosen this name after barely a second’s consideration, because he had seen on Myles’s preferred news channel that people who squealed were sometimes called whistle-blowers, and also, Beckett was not the kind of fellow who wasted time on decisions.

Beckett turned to show Myles his beach salvage, though his brother had always been a little snooty when it came to toys, claiming they were for children even though he was patently himself a child and would be for a few more years.

“See, brother?” he called, wagging the action figure. “I found a new friend.”

Myles sneered as expected, and opened his mouth to pass a derogatory remark along the lines of:

*Honestly, Beck. We are eleven years old now. Time to leave childish things behind.*



But his scorn was interrupted by a deafening series of honks.

The emergency klaxon.

It is true to say that there is hardly a more alarming sound than an alarm klaxon, heralding as it does the arrival of some form of disaster. Most people do not react positively to this sound. Some scream, some faint. There are those who run in pointless circles wringing their hands, which is also pointless. And of course there are people who have involuntary purges, which shall not be elaborated upon here.

The reactions of the Fowl twins could seem strange to a causal observer, for Myles discarded his seaweed bucket and uttered a single word: “Finally.”

While Beckett spoke to his sparkling necktie. “Do you hear that, Gloop?” he asked. “We’re going flying!”

To explain:

Myles had worked with Artemis to design the security system, so he had a cool scientific interest in putting the extraction drobots through their paces as thus far they had only been tested with crash dummies. Beckett, on the other hand, was just dying to be yanked backward into the air at high speed and dumped into a security chute, and he fervently hoped the ride would last much longer than the projected half a minute.

Myles forgot all about getting to bed on time. He was in action mode now as the countermeasure flares fanned out behind his head like fireworks painting the undersides of passing cumulus. NANNI broadcast a message to his earpiece, which Myles repeated aloud to Beckett in melodramatic tones that he knew his brother would respond to as it made him feel like he was on an adventure.

“Red alert!” Myles called. “Extraction position.”

The twins had been drilled on this particular position so often that Beckett reacted to the command with prompt obedience—two words that he would never find written on any of his school report cards.

Extraction position was as follows: chin tucked low, arms stretched overhead, and relaxed jaw to avoid cracked teeth.

“Ten seconds,” said Myles, slipping his spectacles into a jacket pocket. “Nine, eight...”

Beckett also slipped something into his pocket before assuming the position.

“Three,” said Myles. “Two . . .”

Then the boy allowed his jaw to relax and spoke no more.

The two drobots shot from under the villa’s eaves and sped unerringly toward the twins. They maintained an altitude of six feet from the ground by dipping their rotors and adjusting their course as they flew, communicating with each other through coded clicks and beeps. With their gear retracted, the drobots resembled nothing more than old propeller hats that children used to wear in simpler times as they rode their bicycles.

The drobots barely slowed as they approached the twins, lowering micro-servo cable arms that lassoed the boys’ waists, then inflated impact bags to avoid injuring their cargo.

“Cable loop in place,” said Myles, lowering his arms. “Bags inflated. Most efficient.”

In theory, the ride should be so smooth his suit would not get wrinkled.

“Let’s go!” shouted Beckett impatiently. “No more science talk.”

And go they did.

The servo cables retracted smoothly to winch the twins into the air. Myles noted that there had been no discernable impact on his spine, and while acceleration was rapid—zero to sixty miles an hour in four seconds according to his smart watch—the ride was not excessively jarring.

“So far so good,” he said into the wind. He glanced sideways to see Beckett ignoring the flight instructions, waving his arms around as though he were on a rollercoaster.

“Arms folded, Beck!” he called sternly to his brother. “Feet crossed at the ankles. You are increasing your own drag.”

It was possible that Beckett could not hear the instructions, but it was probable that he simply ignored them and continued to treat their emergency extraction like a fairground ride.

The journey was over almost as soon as it began and the twins found themselves deposited in two small chimney-like padded tubes to the rear of the house. The drobots lowered them to the safe room then sealed the tubes with their own shells.

NANNI’s face appeared in a free-floating liquid speaker ball, which was held in shape by an electric charge. “Shall I activate the EMP?”

Myles considered this as he checked unclipped the servo cable. Villa Éco was outfitted with a localized Electro Magnetic Pulse generator that would knock out any electronic systems entering the island’s airspace. The Fowl’s own electronics would not be affected, as they had a backup that ran on optical cable. A little old school, but it could keep systems ticking until the danger was past.

“Hmm,” said Myles. “That seems a little drastic. What is the nature of the emergency?”

“Sonic boom detected,” said the comforting female voice. “Origin uncertain. Possibly a high-powered rifle.”

A sonic boom could be many things, and the majority of those things were harmless. Still, Myles now had a valid excuse to employ the EMP, something he had been forbidden to do unless absolutely necessary.

It was, in fact, a judgment call.

Beckett, who had somehow become inverted in the delivery chute, tumbled onto the floor and cried, “Activate the EMP!”

And for once, Myles found himself in agreement with his brother.

“I concur,” he said. “Activate the EMP, NANNI. Tight radius, low intensity. No need to knock out the mainland.”

“Activating EMP,” said NANNI and promptly collapsed in a puddle on the floor as her own electronics had not yet been converted to optical cable.

“See, Beck?” said Myles, lifting one black loafer from a glistening wet patch. “That is what we scientists call a design flaw.”

Lord Bleedham-Drye was doubly miffed and thrice surprised by the developments on Dalkey Island.

Surprise number one: Brother Colman spoke the truth and trolls did indeed walk the earth.

Surprise the second: The troll was tiny. Whoever heard of a tiny troll?

Surprise the last (for the moment): Flying boys had sequestered his prey.

“What on earth’s going on?” he asked no one in particular.

The duke expertly broke down his rifle and cleaned the component parts with a chamois cloth, still muttering to himself. “These Fowl people seem prepared for full-scale invasion. They have flare countermeasures. Drones flying off with children. Who knows what else? Anti-tank guns and trained bears, I shouldn’t wonder. Even Churchill couldn’t take that beach.”

It occurred to Lord Teddy that he could blow up the entire island for spite. He was partial to a spot of spite, after all. But after a moment’s consideration, he dismissed the idea. It was a cheery notion, but the person he would be ultimately be spiting was none other than the

Duke of Scilly, i.e. his royal self. He would hold his fire for now, but when those boys re-emerged from their fortified house, he would be ready with his trusty rifle. After all, he was a quite excellent with a gun, as his last shot had proven. It was unseemly to shoot anything except pheasants off the battlefield, unless one was engaged in a duel. Pistols at dawn, that sort of thing. But he would make an exception for a troll, and those blooming Fowl boys.

Lord Teddy reassembled the rifle and set it on the balcony floor, muzzle pointed toward the island.

*You can't stay in that blasted house forever, my boys, he thought. And the moment you poke your noses from cover, Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye shall be prepared.*

He could wait.

He was prepared to put in the hours. As the duke often said to himself: *One must spend time to make time.*

Teddy lay on the yoga mat, which had been his bed for almost a month now, and ran a sweep of the island through his night vision monocular. The whole place was lit up like a fairground with roaming spotlights and massive halogen lamps. There was not a square inch of space for an intruder to hide.

*Clever chappies, these Fowls, thought the duke. The father must have a lot of enemies.*

Teddy fished a boar bristle brush from his duffel bag and began his evening ritual of one hundred brushes on his beard. The beard rippled and glistened as he brushed, like the pelt of an otter, and Teddy could not help but congratulate himself. A beard required a lot of maintenance, but, by heaven, it was worth it.

On stroke fifty-seven, Lord Teddy's hunter sense registered that something had changed. It was suddenly darker. He looked up, expecting to find that the lights had been shut off on Dalkey Island, but the truth was more drastic.

The island itself had disappeared.

Lord Teddy checked all the way to the horizon with his trusty monocular. In the blink of an eye the entirety of Dalkey Island had vanished with only an abandoned stretch of wooden jetty to hint that the Fowl residence might ever have existed at the end of it.

Lord Bleedham-Drye was surprised to the point of stupefaction, but his manners and breeding would not allow him to show it.

“I say,” he said mildly. “That’s hardly cricket, is it? What has the world come to when a chap can’t bag himself a troll without entire land masses disappearing?”

Lord Teddy Bleedham-Drye’s bottom lip drooped. Quite the sulky expression for a hundred-and-fifty-year-old. But the duke did not allow himself to wallow for long. Instead, he set his mind to the puzzle of the disappearing island.

“One can’t help but wonder, Teddy old boy,” mused the duke to the mirror on the flat side of his brush, “if all this troll malarkey is indeed true, then is the rest also true? What Brother Colman said vis a vis elves, pixies, and gnomes all hanging around for centuries? Is there, in fact, magic in the world?”

He would, Lord Teddy decided, proceed under the assumption that magic did exist, and therefore by logical extension, magical creatures.

“And so it is only reasonable to assume,” Teddy said, “that these fairy chaps will wish to protect their own, and perhaps send their version of the cavalry to rescue the little troll. Perhaps the cavalry has already arrived, and this disappearing island trick is actually some class of a magical spell cast by a wizard.”

The duke was right about the cavalry. The fairy cavalry had already arrived.

One fairy, at least.

But he was dead wrong about a *wizard* casting a spell. The fairy who had cast the spell was a far cry indeed from being a wizard of even the most basic level. She had made a split-second decision and was now pretty certain that it was absolutely the wrong one.