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opening extract from

Artemis Fowl and the Opal Deception

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PROLOGUE

The following article was posted on the fairy internet on the site www.horsesense.gnom. It is believed that this site is maintained by the centaur Foaly, technical consultant to the Lower Elements Police, although it has never been proved. Almost every detail of this account contradicts the official release from the LEP Press Office.

We've all heard the official explanation for the tragic events surrounding the Zito Probe investigation. The LEP's statement contained little in the way of concrete detail, preferring to fudge the facts and question the decisions of a certain female officer.

I know for an absolute fact that the officer in question, Captain Holly Short, behaved in an exemplary manner, and if it had not been for her skill as a field operative, many more lives would have been lost. Instead of scapegoating Captain Short, the Lower Elements Police should give her a medal.

Humans are at the centre of this particular case. Most humans aren't smart enough to find the leg holes in their trousers, but

there are certain Mud Men clever enough to make me nervous. If they discovered the existence of an underground fairy city, they would certainly do their best to exploit the residents. Most men would be no match for superior fairy technology. But there are some humans who are almost smart enough to pass as fairies. One human in particular. I think we all know who I'm talking about.

In fairy history only one human has bested us. And it really sticks in my hoof that this particular human is little more than a boy. Artemis Fowl, the Irish criminal mastermind. Little Arty led the LEP a merry dance across the continents, until finally they used fairy technology to wipe our existence from his mind. But even as the gifted centaur Foaly pressed the mind-wipe button, he wondered if the fairy People were being fooled again. Had the Irish boy left something behind to make himself remember? Of course he had, as we were all to find out later.

Artemis Fowl does play a significant role in the following events, but for once he was not trying to steal from the People as he had completely forgotten we existed. No, the mastermind behind this episode is actually a fairy.

So who is involved in this tragic tale of two worlds? Who are the main fairy players? Obviously Foaly is the real hero of the piece. Without his innovations, the LEP would soon be beating the Mud Men back from our doors. He is the unsung hero who solves riddles of the ages, while the reconnaissance and retrieval teams swan about above ground, taking all the glory.

Then there's Captain Holly Short, the officer whose reputation is under fire. Holly is one of the LEP's best and brightest.

A natural-born pilot with a gift for improvisation in the field. She's not the best at taking orders, a trait that has landed her in trouble on more than one occasion. Holly was the fairy at the centre of all the Artemis Fowl incidents. The pair had almost become friends, when the Council ordered the LEP to mind-wipe Artemis, and just when he was becoming a nice Mud Boy too.

As we all know, Commander Julius Root has a role in proceedings. The youngest-ever full commander in the LEP. An elf who has steered the People through many a crisis. Not the easiest fairy to get along with, but sometimes the best leaders do not make the best friends.

I suppose Mulch Diggums deserves a mention. Until recently Mulch was imprisoned, but as usual he managed to wriggle his way out. This kleptomaniac, flatulent dwarf has played a reluctant part in many of the Fowl adventures. But Holly was glad to have his help on this mission. If not for Mulch and his bodily functions, things could have turned out a lot worse than they did. And they turned out badly enough.

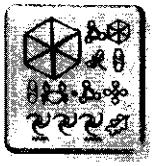
At the very centre of this case lies Opal Koboi, the pixie who bankrolled the goblin gang's attempted takeover of Haven City. Opal was facing a lifetime behind laser bars. That is, if she ever recovered from the coma that claimed her when Holly Short foiled her plan.

For almost a year, Opal Koboi had languished in the padded-cell wing of the J. Argon Clinic, showing no response to the medical warlocks who tried to revive her. In all that time, she spoke not a single word, ate not a mouthful of food and exhibited

no response to stimuli. At first the authorities were suspicious. It is an act, they declared. Koboi is faking catatonia to avoid prosecution. But as the months rolled by, even the most sceptical were convinced. No one could pretend to be in a coma for almost a year. Surely not. A fairy would have to be totally obsessed . . .

CHAPTER 1: TOTALLY OBSESSED

THE J. ARGON CLINIC, HAVEN CITY, THE LOWER ELEMENTS, THREE MONTHS EARLIER



THE J. Argon Clinic was not a state hospital. Nobody stayed there for free. Argon and his staff of psychologists only treated fairies who could afford it. Of all the clinic's wealthy patients, Opal Koboi was unique. She had set up an emergency fund for herself more than a year previously, *just in case* she ever went insane and needed to pay for treatment. It was a smart move. If Opal hadn't set up the fund, her family would undoubtedly have moved her to a cheaper facility. Not that the facility itself made much difference to Koboi, who had spent the past year drooling and having her reflexes tested. Doctor Argon doubted if Opal would have noticed a bull troll beating its chest in front of her.



The fund was not the only reason why Opal was unique. Koboi was the Argon Clinic's celebrity patient. Following the attempt by the B'wa Kell goblin triad to seize power, Opal Koboi's name had become the most infamous four syllables under the world. After all, the pixie billionairess had formed an alliance with disgruntled LEP officer Briar Cudgeon, and funded the triad's war on Haven. Koboi had betrayed her own kind, and now her own mind was betraying her.

For the first six months of Koboi's incarceration, the clinic had been besieged by media filming the pixie's every twitch. The LEP guarded her cell door in shifts, every staff member in the facility was treated to background checks and stern glares. Nobody was exempt. Even Doctor Argon himself was subjected to random DNA swabs to ensure that he was who he said he was. The LEP wasn't taking any chances with Koboi. If she escaped from Argon's clinic, not only would they be the laughing stock of the fairy world, but a highly dangerous criminal would be unleashed on Haven City.

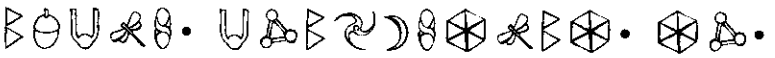
But as time went by, fewer camera crews turned up at the gates each morning. After all, how many hours of drooling can an audience be expected to sit through? Gradually the LEP crews were downsized from a dozen to six and finally to a single officer per shift. Where could Opal Koboi go? the authorities reasoned. There were a dozen cameras focused on her twenty-four hours a day.



There was a subcutaneous seeker-sleeper under the skin of her upper arm and she was DNA swabbed four times daily. And even if someone did get Opal out, what could they do with her? The pixie couldn't even stand without help, and the sensors said her brainwaves were little more than flat lines.

That said, Doctor Argon was very proud of his prize patient, and mentioned her name often at dinner parties. Since Opal Koboi had been admitted to the clinic, it had become almost fashionable to have a relative in therapy. Almost every family on the rich list had a crazy uncle in the attic. Now, that crazy uncle could receive the best of care in the lap of luxury.

If only every fairy in the facility was as docile as Opal Koboi. All she needed was a few intravenous tubes and a monitor, which had been more than paid for by her first six months' medical fees. Doctor Argon fervently hoped that little Opal never woke up. Because once she did, the LEP would haul her off to court. And when she had been convicted of treason her assets would be frozen, including the clinic's fund. No, the longer Opal's nap lasted, the better for everyone, especially her. Because of their thin skulls and large brain volume, pixies were susceptible to various maladies such as catatonia, amnesia and narcolepsy. So it was quite possible that her coma would last for several years. And even if Opal did wake up, it was quite possible that her memory would



stay locked up in some drawer in her huge pixie brain.

Doctor J. Argon did his rounds every night. He didn't perform much hands-on therapy any more, but he felt that it was good for the staff to feel his presence. If the other doctors knew that Jerbal Argon kept his finger on the pulse, then they were more likely to keep their own fingers on that pulse too.

Argon always saved Opal for last. It calmed him somehow to see the small pixie asleep in her harness. Often at the end of a stressful day, he even envied Opal her untroubled existence. When it had all become too much for the pixie, her brain had simply shut down, all except the most vital functions. She still breathed, and occasionally the monitors registered a dream spike in her brainwaves. But other than that, for all intents and purposes, Opal Koboi was no more.

On this fateful night, Jerbal Argon was feeling more stressed than usual. His wife was suing for divorce on the grounds that he hadn't said more than six consecutive words to her in over two years, the Council was threatening to pull his government grant because of all the money he was making from his new celebrity clients and he had a pain in his hip that no amount of magic could seem to cure. The warlocks said it was probably all in his head. They seemed to think that was funny.

Argon limped down the clinic's eastern wing, checking the plasma chart of each patient as he passed their



room. He winced each time his left foot touched the floor.

The two janitor pixies, Mervall and Descant Brill, were outside Opal's room, picking up dust with static brushes. Pixies made wonderful employees. They were methodical, patient and determined. When a pixie was instructed to do something, you could rest assured that thing would be done. Plus they were cute, with their baby faces and disproportionately large heads. Just looking at a pixie cheered most people up. They were walking therapy.

'Evening, boys,' said Argon. 'How's our favourite patient?'

Merv, the elder twin, glanced up from his brush. 'Same old, same old, Jerry,' he said. 'I thought she moved a toe earlier, but it was just a trick of the light.'

Argon laughed, but it was forced. He did not like to be called Jerry. It was *his* clinic after all; he deserved some respect. But good janitors were like gold dust, and the Brill brothers had been keeping the building spotless and shipshape for nearly two years now. The Brills were almost celebrities themselves. Twins were very rare among the People. Mervall and Descant were the only pixie pair currently residing in Haven. They had featured on several TV programmes, including *Canto,* PPTV's highest-rated chat show.

LEP Corporal Grub Kelp was on sentry duty. When Argon reached Opal's room, the corporal was engrossed

in a movie on his video goggles. Argon didn't blame him. Guarding Opal Koboi was about as exciting as watching toenails grow.

'Good film?' enquired the doctor pleasantly.

Grub raised the lenses. 'Not bad. It's a human Western. Plenty of shooting and squinting.'

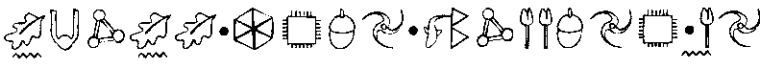
'Maybe I'll borrow it when you're finished?'

'No problem, Doctor. But handle it carefully. Human disks are very expensive. I'll give you a special cloth.'

Argon nodded. He remembered Grub Kelp now. The LEP officer was very particular about his possessions. He had already written two letters of complaint to the clinic board about a protruding floor rivet that had scratched his boots.

Argon consulted Koboi's chart. The plasma screen on the wall displayed a constantly updated feed from the sensors attached to her temples. There was no change, nor did he expect there to be. Her vitals were all normal, and her brain activity was minimal. She'd had a dream earlier in the evening but now her mind had settled. And finally, as if he needed telling, the seeker-sleeper implanted in her arm informed him that Opal Koboi was indeed where she was supposed to be. Generally the seeker-sleepers were implanted in the head, but pixie skulls were too fragile for any local surgery.

Jerbal punched in his personal code on the reinforced door's keypad. The heavy door slid back to reveal a



spacious room with gently pulsing floor mood lights. The walls were soft plastic, and gentle sounds of nature spilled from recessed speakers. At the moment a brook was splashing over flat rocks.

In the middle of the room, Opal Koboi hung suspended in a full body harness. The straps were gel-padded and adjusted automatically to any body movement. If Opal did happen to wake, the harness could be remotely triggered to seal like a net, preventing her from harming herself.

Argon checked the monitor pads, making sure they had good contact on Koboi's forehead. He lifted one of the pixie's eyelids, shining a pencil light at the pupil. It contracted slightly, but Opal did not avert her eyes.

'Well, anything to tell me today, Opal?' asked the doctor softly. 'An opening chapter for my book?'

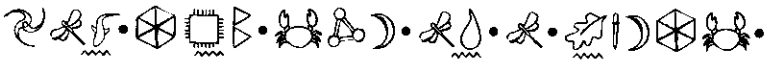
Argon liked to talk to Koboi, just in case she could hear. When she woke up, he reasoned, he would have already established a rapport.

'Nothing? Not a single insight?'

Opal did not react. As she hadn't for almost a year.

'Ah well,' said Argon, swabbing the inside of Koboi's mouth with the last cotton bud in his pocket. 'Maybe tomorrow, eh?'

He rolled the cotton bud across a sponge pad on his clipboard. Seconds later, Opal's name flashed up on a tiny screen.



'DNA never lies,' muttered Argon, tossing the bud into a recycling bin.

With one last look at his patient, Jerbal Argon turned towards the door.

'Sleep well, Opal,' he said, almost fondly.

He felt calm again, the pain in his hip almost forgotten. Koboi was as far under as she had ever been. She wasn't going to wake up any time soon. The Koboi fund was safe.

It's amazing just how wrong one gnome can be.

Opal Koboi was not catatonic, but neither was she awake. She was somewhere in between, floating in a liquid world of meditation where every memory was a bubble of multicoloured light popping gently in her consciousness.

Since her early teens Opal had been a disciple of Gola Schweem, the cleansing coma guru. Schweem's theory was that there was a deeper level of sleep than that experienced by most fairies. The cleansing coma state could usually be reached only after decades of discipline and practice. Opal had reached her first cleansing coma at the age of fourteen.

The benefits of the cleansing coma were that a fairy usually awoke completely refreshed but also spent the sleep time thinking, or in this case plotting. Opal's coma was so complete that her mind was almost entirely separated from her body. She could fool the sensors and felt no embarrassment at the indignities of intravenous



feeding and changing. The longest recorded consciously self-induced coma was forty-seven days. Opal had been under for eleven months and counting, though she wasn't planning to be counting much longer.

When Opal Koboi had joined forces with Briar Cudgeon and his goblins, she'd realized that she needed a back-up plan. Their scheme to overthrow the LEP had been ingenious, but there was always a chance that something could go wrong. In the event that it did, Opal had no intention of spending the rest of her life in prison. The only way she could make a clean getaway would be if everybody thought she was still locked up. So Opal had begun to make preparations.

The first was to set up the emergency fund for the Argon Clinic. This would ensure she was sent to the right place if she had to induce a cleansing coma. The second step was to get two of her most trusted personnel installed in the clinic, to help with her eventual escape. Then she began siphoning huge amounts of gold from her businesses. Opal did not wish to become an impoverished exile.

The final step was to donate some of her own DNA and to green light the creation of a clone that would take her place in the padded cell. Cloning was completely illegal and had been banned by fairy law for over five hundred years since the first experiments in Atlantis. It was by no means a perfect science. Doctors had never been able to create an exact fairy clone. The clones looked fine, but



they were basically shells with only enough brainpower to run the body's basic functions. They were missing the spark of true life. A fully grown clone resembled nothing more than the original person in a coma. Perfect.

Opal had had a greenhouse lab constructed, far from Koboi Laboratories, and had diverted enough funds to keep the project active for two years, the exact time it would take to grow a clone of herself to adulthood. Then, when she wanted to escape from the Argon Clinic, a perfect replica of herself would be left in her place. The LEP would never know she was gone.

As things had turned out, she had been right to plan ahead. Briar had proved treacherous, and a small group of fairies and humans had ensured his betrayal led to her own downfall. Now Opal had a goal to bolster her willpower: she would maintain this coma for as long as it took, because there was a score to be settled. Foaly, Root, Holly Short and the human, Artemis Fowl. They were the ones responsible for her defeat. Soon she would be free of this clinic, and then she would visit those who had caused her such despair, and give them a little despair of their own. Once her enemies were defeated she could proceed with the second phase of her plan: introducing the Mud Men to the People in a way that could not be covered up by a few mind wipes. The secret life of fairies was almost at an end.

Opal Koboi's brain released a few happy endorphins.