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opening extract from

Artemis Fowl and the Lost Colony

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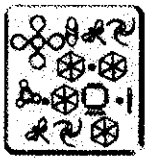
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CHAPTER 1: BLAST TO THE PAST

BARCELONA, SPAIN



HAPPY was not a word often used to describe Artemis Fowl's bodyguard. *Jolly* and *contented* were also words that were rarely applied to him or to people in his immediate vicinity. Butler did not get to be one of the most dangerous men in the world by chatting with anyone who happened to stroll past, unless the chat concerned exit routes and concealed weapons.

On this particular afternoon Butler and Artemis were in Spain, and the bodyguard's Eurasian features were even more taciturn than normal. His young charge was, as usual, making Butler's job more complicated than it needed to be. Artemis had insisted that they stand on the sidewalk of Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia for over an hour



in the afternoon sun with only a few slender trees to provide them with cover from the heat or possible enemies.

This was the fourth unexplained trip to foreign locations in as many months. First Edinburgh, then Death Valley in the American West, followed by an extremely arduous trek to doubly landlocked Uzbekistan. And now Barcelona. All to wait for a mysterious *visitor*, who had not as yet made an appearance.

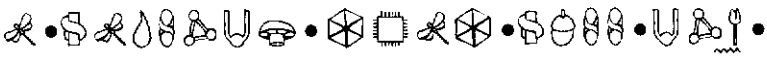
They made an odd couple on the busy pathway. A huge, muscular man: forties, Hugo Boss suit, shaven head. And a slight teenager: pale, raven-haired with large piercing blue-black eyes.

'Why must you circle so, Butler?' asked Artemis, irritated. He knew the answer to his own question, but according to his calculations, the expected visitor to Barcelona was a minute late, and he allowed his annoyance to transfer to the bodyguard.

'You know perfectly well why, Artemis,' replied Butler. 'In case there is a sniper or an audio-tech on one of the rooftops. I am circling to provide the maximum cover.'

Artemis was in the mood to demonstrate his genius. This was a mood in which he frequently found himself. And as satisfying as these demonstrations were for the fourteen-year-old Irish boy, they could be intensely irritating for anyone on the receiving end.

'Firstly, it is hardly likely that there is a sniper gunning



for me,' he said. 'I have liquidated eighty per cent of my illegal ventures and spread the capital across an extremely lucrative portfolio. Secondly, any audio-tech trying to eavesdrop on us may as well pack up and go home as the third button on your jacket is emitting a Solinium pulse that whites out any surveillance tape, human or fairy.'

Butler glanced at a passing couple, who were bewitched by Spain and young love. The man had a camcorder slung round his neck. Butler fingered his third button guiltily.

'We may have ruined a few honeymoon videos,' he noted.

Artemis shrugged. 'A small price to pay for my privacy.'

'Was there a third point?' asked Butler innocently.

'Yes,' said Artemis, a touch testily. Still no sign of the individual he was expecting. 'I was about to say that if there is a gunman on one of these buildings, it's that one directly to the rear. So you should stay behind me.'

Butler was the best bodyguard in the business, and even he couldn't be a hundred per cent sure which rooftop a potential gunman would be on.

'Go on. Tell me how you know. I know you're dying to.'

'Very well, since you ask. No sniper would position himself on the rooftop of Casa Milá, directly across the street, because it is open to the public and so his access and escape would probably be recorded.'

'His or her,' corrected Butler. 'Most metal men are women these days.'



'His or her,' amended Artemis. 'The two buildings on the right are somewhat screened by foliage, so why handicap yourself?'

'Very good. Go on.'

'The cluster behind us to the left is a group of financial buildings with private security stickers on the windows. A professional will avoid any confrontation he is not being paid for.'

Butler nodded. It was true.

'And so, I logically conclude that your imaginary sniper would pick the four-storey construction to our rear. It is residential, so access is easy. The roof affords him *or her* a direct line of fire, and the security is possibly dismal and more than likely non-existent.'

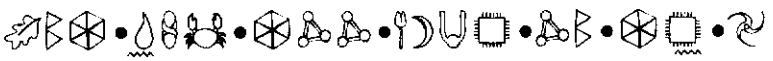
Butler snorted. Artemis was probably right. But in the protection game, *probably* wasn't nearly as comforting as a Kevlar vest.

'You're *probably* right,' admitted the bodyguard. 'But only if the sniper is as smart as you are.'

'Good point,' said Artemis.

'And I imagine you could put together a convincing argument for any one of these buildings. You just picked that one to keep me out of your line of vision, which leads me to believe that whoever you're expecting will turn up outside Casa Milá.

Artemis smiled. 'Well done, old friend.'



Casa Milá was an early twentieth-century dwelling designed by the Spanish art nouveau architect Antonio Gaudí. The facade consisted of curved walls and balconies topped by twisted ironworks. The walkway outside the building was thronged with tourists, lining up for the afternoon tour of the spectacular house.

'Will we recognize our visitor among all these people? Are you sure that he is not already here? Watching us?'

Artemis smiled and his eyes glittered. 'Believe me, he is not here. If he were, there would be a lot more screaming.'

Butler scowled. Once, just once, he would like to get all the facts before they boarded the jet. But that wasn't the way Artemis worked. To the young Irish genius, the *reveal* was the most important part of his schemes.

'At least tell me if our contact will be armed.'

'I doubt it,' said Artemis. 'And even if he is, he won't be with us for more than a second.'

'A second? Just beaming down through outer space, is he?'

'Not space, old friend,' said Artemis, checking his wristwatch. 'Time.' The boy sighed. 'Anyway, the moment has passed. It seems as though I have brought us here for nothing. Our visitor has not materialized. The chances were slim. Obviously there was nobody at the other end of the rift.'

Butler didn't know what rift Artemis was referring to,

he was simply relieved to be leaving this insecure location. The sooner they could get back to Barcelona Airport the better.

The bodyguard pulled a mobile phone from his pocket and hit a number on the speed dial. The person on the other end picked up on the first ring.

'Maria,' said Butler. 'Collection, *pronto*.'

'*Si*,' replied Maria tersely. Maria worked for an exclusive Spanish limousine company. She was extremely pretty and could break a breeze block with her forehead.

'Was that Maria?' said Artemis, mimicking casual conversation perfectly.

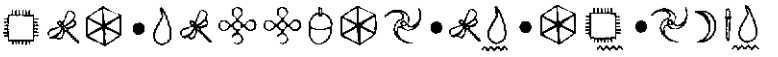
Butler was not fooled. Artemis Fowl rarely asked casual questions.

'Yes, that was Maria. You could tell because I used her name when I spoke to her. You don't usually ask so many questions about the limo driver. That's four in the past fifteen minutes. Will *Maria* be picking us up? Where do you think *Maria* is right now? How old do you think *Maria* is?'

Artemis rubbed his temples. 'It's this blasted puberty, Butler. Every time I see a pretty girl, I waste valuable mind space thinking about her. That girl at the restaurant for instance. I've glanced in her direction a dozen times in the past few minutes.'

Butler gave the pretty girl in question an automatic bodyguard's once-over.

She was twelve or thirteen, did not appear to be armed



and had a mane of tight blonde curls. The girl was studiously working her way through a selection of *tapas* while a male guardian, perhaps her father, read the paper. There was another man at the table who was struggling to stow a set of crutches under his chair. Butler judged that the girl was not a direct threat to their safety, though indirectly she could cause trouble if Artemis was unable to concentrate on his plan.

Butler patted his young charge on the shoulder. 'It's normal to be distracted by girls. Natural. If you hadn't been so busy saving the world these past few years, it would have happened sooner.'

'Nevertheless, I have to control it, Butler. I have things to do.'

'Control puberty?' snorted the bodyguard. 'If you manage that, you'll be the first.'

'I generally am,' said Artemis.

And it was true. No other teenager had kidnapped a fairy, rescued their father from the Russian *Mafiya* and helped put down a goblin revolution by the tender age of fourteen.

A horn honked twice. From across the intersection, a young lady gestured through an open limousine window.

'It's *Maria*,' said Artemis, then caught himself. 'I mean, let us go. Maybe we'll have better luck at the next site.'

Butler took the lead, stopping the traffic with a wave of one massive palm. 'Maybe we should take Maria with us.



A full-time driver would make my job a lot easier.'

It took Artemis a moment to realize that he was being ribbed. 'Very funny, Butler. You were joking, weren't you?'

'Yes, I was.'

'I thought so, but I don't have a lot of experience with humour. Apart from Mulch Diggums.'

Mulch was a kleptomaniac dwarf who had stolen from, and for, Artemis on previous occasions. Diggums liked to think of himself as a funny fairy, and his main sources of humour were his own bodily functions.

'If you can call that humour,' said Butler smiling, in spite of himself, at his own memories of the pungent dwarf.

And suddenly Artemis froze. In the middle of a heaving intersection.

Butler glowered at the three lanes of city traffic, a hundred impatient drivers leaning on their horns.

'I feel something,' breathed Artemis. 'Electricity.'

'Could you feel it on the other side of the road?' asked Butler.

Artemis stretched out his arms, feeling a tingle on his palms.

'He's coming after all, but several metres off target. Somewhere there is a constant that is not constant.'

A shape formed in the air. From nothing came a cluster of sparks and the smell of sulphur. Inside the cluster a grey-green thing appeared, with golden eyes, chunky scales and great horned ears. It stepped out of nowhere and on



to the road. It stood erect, five feet high, humanoid, but there was no mistaking this creature for human. It sniffed the air through slitted nostrils, opened a snake's mouth and spoke.

'Felicitations to Lady Heatherington Smythe,' it said in a voice of crushed glass and grating steel. The creature grasped Artemis's outstretched palm with a four-fingered hand.

'Curious,' said the Irish boy.

Butler wasn't interested in *curious*. He was interested in getting Artemis away from this creature as quickly as possible.

'Let's go,' he said brusquely, laying a hand on Artemis's shoulder.

But Artemis was already gone. The creature had disappeared as quickly as it had come, taking the teenager with him. The incident would make the news later that day, but strangely enough, in spite of the hundreds of tourists armed with cameras, there would be no pictures.

The creature was insubstantial, as though it did not have a proper hold on this world. Its grip on Artemis's hand was soft with a hard core, like bone wrapped in foam rubber. Artemis did not try to pull away; he was fascinated.

'Lady Heatherington Smythe?' repeated the creature, and Artemis could hear that it was scared. 'Dost this be her estate?'



Hardly modern syntax, thought Artemis. *But definitely English. Now how does a demon exiled in Limbo learn to speak English?*

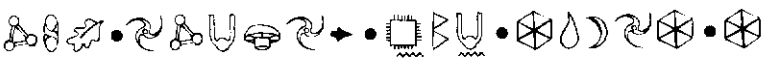
The air buzzed with power and white electrical bolts crackled around the creature, slicing holes in space.

A temporal rent. A hole in time.

Artemis was not overly awed by this – after all, he had seen the Lower Elements Police actually *stop* time during the Fowl Manor siege. What did concern him was that he was likely to be whisked away with the creature, in which case the chances of him being returned to his own dimension were small. The chances of him being returned to his own time were miniscule.

He tried to call out to Butler, but it was too late. If the word *late* can be used in a place where time does not exist. The rent had expanded to envelop both him and the demon. The architecture and population of Barcelona faded slowly like spirits to be replaced first by a purple fog, then a galaxy of stars. Artemis experienced feverish heat, then bitter cold. He felt sure that if he materialized fully he would be scorched to cinders, then his ashes would freeze and scatter across space.

Their surroundings changed in a flash, or maybe a year, it was impossible to tell. The stars were replaced by an ocean, and they were underneath it. Strange deep-sea creatures loomed from the depths, luminous tentacles scything the water all around them. Then there was a field of



ice, then a red landscape, the air filled with fine dust. Finally they were looking at Barcelona again. But different. The city was younger.

The demon howled and gnashed its pointed teeth, abandoning all attempts to speak English. Luckily, Artemis was one of two humans in any dimension who spoke Gnommish, the fairy language.

'Calm yourself, friend,' he said. 'Our fate is sealed. Enjoy these wondrous sights.'

The demon's howl ceased abruptly, and he dropped Artemis's hand.

'Speak you fairy tongue?'

'Gnommish,' corrected Artemis. 'And better than you, I might add.'

The demon fell silent, regarding Artemis as though he was some kind of fantastic creature. Which, of course, he was. Artemis, for his part, spent what could possibly be the last few moments of his life, observing the scene before him. They were materializing at a building site. It was the Casa Milá, but not yet completed. Workmen swarmed across scaffolding erected at the front of the building and a swarthy bearded man stood scowling at a sheet of architectural drawings.

Artemis smiled. It was Gaudí himself. How amazing.

The scene solidified, colours painting themselves brighter. Artemis could smell the dry Spanish air now, and the heavy tangs of sweat and paint.



'Excuse me?' said Artemis in Spanish.

Gaudí looked up from the drawings, and his scowl was replaced with a look of utter disbelief. There was a boy stepping from thin air. Beside him a cowering demon.

The brilliant architect absorbed every detail of the tableau, committing it to his memory forever.

'*Si?*' he said hesitantly.

Artemis pointed to the top of the building. 'You've got some mosaics planned for the roof. You might want to rethink those. Very derivative.'

Then boy and demon disappeared.

Butler did not panic when a creature stepped out of the hole in time. Then again, he *was* trained not to panic, no matter how extreme the situation. Unfortunately nobody else at the Passeig de Gràcia intersection had attended Madam Ko's Personal Protection Academy and so they proceeded to panic just as loudly and quickly as they could. All except the curly-haired girl and the two men with her.

When the demon appeared, the public froze. When the creature disappeared they un-froze explosively. The air was rent with the sounds of shouting and screaming. Drivers abandoned their cars, or simply drove them into store windows to escape. A wave of humans withdrew from the point of materialization as though repelled by an invisible force. Again, the girl and her companions bucked the trend,

actually running towards the spot where the demon had shown up. The man with the crutches displayed remarkable agility for one who was supposedly injured.

Butler ignored the pandemonium, concentrating on his right hand. Or rather where his right hand had been a second earlier. Just before Artemis fizzled into another dimension, Butler had managed to get a grip on his shoulder. Now the disappearing virus had claimed his own hand. He was going wherever Artemis had gone. He could still feel his young charge's bony shoulder in his grip.

Butler fully expected his arm to vanish, but it didn't. Just the hand. He could still feel it in an underwater-pins-and-needles kind of way. And he could still feel Artemis.

'No, you don't,' he grunted, tightening his invisible grip. 'I've put up with too much hardship over the years for you to disappear on me now.'

And so Butler reached down through the decades and yanked his young charge back from the past.

Artemis didn't come easy. It was like dragging a boulder through a sea of mud, but Butler was not the kind of person that gave up easily. He planted his feet and put his back into it. Artemis popped out of the twentieth century and landed sprawling in the twenty-first.

'I'm back,' said the Irish boy, as if he had simply returned from an everyday errand. 'How unexpected.'

Butler picked his principal up and gave him a perfunctory examination.



'Everything is in the right place. Nothing broken. Now, Artemis, tell me, what is twenty-seven multiplied by eighteen point five?'

Artemis straightened his suit jacket. 'Oh, I see, you're checking my mental faculties. Very good. I suppose it's conceivable that time travel could affect the mind.'

'Just answer the question!' insisted Butler.

'Four hundred and ninety-nine point five, if you must know.'

'I'll take your word for it.'

The giant bodyguard cocked his head to one side. 'Sirens. We need to get out of this area, Artemis, before I'm forced to cause an international incident.'

He hustled Artemis to the other side of the road, to the only car still idling there. Maria looked a little pale, but at least she had not abandoned her clients.

'Well done,' said Butler, flinging open the rear door. 'Airport. Stay off the motorway as much as possible.'

Maria barely waited until Butler and Artemis were belted, before burning rubber down the street, ignoring the traffic lights. The blonde girl and her companions were left on the roadside behind them.

Maria glanced at Artemis in the mirror. 'What happened out there?'

'No questions,' said Butler curtly. 'Eyes on the road. Drive.'

He knew better than to ask questions himself. Artemis



would explain all about the strange creature and the shining rift when he was ready.

Artemis remained silent as the limousine swung down towards Las Ramblas and from there into the labyrinthine backstreets of downtown Barcelona.

'How did I get here?' he said eventually. Musing aloud. 'Or rather why aren't we there? Or why aren't we *then*? What anchored us to this time?' He looked at Butler. 'Are you wearing any silver?'

Butler grimaced sheepishly. 'You know I never usually wear jewellery, but there is this.' He shot one cuff. There was a leather bracelet on his wrist, with a silver nugget in the centre. 'Juliet sent it to me. From Mexico. It's to ward off evil spirits apparently. She made me promise to wear it.'

Artemis smiled broadly. 'It was Juliet. She anchored us.' He tapped the silver nugget on Butler's wrist. 'You should give your sister a call. She saved our lives.'

As Artemis tapped his bodyguard's wristband, he noticed something about his own fingers. They *were* his fingers, no doubt about it. But different somehow. It took him a moment to realize what had happened.

He had, of course, done some theorizing on the hypothetical results of interdimensional travel, and concluded that there could possibly be some deterioration of the original, as with a computer program that has been copied once too often. Streams of information could be lost in the ether.



As far as Artemis could tell, nothing had been lost, but now the index finger on his left hand was longer than the second finger. Or more accurately, the index finger had swapped places with the second finger.

He flexed the fingers experimentally.

'Hmm,' noted Artemis Fowl. 'I am unique.'

Butler grunted. 'Tell me about it,' he said.

