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Opening extract from

Artemis Fowl and the Arctic Incident

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PROLOGUE

Murmansk, northern Russia, two years ago

THE two Russians huddled around a flaming barrel in a futile attempt to ward off the Arctic chill. The Bay of Kola was not a place you wanted to be after September, especially not Murmansk. In Murmansk even the polar bears wore scarves. Nowhere was colder, except perhaps Noril'sk.

The men were Mafiya enforcers and were more used to spending their evenings inside stolen BMWs. The larger of the two, Mikhael Vassikin, checked the fake Rolex beneath the sleeve of his fur coat.

'This thing could freeze up,' he said, tapping the diving bezel. 'What am I going to do with it then?'

'Stop your complaining,' said the one called Kamar. 'It's your fault we're stuck outside in the first place.'

Vassikin paused. 'Pardon me?'

'Our orders were simple: sink the *Fowl Star*. All you had

to do was blow the cargo bay. It was a big enough ship, heaven knows. Blow the cargo bay and down she goes. But no, the great Vassikin hits the stern. Not even a back-up rocket to finish the job. So now we have to search for survivors.'

'She sank, didn't she?'

Kamar shrugged. 'So what? She sank slowly, plenty of time for the passengers to grab on to something. Vassikin, the famous sharpshooter! My grandmother could shoot better.'

Lyubkhin, the Mafiya's man on the docks, approached before the discussion could develop into an all-out brawl.

'How are things?' asked the bear-like Yakut.

Vassikin spat over the quay wall. 'How do you think? Did you find anything?'

'Dead fish and broken crates,' said the Yakut, offering both enforcers a steaming mug. 'Nothing alive. It's been over eight hours now. I have good men searching all the way down to Green Cape.'

Kamar drank deeply, then spat in disgust. 'What is this stuff? Pitch?'

Lyubkhin laughed. 'Hot cola. From the *Fowl Star*. It's coming ashore by the crate-load. Tonight we are truly on the Bay of Kola.'

'Be warned,' said Vassikin, spilling the liquid on to the snow. 'This weather is souring my temper. So no more terrible jokes. It's enough that I have to listen to Kamar.'

'Not for much longer,' muttered his partner. 'One more sweep and we call off the search. Nothing could survive these waters for eight hours.'

Vassikin held out his empty cup. 'Don't you have something stronger? A shot of vodka to ward off the cold? I know you always keep a flask hidden somewhere.'

Lyubkhin reached for his hip pocket, but stopped when the walkie-talkie on his belt began to emit static. Three short bursts.

'Three squawks. That's the signal.'

'The signal for what?'

Lyubkhin hurried down the docks, shouting back over his shoulder. 'Three squawks on the radio. It means that the K9 unit has found someone.'

The survivor was not Russian. That much was obvious from his clothes. Everything, from the designer suit to the leather overcoat, had obviously been purchased in Western Europe, perhaps even America. They were tailored to fit, and made from the highest-quality material.

Though the man's clothes were relatively intact, his body had not fared so well. His bare feet and hands were mottled with frostbite. One leg hung strangely limp below the knee, and his face was a horrific mask of burns.

The search crew had carried him from a ravine three klicks south of the harbour on a makeshift tarpaulin

stretcher. The men crowded around their prize, stamping their feet against the cold that invaded their boots. Vassikin elbowed his way through the gathering, kneeling for a closer look.

'He'll lose the leg for sure,' he noted. 'A couple of fingers too. The face doesn't look too good either.'

'Thank you, Doctor Mikhael,' commented Kamar drily. 'Any ID?'

Vassikin conducted a quick thief's search. Wallet and watch.

'Nothing. That's odd. You'd think a rich man like this would have some personal effects, wouldn't you?'

Kamar nodded. 'Yes, I would.' He turned to the circle of men. 'Ten seconds, then there'll be trouble. Keep the currency, everything else I need returned.'

The sailors considered it. The man was not big. But he was Mafiya, the Russian organized-crime syndicate.

A leather wallet sailed over the crowd, skidding into a dip in the tarpaulin. Moments later it was joined by a Cartier chronograph. Gold with diamond studding. Worth five years of an average Russian's wages.

'Wise decision,' said Kamar, scooping up the treasure trove.

'Well?' asked Vassikin. 'Do we keep him?'

Kamar pulled a platinum Visa card from the kidskin wallet, checking the name.

'Oh we keep him,' he replied, activating his mobile

phone. 'We keep him, and put some blankets over him. The way our luck's going, he'll catch pneumonia. And believe me, we don't want anything to happen to this man. He's our ticket to the big time.'

Kamar was getting excited. This was completely out of character for him.

Vassikin clambered to his feet. 'Who are you calling? Who is this guy?'

Kamar picked a number from his speed-dial menu. 'I'm calling Britva. Who do you think I'm calling?'

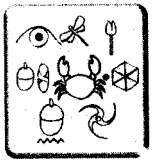
Vassikin paled. Calling the boss was dangerous. Britva was well known for shooting the bearers of bad news. 'It's good news, right? You're calling with good news?'

Kamar flipped the Visa at his partner. 'Read that.'

Vassikin studied the card for several moments. 'I don't read *Angliskii*. What does it say? What's the name?'

Kamar told him. A slow smile spread across Mikhael's face. 'Make the call,' he said.

CHAPTER 1: FAMILY TIES



THE loss of her husband had a profound effect on Angeline Fowl. She had retreated to her room, refusing to go outside. She took refuge in her mind, preferring dreams of the past to real life. It is doubtful whether she would have recovered had not her son, Artemis the Second, done a deal with the elf Holly Short: his mother's sanity in return for half the ransom gold he had stolen from the fairy police. His mother fully recovered, Artemis Junior focused his efforts on locating his father, investing large chunks of the family fortune in Russian excursions, local intelligence and Internet-search companies.

Young Artemis had received a double share of Fowl guile. However, with the recovery of his mother, a moral and beautiful lady, it became increasingly difficult for him to realize his ingenious schemes. Schemes that were ever more necessary to fund the search for his father.

Angeline, distraught by her son's obsession and afraid

of the effects of the past two years on his mind, signed up her thirteen-year-old for treatment with the school counsellor.

You have to feel sorry for him. The counsellor, that is ...

St Bartleby's School for Young Gentlemen, County Wicklow, Ireland, present day

Doctor Po leaned back in his padded armchair, eyes flicking across the page in front of him.

'Now, Master Fowl, let's talk, shall we?'

Artemis sighed deeply, smoothing his dark hair back from a wide, pale brow. When would people learn that a mind such as his could not be dissected? He himself had read more psychology textbooks than the counsellor. He had even contributed an article to *The Psychologists' Journal* under the pseudonym Doctor F. Roy Dean Schlippe.

'Certainly, Doctor. Let's talk about your chair. Victorian?'

Po rubbed the leather arm fondly. 'Yes, quite correct. Something of a family heirloom. My grandfather acquired it at auction at Sotheby's. Apparently it once stood in the palace. The Queen's favourite.'

A taut smile stretched Artemis's lips perhaps a

centimetre. 'Really, Doctor. They don't generally allow fakes in the palace.'

Po's grip stretched the worn leather. 'Fake? I assure you, Master Fowl, this is completely authentic.'

Artemis leaned in for a closer examination. 'It's clever, I grant you. But look here.' Po's gaze followed the youth's finger. 'Those furniture tacks. See the criss-cross pattern on the head? Machine tooled. Nineteen twenty at the earliest. Your grandfather was duped. But what matter? A chair is a chair. A possession of no importance, eh, Doctor?'

Po scribbled furiously, burying his dismay. 'Yes, Artemis, very clever. Just as your file says. Playing your little games. Now, shall we get back to you?'

Artemis Fowl the Second straightened the crease in his trousers.

'There is a problem here, Doctor.'

'Really? And what might that be?'

'The problem is that I know the textbook replies to any question you care to ask.'

Doctor Po jotted in his pad for a full minute. 'We do have a problem, Artemis. But that's not it,' he said eventually.

Artemis almost smiled. No doubt the doctor would treat him to another predictable theory. Which disorder would he have today? Multiple personality perhaps, or maybe he'd be a pathological liar?

'The problem is that you don't respect anyone enough to treat them as an equal.'

Artemis was thrown by the statement. This doctor was smarter than the rest. 'That's ridiculous. I hold several people in the highest esteem.'

Po did not glance up from his notebook. 'Really? Who, for example?'

Artemis thought for a moment. 'Albert Einstein. His theories were usually correct. And Archimedes, the Greek mathematician.'

'What about someone that you actually know?'

Artemis thought hard. No one came to mind.

'What? No examples?'

Artemis shrugged. 'You seem to have all the answers, Doctor Po. Why don't you tell me?'

Po opened a window on his laptop. 'Extraordinary. Every time I read this ...'

'My biography, I presume?'

'Yes, it explains a lot.'

'Such as?' asked Artemis, interested in spite of himself.

Doctor Po printed off a page.

'Firstly there's your associate, Butler. A bodyguard, I understand. Hardly a suitable companion for an impressionable boy. Then there's your mother. A wonderful woman in my opinion, but with absolutely no control over your behaviour. Finally, there's your father.

According to this, he wasn't much of a role model even when he was alive.'

The remark stung, but Artemis wasn't about to let the doctor realize how much. 'Your file is mistaken, Doctor,' he said. 'My father is alive. Missing perhaps, but alive.'

Po checked the sheet. 'Really? I was under the impression that he has been missing for almost two years. Why, the courts have declared him legally dead.'

Artemis's voice was devoid of emotion, though his heart was pounding. 'I don't care what the courts say, or the Red Cross. He is alive, and I will find him.'

Po scratched another note.

'But even if your father were to return, what then?' he asked. 'Will you follow in his footsteps? Will you be a criminal like him? Perhaps you already are?'

'My father is no criminal,' Artemis pointed out testily. 'He was moving all our assets into legitimate enterprises. The Murmansk venture was completely above board.'

'You're avoiding the question, Artemis,' said Po.

But Artemis had had enough of this line of questioning. Time to play a little game. 'Why, Doctor?' said Artemis, shocked. 'This is a sensitive area. For all you know, I could be suffering from depression.'

'I suppose you could,' said Po, sensing a breakthrough. 'Is that the case?'

Artemis dropped his face into his hands. 'It's my mother, Doctor.'

'Your mother?' prompted Po, trying to keep the excitement from his voice. Artemis had retired half a dozen counsellors from St Bartleby's already this year. Truth be told, Po was on the point of packing his own bags. But now ...

'My mother, she ...'

Po leaned forward on his fake Victorian chair. 'Your mother, yes?'

'She forces me to endure this ridiculous therapy when the school's so-called counsellors are little better than misguided do-gooders with degrees.'

Po sighed. 'Very well, Artemis. Have it your way, but you are never going to find peace if you continue to run away from your problems.'

Artemis was spared further analysis by the vibration of his mobile phone. It was on a coded secure line. Only one person had the number. The boy retrieved it from his pocket, flipping open the tiny communicator. 'Yes?'

Butler's voice came through the speaker. 'Artemis. It's me.'

'Obviously. I'm in the middle of something here.'

'We've had a message.'

'Yes. From where?'

'I don't know exactly. But it concerns the *Fowl Star*.'

A jolt flew along Artemis's spine. 'Where are you?'

'The main gate.'

'Good man. I'm on my way.'

Doctor Po whipped off his spectacles. 'This session is not over, young man. We made some progress today, even if you won't admit it. Leave now and I will be forced to inform the Dean.'

The warning was lost on Artemis. He was already somewhere else. A familiar electric buzz was crackling over his skin. This was the beginning of something. He could feel it.