Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

Opening extract from

Artemis Fowl and the Eternity Code

Written by

Eoin Colfer

Published by

Puffin

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

PROLOGUE

Excerpt from Artemis Fowl's diary. Disk 2. Encrypted.

FOR the past two years my business enterprises have thrived without parental interference. In this time, I have sold the Pyramids to a Western businessman, forged and auctioned off the lost diaries of Leonardo da Vinci and separated the fairy People from a large portion of their precious gold. But my freedom to plot is almost at an end. As I write, my father lies in a hospital bed in Helsinki, where he recovers after a two-year imprisonment by the Russian Mafiya. He is still unconscious following his ordeal, but he will awaken soon and retake control of the Fowl finances.

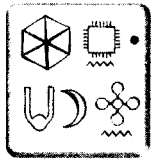
With two parents resident in Fowl Manor, it will be impossible for me to conduct my various illegal ventures undetected. Previously this would not have been a problem as my father was a bigger crook than me, but Mother is determined that the Fowls are going straight.

However, there is time for one last job. Something that my mother would not approve of. I don't think the fairy folk would like it much either. So I shall not tell them.

PART I: ATTACK

CHAPTER 1: THE CUBE

En Fin, Knightsbridge, London



ARTEMIS Fowl was almost content. His father would be discharged from Helsinki's University Hospital any day now. He himself was looking forward to a delicious late lunch at En Fin, a London seafood restaurant, and his business contact should arrive any moment. All according to plan.

His bodyguard, Butler, was not quite so relaxed. But then again he was never truly at ease – one did not become one of the world's deadliest men by dropping one's guard. The giant Eurasian flitted between tables in the Knightsbridge bistro, positioning the usual security items and clearing exit routes.

'Are you wearing the earplugs?' he asked his employer.

Artemis sighed deeply. 'Yes, Butler. Though I hardly

think we are in danger here. It's a perfectly legal business meeting in broad daylight, for heaven's sake.'

The earplugs were actually sonic filter sponges, cannibalized from fairy Lower Elements Police helmets. Butler had obtained the helmets, along with a treasure trove of fairy technology, over a year previously when one of Artemis's schemes pitted him against a fairy SWAT team. The sponges were grown in LEP labs, and had tiny porous membranes that sealed automatically when decibel levels surpassed safety standards.

'Maybe so, Artemis, but the thing about assassins is that they like to catch you unawares.'

'Perhaps,' replied Artemis, perusing the menu's entrée section. 'But who could possibly have a motive to kill us?'

Butler shot one of the half-dozen diners a fierce glare, just in case she was planning something. The woman must have been at least eighty.

'They might not be after *us*. Remember, Jon Spiro is a powerful man. He put a lot of companies out of business. We could be caught in a crossfire.'

Artemis nodded. As usual, Butler was right, which explained why they were both still alive. Jon Spiro, the American he was meeting, was just the kind of man to attract assassins' bullets. A successful IT billionaire, with a shady past and alleged mob connections. Rumour had it that his company, Fission Chips, had made it to the top on the back of stolen research. Of course, nothing was ever

proved – not that Chicago's district attorney hadn't tried. Several times.

A waitress wandered over, giving them a dazzling smile.

'Hello there, young man. Would you like to see the children's menu?'

A vein pulsed in Artemis's temple.

'No, mademoiselle, I would not like to see the *children's menu*. I have no doubt the *children's menu* itself tastes better than the meals on it. I would like to order à la carte. Or don't you serve fish to minors?'

The waitress's smile shrank by a couple of molars. Artemis's vocabulary had that effect on most people.

Butler rolled his eyes. And Artemis wondered who would want to kill him. Most of the waiters and tailors in Europe, for a start.

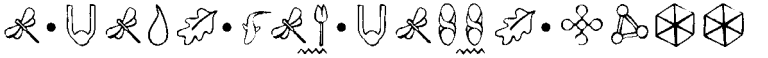
'Yes, sir,' stammered the unfortunate waitress. 'Whatever you like.'

'What I would like is a medley of shark and swordfish, pan-seared, on a bed of vegetables and new potatoes.'

'And to drink?'

'Spring water. Irish, if you have it. And no ice, please, as your ice is no doubt made from tap water, which rather defeats the purpose of spring water.'

The waitress scurried to the kitchen, relieved to escape from the pale youth at table six. She'd seen a vampire movie once. The undead creature had the very same



hypnotic stare. Maybe the kid spoke like a grown-up because he was actually five hundred years old.

Artemis smiled in anticipation of his meal, unaware of the consternation he'd caused.

'You're going to be a big hit at the school dances,' Butler commented.

'Pardon?'

'That poor girl was almost in tears. It wouldn't hurt you to be nice occasionally.'

Artemis was surprised. Butler rarely offered opinions on personal matters.

'I don't see myself at school dances, Butler.'

'Dancing isn't the point. It's all about communication.'

'Communication?' scoffed young Master Fowl. 'I doubt there is a teenager alive with a vocabulary equal to mine.'

Butler was about to point out the difference between talking and communicating when the restaurant door opened. A small tanned man entered, flanked by a veritable giant. Jon Spiro and his security.

Butler bent low to whisper in his charge's ear. 'Be careful, Artemis. I know the big one by reputation.'

Spiro wound through the tables, arms outstretched. He was a middle-aged American, thin as a javelin, and barely taller than Artemis himself. In the eighties, shipping had been his thing; in the nineties he made a killing in stocks and shares. Now, it was communications.

He wore his trademark white linen suit, and there was enough jewellery hanging from his wrists and fingers to gold leaf the Taj Mahal.

Artemis rose to greet his associate. 'Mister Spiro, welcome.'

'Hey, little Artemis Fowl. How the hell are you?'

Artemis shook the man's hand. His jewellery jangled like a rattlesnake's tail.

'I am well. Glad you could come.'

Spiro took a chair. 'Artemis Fowl calls with a proposition: I would've walked across broken glass to be here.'

The bodyguards appraised each other openly. Apart from their bulk, the two were polar opposites. Butler was the epitome of understated efficiency. Black suit, shaven head, as inconspicuous as it was possible to be at almost seven feet tall. The newcomer had bleached blond hair, a cut-off T-shirt and silver pirate rings in both ears. This was not a man who wanted to be forgotten, or ignored.

'Arno Blunt,' said Butler. 'I've heard about you.'

Blunt took up his position at Jon Spiro's shoulder.

'Butler. One of *the* Butlers,' he said, in a New Zealand drawl. 'I hear you guys are the best. That's what I hear. Let's hope we don't have to find out.'

Spiro laughed. It sounded like a box of crickets.

'Arno, please. We are among friends here. This is not a day for threats.'

Butler was not so sure. His soldier's sense was buzzing like a nest of hornets at the base of his skull. There was danger here.

'So, my friend. To business,' said Spiro, fixing Artemis with his close-set dark eyes. 'I've been salivating all the way across the Atlantic. What have you got for me?'

Artemis frowned. He'd hoped business could wait until after lunch.

'Wouldn't you like to see a menu?'

'No. I don't eat much any more. Pills and liquids mostly. Gut problems.'

'Very well,' said Artemis, laying an aluminium briefcase on the table. 'To business then.'

He flipped the case's lid, revealing a red cube the size of a minidisc player, nestling in blue foam.

Spiro cleaned his spectacles with the tail end of his tie.

'What am I seeing here, kid?'

Artemis placed the shining box on the table.

'The future, Mister Spiro. Ahead of schedule.'

Jon Spiro leaned in, taking a good look.

'Looks like a paperweight to me.'

Arno Blunt sniggered, his eyes taunting Butler.

'A demonstration then,' said Artemis, picking up the metal box. He pressed a button and the gadget purred into life. Sections slid back to reveal speakers and a screen.

'Cute,' muttered Spiro. 'I flew three thousand miles for a micro-TV?'

Artemis nodded. 'A micro-TV. But also a verbally controlled computer, a mobile phone, a diagnostic aid. This little box can read any information on absolutely any platform, electrical or organic. It can play videos, laserdiscs, DVDs; go online, retrieve e-mail, hack any computer. It can even scan your chest to see how fast your heart's beating. Its battery is good for two years and, of course, it's completely wireless.'

Artemis paused, to let it sink in.

Spiro's eyes seemed huge behind his spectacles.

'You mean, this box ...?'

'Will render all other technology obsolete. Your computer plants will be worthless.'

The American took several deep breaths.

'But how ... how?'

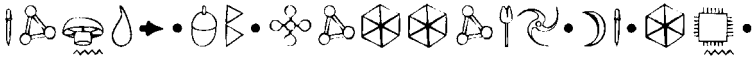
Artemis flipped the box over. An infrared sensor pulsed gently on the back.

'This is the secret. An omni-sensor. It can read anything you ask it to. And if the source is programmed in, it can piggyback any satellite you choose.'

Spiro wagged a finger. 'But that's illegal, isn't it?'

'No, no,' said Artemis, smiling. 'There are no laws against something like this. And there won't be for at least two years after it comes out. Look how long it took to shut down Napster.'

The American rested his face in his hands. It was too much.



'I don't understand. This is years, no, *decades* ahead of anything we have now. You're nothing but a thirteen-year-old kid. How did you do it?'

Artemis thought for a second. What was he going to say? Sixteen months ago Butler took on a Lower Elements Police Retrieval squad and confiscated their fairy technology? Then he, Artemis, had taken the components and built this wonderful box? Hardly.

'Let's just say I'm a very smart boy, Mister Spiro.'

Spiro's eyes narrowed. 'Maybe not as smart as you'd like us to think. I want a demonstration.'

'Fair enough.' Artemis nodded. 'Do you have a mobile phone?'

'Naturally.' Spiro placed his mobile phone on the table. It was the latest Fission Chips model.

'Secure, I take it?'

Spiro nodded arrogantly. 'Five hundred bit encryption. Best in its class. You're not getting into the Fission 400 without a code.'

'We shall see.'

Artemis pointed the sensor at the handset. The screen instantly displayed an image of the mobile phone's workings.

'Download?' enquired a metallic voice from the speaker.

'Confirm.'

In less than a second, the job was done. 'Download complete,' said the box, with a hint of smugness.

Spiro was aghast. 'I don't believe it. That system cost twenty million dollars.'

'Worthless,' said Artemis, showing him the screen. 'Would you like to call home? Or maybe move some funds around? You really shouldn't keep your bank account numbers on a sim card.'

The American thought for several moments.

'It's a trick,' he pronounced finally. 'You must've known about my phone. Somehow, don't ask me how, you got access to it earlier.'

'That is logical,' admitted Artemis. 'It's what I would suspect. Name your test.'

Spiro cast his eyes around the restaurant, fingers drumming the tabletop.

'Over there,' he said, pointing to a video shelf above the bar. 'Play one of those tapes.'

'That's it?'

'It'll do, for a start.'

Arno Blunt made a huge show of flicking through the tapes, eventually selecting one without a label. He slapped it down on the table, bouncing the engraved silver cutlery into the air.

Artemis resisted the urge to roll his eyes and placed the red box directly on to the tape's surface.

An image of the cassette's innards appeared on the tiny plasma screen.

'Download?' asked the box.

Artemis nodded. 'Download, compensate and play.'

Again, the operation was completed in under a second. An old episode of an English soap crackled into life.

'DVD quality,' commented Artemis. 'Regardless of the input, the C Cube will compensate.'

'The what?'

'C Cube,' repeated Artemis. 'The name I have given my little box. A tad obvious, I admit. But appropriate. The cube that sees everything.'

Spiro snatched the video cassette. 'Check it,' he ordered, tossing the tape to Arno Blunt.

The bleached-blond bodyguard activated the bar's TV, sliding the video into its slot. *Coronation Street* flickered across the screen. The same show. Nowhere near the same quality.

'Convinced?' asked Artemis.

The American tinkered with one of his many bracelets.

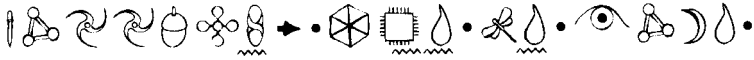
'Almost. One last test. I have a feeling that the government is monitoring me. Could you check it out?'

Artemis thought for a moment, then addressed the red box again.

'Cube, do you read any surveillance beams concentrated on this building?'

The machine whirred for a moment.

'The strongest ion beam is eighty kilometres due west, emanating from US satellite code number ST1132P. Registered to the Central Intelligence Agency. Estimated



time of arrival, eight minutes. There are also several LEP probes connected to ...'

Artemis hit the mute button before the Cube could continue. Obviously the computer's fairy components could pick up Lower Elements technology too. He would have to remedy that. In the wrong hands that information would be devastating to fairy security.

'What's the matter, kid? The box was still talking. Who are the LEP?'

Artemis shrugged. 'No pay, no play, as you Americans say. One example is enough. The CIA no less.'

'The CIA,' breathed Spiro. 'They suspect me of selling military secrets. They've pulled one of their birds out of orbit, just to track me.'

'Or perhaps me,' noted Artemis.

'Perhaps you,' agreed Spiro. 'You're looking more dangerous by the second.'

Arno Blunt chuckled derisively.

Butler ignored it. One of them had to be professional.

Spiro cracked his knuckles, a habit Artemis detested.

'We've got eight minutes, so let's get down to the nitty gritty, kid. How much for the box?'

Artemis was not paying attention, distracted by the LEP information that the Cube had almost revealed. In a careless moment, he had nearly exposed his subterranean friends to exactly the kind of man who would exploit them.

'I'm sorry, what did you say?'

'I said, how much for the box?'

'Firstly, it's a Cube,' corrected Artemis. 'And secondly, it's not for sale.'

Jon Spiro took a deep, shuddering breath. 'Not for sale? You brought me across the Atlantic to show me something you're not going to sell me? What's going on here?'

Butler wrapped his fingers around the handle of a pistol in his waistband. Arno Blunt's hand disappeared behind his back. The tension cranked up another notch.

Artemis steepled his fingers. 'Mister Spiro. Jon. I am not a complete idiot. I realize the value of my Cube. There is not enough money in the world to pay for this particular item. Whatever you could give me, it would be worth a thousand per cent more in a week.'

'So what's the deal, Fowl?' asked Spiro, through gritted teeth. 'What are you offering?'

'I'm offering you twelve months. For the right price, I'm prepared to keep my Cube off the market for a year.'

Jon Spiro toyed with his ID bracelet. A birthday present to himself.

'You'll suppress the technology for a year?'

'Correct. That should give you ample time to sell your stocks before they crash, and to use the profits to buy into Fowl Industries.'

'There is no Fowl Industries.'

Artemis smirked. 'There will be.'

Butler squeezed his employer's shoulder. It was not a good idea to bait a man like Jon Spiro.

But Spiro hadn't even noticed the jibe. He was too busy calculating, twisting his bracelet like a string of worry beads.

'Your price?' he asked eventually.

'Gold. One metric ton,' replied the heir to the Fowl estate.

'That's a lot of gold.'

Artemis shrugged. 'I like gold. It holds its value. And anyway, it's a pittance compared to what this deal will save you.'

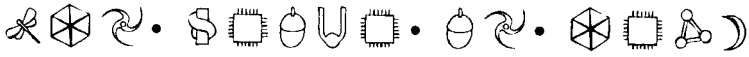
Spiro thought about it. At his shoulder, Arno Blunt continued staring at Butler. The Fowl bodyguard blinked freely: in the event of confrontation, dry eyeballs would only lessen his advantage. Staring matches were for amateurs.

'Let's say I don't like your terms,' said Jon Spiro. 'Let's say I decide to take your little gadget with me right now.'

Arno Blunt's chest puffed out another centimetre.

'Even if you could take the Cube,' said Artemis, smiling, 'it would be of little use to you. The technology is beyond anything your engineers have ever seen.'

Spiro gave a thin, mirthless smile. 'Oh, I'm sure they could figure it out. Even if it took a couple of years, it won't matter to you. Not where you're going.'



'If I *go* anywhere, then the C Cube's secrets go with me. Its every function is coded to my voice patterns. It's quite a clever code.'

Butler bent his knees slightly, ready to spring.

'I bet we could break that code. I got one helluva team assembled in Fission Chips.'

'Pardon me if I am unimpressed by your "*one helluva team*",' said Artemis. 'Thus far you have been trailing several years behind Phonetix.'

Spiro jumped to his feet. He did not like the P word. Phonetix was the only communications company whose stock was higher than Fission Chips's.

'OK, kid, you've had your fun. Now it's my turn. I have to go now, before the satellite beam gets here. But I'm leaving Mister Blunt behind.' He patted his bodyguard on the shoulder. 'You know what you have to do.'

Blunt nodded. He knew. He was looking forward to it.

For the first time since the meeting began, Artemis forgot about his lunch and concentrated completely on the situation at hand. This was not going according to plan.

'Mister Spiro. You cannot be serious. We are in a public place, surrounded by civilians. Your man cannot hope to compete with Butler. If you persist with these ludicrous threats, I will be forced to withdraw my offer, and will release the C Cube immediately.'

Spiro placed his palms on the table. 'Listen, kid,' he whispered. 'I like you. In a couple of years, you could have

been just like me. But did you ever put a gun to somebody's head and pull the trigger?'

Artemis didn't reply.

'No?' grunted Spiro. 'I didn't think so. Sometimes that's all it takes. Guts. And you don't have them.'

Artemis was at a loss for words. Something that had only happened twice since his fifth birthday. Butler stepped in to fill the silence. Unveiled threats were more his area.

'Mister Spiro. Don't try to bluff us. Blunt may be big, but I can snap him like a twig. Then there's nobody between me and you. And, take my word for it, you don't want that.'

Spiro's smile spread across his nicotine-stained teeth like a smear of treacle.

'Oh, I wouldn't say there's nobody between us.'

Butler got that sinking feeling. The one you get when there are a dozen laser sights playing across your chest. They had been set up. Somehow Spiro had outmanoeuvred Artemis.

'Hey, Fowl?' said the American. 'I wonder how come your lunch is taking so long.'

It was at that moment Artemis realized just how much trouble they were in.

It all happened in a heartbeat. Spiro clicked his fingers and every single customer in En Fin drew a weapon from

inside his or her coat. The eighty-year-old lady suddenly looked a lot more threatening with a revolver in her bony fist. Two armed waiters emerged from the kitchen wielding folding-stock machine guns. Butler never even had time to draw breath.

Spiro tipped over the salt cellar. 'Check and mate. My game, kid.'

Artemis tried to concentrate. There must be a way out. There was always a way out. But it wouldn't come. He had been hoodwinked. Perhaps fatally. No human had ever outsmarted Artemis Fowl. Then again, it only had to happen once.

'I'm going now,' continued Spiro, pocketing the C Cube, 'before that satellite beam shows up, and those other ones. The LEP, I've never heard of that particular agency. And as soon as I get this gizmo working they're going to wish they never heard of me. It's been fun doing business with you.'

On his way to the door, Spiro winked at his bodyguard.

'You got six minutes, Arno. A dream come true, eh? You get to be the guy who took out the great Butler.' He turned back to Artemis, unable to resist a final jibe.

'Oh, and by the way – Artemis, isn't that a girl's name?' And he was gone, into the multicultural throngs of tourists on the high street.

The old lady locked the door behind him. The click echoed around the restaurant.

Artemis decided to take the initiative. 'Now, ladies and gentlemen,' he said, trying to avoid staring down the black-eyed gun barrels. 'I'm sure we can come to an arrangement.'

'Quiet, Artemis!'

It took a moment for Artemis's brain to process the fact that Butler had *ordered* him to be silent. Most impertinently in fact.

'I beg your pardon ...'

Butler clamped a hand over his employer's mouth.

'Quiet, Artemis. These people are professionals, not to be bargained with.'

Blunt rotated his skull, cracking the tendons in his neck.

'You got that right, Butler. We're here to kill you. As soon as Mister Spiro got the call we started sending people in. I can't believe you fell for it, man. You must be getting old.'

Butler couldn't believe it either. There was a time when he would have staked out any rendezvous site for a week before giving it the thumbs-up. Maybe he *was* getting old, but there was an excellent chance he wouldn't be getting any older.

'OK, Blunt,' said Butler, stretching out his empty palms before him. 'You and me. One on one.'

'Very noble,' said Blunt. 'That's your Asian code of honour, I suppose. Me, I don't have a code. If you think I'm going to risk you somehow getting out of here, you're

crazy. This is an uncomplicated deal. I shoot you. You die. No face-off, no duel.'

Blunt reached lazily into his waistband. Why hurry? One move from Butler and a dozen bullets would find their mark.

Artemis's brain seemed to have shut down. The usual stream of ideas had dried up. I'm going to die, he thought. I don't believe it.

Butler was saying something. Artemis decided he should listen.

'Richard of York gave battle in vain,' said the bodyguard, enunciating clearly.

Blunt was screwing a silencer on to the muzzle of his ceramic pistol.

'What are you saying? What kind of gibberish is that? Don't say the great Butler is cracking up! Wait till I tell the guys.'

But the old woman looked thoughtful.

'Richard of York ... I know that.'

Artemis knew it too. It was virtually the entire verbal detonation code for the fairy sonix grenade magnetized to the underside of the table. One of Butler's little security devices. All they needed was one more word and the grenade would explode, sending a solid wall of sound charging through the building, blowing out every window and eardrum. There would be no smoke or flames, but anyone within a ten-metre radius not wearing earplugs

had about five seconds before severe pain set in. One more word.

The old lady scratched her head with the revolver's barrel.

'Richard of York? I remember now, the nuns taught us that in school. Richard of York gave battle in vain. It's one of those memory tricks. The colours of the rainbow.'

Rainbow. The final word. Artemis remembered – just in time – to slacken his jaw. If his teeth were clenched, the sonic waves would shatter them like sugar glass.

The grenade detonated in a blast of compressed sound, instantaneously hurling eleven people to the furthest extremities of the room, until they came into contact with various walls. The lucky ones hit partitions and went straight through. The unlucky ones collided with cavity block walls. Things broke. Not the blocks.

Artemis was safe in Butler's bear-hug. The bodyguard had anchored himself against a solid door frame, folding the flying boy into his arms. And they had several other advantages over Spiro's assassins: their teeth were intact, they did not suffer from any compound fractures and the sonic filter sponges had sealed, saving their eardrums from perforation.

Butler surveyed the room. The assassins were all down, clutching their ears. They wouldn't be uncrossing their eyes for several days. The manservant drew his Sig Sauer pistol from a shoulder holster.

'Stay here,' he commanded. 'I'm going to check the kitchen.'

Artemis settled back into his chair, drawing several shaky breaths. All around was a chaos of dust and moans. But once again, Butler had saved them. All was not lost. It was even possible that they could catch Spiro before he left the country. Butler had a contact in Heathrow Security: Sid Commons, an ex-Green Beret he'd served with on bodyguard duty in Monte Carlo.

A large figure came into view, blocking out the sunlight. It was Butler, returned from his reconnoitre. Artemis breathed deeply, feelingly uncharacteristically emotional.

'Butler,' he began. 'We really must talk regarding your salary ...'

But it wasn't Butler. It was Arno Blunt. He had something in each hand. On his left palm, two tiny cones of yellow foam.

'Ear plugs,' he spat through broken teeth. 'I always wear 'em before a fire fight. Good thing too, eh?'

In his right hand, Blunt held a silenced pistol.

'You first,' he said. 'Then the ape.'

Arno Blunt cocked the gun, took aim briefly and fired.