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Artemis Fowl and the Last Guardian

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ARTEMIS FOWL

AND THE LAST GUARDIAN

EOIN COLFER



CHAPTER 1:
A COMPLEX SITUATION

From the Case Notes of Doctor Jerbal Argon, Psych Brotherhood

1. **ARTEMIS** Fowl, once self-proclaimed *teenage criminal mastermind*, now prefers the term *juvenile genius*. Apparently he has changed. (Note to self: *harrumph*.)
2. For the past six months Artemis has been undergoing weekly therapy sessions at my clinic in Haven City in an attempt to overcome a severe case of Atlantis Complex, a psychological condition that he developed as a result of meddling in fairy magic. (Serves him right, silly Mud Boy.)
3. Remember to submit outrageous bill to Lower Elements Police.
4. Artemis appears to be cured, and in record time too. Is this likely? Or even possible?
5. Discuss my theory of relativity with Artemis. Could make for a very interesting chapter in my v-book: *Foiling Fowl: Outsmarting the Smarty-pants*. (Publishers love the title: *cha-ching!*)
6. Order more painkillers for my blasted hip.
7. Issue clean bill of mental health for Artemis. Final session today.

Doctor Argon's Office, Haven City, the Lower Elements

Artemis Fowl grew impatient. Doctor Argon was late. This final session was just as unnecessary as the past half dozen had been. He was completely cured, for heaven's sake, and had been since week eighteen. His prodigious intellect had accelerated the process and he should not have to twiddle his thumbs at the behest of a gnome psychiatrist.

At first Artemis paced the office, refusing to be calmed by the waterwall with its gently pulsing mood lights, then he sat for a minute in the oxygen booth, which he found calmed him a little too much.

Oxygen booth indeed, he thought, quickly ducking out of the glass-walled chamber.

Finally the door hissed and slid aside on runners, admitting Doctor Jerbal Argon to his own office. The squat gnome limped directly to his chair. He dropped into the embrace of its many pads, slapping the armrest controls until the gel sac under his right hip glowed gently.

'Aaaah,' he sighed. 'My hip is killing me. Nothing helps, honestly. People think they know pain, but they have no idea.'

'You're late,' noted Artemis in fluent Gnommish, his voice devoid of sympathy.

Argon sighed blissfully again as the heated chair pad went to work on his hip. 'Always in a hurry, eh, Mud Boy? Why didn't you have a puff of oxygen or meditate by the waterwall? Hey-Hey Monks swear by those waterwalls.'

'I am not a pixie priest, Doctor. What Hey-Hey Monks do after first gong is of little interest to me. Can we proceed with my rehabilitation? Or would you prefer to waste more of my time?'

Argon huffed a little, then swung his bulk forward, opening a sim-paper file on his desk. 'Why is it that the saner you get the nastier you are?'

Artemis crossed his legs, his body language relaxed for the first time. 'Such repressed anger, Doctor. Where does it all stem from?'

'Let's stick to your disposition, shall we, Artemis?' Argon snagged a stack of cards from his file. 'I am going to show you some ink blots and you tell me what the shapes suggest to you.'

Artemis's moan was extended and theatrical. 'Ink blots. Oh, please. My lifespan is considerably shorter than yours, Doctor. I prefer not to waste valuable time on worthless pseudo tests. We may as well read tea leaves or divine the future in turkey entrails.'

'Ink blots are a reliable indication of mental health,' Argon objected. 'Tried and tested.'

'Tested by psychiatrists for psychiatrists,' snorted Artemis.

Argon slapped a card down on the table. 'What do you see in this ink blot?'

'I see an ink blot,' said Artemis.

'Yes, but what does the blot suggest to you?'

Artemis smirked in a supremely annoying fashion. 'I see card five hundred and thirty-four.'

'Pardon me?'

'Card five hundred and thirty-four,' repeated Artemis. 'Of a series of six hundred standard ink-blot cards. I memorized them during our sessions. You don't even shuffle.'

Argon checked the number on the back of the card: 534. Of course.

'Knowing the number does not answer the question. What do you see?'

Artemis allowed his lip to wobble. 'I see an axe dripping with blood. Also a scared child and an elf clothed in the skin of a troll.'

'Really?' Argon was interested now.

'No. Not really. I see a secure building, perhaps a family home, with four windows. A trustworthy pet and a pathway leading from the door into the distance. I think, if you check your manual, you will find that these answers fall inside *healthy* parameters.'

Argon did not need to check. The Mud Boy was right, as usual. Perhaps he could blindside Artemis with his new theory. It was not part of the programme but might earn him a little respect.

'Have you heard of the theory of relativity?'

Artemis blinked. 'Is this a joke? I have travelled through time, Doctor. I think I know a little something about relativity.'

'No. Not that theory; my theory of relativity proposes that all things magical are related and influenced by ancient spells or magical hotspots.'

Artemis rubbed his chin. 'Interesting. But I think you'll find that your postulation should be called the theory of *relatedness*.'

'Whatever,' said Argon, waving the quibble away. 'I did a little research and it turns out that the Fowls have been a bother to fairy folk off and on for thousands of years. Dozens of your ancestors have tried for the crock of gold, though you are the only one to have succeeded.'

Artemis sat up straight; this was interesting. 'And I never knew about this because you mind-wiped my forefathers.'

'Exactly,' said Argon, thrilled to have Artemis's full attention. 'When he was a lad, your own father actually managed to hog-tie a dwarf who was drawn to the estate. I imagine he still dreams of that moment.'

'Good for him.' A thought struck Artemis. 'Why was the dwarf attracted to our estate?'

'Because the residual magic there is off the scale. Something happened on the Fowl Estate once. Something huge, magically speaking.'

'And this lingering power plants ideas in our heads and nudges the Fowls towards a belief in magic,' Artemis murmured almost to himself.

'Exactly. It's a goblin-and-egg situation. Did you think about magic and then find magic? Or did the magic make you think about looking for magic?'

Artemis took a few notes on his smartphone. 'And this huge magical event, can you be more specific?'

Argon shrugged. 'Our records don't go back that far. I'd say we're talking about back when fairies lived on the surface, more than ten thousand years ago.'

Artemis rose and loomed over the squat gnome. He felt he owed the doctor something for the theory of *relatedness*, which would certainly bear some investigation.

'Doctor Argon, did you have turned-in feet as a child?'

Argon was so surprised that he blurted an honest answer to a personal question, very unusual for a psychiatrist. 'Yes. Yes, I did.'

'And were you forced to wear remedial shoes with stacked soles?'

Argon was intrigued. He hadn't thought about those horrible shoes in centuries; he had actually forgotten them until this moment.

'Just one, on my right foot.'

Artemis nodded wisely, and Argon felt as though their roles had been reversed and he was the patient.

'I would guess that your foot was pulled into its correct alignment, but your femur was twisted slightly in the process. A simple brace should solve your hip problem.' Artemis pulled a folded napkin from his pocket. 'I sketched a design while you kept me waiting these past few sessions. Foaly should be able to build the brace for you. I may have been a few millimetres off with my estimate of your dimensions, so best to get measured.' He placed ten fingers flat on the desk. 'May I leave now? Have I fulfilled my obligation?'

The doctor nodded glumly, thinking that he would possibly omit this session from his book. He watched Artemis stride across the office floor and duck through the doorway.

Argon studied the napkin drawing and knew instinctively that Artemis was right about his hip.

Either that boy is the sanest creature on Earth, he thought. *Or he is so disturbed that our tests cannot even begin to scratch the surface.*

Argon pulled a rubber stamp from his desk and on the cover of Artemis's file stamped the word **FUNCTIONAL** in big red letters.

I hope so, he thought. *I really hope so*.

Artemis's bodyguard, Butler, waited for his principal outside Doctor Argon's office in the large chair that had been a gift from the centaur Foaly, technical consultant to the Lower Elements Police.

'I can't stand to look at you perched on a fairy stool,' Foaly had told him. 'It offends my eyes. You look like a monkey passing a coconut.'

'Very well,' Butler had said in his gravelly bass. 'I accept the gift, if only to preserve your eyes.'

In truth he had been mightily glad to have a comfortable chair, being more than six and a half feet tall in a city built for three-footers.

The bodyguard stood and stretched, flattening his palms against the ceiling, which was double-height by fairy standards. Thank God Argon had a taste for the grandiose or Butler wouldn't even have been able to stand up straight in the clinic. To his mind the building, with its vaulted ceilings, gold-flecked tapestries and retro sim-wood sliding doors, looked more like a monastery where the monks had taken a vow of wealth, rather than a medical facility. Only the wall-mounted laser hand-sanitizers and the occasional elfin nurse bustling past gave any hint that this place was actually a clinic.

I am so glad this detail is coming to an end, Butler had been thinking at least once every five minutes for the past fortnight. He had been in tight spots many times, but there was something about being confined in a city clamped to the underside of the Earth's crust that made him feel claustrophobic for the first time in his life.

Artemis emerged from Argon's office, his self-satisfied smirk even more pronounced than usual. When Butler saw this expression,

he knew that his boss was back in control of his faculties and his Atlantis Complex was certified as cured.

No more counting words. No more irrational fear of the number four. No more paranoia and delusions. Thank goodness for that.

He asked anyway, just to be certain. 'Well, Artemis, how are we?'

Artemis buttoned the jacket of his navy woollen suit.

'We are fine, Butler. That is to say that I, Artemis Fowl the Second, am one hundred per cent functional, which is about five times the functionality of an average person. Or to put it another way: one point five Mozarts. Or three quarters of a da Vinci.'

'Only three quarters? You're being modest.'

'Correct,' said Artemis, smiling. 'I am.'

Butler's shoulders sagged a little with relief. Inflated ego, supreme self-confidence. Artemis was most definitely his old self.

'Very good. Let's pick up our escort and be on our way then, shall we? I want to feel the sun on my face. The real sun, not the UV lamps they have down here.'

Artemis felt a pang of sympathy for his bodyguard, an emotion he had been experiencing more and more in recent months. It was difficult enough for Butler to be inconspicuous among humans; down here he could hardly attract more attention if he were wearing a clown suit and juggling fireballs.

'Very well,' agreed Artemis. 'We will pick up our escort and depart. Where is Holly?'

Butler jerked a thumb down the hallway. 'Where she generally is. With the clone.'

Captain Holly Short of the Lower Elements Police Recon division stared at the face of her arch-enemy and felt only pity. Of course, had she been gazing at the real Opal Koboi and not a cloned version, then pity might not have been the last emotion on her list, but it would certainly have ranked far below *rage* and *intense*

dislike bordering on hatred. But this was a clone, grown in advance to provide the megalomaniacal pixie with a body double so that she could be spirited from protective custody in the J. Argon Clinic if the LEP ever managed to incarcerate her, which they had.

Holly pitied the clone because she was a pathetic, dumb creature who had never asked to be created. Cloning was a banned science for both religious reasons and the more obvious fact that, without a life force or soul to power their systems, clones were doomed to a short life of negligent brain activity and organ failure.

This particular clone had lived out most of its days in an incubator, struggling for each breath since it had been removed from the chrysalis in which it had been grown.

'Not for much longer, little one,' Holly whispered, touching the ersatz pixie's forehead through the sterile gloves built into the incubator wall.

Holly could not have said for sure why she had begun to visit the clone. Perhaps it was because Argon had told her that no one else ever had.

She came from nowhere. She has no friends.

She had at least two friends now. Artemis had taken to joining Holly on her visits and would sit silently beside her, which was very unusual for him.

The clone's official designation was Unauthorized Experiment 14, but one of the clinic's wits had named her Nopal, which was a cruel play on the name Opal and the words *no pal*. Cruel or not, the name stuck and now even Holly used it, though with tenderness.

Argon assured her that Unauthorized Experiment 14 had no mental faculties, but Holly was sure that sometimes Nopal's milky eyes reacted when she visited. Could the clone actually recognize her?

Holly gazed at Nopal's delicate features and was inevitably reminded of her gene donor.

That pixie is poison, she thought bitterly. *Whatever she touches withers and dies*.

Artemis entered the room and stood beside Holly, resting a hand lightly on her shoulder.

'They're wrong about Nopal,' said Holly. 'She feels things. She understands.'

Artemis knelt down. 'I know. I taught her something last week. Watch.'

He placed his hand on the glass, tapping his fingers in sequence slowly, building up a rhythm. 'It is an exercise developed by Cuba's Doctor Parnassus. He uses it to generate a response from infants, even chimpanzees.'

Artemis continued to tap and slowly Nopal responded, raising her hand laboriously to Artemis's, slapping the glass clumsily in an attempt to copy his rhythm.

'There, you see,' said Artemis. 'Intelligence.'

Holly bumped him gently, shoulder to shoulder, which was her version of a hug. 'I knew your brains would eventually come in handy.'

The acorn cluster on the breast of Holly's LEP jumpsuit vibrated and Holly touched her wi-tech earring, accepting the call. A quick glance at her wrist computer told her that the call was from LEP technical consultant Foaly, and that the centaur had labelled it *urgent*.

'Foaly. What is it? I'm at the clinic, babysitting Artemis.'

The centaur's voice was crystal clear over the Haven City wireless network.

'I need you back at Police Plaza, right now. Bring the Mud Boy.'

The centaur sounded theatrical, but then Foaly would play the drama queen if his carrot soufflé collapsed.

'That's not how it works, Foaly. Consultants don't give orders to captains.'

'We have a Koboi sighting coming through on a satellite. It's a live feed,' countered the technical consultant.

'We're on our way,' said Holly, severing the connection.

*

They picked up Butler in the corridor. Artemis, Holly and Butler, three allies who had weathered battlefields, rebellions and conspiracy together and had developed their own crisis shorthand. Butler saw that Holly was wearing her business face.

'Situation?'

Holly strode past, forcing the others to follow. 'Opal,' she said in English.

Butler's face hardened. 'Eyes on?'

'Satellite link.'

'Origin?' asked the bodyguard.

'Unknown.'

They hurried down the retro corridor towards the clinic's courtyard. Butler outstripped the group and held open the old-fashioned hinged door with its stained-glass window depicting a thoughtful doctor comforting a weeping patient.

'Are we taking the Stick?' asked the bodyguard, his tone suggesting that he would rather not take *the Stick*.

Holly walked through the doorway. 'Sorry, big man. Stick time.'

Artemis had never been one for public transport, human or fairy, and so asked, 'What's the stick?'

The Stick was the street name for a series of conveyor belts that ran in parallel strips along Haven City's network of blocks. It was an ancient and reliable mode of transport from a less litigious time, which operated on a hop-on/hop-off basis similar to certain human airport-walkway systems. There were platforms throughout the city and all a person had to do was step on and grab hold of one of the carbon-fibre stalks that sprouted from the belt. Hence the name *Stick*.

Artemis and Butler had of course seen the Stick before, but Artemis had never planned to use such an undignified mode of transport and so had never even bothered to find out its name. Artemis knew that, with his famous lack of coordination, any attempt to hop casually on to the platform would result in a humiliating tumble. For Butler the problem

was not one of coordination or lack of it. He knew that, with his bulk, it would be difficult just to keep his feet within the belt's width.

'Ah, yes,' said Artemis. '*The Stick*. Surely a green cab would be faster?'

'Nope,' said Holly, hustling Artemis up the ramp on to the platform, then poking him in the kidneys at just the right time so that he stepped unconsciously on to the belt, his hand landing on a stick's bulbous grip.

'Hey,' said Artemis, perhaps the third time in his life he had used a slang expletive. 'I did it.'

'Next stop, the Olympics,' said Holly, who had mounted the platform behind him. 'Come on, bodyguard,' she called over her shoulder to Butler. 'Your principal is heading towards a tunnel.'

Butler shot the elf a look that would cow a bull. Holly was a dear friend, but her teasing could be relentless. He tiptoed on to the belt, squeezing his enormous feet on to a single section and bending his knees to grasp the tiny stick. In silhouette he looked like the world's bulkiest ballerina attempting to pluck a flower.

Holly might have grinned had Opal Koboi not been on her mind.

The Stick belt trundled its passengers from the Argon Clinic along the border of an Italian-style piazza towards a low tunnel, which had been laser-cut from solid rock. Fairies lunching al fresco froze with forkfuls of salad halfway to their mouths as the unlikely trio passed by.

The sight of a jumpsuit-clad LEP officer was common enough on a Stick belt, but a gangly human boy dressed like an undertaker and a troll-sized, buzz-cut man-mountain were quite unusual.

The tunnel was barely a metre high so Butler was forced to prostrate himself over three sections, flattening several handgrips in the process. His nose was no more than a metre from the tunnel wall, which he noticed was engraved with beautiful luminous pictograms depicting episodes from the People's history.

So the young fairies can learn something about their own heritage each time they pass through. How wonderful, thought Butler, but he suppressed his admiration as he had long ago disciplined his brain to concentrate on bodyguard duties and not waste neurons being amazed while he was below ground.

Save it for retirement, he thought. *Then you can cast your mind back and appreciate art.*

Police Plaza was a cobbled crest into which the shape of the Lower Elements Police acorn insignia had been painstakingly paved by master craftsmen. It was a total waste of effort as far as the LEP officers were concerned, as they were not generally the type who were inclined to gaze out of the fourth-floor windows and marvel at how the sim-sunlight caught the rim of each gold-leafed cobble and set the whole arrangement a-twinkling.

On this particular day it seemed that everyone on the fourth floor had slid from their cubicles like pebbles on a tilted surface and gathered in a tight cluster by the situations room, which adjoined Foaly's office/laboratory.

Holly made directly for the narrowest section of the throng and used sharp elbows to inch through the strangely silent crowd. Butler simply cleared his throat once and the crowd peeled apart as though magnetically repelled from the giant human. Artemis took this clear path into the situations room to find Commander Trouble Kelp and Foaly standing before a wall-sized screen, raptly following unfolding events.

Foaly noticed the gasps that followed Butler wherever he went in Haven and glanced round.

'May the fours be with you,' the centaur whispered to Artemis. His standard greeting/joke for the past six months.

'I am cured as you well know,' said Artemis. 'What is going on here?'

Holly cleared a space beside Trouble Kelp, who seemed to

be morphing into her former boss, Commander Julius Root, as the years went on. Commander Kelp was so brimful of gung-ho attitude that he had taken the name Trouble upon graduation and had once tried to arrest a troll for littering, which accounted for the sim-skin patch on the tip of his nose that glowed yellow from a certain angle.

'Haircut's new, Skipper,' Holly said. 'Beetroot had one just like it.'

Commander Kelp did not take his eyes from the screen. Holly was joshing because she was nervous and Trouble knew it. She was right to be nervous. In fact, outright fear would be more appropriate, given the situation that was being beamed in to them.

'Watch the show, Captain,' he said tightly. 'It's pretty self-explanatory.'

There were three figures on screen, a kneeling prisoner and two captors, but Holly did not place Opal Koboi straight away because she was searching for the pixie among the standing pair. She realized with a jolt that Opal was the prisoner.

'This is a trick,' she said. 'It must be.'

Commander Kelp shrugged. *Watch it and see.*

Artemis stepped closer to the screen, scanning the picture for information. 'You are sure this is live?'

'It's a live feed,' said Foaly. 'I suppose they could be sending us a pre-record.'

'Where is it coming from?'

Foaly checked the tracer map on his own screen. The call line ran from a fairy satellite down to South Africa and from there to Miami and then on to a hundred other places like the scribble of an angry child.

'They jacked a satellite and ran the line through a series of shells. Could be anywhere.'

‘The sun is high,’ Artemis mused aloud. ‘I would guess by the shadows that it is early noon. If it is actually a live feed.’

‘That narrows it down to a quarter of the planet,’ said Foaly caustically.

The hubbub in the room rose as, on screen, one of the two bulky gnomes standing behind Opal drew a human automatic handgun, the chrome weapon looking like a cannon in his fairy fingers.

It seemed as though the temperature had suddenly dropped in the situations room.

‘I need quiet,’ said Artemis. ‘Get these people out of here.’

On most days Trouble Kelp would argue that Artemis had no authority to clear a room and would possibly invite more people into the cramped office just to prove his point, but this was not most days.

‘Everybody out,’ he barked at the assembled officers. ‘Holly, Foaly and the Mud Boy, stay where you are.’

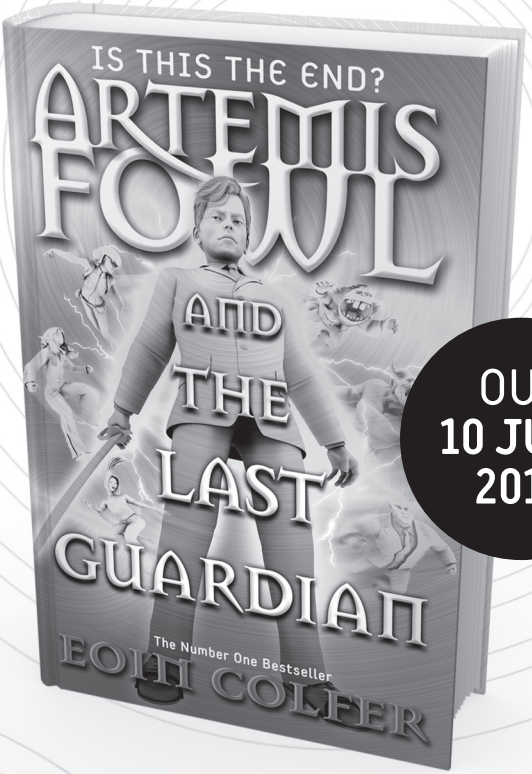
‘I think perhaps I’ll stay too,’ said Butler, shielding the top of his head from lamp burn with one hand.

Nobody objected.

Usually the LEP officers would shuffle with macho reluctance when ordered to move, but in this instance they rushed to the nearest monitor, eager not to miss a single frame of unfolding events.

Foaly shut the door behind them with a swing of his hoof, then darkened the window glass so there would be no distraction from outside. The remaining four stood in a ragged semicircle before the wall screen, watching what would appear to be the last minutes of Opal Koboi’s life. One of the Opal Kobois at any rate.

OPAL KOBOI IS BACK.



OUT
10 JULY
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BUT IS THIS REALLY THE END FOR ARTEMIS FOWL?