

governed their extended lives. Of course, this Book was written in Gnommish, the fairy text, and would be of no use to any human.

Artemis believed that with today's technology the Book could be translated. And with this translation you could begin to exploit a whole new group of creatures.

Know thine enemy was Artemis's motto, so he immersed himself in the lore of the People until he had compiled a huge database on their characteristics. But it wasn't enough. So Artemis put out a call on the Web: **Irish businessman will pay large amount of US dollars to meet a fairy, sprite, leprechaun, pixie.** The responses had been mostly fraudulent, but Ho Chi Minh City had paid off.

Artemis was perhaps the only person alive who could take full advantage of his recent acquisition. He still retained a childlike belief in magic, tempered by an adult determination to exploit it. If there was anybody capable of relieving the fairies of some of their magical gold, it was Artemis Fowl the Second.

It was early morning before they reached Fowl Manor. Artemis was anxious to bring up the file on his computer, but first he decided to call in on Mother.

Angeline Fowl was bedridden. She had been since her husband's disappearance. Nervous tension, the physicians said. Nothing for it but rest and sleeping pills. That was almost a year ago.



Butler's little sister, Juliet, was sitting at the foot of the stairs. Her gaze was boring a hole in the wall. Even the glitter mascara couldn't soften her expression. Artemis had seen that look already, just before Juliet had suplexed a particularly cheeky pizza boy. The suplex, Artemis gathered, was a wrestling move. An unusual obsession for a teenage girl. But then again she was, after all, a Butler.

'Problems, Juliet?'

Juliet straightened hurriedly. 'My own fault, Artemis. Apparently I left a gap in the curtains. Mrs Fowl couldn't sleep.'

'Hmm,' muttered Artemis, scaling the oak staircase slowly.

He worried about his mother's condition. She hadn't seen the light of day in a long time now. Then again, should she miraculously recover, emerging revitalized from her bedchamber, it would signal the end of Artemis's own extraordinary freedom. It would be back off to school, and no more spearheading criminal enterprises for you, my lad.

He knocked gently on the arched double doors.

'Mother? Are you awake?'

Something smashed against the other side of the door. It sounded expensive.

'Of course I'm awake! How can I sleep in this blinding glare?'

Artemis ventured inside. An antique four-poster bed



threw shadowy spires in the darkness, and a pale sliver of light poked through a gap in the velvet curtains. Angeline Fowl sat hunched on the bed, her pale limbs glowing white in the gloom.

‘Artemis, darling, where have you been?’

Artemis sighed. She recognized him. That was a good sign.

‘School trip, Mother. Skiing in Austria.’

‘Ah, skiing,’ crooned Angeline. ‘How I miss it. Maybe when your father returns.’

Artemis felt a lump in his throat. Most uncharacteristic.

‘Yes. Perhaps when Father returns.’

‘Darling, could you close those wretched curtains. The light is intolerable.’

‘Of course, Mother.’

Artemis felt his way across the room, wary of the low-level clothes chests scattered about the floor. Finally his fingers curled around the velvet drapes. For a moment he was tempted to throw them wide open, then he sighed and closed the gap.

‘Thank you, darling. By the way, we really have to get rid of that maid. She is good for absolutely nothing.’

Artemis held his tongue. Juliet had been a hard-working and loyal member of the Fowl household for the past three years. Time to use Mother’s absent-mindedness to his advantage.

‘You’re right of course, Mother. I’ve been meaning to



certainly not my little Arty.’

Artemis blinked back a few rebellious tears. ‘Of course. Sorry, Moth – Sorry.’

‘Hmm. Don’t come back here again, or I’ll have my husband take care of you. He’s a very important man, you know.’

‘Very well, Mrs Fowl. This is the last you’ll see of me.’

‘It had better be.’ Angeline froze suddenly. ‘Do you hear them?’

Artemis shook his head. ‘No. I don’t hear any –’

‘They’re coming for me. They’re everywhere.’

Angeline dived for cover beneath the bedclothes. Artemis could still hear her terrified sobs as he descended the marble staircase.

The Book was proving far more stubborn than Artemis had anticipated. It seemed to be almost actively resisting him. No matter which program he ran it through, the computer came up blank.

Artemis hard-copied every page, tacking them to the walls of his study. Sometimes it helped to have things on paper. The script was like nothing he’d seen before, and yet it was strangely familiar. Obviously a mixture of symbolic and character-based language, the text meandered around the page in no apparent order.

What the program needed was some frame of reference, some central point on which to build. He



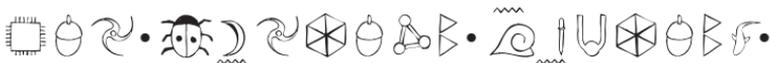
separated all the characters and ran comparisons with English, Chinese, Greek, Arabic and Cyrillic texts, even with Ogham. Nothing.

Moody with frustration, Artemis sent Juliet scurrying when she interrupted with sandwiches, and moved on to symbols. The most frequently recurring pictogram was a small male figure. Male, he presumed, though with the limited knowledge of the fairy anatomy he supposed it could be female. A thought struck him. Artemis opened the ancient languages file on his Power Translator and selected Egyptian.

At last. A hit. The male symbol was remarkably similar to the Anubis god representation on Tutankhamen's inner-chamber hieroglyphics. This was consistent with his other findings. The first written human stories were about fairies, suggesting that their civilization predated man's own. It would seem that the Egyptians had simply adapted an existing scripture to suit their needs.

There were other resemblances. But the characters were just dissimilar enough to slip through the computer's net. This would have to be done manually. Each Gnommish figure had to be enlarged, printed and then compared with the hieroglyphs.

Artemis felt the excitement of success thumping inside his ribcage. Almost every fairy pictogram or letter had an Egyptian counterpart. Most were universal, such as the sun or birds. But some seemed exclusively supernatural



and had to be tailored to fit. The Anubis figure, for example, would make no sense as a dog god, so Artemis altered it to read king of the fairies.

By midnight, Artemis had successfully fed his findings into the Macintosh. All he had to do now was press 'Decode'. He did so. What emerged was a long, intricate string of meaningless gibberish.

A normal child would have abandoned the task long since. The average adult would probably have been reduced to slapping the keyboard. But not Artemis. This book was testing him and he would not allow it to win.

The letters were right, he was certain of it. It was just the order that was wrong. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Artemis glared at the pages again. Each segment was bordered by a solid line. This could represent paragraphs or chapters, but they were not meant to be read in the usual left to right, top to bottom fashion.

Artemis experimented. He tried the Arabic right to left and the Chinese columns. Nothing worked. Then he noticed that each page had one thing in common – a central section. The other pictograms were arranged around this pivotal area. So a central starting point perhaps. But where to go from there? Artemis scanned the pages for some other common factor. After several minutes he found it. There was on each page a tiny spearhead in the corner of one section. Could this be an arrow? A direction? Go this way? So the theory would be



The computer hummed and whirred, converting all the information to binary. Several times it stopped to ask for confirmation of a character or symbol. This happened less and less as the machine learned the new language. Eventually two words flashed on the screen: **File converted.**

Fingers shaking from exhaustion and excitement, Artemis clicked 'Print'. A single page scrolled from the LaserWriter. It was in English now. Yes, there were mistakes, some fine-tuning needed, but it was perfectly legible and, more importantly, perfectly understandable.

Fully aware that he was probably the first human in several thousand years to decode the magical words, Artemis switched on his desk light and began to read.

**The Booke of the People.
Being instructions to our magicks
and life rules.**

Carry me always, carry me well.
I am thy teacher of herb and spell.
I am thy link to power arcane.
Forget me and thy magick shall wane.

Ten times ten commandments there be.
They will answer every mystery.



Cures, curses, alchemy.
 These secrets shall be thine, through me.

But, Fairy, remember this above all.
 I am not for those in mud that crawl.
 And forever doomed shall be the one,
 Who betrays my secrets one by one.

Artemis could hear the blood pumping in his ears. He had them. They would be as ants beneath his feet. Their every secret would be laid bare by technology. Suddenly the exhaustion claimed him and he sank back in his chair. There was so much yet to complete. Forty-three pages to be translated for a start.

He pressed the intercom button that linked him to speakers all over the house. ‘Butler. Get Juliet and come up here. There are some jigsaws I need you to assemble.’

Perhaps a little family history would be useful at this point.

The Fowls were, indeed, legendary criminals. For generations they had skirmished on the wrong side of the law, hoarding enough funds to become legitimate. Of course, once they were legitimate they found it not to their liking and returned almost immediately to crime.

It was Artemis the First, our subject’s father, who had thrown the family fortune into jeopardy. With the



break-up of communist Russia, Artemis Senior had decided to invest a huge chunk of the Fowl fortune in establishing new shipping lines to the vast continent. New consumers, he reasoned, would need new consumer goods. The Russian Mafia did not take too kindly to a Westerner muscling in on their market and so decided to send a little message. This message took the form of a stolen Stinger missile launched at the *Fowl Star* on her way past Murmansk. Artemis Senior was on board the ship, along with Butler's uncle and 250,000 cans of cola. It was quite an explosion.

The Fowls were not left destitute, far from it. But billionaire status was no longer theirs. Artemis the Second vowed to remedy this. He would restore the family fortune. And he would do it in his own unique fashion.

Once the Book was translated, Artemis could begin planning in earnest. He already knew what the ultimate goal was, now he could figure out how to achieve it.

Gold, of course, was the objective. The acquisition of gold. It seemed that the People were almost as fond of the precious metal as humans. Each fairy had its own cache, but not for much longer if Artemis had his way. There would be at least one of the fairy folk wandering around with empty pockets by the time he'd finished.

After eighteen solid hours of sleep and a light continental breakfast, Artemis climbed to the study that



he had inherited from his father. It was a traditional enough room – dark oak and floor-to-ceiling shelving – but Artemis had jammed it with the latest computer technology. A series of networked AppleMacs whirred from various corners of the room. One was running CNN’s web site through a DAT projector, throwing oversized current-affairs images against the back wall.

Butler was there already, firing up the hard drives.

‘Shut them all down, except the Book. I need quiet for this.’

The manservant started. The CNN site had been running for almost a year. Artemis was convinced that news of his father’s rescue would come from there. Shutting it down meant that he was finally letting go.

‘All of them?’

Artemis glanced at the back wall for a moment. ‘Yes,’ he said finally. ‘All of them.’

Butler took the liberty of patting his employer gently on the shoulder, just once, before returning to work. Artemis cracked his knuckles. Time to do what he did best – plot dastardly acts.

