

### EOİП COLFER

## THE ARTEMIS FILES

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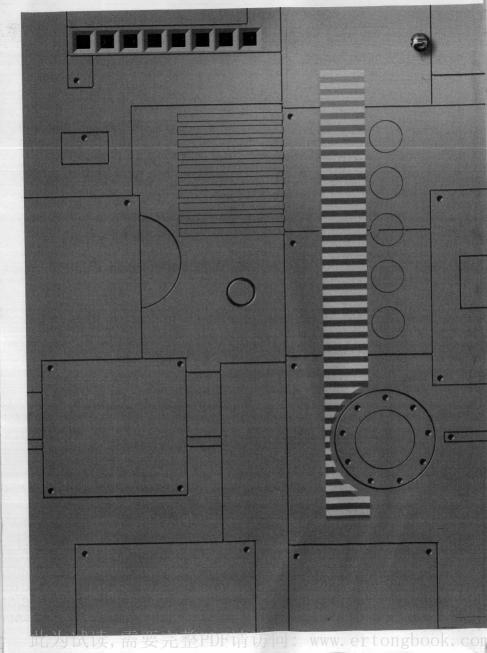
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# THE ARTEMIS FOULL FILES



#### For Finn, Artemis's best friend

Captain Holly Short is known by everyone under the world as one of the key members of the LEPrecon Squad. But the daring young elf's job wasn't always so exciting. Like all Recon officers, she began her career in Traffic. This is the story of her initiation as a Recon captain, and how she became the first female officer to serve under Commander Julius Root.

### LEPRECON

#### CONTENTS

#### **LEPrecon**

CHAPTER I: Along Came a Spider
CHAPTER 2: Something Fishy
CHAPTER 3: The Island of Broken Dreams 26
CHAPTER 4: Brothers with Arms41
CHAPTER 5: Career or Comrades?58
Fairy Code74
Gnommish Alphabet 77
The People: A Spotter's Guide78
Interviews
Artemis Fowl II84
Captain Holly Short
Butler88
Mulch Diggums90
Foaly92
Commander Julius Root
Eoin Colfer96

Artemis Fowl's Report Card98
Fairy Quiz100
Haven to Earth: Fairy Transport Locations
Foaly's Inventions104
Crossword108
Fairy Word Search109
The Seventh Dwarf
CHAPTER I: Lady Fei Fei's Tiara
CHAPTER 2: High Priority
CHAPTER 3: The Seventh Dwarf 128
CHAPTER 4: Showtime140
CHAPTER 5: Ringmaster
EPILOGUE 185

#### CHAPTER I: Along Came a Spider

Sydney Harbor, Australia



"THE thing about pain, Major Evergreen," said the old elf, laying a small wooden case on the table, "is that it hurts."

Evergreen was still too groggy for jokes. Whatever the stranger had put in the dart was taking its time leaving his system. "What are you . . .? Why am I . . .?" Full sentences wouldn't come. He couldn't pluck one from his addled brain.

"Quiet, Major," advised his captor. "Don't fight the serum. You will make yourself ill."

"Serum?" gasped the major.

"A very personal concoction. Since I don't have my magic any more, I have had to rely on nature's



gifts. This particular serum is concocted from equal parts ground ping-ping flower and cobra venom. Not lethal in small doses, but quite an effective sedative."

Fear was piercing the LEP officer's daze now, like a hot poker through snow. "Who are you?"

A child's scowl twisted the stranger's ancient face.

"You may address me as Captain. Don't you know me, Major? From before today? Cast your mind back to your first years in the LEP. Centuries ago, I know, but try. The fairy People often think that they can forget me completely. But I'm never far away, not really."

The major wanted to say, Yes, I know you, but something told him that lying would be even more dangerous than telling the truth. And the truth was that he couldn't remember seeing this old elf before in his life. Not until today, when he had assaulted him on the docks. Evergreen had tracked a runaway-gnome signal to this hut, and the next thing he knew this old elf had stung him with a

syringe gun and was asking to be addressed as Captain. And now Evergreen was tied to a chair, being given a lecture about pain.

The old elf flipped two brass clasps on his case and lifted the lid reverentially. Major Evergreen caught a glimpse of a velvet lining. Red as blood.

"Now, my boy, I need information. Information only an LEP major would know." The captain lifted a leather pouch from the box. There was another box of some kind inside the bag, its edges pressing into the leather.

Evergreen's breath came in short gasps. "I'll tell you nothing."

The old elf undid the bag's leather tie with one hand. The box shone from inside the bag, casting a sickly glow on the old elf's pallor. The wrinkles around his eyes were thrown into deep shadow. The eyes themselves were feverish.

"Now, Major. The moment of truth. Question time."

"Do yourself a favor and close the bag, Captain," said Major Evergreen, with more bravado than he



felt. "I am LEP: you can't harm me and hope to escape."

The captain sighed. "I cannot close the bag. What is inside yearns to come out, to be free and do its work. And don't think anyone is coming to save you. I have jacked into your helmet and sent a malfunction message. Police Plaza thinks your communications are on the blink. They won't be worried for hours."

The old elf pulled a steel object from the leather bag. The object was a mesh cage, and inside was a tiny silver spider with claws so sharp, the tips seemed to disappear. He held up the cage before Evergreen's nose. Inside, the spider slashed its claws in a starving frenzy, an inch from the major's nose.

"Sharp enough to cut air," said the captain. And indeed the claws seemed to leave short-lived rents where they passed.

The mere act of revealing the spider seemed to change the old elf. He had power now and seemed taller. Twin red dots sparked in his eyes though there was no light source in the hut. The ruffles of

an old-style LEP dress uniform poked from beneath his overcoat.

"Now, my young elf, I will ask but once. Answer promptly or bear my wrath."

Major Evergreen shivered from fear and cold, but he kept his mouth tightly closed.

The captain caressed the major's chin with his cage. "Now, here is your question: where is Commander Root's next Recon initiation site?"

The major blinked sweat from his eyes. "Initiation site? Honestly, Captain, I don't know. I'm new on the squad."

The captain held the cage even closer to Evergreen's face. The silver spider lunged forward, clawing the major's cheek.

"Julius's site!" roared the captain. "Out with it!"

"No," said the major through gritted teeth. "You will not break me."

The captain's voice grew shrill with madness. "Do you see how I live? In the human world, I grow old."

Poor Major Evergreen steeled himself for death. This entire assignment had been a trap. "Julius robbed me of Haven," raved the captain.
"Evicted me like a common traitor. Exiled me to
this foul cesspool of the human world. When he
brings the next corporal for initiation, I will be
waiting—along with a few old friends. If we cannot
have Haven, then we will have our revenge."

The captain stopped his rant. He had said too much already and time was against him. He must finish this.

"You came here to search for a missing gnome: there was no gnome. We manipulated the satellite images to trap an LEP officer. I have waited two years for Julius to send a major."

It made sense. Only a major would know the locations of LEP initiations.

"And now that I have you in my clutches, you will tell me what I need to know."

The elderly elf pinched Major Evergreen's nose until he was forced to draw breath through his mouth. In a flash the captain jammed the mesh cage between Evergreen's teeth and flipped the gate. The silver spider was down the young elf's gullet in a shining blur.



The captain tossed the cage to one side. "Now, Major," he said. "You are dead."

Evergreen spasmed as the silver spider's claws went to work on the lining of his stomach.

"That feels bad: internal injuries always hurt the most," commented the old elf. "But your magic will heal you for a while. In minutes, however, your power will dry up, and then my little pet will claw her way out."

Evergreen knew it was true. The spider was a Tunnel Blue. The creature actually used its claws as teeth, pulping its meat before sucking it between its gums. Its favorite method of destruction was from the inside. A nest of these little monsters could take down a troll. One was more than enough to kill an elf.

"I can help you," said the captain. "If you agree to help me."

Evergreen gasped in pain. Whenever the spider clawed him, the magic sealed the wound, but already the healing was slowing.

"No. You'll get nothing from me."