

When the Tripods Came Study Guide

When the Tripods Came by John Christopher

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Plot Summary

This novel for young adults is the first in a series of books about the Tripods, mechanical entities eventually revealed to be the means by which an alien race (known as the Masters) takes control of humanity. "When the Tripods Came" tells the story of how the Tripods first come to Earth and establish control, and in doing so explores themes relating to the occasional necessity of breaking rules, loyalty and the importance and value of free thought.

The narrative, recounted from the first person perspective of mid-teen protagonist Laurie (short for Laurence), begins with Laurie and his friend Andy witnessing the attack of a tall, mechanical, three-legged vehicle (referred to as a Tripod) on a nearby farmhouse. The boys watch as the Tripod destroys the house but is itself destroyed by military forces.

A few months later, Laurie has become a celebrity at school (for having witnessed the events at the farmhouse) while Tripods (which also land in America and Russia, and are destroyed there as well) have become figures of fun, becoming the lead characters in what Laurie describes as a silly but somehow disturbing television program. As time passes, more and more people become obsessively addicted to the program, coming to regard the Tripods as heroes. When a second wave of Tripods lands on Earth, they are greeted by the so-called "Trippies" and hailed as saviors. Meanwhile, Laurie describes (in narration) his complicated relationship with his father (Pa) whom he resents for, as Laurie sees it, devoting too much time and energy to his second wife and their daughter.

Over time, Laurie and his family watch with increasing concern as more and more people go over to the Tripods' cause, becoming fearful for their own safety when those who do not do so voluntarily are forced into specialized helmets, or Caps, that orient the wearer's mind to unquestioning faith in the Tripods' compassion and power. After Laurie narrowly escapes an attempt by his uncle and cousin to force him into a Cap, he and his family attempt to escape to what they believe will be freedom on the isolated island of Guernsey. There, however, they are dismayed to discover that the influence of the Tripods has arrived there first and make plans to escape to the only place in Europe which, to this point, has remained free of Tripod influence—Switzerland, the home country of Pa's second wife.

The stay of Laurie and his family in Switzerland is, at first, peaceful (in spite of Laurie's continued resentment of his father's second family) and safe. Eventually, however, the Tripods assert control there as well. When Andy is captured and in imminent danger of being Capped, Laurie attempts a rescue but is himself captured. He and Andy are both eventually freed by Pa, who then leads the entire group (now consisting of Laurie, Andy, other family members, and a few Swiss refugees from Tripod control) into a hidden valley, where they are safe for a while. Laurie begins to develop a new perspective on his father and their relationship.



After a long winter, the group becomes aware that a Tripod is making regular patrols of the area. Laurie suggests that they trigger an avalanche in order to destroy it, but other members of the group object, saying an attempt (either successful or failed) risks drawing the attention of other Tripods. Eventually, Pa asserts leadership and leads the attack, which successfully buries the Tripod in piles of snow. Although two other Tripods eventually visit the scene and destroy the remains of the sabotaged Tripod, no further patrols are established.

The novel concludes with Laurie (now enjoying a closer relationship than ever with Pa) declaring in narration that the fight for free thought must go on, for centuries if necessary.



Preface and Chapter 1

Preface and Chapter 1 Summary

This novel for young adults is the first in a series of books about the Tripods, mechanical entities eventually revealed to be the means by which an alien race (known as the Masters) takes control of humanity. "When the Tripods Came" tells the story of how the Tripods first come to Earth and establish control, and in doing so explores themes relating to coming of age, loyalty, and the importance and value of free thought.

Preface - The author describes the circumstances of a failed television adaptation of his books about the Tripods, highlighting critics' comments on the lack of up-to-date science the books contained and the relative lack of technological sophistication exhibited by the Tripods themselves. He cites a specific criticism from "the leading British science fiction author of the time", who "scornfully" pointed out that the Tripods used only searchlights to find those they were looking for and "didn't even have infrared". The author then comments on how he chose, in response, to define the Tripods and the aliens who brought them to earth in the way he did (see "Quotes", Preface, p. vi). He also describes how, after writing stories set in times when the Tripods and the aliens operating them had held their power for centuries, he became intrigued by the idea of how they came to that power. The aliens, he writes, "discovered our weakness and [found] a way to exploit it."

Chapter 1 - Laurie is woken in the middle of the night by "an explosion of noise." His friend Andy, also awakened, sleepily suggests it was the explosion of a shell from a nearby artillery range. In first person narration, Laurie describes his irritation with Andy for getting them into their uncomfortable situation - sleeping secretly in a dirty shed near a farmhouse after losing their way on an orienteering expedition. Andy goes back to sleep, and Laurie soon does as well, after hearing another loud explosion (see "Quotes", p. 3). The next morning, Laurie and Andy are awakened by yet another loud noise, this one resembling grinding machinery. They watch from a window in the shed as a Tripod (see "Objects/Places") appears, takes a position over the farmhouse, and sends out a tentacle that squeezes and shatters the chimney. When the farmer runs out to see what is going on, another tentacle picks him up and takes him into the body of the Tripod, which is still for a moment (see "Quotes", p. 5) but then destroys the house and kills a dog attempting to escape. As Andy and Laurie debate whether they should try to get away, military vehicles arrive, one tank waving a white flag of surrender and playing classical music. Andy and Laurie watch as one of the tentacles seems to wave in time to the music while another captures the tank and squeezes it into destruction. Shortly afterwards, two squads of jet planes arrive and destroy the Tripod.



Preface and Chapter 1 Analysis

The Preface serves two primary purposes. First, it explains why the author wrote the book, offering reasons both directly (describing his interest in what brought the Tripods to earth) and indirectly (implying that he was also interested in addressing the "scornful" critics of the lack of technology). Here it is particularly interesting to note that the comment about the lack of infrared (the ability to track the higher wavelengths of a heated body, particularly useful in tracking living beings) is specifically incorporated into the dialogue of Laurie's physics teacher (see Chapter 2). For further consideration of this aspect of the novel (the author's implied intent to address the criticisms of the technological content of his work), see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways does the quote ..."

With Chapter 1, the author introduces several of the narrative's key elements, including its protagonist (Laurie), portrayed here as watchful, thoughtful, and simultaneously resentful of and loyal to the character he says is his best friend (Andy). These aspects of Laurie's character remain consistent throughout the book; on several occasions, for example, Laurie resents Andy's intrusions into his life, at one point even complaining in narration of how Andy used his computer without permission. At the same time, he is unshakably loyal, risking his life and the wrath of his family to rescue Andy when he is imprisoned and in danger of being subjected to the power of the Tripods. These apparently contradictory aspects to Laurie's character function on several levels, and are explored further in "Characters - Laurie"). Meanwhile, loyalty is one of the narrative's secondary themes (see "Themes"), fueling the action that defines and manifests its primary theme relating to the importance and value of free thought.

Other elements introduced in this chapter include its narrative point of view (first person past tense—see "Style - Point of View") and one of its key themes, the value of breaking rules, manifested here in the fact that Laurie and Andy end up where they do as the result of Andy's breaking the rules of their orienteering group. This particular bout of rule breaking is portrayed as initially negative (with Laurie resenting the discomfort Andy's choice has led them into), but it eventually proves to be a positive. Specifically, the information about the Tripods that Laurie accumulates as a consequence of the rule breaking (specifically, his witnessing of the capture of the farmer) leads to important conclusions (about the nature of the Tripods and the Capping) in later chapters. For other manifestations of the novel's thematic interest in the value of rule breaking, see "Themes - The Value of Rule Breaking."

Finally, this section of the narrative also introduces its central conflict (between humans and Tripods). This is perhaps particularly important, in that the Tripods are portrayed in this opening chapter as harsh and violent but somehow ineffectual, as an essentially empty threat that in following chapters proves both easily mock-able and ultimately subversively dangerous. The important question here is whether the Tripods face a genuine defeat (as the result of weakness and/or miscalculation), or whether they deliberately set themselves up to be easily defeated in order to prepare the way for their more successful attempt at world domination that commences in the following section. A



particularly important point to consider is the kidnapping of the farmer and the eventual discovery (Chapter 2) that his brain was dissected. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Do you think that the apparently easy defeat ..."



Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Chapter 2 - Some months after his encounter with the Tripod, Laurie's science teacher ("Wild Bill" Hockey) engages him in a classroom conversation about the Tripods that, much to Laurie's embarrassment, suggests that he is something of a hero. The conversation also reveals that there were two other Tripod landings that day, one in Russia (which resulted in the Tripod being destroyed) and one in America (in which the Tripod self-destructed). Hockey comments on how foolish and backwards the Tripods seem, saying at one point "It looks as though they don't even have infrared." As the other students laugh, Laurie remains quiet (see "Quotes", p. 16). After school, Laurie returns home, and in narration describes his home life with his generally quiet Pa (see "Quotes", p. 21), his Swiss stepmother Ilse and half-sister Angela (adored by Pa and resented by Laurie), and his bossy, businesslike granny who insists upon being called Martha. He also describes an argument with Andy in which they debate whether the army and government made a mistake in acting with such hostility towards the Tripods, which, Andy argues, obviously housed an important alien race. Finally, he describes how a television show mocking the Tripods ("The Trippy Show") has become a worldwide sensation, due at least in part to its catchy theme song (see "Quotes", p. 26).

Laurie also narrates a conversation with Pa, which they have on their way to visit the family's boat, the Edelweiss. As they talk, Pa reveals how he worked out that Laurie was probably near the site of the Tripod landing, and how he believed Laurie and Andy did the right thing by laying low. Conversation also reveals that when the remains of the destroyed Tripod were examined, the body of the kidnapped farmer was discovered, and it was learned that his brain had been dissected. Meanwhile, although he is grateful that Pa clearly cares (see "Quotes", p. 24), Laurie is angered when Pa later tries to convince him that Ilse also cares. Later, Laurie is glad when Ilse leaves to visit her suddenly gravely ill father in Switzerland.

Chapter 3 - One day, while Angela is out with Martha, Laurie watches an episode of "The Trippy Show" and becomes so engrossed in it that he forgets to record it as he had agreed to do. He describes how the show at first seems to be making fun of the Tripods, but in a later segment portrays the Tripods as heroes, rescuing a woman in trouble and destroying a dragon. When Angela and Martha arrive home, both Laurie and Martha become disturbed at the intense, emotionally and physically violent reaction Angela has to learning that Laurie missed recording the show. The next day, Laurie gets into an argument at school with someone who becomes angry when he speaks negatively about the show. Laurie is also surprised to learn that Wild Bill also enjoys "The Trippy Show" and describes in narration how its fans (now known as "Trippies") are becoming more and more common and more and more extreme. Meanwhile, Martha convinces Pa to have Angela looked at by a doctor (Dr. Monmouth), who in turn persuades Pa to hypnotize her in an effort to find out why she is behaving so strangely. Hypnosis reveals that Angela believes that the Tripods are "good," that they "know best," and that she has



been invited to go and be with the Tripods. After Monmouth gives her a post hypnotic suggestion that she is no longer interested in watching television, he suggests to Pa and Martha suggests that all her beliefs and behaviors are the result of her obsessive watching of "The Trippy Show." He also suggests that since no-one seems able to track the origin of the broadcasts, it is possible they originate from space. Later, in narration, Laurie reveals how people all over the world are just as obsessed as Angela is with the show and the Tripods, and are in fact leaving their homes to join communes devoted to both. The chapter ends with a description of more Tripods landing, and the Trippies gathering in large numbers to welcome them (see "Quotes", p. 45-46).

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

There are several important elements in this section. In terms of the main plot, the Tripods' campaign of mental (rather than physical) domination begins with the appearance of "The Trippy Show", with its combination of subliminal (secretly encoded) and direct suggestion that the Tripods are not to be feared and are, in fact, to be viewed as heroic and benevolent. This is a manifestation of the author's intent, indicated in the Preface, to explain not only how the Tripods come to power but how humanity could become so enslaved without the presence of force as a threat and technology as a way of manifesting that threat. In other words, and as the author himself suggests (in the Prologue), using technology in a non-violent way (and perhaps as a result of the dissection of the farmer's brain), the aliens find humanity's weakness and, as a result, develop ways to wage their war of domination. Meanwhile, for consideration of the metaphoric implications of the Tripods' campaign of mental domination, see "Themes - The Importance of Free Thought."

Meanwhile, a key element introduced here is the relationship between Laurie and Pa which, like many of the novel's elements associated with Laurie's character, is complex and multi-faceted. It is clear that Laurie wants a good relationship with his father, but it is also clear that Laurie feels blocked from having that relationship by the presence of Ilse and Angela, and therefore feels resentful towards all three of them. This sense of simultaneous desire for connection and resentment continues throughout the narrative, but is brought to a positive resolution in the final chapter, in which Laurie comments (subtly and almost in passing) on how strong his relationship with Pa has become. A related point is the introduction of Laurie's grandmother who, with strong-willed assertiveness, is portrayed by Laurie as a contrast to his father, whose will (according to the resentful Laurie) has been sapped by his devotion to Ilse and Angela. The irony is that Laurie himself does not seem to have much will of his own, but is for the most part quite reactive. Only in later chapters, and specifically when he is placed in a position of having to rescue Andy, does he develop the sort of independence and determination that he seems to admire in his grandmother and long to see in his father.

Finally, there are a few important elements of foreshadowing here—the references to the Edelweiss and to Martha's gun (both used in subsequent chapters to facilitate the family's escape from the Tripods' growing influence).



Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Chapter 4 - Laurie's narration describes how there is no confrontation with the Tripods after their return, how "The Trippy Show" remains on the air in spite of government efforts to jam it, how Andy's mother suddenly disappears and how Martha insists Pa fetch him to stay with them. Narration also describes the distant relationship Laurie and his family have with Aunt Caroline and Uncle Ian, Pa's arrogantly rich sister and brother-in-law, and their children Nathanael and Verity. While Pa is fetching Andy, Caroline calls to say that Nathanael has "tripped" (gone to join the Trippies) and that Ian has gone to look for him. After he returns with Andy, Pa reassures both Caroline and Andy, suggesting that the Tripods are using a kind of hypnosis on people and that it will soon fade away. That night, conversation with the thoughtful Andy about his missing mother (whom he really misses) makes Laurie wonder about how he would feel if Ilse went missing. Meanwhile, narration describes how, of all the nations in the world, there are no Tripods in Switzerland.

The next day, Laurie has the house to himself when he is visited by the strangely behaving Ian and Nathanael, who have both been absorbed into the Trippie culture. They attempt to convert Laurie to that culture, with Ian showing him a helmet that he and others who did not initially submit to the Tripods have been given. As Laurie prepares to fight his way to freedom, Martha and Angela return, and Martha scares off Ian and Nathanael with her gun. As he flees, Ian leaves behind the bag of helmets that he brought to Cap the family ("Cap" now being the word used for both the helmet and the process of putting one on).

Chapter 5 - Laurie is confronted at school by both arrogance (in a fellow student certain that the Tripods will never control her) and apathy (in a teacher due for retirement and barely able to cope with the day to day, let alone an emergency like the Tripods). These confrontations lead him to an important realization of the value of free thought (see "Quotes", p. 64). That same day, school is dismissed because the Tripods are on the move, advancing towards London. Laurie and Andy go out into the country to see the one nearest them passing and watch as the Tripod, with Trippies hanging onto it, strides through the countryside. They notice a Trippie fall off, and after the Tripod has passed, run to see who it was. They discover it is a teenaged girl, and are dismayed when, as she dies, she says "Hail to the Tripod." The Tripods are then destroyed, but then news about them vanishes, to be replaced by wild rumors. Pa comments that "censorship encourage[s] people to believe nonsense." He also examines the Cap left behind by Uncle Ian, commenting on its electrical circuitry and speculating that the Cap's influence over a Trippie could be broken if the circuit was broken.

Later, after a phone call from Ilse (now in Switzerland), Pa tries to book flights out of the country and discovers that all air travel has been banned. That night, Andy and Laurie watch a battle between two small squads of fighter jets and realize that one side is



Capped and the other is not. In other words, the influence of the Tripods has made its way into the military. The next day, competing radio broadcasts each urge citizens to fight for freedom, one presented from a "Capped" perspective, the other from an un-Capped perspective. Conversation between Martha and Pa following the broadcast leads Martha to the decisive realization that it is time to flee the country—to take the Edelweiss and find sanctuary in her home on the island of Guernsey. As she begins to make preparations, Laurie notices Pa becoming upset and realizes that Pa does not want to leave the home he identifies with Ilse.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

In this section, the author begins the process of entwining the two main narrative threads, the "Tripod takeover" story (main plot) and the "relationship between Laurie and Pa" story (the sub-plot). The relationship between the two is an effective demonstration of the way in which plot and sub-plot most effectively interact, events and circumstances in one affecting and defining the other. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss ways in which the book's plot and sub-plot ..."

Other important elements introduced in this section are the Caps and the Capping process, physical manifestations and further development of the mental control being exerted by the Tripods. On one level, they serve as important developments in the narrative's main plot, increasing the danger for the central characters and providing a powerful obstacle towards their struggle for continued free will. On another level, the Caps and Capping are further metaphoric representations of the mental control exerted by the sort of dictatorships the author is warning against in the creation and writing of this book (see "Analysis, Chapters 2 and 3"). This warning is the novel's central thematic intent, directly and explicitly manifest in Laurie's consideration of the importance of free will as highlighted by his encounters at the beginning of Chapter 5 (see also "Themes - The Importance and Value of Free Will"). In this context, it is also important to note the competing radio broadcasts referred to at the end of Chapter 5, in which both sides present themselves as right, dueling perspectives common to other, similar conflicts between domination (physical, social, mental) and freedom.

Meanwhile, Laurie's journey of transformation (from resentment and passivity to compassion and activism) continues, as he begins to experience a softening of his anger and resentment towards Ilse and Angela. There is a sense here that this particular aspect of his journey, connected as it is to the growth of his relationship with Pa, has an implied resonance with the book's thematic consideration of free will and self-determination. In other words, the growth and evolution of Laurie's feelings towards Pa and Ilse (and eventually towards Angela as well) can be seen as a manifestation of the power of human individuality and independence, of the freedom and integrity of the human spirit. Under the influence of the Cap and the Tripods, everything is always peaceful and happy, everyone essentially remains the same, always, from Capping until death. Under the rule of the Tripods, humanity is neither flawed nor troubled, aspects of existence which arguably define individuals as individuals. In that context, and because



Laurie experiences an expansion of feeling at the same time as he is fighting for intellectual independence, his journey of transformation into a wiser, more compassionate being can be seen as a manifestation of, or inextricably and unavoidably entwined with, his determination to maintain free will and identity.

At the same time, Chapter 5 includes another manifestation of the narrative's thematic focus on rule breaking. When Laurie and Andy break the rules imposed by the police and go out into the country to observe the passing of the Tripod, they gather significant information about the depth and extent of Tripod control through their witnessing of what happens to the teenaged girl. This information, in turn, fuels the boys' determination (Laurie's in particular) to remain free thinking.

Finally, there is a significant element of foreshadowing in this section. The discovery by Pa of the electronic nature of the Caps proves, in later chapters, essential in rendering the Caps useless in terms of the Tripods exerting control but invaluable in terms of enabling Laurie and his group to escape that control.



Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Chapter 6 - Pa drives Laurie and the others (Martha, Andy and Angela) to the marina where the Edelweiss is docked, one of the un-Capped guards proving sympathetic to their desire to escape (see "Quotes", p. 79). During the trip across the English Channel (troubled by rough weather), Pa tells Andy and Laurie of a time when Martha evades the police, and comments that her rebellious attitude is appropriate for the current situation (see "Quotes", p. 82). When the boat arrives at Guernsey, Laurie and the others are dismayed to discover that the Capped are in control there as well. They realize their best option is to get to Switzerland where the Tripods have not taken control and where, Laurie realizes resentfully, Pa can be reunited with Ilse. Pa, who has analyzed the Caps as thoroughly as he can, theorizes that if a particular circuit within them is cut, they will no longer function. He further theorizes that if the circuits in all the Caps left by Ian are cut, the family can disguise themselves as Capped and escape. After some initial hesitation, Laurie volunteers to test Pa's theory. After Pa cuts a couple of wires, Laurie tries on the Cap. Everyone is relieved when it does not work, and they prepare to escape to Switzerland. The disguise works perfectly, and the group ends up on a plane for England (after a disturbing encounter with a Capped priest, who believes that the Tripods are the Second Coming) without having to go through security—only the Capped are allowed to travel, and because the Tripods offer security, there is no need for anyone to be searched. This is how the group gets Martha's gun aboard the plane, and why it is possible for the family to use it to hijack the plane and have the pilot turn it towards Switzerland.

Chapter 7 - Conversation with the Capped pilot (who talks about looking forward to a life of peace on his farm) leads Laurie to wonder for a moment about whether what the Tripods are bringing to the world is in fact so bad (see "Quotes", p. 96). When the plane arrives in Geneva, the Swiss authorities demand that everyone on board remove their Caps. Laurie and the others in his group do so immediately, but everyone else on the plane (including the captain and the priest) refuses. As Laurie and his group are taken aside for questioning, the Swiss security forces begin forcibly removing the Caps of the passengers. There is gunfire, and some of the passengers end up dead. Meanwhile, after a period of intense questioning, Laurie and his family are allowed to stay, but their permission to do so is good for only a week, unless they successfully apply for an extension. The group is also allowed to keep the non-functioning Caps.

At a stop on the train journey to meet Ilse, Laurie, Andy and Angela are confronted by a gang of angry Swiss teenagers, who resent the presence of what they call "dirty English" in their country. Andy fights back and is beaten, while Laurie attempts to escape with Angela. All three are detained by the police as their attackers run off. Pa explains his theory of why the teenagers were so violent, referring to Switzerland's history of isolation and to the concept of xenophobia (one culture's fearful resistance to the influence of another culture). When he complains to security about how the children



were treated, he is told he can either continue on his journey or wait to file an official complaint, with no guarantee of when that complaint will be heard. Pa finally agrees to continue. As the journey continues, Laurie worries that Andy will not understand why he did not help in the fight, but when Andy winks at him, Laurie realizes everything is okay. When they finally reunite with Ilse, Laurie watches as she and his father have an intense reunion—and then realizes that he (Laurie) is genuinely glad to see her.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

The first of several important elements in this section is Pa's story of Martha's rebelliousness, a manifestation of two of the narrative's themes—the main theme relating to the importance of free thought, and the secondary (related) theme about the importance of breaking the rules (a manifestation of such thought). The story is also a foreshadowing of Laurie's own rebelliousness (and manifestation of both themes) in the following chapter (when he goes against Pa's instructions and attempts to rescue Andy). A related element is Laurie's surge of ambivalence about the Tripods, his wondering whether the peace they promise (the surrender of free thought) is in fact such a bad thing. The conflict between this idea and his determination to remain free willed is not resolved until the end of Chapter 8, when he decides to rescue Andy. In other words, at that point Laurie once and for all rejects the Tripods and their control, setting himself firmly on a journey of rebelliousness and freedom.

Other important elements include the reference to both the pervasiveness and the obsession-triggering nature of the Caps. There is a sense here of a net closing around Laurie and his comrades, of obstacles increasing and becoming all but insurmountable. On a technical, story-telling level, these increased obstacles function as obstacles generally do in a well constructed plot such as this one is—to simultaneously raise the stakes and make the central characters even more determined to achieve their goals. In this case, the characters have a great deal more to lose (their thematically central capacity for free thought) and a simultaneously increasing determination to never be Capped. There is also the reference to the de-powered Caps (which play a positive, forward-moving role in subsequent developments of the main plot) and to the reunion between Pa and Ilse (which plays a negative, backward-moving role in the "Pa and Laurie's relationship" sub-plot). Also in terms of that sub-plot, it is interesting to consider the quote from p. 96 (see "Quotes"). Can the reference to becoming "hooked on one particular person" and forgetting about others in fact be a metaphoric reference to how Laurie sees Pa's feelings for Ilse and Angela distracting him (Pa) from his son?

Finally, there is the reference to the attitude of the Swiss towards the English. There are several points to consider here. The first is that the Swiss teenagers are not reacting to the English teens being Capped, but to their being English. A second point is that Pa is right, the citizens of Switzerland have a history and practice of, if not actually resenting, definitely avoiding too much contact and integration with other cultures. As such, and here is a third key point, the attitudes of the Swiss in general, and of the teenagers in particular, can be seen as a metaphoric representation of the attitudes of the Tripods and the Capped towards the un-Capped—threaten, attack, and ultimately suppress.



Chapters 8 and 9

Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Chapter 8 - Laurie describes the first days of the group's stay at the home of Ilse's Swiss parents. He comments on the friendly, distant relationship between the two sides of the family, the peace of doing chores with Yone (a farmhand who does not let Laurie look at his precious shotgun) and further encounters with resentful Swiss teenagers (here led by Rudi, the son of the police chief). Narration also describes how the family's permission to stay is reluctantly extended and how Angela reveals her awareness of what is really going on (the fact that their departure from England is probably permanent). She tells the surprised Laurie that she is determined to stay away from England and how she sometimes remembers the pure happiness of Tripping. Finally, narration describes how Switzerland is suddenly invaded by Capped armies from Germany and France, how the Swiss confidently believe they will triumph, and how the short battle ends in the Swiss being conquered and Capped. As Pa and Martha make plans to escape, Laurie and Andy are confronted on the street by the police, who reveal that the age to be Capped is fourteen. Laurie is allowed to go free, but Andy is taken into custody (due to police doubts that he is as young as he says he is), and is to be Capped the next day. Later, when Laurie tells Pa and Martha of Andy's situation, they reluctantly explain that Ilse's father is dying, and neither she nor her mother will escape until after he is gone. This means that the group needs time, and if an attempt is made to rescue Andy, time will be lost. In other words, Andy is to be left behind while everyone else evacuates to a secret hiding place (a hotel in an isolated valley, accessible only by train). As he is going down to the village to rescue Andy, Laurie pauses and questions his determination to retrieve his friend and almost turns back, but then remembers what Pa told him about Martha (see Chapter 6 and "Quotes", p. 82) and realizes that his questioning is wrong (see "Quotes", p. 121). His determination renewed, he sets off for the village.

Chapter 9 - Laurie takes the books he brought with him from the guest house to gain entry into the police chief's house—he says he brought them for Andy to read while he is waiting to be Capped. The chief's wife (Rudi's mother) lets him in and, while suspicious of someone un-Capped, nevertheless feeds him hot chocolate and cake. In a quiet conversation with Rudi, Laurie learns that he too hates the Cap, and is willing to both help Andy escape and flee as well. He tells Laurie where to find a spare set of keys and distracts his mother while Laurie frees Andy. As the three boys are preparing to leave, however, they are confronted by the police chief, returning home unexpectedly. The three boys are locked away, in preparation for their Capping the following day. Laurie spends much of the night trying to plan an escape, but ends up falling asleep. The next morning, Pa arrives, wearing one of the false Caps and saying he has the right to take Laurie and Andy home to punish them. The police chief tells him he can whip them right there and then, and produces a strap. Pa considers, then leaves, saying he prefers to use his own strap. After he is gone, Laurie reflects angrily on what he sees as Pa's betrayal, thinking he has gone back to Ilse and Angela instead of saving him. Later,



however, he is surprised when Pa returns with Yone and Yone's shotgun. The adults are bound and gagged at gunpoint and Rudi leaves with Pa, Laurie and the others (after Laurie persuades them all that Rudi is on their side). They hurry back to the guest house, where Laurie learns that Ilse's father has died (see "Quotes", p. 131) and that everyone is preparing to leave. As they make their trek to the hiding place, the group is forced to travel slowly in order to help Ilse's elderly mother who, at one point, urges them to leave her. Pa, however, insists she come along. "We can't spare you," he says. "We can't spare anyone. There are too few of us." As the journey continues, Laurie catches a glimpse of a now-abandoned train station, and reflects on how much has changed (see "Quotes", p. 134). He describes how the weather becomes cold and grey, and how he feels "cold and miserable and hopeless."

Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

The most significant element of this section is the turning point reached by Laurie at the end of Chapter 8, the point at which his journey of transformation (see "Characters - Laurie") reaches its climax, moving himself (and the novel) in a different, narratively and thematically significant, direction. All his ambivalence about the Tripods vanishes, all his passivity becomes transformed, and he finally takes direct action that manifests beliefs he has considered, questioned, and now embraces—the power, value and necessity of free will and choice. As such, his actions here embody the novel's central thematic premise—that free, independent thought is an essential expression of individuality and humanity. They also manifest the secondary thematic contention (dramatized several times throughout the narrative) that on occasion, it is both necessary and advisable to reject authority and claim independence of thought and action.

On yet another thematic level, Laurie's actions are also a powerful evocation of one of the novel's other secondary themes, an exploration of loyalty, which is (in turn) also a factor in the "Pa and Laurie's relationship" sub-plot, defined as it is by Laurie's question of Pa's loyalty to him as compared to his loyalty to Ilse and Angela. That sub-plot, it is important to note, also reaches a turning point and climaxes in this section, when Pa returns with Yone to rescue his son. Once and for all, Laurie realizes that his father actually is as devoted to him as he has seemed to be to his "other" family, a step towards the final (perhaps also inevitable) state of connection and mutual respect the two realize in the following chapter. For consideration of the relationship between these two turning points, see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss ways in which ..." Meanwhile, the book's main plot (the confrontation with the Tripods) climaxes in the following section, with the attack on the Tripod patrol.

Other important points include the metaphoric significance of the books Laurie takes to Andy (see "Objects/Places - Laurie's Books"), the almost-in-passing comment by Pa about how few of "them" are left ("them" being a reference to the non-Capped). There is, in this statement, the implied but chilling suggestion that the group does not really know how many like them are left in the world and, by implication, the situation faced by free humanity is even more desperate than they may have previously believed. Finally, at the conclusion of the chapter, the quote from p. 134 (see "Quotes") can be seen as a

lament, a grieving for manifestations of free thought, while the description of the deteriorating weather is clearly linked with the deteriorating spirits of Laurie and the rest of his companions.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The chapter begins with Laurie commenting that he finds "the notebooks in which [he is] writing in the hotel" which they finally reach after a long, tedious journey through the tunnel. He describes the peace and quiet the group finds after that journey, how they find supplies in both the train and the abandoned train station (glimpsed at the end of Chapter 9), and how they spend the winter in hiding, learning to ski and raiding Capped homes for more supplies (see "Quotes", p. 138). He also describes the death of Ilse's mother (see "Quotes", p. 138), the recruiting of young people resistant to the Cap and how the Tripods install new Caps (that bond with the skull) onto the heads of the Capped, making the Capping permanent (see "Quotes", p. 140)

The following fall, the group realizes that a Tripod is making what appears to be a routine patrol of the area. When Andy worries that the noise of its passing could set off an avalanche, Laurie wonders what would happen if one was set off deliberately, swamping the patrolling Tripod. The group argues the pros and cons of taking such an action, some members (including Ilse and Martha) worrying that a failed attempt (or even a successful one) will bring unwanted and dangerous attention to them and their hiding place. Eventually, however, Pa takes charge, defining himself as leader (see "Quotes", p. 145) and setting the attack for two days following.

As Laurie, Pa and Andy (who are to mount the attack) are due to leave, Ilse bids farewell to all three, making sure to say a particular goodbye to Laurie, who responds gently. As they wait for the right moment to trigger the avalanche, Laurie reflects on how foolish it was to take the Tripods so lightly when they first appeared, and on how important it is to keep fighting. When the Tripod finally appears on its schedule, the impatient Laurie waits for Pa to fire Yone's shotgun and trigger the avalanche. When it finally starts, the avalanche moves slowly, and Pa urges it to hurry up, Laurie echoing him (see "Quotes", p. 148). Finally, however, the avalanche gains power, eventually burying the Tripod.

The following summer, Laurie, Andy and Rudi discuss what happened. As Laurie reflects on the beauty of the day, and the relationship both he and the band now have with his father (see "Quotes", p. 151), narration reveals that although a pair of Tripods come and destroyed the Tripod trapped in the avalanche, regular patrols do not resume. Laurie comments in narration that "it was a small victory, but something to build on", commenting on how the fight against the Tripods might end up lasting centuries (see "Quotes", p. 151 - 2) but must be fought and ultimately won. He concludes by commenting that the job of the group, his job, is "to lay the foundations which could make it happen."



Chapter 10 Analysis

Again, there are several points to note in this section. The first is the reference at the beginning of the chapter to the notebooks in which Laurie is writing down the story, an illumination of the narrative's point of view (see "Style - Point of View"). Another important point is the variety of manifestations of Laurie's commitment to freedom (defined during the climax of his journey of transformation in the previous chapter, itself a manifestation of the novel's central theme). These manifestations include the commentary on the nature of Ilse's mother's burial (see "Quotes", p. 138), the comment on the group's rationalization of supply theft (see "Quotes", p. 138), and his involvement in the attack on the Tripod (in particular, his coming up with the idea). Also, and perhaps most importantly, there are his comments in narration at the end of the book on the necessity of fighting the Tripods, if necessary for centuries. This last point is particularly important, in that it solidifies both Laurie's personal commitment and the book's central thematic statement regarding the value and necessity for free thought. It also foreshadows events in later books in the series of "Tripod" books, some of which were written prior to this book but all of which describe events taking place hundreds of years after those of this book (see "Topics for Discussion - Obtain, read and discuss the other books ...")

Also in this section, the entwining of the main plot and the sub-plot continues. Specifically, Pa's actions in setting up and enacting the destruction of the patrolling Tripod (the climax of the book's main plot) triggers a new respectful, connected relationship with Laurie (the resolution of the book's sub-plot). The quote on p. 151 is particularly relevant here, in that it clearly suggests Laurie has a much stronger father/son relationship with Pa than he ever did before.

Finally, there is the main event of this chapter, the confrontation with the patrolling Tripod. The first point to note here is that there is no direct, open discussion of what the group stands to immediately gain from a successful attack. Continued safety is certainly a possibility, as is the larger, broader strokes issue of taking a stand against oppression, but as suggested, these are only implied (although the latter is certainly the most thematically relevant. In any case, the attack is the novel's climax, its high point in terms of emotion, tension, and thematic statement, a powerful reflection of the book's narrative and thematic focus on the power of free will and the necessity to fight for it. Entwined as it is with a similarly high point (but not the climax) in Laurie's journey of transformation (see above), the confrontation is a particularly effective example of how plot and character can affect, define and illuminate each other. Interestingly, and as Laurie points out, it is simultaneously an ending and a beginning (as, it could be argued, all "good" climaxes are). He, his group of exiles, and by extension all of humanity are at the end of one stage of existence and the beginning of another. Those who once lived in freedom have now become those who fight for freedom, with the result that the novel comes across as suggesting that even though humanity may not be fighting overt, alien domination, each individual has the responsibility to fight similar domination and stand for freedom in every sphere of life in which it manifests.



Characters

Laurie (Laurence)

Laurie is the book's central character, its narrator and protagonist. As suggested in "Preface and Chapter 1, Analysis"), several aspects of Laurie's character and identity can at first appear contradictory, specifically his simultaneous loyalty to and resentment of Andy and his father. Ultimately, though, these apparent contradictions entwine to create the sense that Laurie is in fact complex, experiencing what might be described as the normal unpredictable emotions of the middle adolescent he is.

The main point to note about Laurie, however, is his journey of transformation over the course of the novel. In the beginning, he is in many ways reactive—for example, following Andy's guidance during the orienteering session that ends up getting them lost and forcing them into an uncomfortable, and ultimately dangerous, sleeping arrangement. His reactivity also manifests in his relationship with Pa, in which he (Laurie) spends more time and energy reacting with resentment and anger towards what he perceives as Pa's favoritism towards (the equally resented) Ilse and Angela, rather than actively working towards improving their relationship. Over the course of the narrative, however, Laurie becomes more proactive and compassionate, moving from decision-accepter to decision-maker, from resentment and passivity into compassion and activism. In that sense, it could be argued that Laurie is an avatar for all humanity, a metaphoric representation of what the novel seems to be suggesting is an essential, vital component of the human experience—the capacity to transform and evolve through the application of both free thought and free feeling. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Analysis - Chapter 5."

Pa

Laurie's father is referred to (in Laurie's narration) as Pa throughout the narrative, with his given name (Martin) used only occasionally. He too undergoes a significant journey of transformation, moving from passive reactivity to more active self-determination in much the same way Laurie does. Compassionate and thoughtful, Pa is forced by circumstances into a position of leadership that at first he does not feel comfortable with, but eventually realizes is a responsibility he must fully and openly accept. Pa's insight, thoughtfulness, and resourcefulness prove essential in defining several key points in the narrative, in particular his realization of the nature of the Caps and their potential use as a disguise by the non-Capped. Perhaps most important, however, is his rescue of Laurie in Chapter 9, a turning point in both the main plot (the rebellion against the Tripods) and the sub-plot (the relationship between Laurie and Pa). This sub-plot, in turn, also contains a particularly telling moment relating to the use of Pa's name. In the final chapter, Laurie reveals that everyone else in their group of freedom fighters refers to Pa as Martin, but he (Laurie) still refers to him as Pa. For the narrative implications of this, see "Quotes", p. 151, and "Chapter 10 - Analysis."



Martha

Martha is Pa's mother and Laurie's grandmother, strong-willed, opinionated, and resourceful. She is important to the narrative in several ways, providing protection to her family that is both intellectual (her idea of escape to Guernsey) and physical (her gun). In fact, for most of the narrative she supplies decisive leadership that Laurie simultaneously values (in that it helps save his life) and resents (he feels his father should be providing exactly that sort of leadership). Eventually, however, Martha's authority is taken over by Pa in a turn of events (the plan to avalanche the Tripod—see Chapter 9) that ultimately seems to work for everyone's benefit.

Ilse

The Swiss Ilse is Pa's second wife (what happened to his first wife is never fully explained). Reading between the lines of his initially prejudiced narrative perspective (see "Style - Point of View"), Ilse comes across as genuinely interested in developing a positive relationship with Laurie, but because he so strongly resents Pa's devotion to her, that interest is met with sullen reluctance. Eventually, however, Ilse's apparently consistent good will wears down his resistance and Laurie reveals a genuine compassion for her and valuing of her company. Ilse, in her loyalty to her husband, daughter and parents, is a manifestation and embodiment of the narrative's secondary thematic focus on loyalty (see "Themes").

Angela

Angela is the seven year old daughter of Pa and Ilse. As seen through Laurie's resentful narrative perspective, she is portrayed as both spoiled and indulged, but again reading between the lines, she actually seems to be nothing more than a typical young girl learning to navigate the minefield of a blended family. She is significant to the overall narrative in that she is the one member of Laurie's immediate circle of family and friends to succumb to the influence of "The Trippy Show" (see "Objects/Places") and thereby of the Tripods, an influence eventually broken by the efforts of Dr. Monmouth (see below). In later chapters, she reveals an insight and feistiness that Laurie, again reading between the lines, seems to admire.

Andy

Andy is Laurie's best friend and companion. A relatively minor character, he nevertheless serves as an important narrative contrast to Laurie. Specifically, he highlights Laurie's reactivity by, at times, exhibiting more active impulsiveness (getting himself and Laurie lost as the novel begins and leaping in to fight back when confronted by anti-English sentiment in Chapter 7). He also highlights Laurie's resentments of his family by exhibiting more thoughtfulness and compassion (particularly when he wonders about his missing mother in Chapter 4).



Wild Bill

"Wild Bill" is Laurie's teacher, and at first represents the patronizing amusement with which society views the Tripods' first appearance. He also appears to represent a similar sort of amusement, referred to in the Preface, exhibited by the author's critics of his work. This idea is born out by the fact that Wild Bill quotes, almost exactly, a comment made by one such critic, also referred to in the Preface. It is therefore (ironic? authorial revenge?) that Wild Bill is one of the first adults in the narrative to succumb to the influence of "The Trippy Show" (see "Objects/Places").

Dr. Monmouth

Monmouth is the physician who identifies the triggering source for Angela's strange behavior (see Chapter 3) and proposes several theories about the Tripods' influence that ultimately prove to be correct (that "The Trippy Show" is a form of mind control). In other words, he is an important source of information that proves important in later chapters as Laurie and his fellow escapees from the Tripods' control struggle to maintain their freedom.

Aunt Caroline, Uncle Ian, Nathanael

Caroline is Pa's sister, Ian is her husband, and Nathanael is their son. Described in Laurie's (somewhat resentful) narration as well off and self-indulgent, they become important figures in defining Laurie's evolving understanding of what the influence of the Tripods actually means. Specifically, Ian and Nathanael come to Laurie's house with a bag of Caps, intending to Cap all of Laurie's family and thereby extend the Tripods' influence. Caroline, meanwhile, refuses to listen to warnings about their behavior. All three characters can be seen as metaphoric representations of society at large—specifically, of how society can unwittingly submit to the dominance of a stronger will, particularly one that promises peace.

Trippies

"Trippies" is the name given to those who, influenced by both "The Trippy Show" and the Caps, become absorbed into the influence of the Tripods. It is interesting to note the similarity between the words "Trippie" and "Hippy", the word used to broadly identify persons in the 1960s and early 1970s (particularly in North America) who participated in the cultural, social, political, and sexual rebellions of the time. It could be argued, in fact, that by using such a similar name, the author is suggesting that "Hippies" and the values they represent were, in fact, as mindless, soul-less, and identity-less as the Trippies seem to be. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Research the nature and practices ..."



Michael Hardy

The captain of the airplane, whose Capped anticipations of a peaceful future make Laurie wonder whether the peace the Tripods apparently promise is all that bad (see "Quotes", p. 96). Hardy is shot by the Swiss police when, after he lands the plane, he refuses to take off his Cap.

Ilse's Parents

After arriving in Switzerland, Laurie and the rest of his group of refugees from the Tripods (Pa, Martha, Angela, Andy) take refuge in the guest house run by Ilse's elderly father and mother. Referred to in Laurie's narration as "Swigram" and "Swigramp" (short for "Swiss Grandma" and "Swiss Grandpa") these characters are in fact more important in death than in life—see "Quotes", pp. 131 and 138.

Yone

Yone is the farmhand at the home of Ilse's parents. Wise and resourceful, he provides invaluable support (particularly in the form of his shotgun) for the group of escapees from England.

Rudi

Rudi is the son of the Swiss police chief that detains Andy for being uncapped. Rudi, to Laurie's intense surprise, identifies himself as resistant to the Tripods' cause and influence, and becomes the first of several recruits welcomed into the group of resistors led by Pa.



Objects/Places

England

England is the novel's primary setting, the home of Andy and his family, and the site of what the narrative implies is the only successful one of the three initial Tripod landings ("success" being defined by the Tripods' apparent accessing of the human brain that in turn enables the Tripods' eventual control of the collective human mind—see "Topics for Discussion - Do you think ...")

The Tripods

The Tripods first appear as machines, consisting of a capsule with a pointed top and flat bottom, standing on three metallic legs. On the flat side of the capsule is a circle of individual, glass-like panels, resembling windows. Each of the Tripods is equipped with a pair of metallic tentacles, capable of agile, at times even delicate, movement. Their initial appearance is portrayed as being initially dangerous but ultimately weak, but later appearances portray them as calculated, dominant, and ruthless. Later novels in the series (of which "When the Tripods Came" is the first) portray the Tripods as being manifestations of the will and power of alien "Masters."

The Edelweiss

The Edelweiss, named after a small, white flower, is the name of the small boat owned by Pa that is the vehicle for his family's fleeing to Guernsey to escape the Tripods.

The Trippy Show

This is the animated television show that, following humanity's initial contact with the Tripods, presents them as foolish and eventually heroic (see "Quotes", p. 29). For explanation of the origins and effects of the show, see "Characters - Dr. Monmouth" and also Chapter 3.

The Caps

As the Tripods' quest for domination of humanity and the world increases, "Trippies" are given helmets to both wear and pass on to non-Trippies. The helmets, or Caps, are first presented as signs of devotion to the Tripods, but are later revealed to be the source, and/or the primary manifestation of, the Tripods' control. Originally black and more helmet-like, the Caps evolve into what is described as a silvery mesh that bonds with the skull of those who wear them, with Cap and Tripod control becoming inseparable from the wearer's body and mind.



Guernsey

Guernsey is an island in the English Channel between England and France. Laurie and his family attempt to take refuge from the Tripods in a house on the island owned by Martha, but when they realize the Tripods and the Capped have taken control there as well, they flee to Switzerland.

Switzerland

Long a worldwide symbol of socio-political and economic neutrality, Switzerland (home to Ilse and her family) remains free of Tripod influence for much of the narrative, and as such becomes the ultimate destination for Laurie and his family. Eventually, however, the country and its people are forced into submission to the Tripods.

Fernohr

Fernohr is the small Swiss community near the home of Ilse's Swiss grandparents. Here Laurie and Andy encounter the Capped police and come close to being forcibly Capped themselves.

The Gasthaus (guest house)

This is the home and business of Ilse's parents outside Fernohr where Laurie and his family take refuge after fleeing Tripod control in both England and Guernsey.

Laurie's Books

These books, taken by Laurie to Andy while the latter awaits Capping (see Chapter 9), can be seen as metaphoric representations of everything Laurie and the other un-Capped are fighting for—free thought, as manifest in writing (and, perhaps by extension, by art in general). In other words, by taking the books to the imprisoned Andy, Laurie is metaphorically taking him both freedom and hope.

The Hidden Valley

After the Tripods take control of Switzerland, Laurie and his group make a dangerous but ultimately successful expedition to a northern valley, accessible only through an abandoned train tunnel, where they set up camp and remain hidden from Tripod influence and patrols.



Themes

The Importance of Free Thought

This is the narrative's central theme, anchoring and defining both its action and the personal transformations of its characters. On one level, exploration of this theme applies on a book-specific, literal level. Everything the Tripods do is an assault on free thought, while everything that Laurie and the other principal characters (Pa, Andy, Martha, Ilse, and the others) do is a defense of free thought. On another, more metaphorical level, the narrative's exploration of this theme is a condemnation of such assaults in general. In other words, there is the strong sense that the influence of the Tripods is intended to be a symbolic representation of the domination of earthly dictatorships which, as in the case of the Tripods, are defined and motivated by the determination to suppress individual thought in order to gain and maintain power. This sense is supported by the author's occasional references to the two World Wars (defined and triggered by the quest of dominating nations to assert control over the minds and bodies of the world's population) and Laurie's frequent, increasingly passionate comments on the importance of free will (see "Themes"). There is also the sense that the action of the book is a warning against unquestioning acceptance of such dominance and dictatorship, which, as suggested in "Loyalty" below, has dire consequences for those who submit. It is important to note however, that outside of the previously discussed (and passing) references to the two World Wars, the narrative never makes specific reference to circumstances of such dominance, but is more general in its warnings. There are, however, several possibilities for specific organizations, circumstances or philosophies that could fall in this category—Communism, Capitalism, and religious extremism are only a few (see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss manifestations of attempts to dominate thought ...").

Loyalty

The novel thematically considers (and narratively dramatizes) two kinds of loyalty. The first is imposed, a kind of ultimately mindless submission portrayed in the relationship between the Trippies/Capped and the Tripods. This particular relationship is a metaphoric representation and condemnation of similar sorts of loyalties that have manifested throughout human history, misguided and unfortunate German loyalty to Nazism being just one example. This sort of loyalty, in both history and the novel, results in both violence and oppression of the sort that takes place in the book (as examples, the Capping process, the hunting down of the un-Capped) and which gives lie to the protestations of the dominant that they are, in fact, bringing peace. Meanwhile, a second sort of imposed loyalty is that experienced by Laurie, when he feels expected to be loyal to Ilse and Angela when, in fact, he feels nothing but resentment (a kind of emotional violence) towards them. The transformation of that resentment into genuine affection and a sense of responsibility is also a transformation into the second kind of loyalty considered by the book, a sort that might best be described as voluntary.



There are several instances of voluntary loyalty: Pa's loyalty to Ilse and Angela (resented as it is by Laurie) and his eventual loyalty to Laurie himself, Ilse's loyalty to her parents, and perhaps most notably, Laurie's loyalty to Andy. In all cases, but in the Laurie/Andy relationship in particular, this sort of loyalty both fuels and triggers his decision to manifest his free will in defiance of both his father and the Tripods. In fact, loyalty performs this function in almost all the positive interpersonal relationships portrayed in the novel, a circumstance that suggests that the novel is portraying loyalty as a defining factor in the overall struggle against the influence of the Tripods—loyalty to human identity, both as individuals and as a community. In other words, in the book's narrative and thematic contexts, voluntary loyalty exists in both contrast to and defiance of imposed loyalty.

The Value of Rule Breaking

On several occasions, the narrative refers to characters that cross the boundaries of accepted behavior in the name of independence and freedom, and are rewarded for doing so. This can be seen as a manifestation of the narrative's thematic focus on the value of independent, free thought—specifically, as a suggestion that by breaking the rules, individuals are exhibiting free thought and ought to be rewarded.

The first example of the value of rule breaking occurs even before the story begins, but is referred to in Chapter 1. Laurie and Andy break the rules of their orienteering session, get lost, and even though they become fearful when they witness the violence of the Tripods, eventually they are rewarded (albeit indirectly) with knowledge of the Tripods' power and frailty. Another example of the narrative giving a positive portrayal of rule breaking is how Laurie and Andy secretly watch the Tripod in Chapter 5 and are "rewarded" with insight into how obsessive and destructive the devotion of the Trippies can be. The two primary manifestations of this theme, however, are Pa's story, told in Chapter 6, of Martha's defiance and Laurie's rescue of Andy. Finally, the narrative manifests this theme in its overall narrative line—specifically, the rejection of the Tripods' authority and influence led by Laurie, Pa and Martha. They, and anyone who resists the control of the Tripods, are breaking imposed rules, and therefore enacting the book's thematic suggestion that when mutual respect and freedom is no longer the reality, every individual has not only the right but the responsibility to break the rules and proclaim freedom, for the self and by extension for humanity.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from the first person, past tense point of view—specifically, that of Laurie, who is also the narrative's protagonist. As is the case with most, if not all, first person narratives, this stylistic choice draws the reader into the story with an immediacy and intimacy that brings the events of the story, and the emotions associated with them, into clear, personal focus. As is also the case with such narratives, its perspective is limited—because the narrator's insight is limited; he only knows his own experiences for certain and he can offer only assumptions and guesses as to the motivation and experiences of other characters. In the case of this narrator, while it might be interesting to gain insight into the psyches and experiences of Pa, Martha, Ilse, or any of the other characters), it is equally as interesting to read past what Laurie says and come to an understanding of the other characters that transcends what he himself implies is a prejudiced point of view. The point must be made that Laurie is not an unreliable narrator, just one with a set of prejudices and preconceptions that, as the result of his journey of transformation (see "Characters - Laurie") ultimately transform and evolve into something more positive. In this way, point of view becomes a manifestation of that transformation, style echoing substance and substance defining style.

Another interesting element to the book's point of view is the reference at the beginning of Chapter 10 to the notebooks in which Laurie is writing down the story. This, combined with his comments at the end of the chapter (about how the fight against the Tripods and their control must continue and may, in fact, continue for centuries) suggests that he is not simply telling a story, but is in fact leaving a historical record.

Setting

What is particularly interesting about the book's setting is that the narrative carries with it no particular indication of its placement in time. There is television and there are computers, but there is no reference to the Internet (which definitively places a narrative in a post-mid 1990s time frame). Perhaps more interestingly, there is no reference to terrorism, which in principle, goal and effect would seem to have significant resonance with the activities of the Tripods, which has existed throughout human history and which has come to the forefront of human consciousness since 9/11/2001 (see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways might the narrative and themes ..."). Therefore, by the process of elimination, it becomes reasonable and possible to suggest that the novel is set in the early 1990s, or earlier.

Another intriguing aspect of the book's setting is that for the most part, its action takes place in a rural environment—or, at the very least, away from large cities. Laurie and his family live in a community with accessible countryside outside the urban busy-ness of the British capital (London), while Guernsey (to which they attempt to escape) has no



large centers. On the other hand, when Laurie and the others arrive in Switzerland they pass through Geneva (the Swiss capital) and Lausanne (another large city), where they have their only really violent encounters. Specifically, in Geneva they witness the confrontation between the Capped travelers and the un-Capped Swiss authorities, while in Lausanne Andy, Laurie and Angela are attacked by Swiss youths. Even in the small town near which Laurie and the others take refuge, there is a violent confrontation between Andy and Rudi. In short, there seem to be, at least to some degree, associations between urbanization and violence, between the countryside and freedom, and between nature and self-determination. The latter two associations seem to be reinforced by Laurie and his family finally finding, and eventually defending, safety in an isolated mountain valley. There is also reinforcement for this idea in the quote on p. 148, which suggests that Laurie and Pa are calling upon nature to sabotage and destroy the unnatural entity (the Tripod) which has come among them.

Language and Meaning

The language used in the narrative is fairly straightforward, and for the most part feels both true to and evocative of a fourteen year old (which, according to narration, Laurie is). There are times when the vocabulary seems somewhat sophisticated for an average fourteen year old, but not obtrusively or disturbingly so.

In terms of meaning, there are two noteworthy, almost contradictory, points. The first is that on occasion, meaning and implication are communicated with a starkness that underlines the power and impact of the moment described. Examples of this occur frequently, from the understated horror of the Tripod's throwing of the dog in Chapter 1 through Laurie's statements of insight into the value of freedom (see "Quotes", p. 64) to his contemplations of death and the future in Chapter 10. It could be argued that Laurie's statements relating to freedom in particular are heavy-handed and obvious, but it could also be argued that given his apparent intent to leave something of a historical record (see "Point of View"), such strong clarity is not only valid but appropriate and necessary. They turn the document into something of a manifesto, a kind of call to arms—which, on some level, the novel actually is, calling the reader to vigilance against similar attacks on his own freedom of thought.

The second point to note about meaning is that, at the same time (and almost in the same narrative breath) as the above mentioned starkness, there are points at which the narrative communicates its meaning and intent with remarkable subtlety. The primary example of this can be found in Chapter 10, in which the book-long conflict between Laurie and his father, triggered and sustained by Laurie's resentment, is resolved in the simple, evocative statement found in "Quotes," p. 151. Here the author simply, evocatively, and powerfully communicates to the reader that Laurie has come to a new respect, understanding, and affection for his father, doing so by suggestion rather than the outright statement of the sort that defines the character's understanding of freedom.



Structure

The narrative's structure is essentially linear, moving in a straightforward line from beginning through incident after incident towards climax and resolution. This structure simultaneously reinforces and defines the book's powerfully effective sense of suspense, each confrontation increasing the stakes and thereby increasing the reader's desire to see the characters triumph.

It is important to note that this sense of narrative movement, of suspense, rising stakes, and increasing reader involvement, manifests in both the narrative's plots (the main plot focusing on the resistance of Laurie and the other characters to the Tripods, and the sub-plot focusing on the relationship between Laurie and Pa). In fact, and as noted throughout this analysis, the two plots simultaneously trigger and feed on each other, the depth of feeling and intensity of action in each combining to increase the reader's interest in, and connection to, both. This sense of interrelationship manifests structurally as well as emotionally and thematically, with chapter-by-chapter events and circumstances in one plot functioning to define and motivate similarly chapter-by-chapter events and circumstances in the other.

Finally, it is important to note that this book is the first in a series, recounting the origins of circumstances that define the action and themes of three subsequent books. In other words, while the book is structurally self-contained (with its own beginning, middle and end, plot and sub-plot, and character journeys of transformation), it is also the narrative foundation for three other stories. As previously discussed, the book's ending is in fact a beginning, the starting point for a much longer story, the ending of which is hoped for, perhaps even foreshadowed, at the end of this book.



Quotes

"The secret of success in battle lies often not so much in the use of one's own strength but in the exploitation of the other side's weaknesses." (Preface, p. vi)

"...I was too weary really to wake up—I couldn't even be sure I wasn't dreaming." (p. 3)

"The woman in the house had also become quiet; but the silence was even more frightening. Resting on its spindly legs, the machine had the look of an insect digesting its prey." (p. 5)

"I could still see it too clearly—the insectlike shape towering above the ruins of the farmhouse, the snaky tentacles plucking up pathetic bits and pieces and tossing them away ... it hadn't been funny then, and it wasn't now." (p. 16)

"I couldn't recall much of the way things had been between him and my mother, except for the silences, which sometimes lasted days ... he talked his head off both to [Ilse] and to Angela. He never seemed to talk much to me, though." (p. 21)

"Normally Pa was easy tempered and anxious to please with people he didn't know. The thought of him losing his temper made me feel better." (p. 24)

"The words were stupid, the music was jangly and repetitive, and the synthetic voice was irritating, but it was the sort of number that gets under your skin and has you humming and being driven mad by it at the same time." (p. 26)

"The fact of using something as clumsy as a Tripod doesn't mean [the aliens] might not be a long way ahead of us in studies of the mind, and mental processes." (Dr. Monmouth, p. 44)

"A Tripod stood center screen ... small dots swarmed like bees about the gigantic feet ... the camera zoomed into close-up. The swarm of dots turned into people. Hundreds—thousands of them, waving and cheering and brandishing Trippie signs." (pp. 45-46)

"What I did notice was the way Pa talked to him—naturally, not going into silences and then talking too fast to make up for it. I'd left them talking. I wondered how it was he seemed able to talk easily to everyone but me." (p. 54)

"It's something you have to experience to understand, but once you have, everything else is like a bad dream. For thousands of years men have fought one another, killing and torturing and enslaving. That's all gone. The Tripods are bringing peace and freedom." (Uncle Ian to Laurie, p. 56)

"What I was suddenly aware of was the importance of their being whatever each of them was ... as long as it was something they'd come to in their own way: the importance of being human, in fact. The peace and harmony Uncle Ian and the others



claimed to be handing out in fact was death, because without being yourself, an individual, you weren't really alive." (p. 64)

"My grandfather used to talk about the 1914 War. They told him it would be over by Christmas and he was four years out there ... And at least they could tell who the enemy was." (Checkpoint Soldier, p. 79)

"In a normal law abiding world it's better to toe the line, and come to heel when the man in uniform calls you. But that world's gone, for the time being at least. From now on it's safer to follow Martha's policy—turn a blind eye and put your foot down." (Pa, p. 82)

"...if the Tripods really were bringing peace, surely that was a good thing? Peace was about people liking one another; and perhaps in a way that meant they didn't get hooked on one particular person and forget about others." (p. 96)

"For hundreds of years [the Swiss had] been surrounded by dictatorships and empires and such, and had managed to disregard them. They had the protection of their mountains, and an army in which all male citizens served ... they felt all they needed to do was sit tight and go on being Swiss." (p. 109)

"I stood looking down at the huddled roofs of the village ... it was a picturesque and ordinary scene, except that the people beneath the roofs had lost what lay at the heart of being human: their individuality, and the power to act as free men and women. But in their case it had been forcibly taken from them; I was surrendering mine out of cowardice." (p. 121)

"People still died; the Tripods and Capping made no difference to that. And others had to go on." (p. 131)

"Tourism was a thing of the past, along with parliaments and television chat shows, universities and churches, human disorder and human freedom." (p. 134)

"We could not mark the grave, but her body would lie there forever unchanged in the perpetual frost. A different end from [Ilse's father], whose body had burned to ash in the flames that destroyed the home they'd shared, but bodies didn't matter, really. They had both died free." (p. 138)

"It's theft, of course ... but the people we steal from are Capped, and we are as much at war with them as their Tripod masters." (p. 138)

"The horrifying thing was that the silver part was a metal mesh, which seemed welded into the living flesh. From now on, the Cap, once imposed, was there for life, and eventually would crown a skeleton." (p. 140)

"The hatred I felt for the Tripods and what they had done to us was too great. Nor could I abide the thought of huddling here forever like moles, while our enemy stomped arrogantly through the valley. I wanted to attack!" (pp. 143-144)



"Our first aim has to be self-preservation, but ... aiming just at that, we could slip into a routine of caution and playing safe which would ... eventually destroy us as totally as the Tripods have destroyed our cities. So our second aim must be to fight the Tripods—without much hope for the immediate future, but as a means of keeping hope alive." (Pa, p. 144)

"I heard myself echoing him ... as though urging the mountain, the planet which had borne us, to come to our aid. We were all three crying out, shouting for help to the empty sky." (p. 148)

"They all called Pa Martin these days, though certainly not from lack of respect. Everyone listened carefully when he spoke. But he talked to me more than the others, and I called him Pa." (p. 151)

"I wondered about those who would come after—if maybe one day three like us would lie on this hillside in the sun watching butterflies as we were doing, but able also to look towards a day which would see humanity free again." (p. 151)



Topics for Discussion

In what ways does the quote from the Preface (see Quotes, Preface, p. vi) relate to the action of the narrative?

Research and discuss ways the quote from the Preface (see Quotes, Preface, p. vi) relates or applies to other conflicts—military, moral, social, or terrorist, for examples.

Do you think that the apparently easy defeat of the Tripods in Chapter 1 is a genuine defeat, or do you think it was all part of their master plan for world domination? Where do you think the kidnapping of the farmer, and the eventual discovery that his brain was dissected, fits into the Tripods' plans—did the dissection trigger the plan, or was the dissection part of the plan? Explain and justify your answer.

Discuss ways in which the book's plot and sub-plot interact. In other words, in what ways do events in the "Tripod takeover" story (the plot) affect and define events in the "Laurie and Pa's relationship" story (the sub-plot)? In what ways do events in the sub-plot affect and define events in the main plot?

Obtain, read, and discuss the other books in the "Tripods" series ("The White Mountains", "The City of Gold and Lead", "The Pool of Fire"). What themes recur in the three books? In what ways do their stories reflect or illuminate the story in this book?

Research the nature, practices and beliefs of the so-called "Hippie" movement. What do you see as the relationship between the "Hippies" and the "Trippies"? Discuss whether the book's apparent indictment of "Trippie" philosophies and practices is intended to be a metaphorical authorial indictment of those associated with the "Hippy" movement, or whether the name is merely a coincidence.

Discuss manifestations of attempts to dominate thought in contemporary society. Consider a variety of arenas in which such dominance is possible—spiritual/religious, economic, political, social. In what ways do the groups attempting dominance manifest their intent? In what ways are their attempts similar to those of the Tripods? In what ways are attempts to resist that dominance similar to those of the freedom fighters in the novel?

In what ways might the narrative and themes of the novel be different if it were set after the 9/11 terrorist attacks? How might the characters react differently? How might the Tripods act differently?