

The White Mountains Study Guide

The White Mountains by John Christopher and Samuel Youd

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

The White Mountains Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Plot Summary.....	6
Chapter 1 Capping Day.....	7
Chapter 2 My Name Is Ozymandias.....	10
Chapter 3 The Road to the Sea.....	12
Chapter 4 Beanpole.....	14
Chapter 5 The City of the Ancients.....	16
Chapter 6 The Castle of the Red Tower.....	18
Chapter 7 The Tripod.....	20
Chapter 8 Flight and a Follower.....	22
Chapter 9 We Fight a Battle.....	23
Chapter 10 The White Mountains.....	25
Characters.....	27
Objects/Places.....	31
Setting.....	35
Social Sensitivity.....	36
Literary Qualities.....	37
Themes.....	38
Themes/Characters.....	40
Style.....	42
Quotes.....	45
Topics for Discussion.....	48

Essay Topics.....	49
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	50
Further Study.....	51
Related Titles.....	52
Copyright Information.....	53

Overview

Like most of Christopher's books for young readers, *The White Mountains* dramatizes painful truths about human nature and raises important questions about what makes life worth living.

Christopher believes that human beings are inevitably flawed, and that technological achievement is a mixed blessing in the hands of fallible people. Still, he holds out hope that strong individuals, bound together by a desire to protect freedom of thought and free will, may yet save humanity from its own worst impulses.

Christopher's brand of science fiction is less concerned with making fantastic scientific predictions than it is with exploring, in an imaginative way, very immediate human problems. In *The Tripods Trilogy*, of which *The White Mountains* is the first volume, alien invaders of Earth have gained almost complete control over humankind. The young protagonists of the trilogy must struggle painfully for the autonomy they desire. Freedom for them is neither comfortable nor safe, and its acquisition by no means guarantees happiness. The boys learn through bitter experience that they must struggle not only against the external forces that would oppress them, but also against their own selfishness, jealousy, pride, fear, and recklessness.

Christopher has a gift for creating memorable and evocative images in his fiction. The shining metallic Tripods with their strange hunting call and gleaming tentacles are haunting incarnations of power; the ruined cities of the ancients are apt symbols of failed technology and the decay of human knowledge; and the pastoral beauty of the village of Wherton recalls a simpler life made largely obsolete by technological progress.

About the Author

John Christopher was born Christopher Samuel Youd in Knowley, Lancashire, England, on April 16, 1922.

When he was ten years old, his family moved to Hampshire, where he was educated at Peter Symonds's School, Winchester. Youd became interested in science fiction in the late 1930s and published a magazine in the field called the *Fantast*. He served in the Royal Corps of Signals from 1941 to 1946, and when he returned to civilian life received a Rockefeller Foundation Grant that enabled him to devote an entire year to writing. After this, he worked for ten years in the information bureau of a diamond-cutting firm, continuing to write fiction in his spare time. Youd wrote a number of serious novels for adults under his own name, including *Giant's Arrow* (1956) and *Messages of Love* (1961). His work was well received by critics but was not a resounding commercial success.

With a family of five children to support, Youd decided in 1958 to attempt to write novels in a variety of genres. He has published science fiction as "John Christopher," detective novels as "Peter Graff" and "Peter Nichols," cricketing books as "William Godfrey," and light comedies as "Hilary Ford." His "John Christopher" novels for adults, mostly science fiction, have achieved considerable success. In such books as *Caves of Night* (1958) and *The Death of Grass* (1956), Christopher explores human reactions to situations of unusual stress.

This thematic concern appears also in his science fiction for young adults, which has been exceptionally popular, especially in England. Christopher's best-known works for younger readers include *The Tripods Trilogy*—composed of *The White Mountains*, *The City of Gold and Lead*, and *The Pool of Fire*—and *The Guardians*, which won the 1970 Christopher Award and the 1971 Guardian Award for children's fiction.

Plot Summary

Will and Henry Parker are thirteen-year-old cousins living in a small English town in the far future. Technology is largely forgotten and humanity lives under a feudal system of government. Humanity has been conquered by a race of beings known as Tripods. Tripods are huge, mechanical beings, perhaps sixty feet tall, with three mechanical legs and metallic tentacles that descend from a hemispherical body. When a person reaches the age of fourteen, they are taken by a Tripod and Capped. Capping is a type of surgical procedure where a metallic mesh Cap is implanted onto a person's head. Once Capped, a person's thoughts and actions are controlled by the Tripods.

Will and Henry learn of a distant location in the South, called the White Mountains, where men live free from the Tripods. The Tripods apparently do not enter the White Mountains, because of the altitude. Will and Henry desire to retain their individuality and escape from the Tripods and therefore run away from home and travel hundreds of miles over land and ocean in quest of the White Mountains.

When Will and Henry reach the coast of France, they are aided by Beanpole, who joins them in their quest for the White Mountains. Somewhere south of Paris, France, Will becomes sick and the three characters spend several weeks at a French castle while Will recovers his strength. While at the castle, Will falls in love with a young woman who has already been Capped. Will tries to decide whether to stay and be Capped or continue his quest. After some prolonged contemplation and turmoil, Will decides to continue and he, Henry, and Beanpole have additional adventures and finally reach the White Mountains and join with other free men.

Chapter 1 Capping Day

Chapter 1 Capping Day Summary

The narrative begins with Will Parker thinking about his father's wristwatch. Will's father owns the only wristwatch in town, and it is an object of intrigue and value. The wristwatch was made many, many years ago by an ancient civilization that no longer exists. Mr. Parker keeps the watch locked away, but Will knows where the key is hidden. One Saturday morning, while everyone else is out of the house, Will decides to sneak a look at the watch. After retrieving the key and obtaining the watch, he puts it on his own arm and admires it. He then decides to sneak out into the town and find his cousin and best friend, Jack Leeper, to show him the wristwatch.

While Will is walking through the town of Wherton, England, he realizes his hated cousin, Henry Parker, is coming toward him. Will and Henry frequently fight, and they rarely see eye-to-eye. Will runs away from Henry and leaves the town with Henry in pursuit. Henry, a month younger than Will, but both taller and stronger, eventually catches up with him, tackles him, and begins to fight with him. Henry obtains the wristwatch and taunts Will, threatening to fling the watch into the river. Will is saved when Jack discovers Will and Henry and intervenes. Jack is older and physically larger than Henry, and Henry returns the watch and leaves. Jack reprimands Will for being so foolish, and together they return to Will's home and return the watch to its hiding place.

Will and Jack then leave Wherton and walk a few hundred yards to a ruined city, another construction of an ancient civilization. Although most people never enter the ruins, Will and Jack maintain a secret hideout in a collapsing building they call the den. At the den, they cook a rabbit Jack has killed and eat it while they have conversation.

Jack will soon be Capped by the Tripods. Jack and Will discuss the Tripods - huge, mechanical beings that dominate humanity. When individual humans reach the age of fourteen, they are taken inside a Tripod. Once inside, their head is shaved and a flexible mesh of metal, called a Cap, is implanted into their scalp. The Cap's metallic mesh extends from the surface downward into the head and cannot be removed. Eventually, the hair grows back around and through the mesh, largely covering the Cap. Being Capped is seen as a coming-of-age ritual, and after being Capped, Jack will no longer be a child but a man. In addition, after being Capped, Jack will lose a good portion of his freewill, because the Caps allow the Tripods to control the thoughts and actions of the Capped individual. Usually, individuals are allowed to continue their normal life, but they behave differently and no longer have curiosity or a desire to explore.

Jack and Will discuss vagrants. About 5% of those Capped, mostly males but some females, do not accept the Capping well. They develop a fever, pain, and illness that resolves in several days. Afterward, however, their brains are damaged, and they aimlessly wander the countryside, babbling incoherently and performing meaningless, trivial tasks. Every town has a vagrant house, a sort of poor house, where wandering

vagrants can stay and be fed. Vagrants never stay in one town more than a few days, and children are generally afraid of them. Jack says that he would almost prefer to become a vagrant after being Capped instead of being controlled by the Tripods. Jack and Will are evidently disturbed and frightened by the prospect of being Capped, but see no real alternative.

Jack and Will also discuss the Black Ages, a time in the past about which little is known. The Black Ages extend to that period of time where humanity existed before the Tripods came. Most adults say the Black Ages were a time of warfare, starvation, and disease, and that the Tripods benefit humanity. No one knows where the Tripods came from or what, exactly, they are, but Jack and Will know that at one time humanity existed without them. Jack tells Will about a huge rusting ship he once saw in a distant ruined city. Jack reasons that if humanity could create a ship larger than the village of Wherton, that humanity must have been capable of amazing and astounding feats. Wherton, like most of the Earth, is now dominated by a feudal system of society, with the Tripods as the ultimate rulers.

Jack and Will then return home to the village, and about eight or nine days later, a Capping Day Festival is held. The Capping Day is a day of joy in the village, games are played, and huge feasts are held. Jack is the guest of honor, because he is the only person to be Capped on this Capping Day. Will knows that the next year he and Henry, among others, will be Capped, and the thought of this troubles him.

During the festivities, a huge Tripod arrives. It is approximately sixty feet tall and has a huge hemispherical body set on three metallic mechanical legs. Several metallic tentacles descend from the body to the ground. The body is set around with green glass windows and there is an opening on the body. No one knows if the Tripod is alive or if it is a robot that houses living things. The Tripod reaches down with a tentacle, picks up Jack, and moves him into the Tripod's body. Some time goes by and the Tripod returns Jack. Jack's head has been shaved and a metallic mesh has been implanted onto his scalp - he has been Capped.

Two days later, Will meets Jack in the town. Will tries to talk to Jack as though they were friends, but it quickly becomes apparent that Jack has moved away from Will. Jack is now a Capped man and has little time for Will's childish ideas. When Will reminds Jack about the accomplishments and inventions of humanity during the Black Ages, Jack dismisses it as nonsense and walks away, leaving Will feeling alone.

Chapter 1 Capping Day Analysis

Chapter 1 is the most important chapter in the novel. It presents and develops two of the novel's primary characters, Will Parker and Henry Parker, and many of the novel's secondary characters. This chapter establishes a sense of place in Wherton, England, and describes the culture and society of the people who live there. It also establishes a timeline for a future Earth (probably intended to be approximately 2160 C.E.), where

civilization as we know it today is no more. Instead, technology is rudimentary, trade is nearly non-existent, and government is a type of feudal structure.

However, all this material, as important as it is, is overshadowed by the Tripods and their dominant control over humanity. Humans are no longer personally free. Instead, they are forcibly Capped with a mind-controlling implant, which allows a Tripod to locate and also control thought and action. Once Capped, a person views the Tripods as benevolent masters and holds them in awe, even though the Tripods clearly have no particular care for humanity. Capped people actively force un-Capped people to be Capped, even though a great number of people - approximately 5% - are irrevocably brain-damaged by the procedure.

The gritty, believable, and strange existence presented in chapter 1 is the backdrop against which the remainder of the novel is set. The strange culture also provides motivation for the primary character's future adventures and explains why the future world is so technologically backward.

The Tripods are presented as a distant, inscrutable, and nearly infinitely powerful master class of organisms that are terrifying to those who still retain their capacity for independent thought. Will Parker views them with unease and distaste, but erroneously assumes he and Jack are the only thirteen-year-olds who view their future Capping in a negative light. Indeed, Will does soon discover that most people who are within a year or so of being Capped feel equally distraught at the grim prospect of losing their self-will and much of their individuality.

Chapter 2 My Name Is Ozymandias

Chapter 2 My Name Is Ozymandias Summary

Without Jack's friendship, Will finds himself lonely and despondent. Will continues to fight with Henry and finally beats him. Henry then leaves Will alone. Will spends time alone in the den, thinking about Capping and the Black Ages. Will also finds Jack's marked personality shift very disturbing and begins to dread his own Capping in just one year's time. While he considers his future, Will begins to understand Jack's somewhat jesting hope to become a vagrant after Capping. Will begins to pay more attention to the vagrants in Wherton and notes that they usually stay in town for only a few days or weeks before wandering away.

One day, Will talks to a vagrant who is wandering into the town. Will and the vagrant talk about Jack previous to Capping and Will's pending Capping. The vagrant identifies himself as Ozymandias. Will thinks Ozymandias makes more sense than a typical vagrant does. Will takes Ozymandias to the vagrant house, but becomes distressed when he discovers he is being furtively observed by townspeople. Ozymandias then begins to spout nonsense and behave strangely, and Will goes home. Later, Mr. Parker reprimands Will for speaking to vagrants and tells Will to keep away from them.

A few days later, Ozymandias seeks out Will to talk again. Will is somewhat anxious about speaking to a vagrant in public, but does allow Ozymandias to arrange a private meeting later at the den.

Will later meets Ozymandias at the den, where they have a lengthy and private discussion. Ozymandias is not a vagrant and, in fact, he is not Capped. Instead, the Cap he wears was taken from a dead man and is worn merely to allow Ozymandias to travel as a vagrant without raising suspicions. Ozymandias tells Will that no one knows what the Tripods are, whether they are living or mechanical, or if they came from another planet or are an invention of humanity.

Ozymandias tells Will that no one knows why some people become vagrants when Capped, but Ozymandias suspects the very strong-willed resist the Tripods' mental domination until they become insane and vagrants. Ozymandias also notes that people who are Capped far from their own home are very likely to become vagrants, perhaps because they speak a different language than the programming in the Caps they receive.

Ozymandias tells Will that the Tripods do not go high into the mountains, and that there is an enclave of humans living in the White Mountains of Switzerland, far to the South, who are not Capped and live as free people without the domination of the Tripods. Ozymandias is traveling the world in search of people, like Will, who do not want to be subjected to the Tripod's control.



Will expresses a desire to escape from the Tripods to the White Mountains. Ozymandias gives Will a compass, a map, many verbal instructions, and the name of a ship captain who will transport Will across the English Channel. Will tells Ozymandias there are no other people in Wherton who would desire to escape. While Will starts to stockpile food and supplies to make good his escape, Ozymandias babbles around town for a few days, and then wanders away, seemingly an addled vagrant.

Chapter 2 My Name Is Ozymandias Analysis

Chapter 2 establishes the central plot device used throughout the remainder of the novel, that there is another, better place where Will can go to be free of the mental control of the Tripods. When Will learns he can escape the fate he assumed was inescapable, he is immediately determined to try to run away to the White Mountains and live as a free man.

Although Ozymandias is unable to answer most of Will's fundamental questions about the Tripods, he does provide Will with several plausible answers to think about. One of the most interesting aspects of the novel is that the nature and origins of the Tripods is unknown. Will and the other characters in the novel only know how things are, not how they came to be that way. With today's easy access to detailed history, this situation is difficult to imagine, and yet, it is the very situation that Will and his friends must accept.

Ozymandias' cover as a vagrant is particularly well suited to his self-appointed task of recruiting people to resist being Capped. Ozymandias is constantly able to travel from place to place without arousing suspicions, while simultaneously receiving food and shelter at no cost or effort. Ozymandias is careful to behave ridiculously and erratically when in public so that his status as a mentally deranged vagrant is not questioned. It is notable that much of Ozymandias' babbling is actually paraphrased or quoted poetry and scripture from the literature during the Black Ages.

When Will expresses astonishment that Ozymandias somehow knew Will did not want to be Capped, Ozymandias tells Will that most people feel uneasy at the prospect. This is another interesting aspect of the novel, because all of the supposedly responsible adults in the society have already been Capped and are therefore unable and unwilling to challenge the established order. Only the un-Capped children are truly free in thought and action, yet the entire society is geared toward raising them to be Capped, thus surrendering their autonomy. The remainder of the novel deals with Will's attempt to reach the White Mountains, the far-flung destination that gives its name to the title of the novel.

Chapter 3 The Road to the Sea

Chapter 3 The Road to the Sea Summary

Will is determined to leave Wherton and seek the White Mountains. Will's occasional meetings with Jack have convinced him that Capping robs one of initiative and individuality. Will does not feel particularly close to his parents and has no significant remaining friends. Thus, he decides to try to escape as Ozymandias has suggested. Will begins to stockpile food in the den and plans to leave within a week or two.

However, Will's plans are interrupted by the death of Henry Parker's mother. Henry's father is a distant and busy man, and he sends Henry to stay with Will's parents. Henry moves into Will's room and the two enemies begin an uneasy coexistence. Will waits for Henry to return home, but when he learns Henry will be a permanent resident, he decides he will have to sneak away without awakening Henry. When he judges the weather acceptable, he sneaks away in the night and goes to the den, where he packs food into a backpack, and then prepares to leave.

Henry, however, has silently followed Will to the den, and the two begin to fight. Henry overpowers Will and pins him down. Henry then explains that having lost his mother, he has no desire to remain in Wherton. Henry knows Will is running away, though he does not know why, and Henry wants to run away with Will. Will agrees, seeing no viable alternative.

The pair travels south for two days, and then at night, they hear noises and believe they are being followed. They begin to run blindly in the dark, and Will falls and turns his ankle. They then realize what they heard was only farm animals, and Henry carries the disabled Will back to an abandoned hut they passed earlier in the day. They remain in the hut for three days while Will's ankle heals and Henry scavenges surrounding farms for food. Henry's care wins Will's begrudging trust, and as they begin walking south again, Will tells Henry about Ozymandias and the White Mountains. Henry tells Will that he also does not wish to be Capped and the two determine to reach the White Mountains together.

Chapter 3 The Road to the Sea Analysis

Chapter 3 continues to develop Will and Henry as characters, and further develops the society in which they live. Their willingness to leave behind the life they know is fully explained - neither feels any particular attachment to the area or, in fact, to their families. Both boys fear being Capped and have a desire for adventure and excitement. Although they have never liked each other, they find themselves engaged in a common cause and are able to set aside their differences.

The descriptions of the English countryside are engaging and picturesque. The difficulty of travel is also made apparent as the pair quickly exhausts their food and struggle to

make good progress while traveling at night. Will's injury is a believable event that serves several purposes in the narrative. First, it demonstrates the dangers and inconveniences of prolonged overland foot travel. Second, it forces Will to become dependent on Henry and allows Henry to establish himself as a trustworthy character. Once Will sees Henry is reliable, Will feels enabled to discuss his future plans with Henry and to include Henry in them.

When Henry admits that much of his desire to leave Wherton was to escape being Capped, even if just for a while, Will realizes that his earlier antagonistic relationship with Henry had nearly prevented him from finding in Henry a potential ally for the voyage. Chapter 3 also begins the long voyage of adventure and escape that is discussed in the remainder of the novel. In this sense, the novel is a novel of quest and the plot is fundamentally driven by constant progress toward the final goal of the White Mountains.

Chapter 4 Beanpole

Chapter 4 Beanpole Summary

After some more overland travel, Will and Henry arrive at a busy port town called Rumney. The size and bustle of the port allow the two country boys to pass mostly unnoticed while they unsuccessfully search the waterfront for *Orion*, the ship Ozymandias told Will would be able to transport them across the English Channel to France.

Unable to locate the boat, Will enters a shop and purchases some food. While he is exiting the shop, he is grabbed by a ship's captain who is searching for labor. The captain tells Will he has no choice and begins to drag him off to work on his ship. Will happens to see a man matching Ozymandias' description of the captain of the *Orion* and calls out to him. Fortunately, for Will, the man is indeed Captain Curtis, who intervenes and prevents Will from being abducted. Captain Curtis then takes Will and Henry and sneaks them aboard *Orion*.

They sail across the English Channel to a port city in France. While on the high seas, the *Orion* is approached by several Tripods who, Will learns, are also able to move across water. The Tripods ominously circle the ship, and then speed away. Captain Curtis later tells Will that these types of sightings at sea are dangerous and, unfortunately, fairly common. The Tripods actions appear nonsensical to Will and Henry.

When they reach France, Captain Curtis takes Will and Henry ashore to a small village, warns them to avoid detection, and then leaves them. Within moments, they are spotted by a villager, who raises the alarm, and they soon find themselves imprisoned in a cellar. Unable to speak the local language, Will and Henry are frightened and helpless. They await their uncertain fate as night falls. During the night, they hear someone come down the stairs and are surprised to see another thirteen-year-old boy, wearing homemade spectacles, enter the cellar. The boy introduces himself as Jean-Paul, and the boys have a brief conversation.

Jean-Paul is christened Beanpole by Henry. Beanpole is a prodigy - he has taught himself to speak English by studying an old book. Beanpole made his own spectacles to improve his visual acuity. Seeing little alternative, Will tells Beanpole they are trying to escape the Tripods. Beanpole is immediately interested and offers to help Will and Henry escape if they promise to take him with them. They readily agree.

Chapter 4 Beanpole Analysis

The port city of Rumney is large and busy and offers some anonymity to travelers. It also allows unscrupulous people to kidnap laborers. This type of kidnapping, often referred to as 'pressing', was a common practice in England in the early nineteenth

century and has apparently resurfaced during the time of the novel. Will narrowly escapes a period of enforced labor by his astute recognition of Captain Curtis.

The chance meeting at sea with the Tripods is interesting. It demonstrates that the Tripods are the nearly undisputed masters of the planet - even oceangoing ships are within their grasp. Their behavior is seen by Will as somewhat capricious and bizarre, but Captain Curtis tells him Tripods frequently behave in the way observed. This encounter foreshadows a subsequent encounter the boys will have with strangely behaving Tripods in Chapter 10 and serves to further make the Tripods a strange and alien object, whose actions are often unpredictable.

The landing of Will and Henry does not go as planned, and their near-immediate capture seems very ominous in the narrative. This plot device successfully builds suspense and appears to change the course of the novel. Their misfortune is really a blessing in disguise, however, because they are rescued by, and then recruit the ever-resourceful Beanpole. In addition to being a native speaker of French, Beanpole is very intelligent and insightful and will assist Will and Henry on their journey. Henry Anglicizes 'Jean-Paul' into 'Beanpole' after he hears the name pronounced as 'Zhan-Pole'. The nickname adds a risible element to the character of Beanpole and aids in the rapid characterization necessary to set Beanpole on an equal textual footing with the developed characters of Will and Henry.

Beanpole is the final major character of the novel. His late introduction is a successful plot element that continues to propel the voyage forward. Beanpole's understanding of the local customs and his ability to speak French also allows further plot developments in Chapter 6 to be believable.

Chapter 5 The City of the Ancients

Chapter 5 The City of the Ancients Summary

Beanpole tells Will and Henry that he is an orphan being raised by relatives. His relatives are not particularly affectionate and Beanpole has no attachment to them or the area. He explains that he has always been interested in scientific investigation and is fascinated by the prospects of developing steam power. He tells him he once broke his leg while inventing a pogo stick. Beanpole has observed that the process of being Capped ruins the intellect and converts people into complacent automatons, uninterested in the world around them and without curiosity. For this reason, he does not want to be Capped. Beanpole rapidly gains the trust of Will and Henry, and they escape from the town at night and head south.

Beanpole leads Will and Henry off the course indicated by the map, because he has a plan to expedite their journey. Beanpole leads the group to what he calls a Shmand-Fair. The Shmand-Fair is a series of coaches on wheels, pulled by several horse teams, which runs upon an old but serviceable railroad line. The boys manage to scramble onto the Shmand-Fair undetected and ride it south for nearly one hundred miles.

While they ride along, Beanpole envisions somehow using a steam engine to drive the Shmand-Fair in place of the horse teams. Henry and Will ridicule the idea as fantastic. Beanpole joins in their laughter, but insists there must be a way. The boys leave the Shmand-Fair undetected and continue to make their way south until they come to a gigantic ruined city. The city is very large and will take days to circumvent, so they decide to walk through it instead of going around it. A good deal of time is spent walking through the city, observing objects in the city, and exploring the ruins.

In one store, Will finds a cabinet full of watches. Will selects a particularly nice watch and places it on his arm, high up above his clothes. Will does not tell Henry or Beanpole about all of the other watches, because he wants to have the only watch. Unknown to Will, the watch he selects is a self-winding watch, and he is amazed a few hours later to note that it has started functioning again. The boys also explore through what were evidently once grocery stores. They take useful items such as a hatchet from an old hardware store. They encounter a huge river and find a bridge on which to cross over. They pass by a huge cathedral on an island in the river and note it has been partially destroyed.

The boys also come to a huge underground entrance, which Beanpole insists they explore. It is a subway entrance and Beanpole labels it a type of underground Shmand-Fair. Inside the station, they find an old railcar loaded with food and other strange objects. By a simple mistake, they discover that some of the objects will violently explode. The objects look like goose eggs, and Beanpole decides they may come in useful and packs several of them away.

The boys continue walking through the city and eventually walk through a vast graveyard. They note the date on one headstone as 1966. They finally leave the city and continue walking south. Will develops a fever and becomes sick. The group continues to press on until Will collapses and passes out. When he comes to, he is laying in a lavish bed in a beautifully appointed room.

Chapter 5 The City of the Ancients Analysis

The Shmand-Fair is an Anglicized word for the French *chemin de fer*, or railroad. The old iron tracks still remain from the Black Ages, and are now used by a sort of horse-drawn stagecoach on rails. The description of the operation of the Shmand-Fair is interesting. The use of the rails is reminiscent of Mr. Parker's prized possession of a wristwatch. Both objects date from the Black Ages but are retained as mementos without arousing further interest in things of the past. This limited use without a complementary desire for further inquiry illustrates how fundamentally robotic Capped people are in their outlook on life.

The City of the Ancients is an abandoned and ruined Paris, France. The underground Shmand-Fair is the old Paris Metro, and the exploding goose eggs are hand grenades left over from a now-gone humanity's previous battle against the Tripods. Will's narrative description of the abandoned ruins makes some of the most interesting reading in the novel. Many objects that a modern reader takes for granted appear to Will as both fantastic and incredible. Will marvels at the size of stores and the incredible amount of moldering products on the collapsing shelves. The width of the streets, now filled with trees and bushes, seems extraordinary. The novel's portrayal of common objects as amazing and inspirational is particularly successful. The cathedral mentioned is the Notre Dame.

Will finds a watch shop and takes a watch for himself. Will hides it from Henry and Beanpole on the assumption that, if they see it, they also will want one, and Will wants to have the only watch. In this way, Will unconsciously demonstrates that he has not yet wholly abandoned his previous life. Will's father's importance was magnified by being in possession of the only watch in Wherton, so Will wants to have the only watch in the group. The watch becomes symbolic of Will's ties to a prior way of life, and the symbolism will resurface in a later chapter. Recall that, in Wherton, a single watch was serviced only once every three years, because it was a great rarity - image Will's surprise when he finds a store full of dozens of them.

Chapter 6 The Castle of the Red Tower

Chapter 6 The Castle of the Red Tower Summary

Will regains consciousness in a lavish bed in a beautifully appointed room. Will is in the presence of a woman who is speaking to him in English. Will recalls that Beanpole had developed a plan in case they were compromised. Will and Henry would pretend to be deaf and mute and Beanpole would explain they were his cousins. In this way, Beanpole reasoned their inability to speak or understand French would not arouse suspicions. Will, still somewhat confused, is determined not to speak. However, the woman informs him that in his delirium he has told her many things in English. The woman knows his name and knows he has run away from England. The woman also knows of Beanpole's plan. Seeing there is no use in continuing to pretend, Will confesses that he is indeed a runaway. Will cannily does not tell her anything else.

The woman is the goodly Comtesse de la Tour Rouge, husband to the Comte and mother of Eloise. The Comtesse, fluent in English, is famous for her charity and has taken the ill Will in for nursing. The Comtesse's beautiful daughter, Eloise, nurses Will back to health. Henry and Beanpole are living with the castle squires, awaiting Will's recovery.

Over the next several weeks, Will learns to speak French and becomes familiar with French feudal society and culture. Will learns that the French admire a young man's desire to wander and adventure. The Comte and Comtesse find Will's actions bold and resourceful. Of course, they do not realize that Will is trying to escape from the Tripods and assume that Will, Henry, and Beanpole are just having some boyish fun before being Capped.

While Eloise nurses Will back to health, the two develop a deep friendship. Will begins to fall in love with Eloise. Beanpole and Henry become good friends, and Will begins to feel distanced from them and sees them very infrequently. Although the beautiful Eloise has been recently Capped, Will sees her as a free and independent spirit. Eloise's head is still nearly bald from her recent Capping and she wears a turban to conceal her scalp. In England, young women do not wear a turban. In one playful moment, Will pulls the turban from Eloise's head. Eloise is mortified and angry and Will later learns that, in French culture, seeing a young woman's scalp after her Capping is akin to seeing her naked. His *faux pas* causes a temporary rift, but the two eventually become friends again.

One day, Will and Eloise go rowing in a small boat. While out on the lake, Will decides to show off his wristwatch to Eloise, and he removes it from his arm and tosses it to her. Eloise does not catch the watch, however, and it drops over the side of the boat and sinks into the lake. Eloise apologizes, and Will tells her the watch is not important. Will then realizes that the watch is actually no longer important to him.

After several weeks, the Comtesse grows fond of Will and asks him to stay and live permanently with the family. Will is honored and envisions himself becoming a noble and a knight and being married to Eloise. Will spends a great deal of time in introspection, but in the end, he decides his feelings for Eloise are more important than his fear of being Capped and decides he will abandon his quest for freedom.

A grand knightly tournament is held. At the end of the tournament, all eligible boys and girls will be Capped. Beanpole and Henry use the commotion of the tournament to stockpile supplies and escape unnoticed. Will tells them he will remain behind to allay suspicions, and then will catch up to them. Henry and Beanpole believe that Will intends to remain behind permanently, and this is indeed Will's unspoken intention.

Chapter 6 The Castle of the Red Tower Analysis

Will's journey to the White Mountains takes a prolonged pause at the Chwteau de la Tour Rouge. Will's health gives out again, and he must spend several weeks convalescing. While resting, he meets and falls in love with the beautiful Eloise. Will gradually begins to realize that he must put behind his old life and embrace a new one. In this way, Chapter 6 presents Will's coming-of-age event. Although he implicitly realizes that the Capped nobles and knights are merely a shadow of true nobility and gallantry, his feelings for Eloise become more important to him than continuing his quest for freedom in the White Mountains. Will also notes, on the infrequent occasions when he talks with Henry and Beanpole, that they have formed a strong friendship that somewhat alienates Will. When Eloise's mother asks Will to stay at the chwteau, he accepts. This decision is not made lightly, but Will's change of plans is surprising and marks a dramatic turn in the novel's plot.

The major theme of freedom is explored in Chapter 6. Will compares the noble's professed spirit and gallantry to their actual status as dominated servants of the Tripods and sees that the life he considers joining is actually a mockery of many of the values it purports to esteem. Nevertheless, he feels entirely free of his past life and is seeking for a new situation. Will's casual acceptance of the loss of his own wristwatch illustrates how fully he has broken with his past values.

On the other hand, Henry and Beanpole are determined to continue their journey. They have not fallen in love with a noble's beautiful daughter, and they have not been offered a place of luxury and ease in the noble's household. Instead, they have been living as squires and are somewhat envious of Will's pleasant situation. Nevertheless, they are disappointed when they discern that Will intends to remain behind. As is typical, Will again underestimates his personal value to his friends and assumes they will proceed without missing him.

Chapter 7 The Tripod

Chapter 7 The Tripod Summary

The tournament continues, and Will contemplates his impending Capping. One of the main events of the tournament is selecting a Queen of the tournament. All of the beautiful women of the area are presented to the knights who cheer for their favorite. Eloise is selected as the most beautiful woman and is crowned the Queen of the tournament. Will is proud of Eloise's accomplishment. A Tripod arrives at the tournament and stands motionless and mute. Looking at it, Will realizes it is the Tripod that will performing the Capping.

Eloise busily performs the duties of the Queen and Will is left to himself for the remainder of the day. Will thinks about being Capped within just hours and wonders if he has made the right decision. In the evening of the last day of the tournament, Eloise finally has time to visit Will.

In a startling turn of events, Will learns that the Queen of the tournament is always taken away to the city of the Tripods to serve the Tripods forever. Eloise is ecstatic at receiving this great honor and says goodbye to Will. Will's world quickly falls apart as he realizes that he will not be with Eloise again. Will is stunned that the seemingly free-spirited Eloise is not only willing but also anxious to leave behind her family and loved ones to serve the unknown Tripods. He also realizes she is so willing to do this because she does not actually have free will or the capacity to resist the commands of the Tripods. As Eloise walks away, Will nearly instantly reverses his earlier decision and becomes determined to escape and rejoin Henry and Beanpole in the quest for the White Mountains.

Very early the next morning, Will takes a horse and sneaks away out of the town and past the Tripod standing sentinel by the chateau. The Tripod is frightening but does not seem to notice him while Will slips away. However, the Tripod suddenly reacts and encircles Will in one of its metallic tentacles. The Tripod lifts a struggling and screaming Will toward the opening in the side of the hemispherical body and Will, in a panic of fright, blacks out.

Will comes to on the grass near his horse, which is idly grazing. Will has not been Capped, and the Tripod has resumed its station near the chateau. Will is confused and doubtful about his memory but rides away and, after several hours of searching, finds Henry and Beanpole, who are surprised to see him.

Chapter 7 The Tripod Analysis

The plot again takes a startling turn when Will realizes that Eloise's feelings for him are completely forgotten in her joy at being selected to serve the Tripods. With Eloise's companionship removed from the life he was envisioning, Will nearly immediately

decides to continue his quest for freedom. Will spends several hours, and indeed many days, contemplating his decision to trade freedom for ease and security. Although he feels lucky to have escaped being Capped, he is also fairly hard on himself for making that decision.

The encounter with the Tripod again marks their behavior as strange and unpredictable. Will assumes he will be Capped but is not. The plot development is unexpected and interesting and sets up a suspenseful sub-plot that will develop through Chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 7 concludes Will's prolonged stay at the Chateau de la Tour Rouge, which began in Chapter 6. This prolonged interlude in the voyage provides several elements to the narrative. Will regains his health and Henry and Beanpole re-supply and rest. Henry and Beanpole develop a close friendship, from which Will feels excluded. Will completes a break from his past life and contemplates his future options. Will learns a new language, becomes familiar with a new culture, and learns several important skills, such as horsemanship. Others recognize in Will an innate value and enjoy his easy companionship, but most important of all, Will finally fully realizes how insidiously trapped and subjugated Capped individuals are to the Tripods.

Eloise's deep feelings for Will vanish instantly at some type of mental command from the Tripods. Eloise's parents are joyous to see their daughter being taken away to serve alien masters. All of the nobles and knights think it proper for Eloise to leave forever for an unknown land and unknown future. Only Will is mentally free to see the inherent shortcomings of the entire situation. The lesson is not forgotten.

The feudal nature of French society mirrors the feudal nature of English society. Although the two cultures are markedly different, they are both organized around a similar principle of governance. As with all aspects of life, governance is dominated by the Tripods. Feudalism presents the ultimate form of governance for the Tripods to maintain their unchallenged supremacy. With very little oversight, the Tripods remain the preeminent rulers, while local vassals, such as the Comte, regulate the day-to-day affairs of smaller towns. The lack of technology and the rural lifestyle of humanity place little strain on the relatively inefficient system of feudalism. The system's widespread use further adds to the novel's flavor of blending the future with the past.

Chapter 8 Flight and a Follower

Chapter 8 Flight and a Follower Summary

Will does not tell Henry or Beanpole about Eloise or the tournament's change of events. Will acts as though his intention all along was to rejoin Henry and Beanpole in the quest. Will is not trying to fool himself but does not want to listen to Henry's teasing. Will does tell them about his encounter with the Tripod and all three boys are perplexed and confused about the Tripod's behavior. They set Will's horse free and continue on foot. Henry does tease Will, who is sad and somewhat depressed.

The boys eventually come to an unnaturally straight river, which has large mechanical dams at uneven intervals. Beanpole realizes the dams are locks, which would allow boat traffic to move along the canal against the steep incline. Beanpole refers to the canal as an aquatic Shmand-Fair. Henry ridicules the idea, but Beanpole realizes the canal must have been constructed during the Black Ages. Beanpole speculates that boats could have moved along the canal and through the locks by using steam power. The boys follow the river for many miles until it veers off to the north.

They see a Tripod and sneak away. Several hours later, they see another Tripod and again sneak away. Over several days, they continue to see a Tripod and come to realize that it is the same Tripod and that it is following them. Hours or days will go by with no sight of the Tripod, but then it will suddenly appear again. They try various methods of escaping undetected, including fording rivers and sneaking through heavy foliage, but they are unable to escape the Tripod. Finally, they top a rise and see the White Mountains stretching away to the south.

Chapter 8 Flight and a Follower Analysis

Most of Chapter 8 deals with a complex series of escape and evasion maneuvers the group makes to lose the Tripod that is tailing them. Although many of the plans should be successful, the Tripod always eventually shows up again. Will's distance from Henry and Beanpole gradually diminishes as the three boys spend many days voyaging together. Beanpole's amazing intellect and intuitive ability to discern the use of various objects is again displayed when he discusses the possible method of use of the canal with locks.

Will, Henry, and Beanpole cover approximately one hundred miles of ground in Chapter 8 and suffer hunger and some exposure to the elements. Their clothes become worn out and ragged. They scavenge for food and improvise shelter as they continue their journey, but the primary concern for them is how to escape the Tripod that seems to be unerringly able to find them.

Chapter 9 We Fight a Battle

Chapter 9 We Fight a Battle Summary

One day, when the Tripod is out of sight, Henry and Beanpole search for food while Will relaxes for a moment. Will puts his hands behind his head and reclines on the grass while gazing at the sky. Will's shirt is torn open and tattered from the long voyage. When Henry and Beanpole return, they notice a strange object under Will's arm. They can only see the object because of a hole in Will's shirt and the way he is reclining on the ground. Once they point it out, Will becomes very aware of the object. It is a small button of the same metallic mesh material from which Caps are made, and it is fused into Will's skin near his armpit.

Will realizes it was placed there when he was taken into the Tripod. Beanpole immediately realizes that the Tripod is able to track the group because of the button. Henry believes Will must be controlled by the Tripods but Beanpole reasons that this is not the case. Will offers to leave the group, but Beanpole instead suggests the removal of the button. In a somewhat gruesome scene, Henry pinions Will's arms, while Beanpole uses a knife to carve the button out of Will's arm. Beanpole then bandages the wound. The boys examine the button's bloody construction, and then discard it.

They soon hear the distant Tripod crashing through the underbrush toward them. As the Tripod approaches, they hide in some bushes. As the Tripod searches for them, Beanpole remembers the exploding goose eggs he is carrying. Beanpole hands one to Henry and one to Will. In a concerted movement, Henry and Beanpole throw their grenades at the Tripod and they harmlessly explode near one of its feet. Will then pulls the pin, but his wounded arm balks when he tries to throw the grenade and the Tripod grabs Will with a tentacle and lifts him towards the opening in its hemispherical body. When Will is only a few yards away, he throws the grenade into the opening and it explodes inside the Tripod's body. The Tripod becomes motionless and drops Will to the ground.

Chapter 9 We Fight a Battle Analysis

The discovery of the implanted button under Will's arm explains how the Tripod has so flawlessly tracked the group. Once again, the boys can only speculate on the Tripod's motivation. Will demonstrates his selflessness by immediately offering to part ways with Henry and Beanpole, but Beanpole's solution is certainly more logical.

The field surgery performed by Beanpole is the most graphic scene in the novel and is somewhat gruesome. Henry physically restrains Will, while Beanpole applies the knife. After the surgery, the boys closely examine the button and Will notes that bloody gobbets of his flesh are hanging from innumerable small wires. The wound is sufficiently large to prevent Will full use of his arm for several days.

The Tripod is immediately aware that the button has been removed and instantly attempts to pursue and capture Will. Will's subsequent destruction of the Tripod is his most traditionally heroic act. Beanpole atypically does not seek to investigate or examine the dead Tripod. Instead, the boys rush to continue their journey to the White Mountains, which are now within sight.

Chapter 10 The White Mountains

Chapter 10 The White Mountains Summary

Within hours of the battle with the Tripod, the boys hear numerous other Tripods rapidly approaching from several directions. They run at top speed as long as they can and eventually run down into a valley with a stream running along the bottom. Many Tripods are scouring the area, projecting brilliant spotlights onto the ground and using their tentacles to rip up bushes and other potential hiding places. The boys are unsure how the Tripods are able to follow them, but Beanpole surmises they must be following their tracks. The boys then run along the riverbed, keeping in the water to avoid making more tracks.

However, their long run has taken its toll and the tireless Tripods continue mechanically searching and begin to close in on the boys from all directions. Beanpole notices a slight ledge on a boulder and suggests it would be a suitable hiding space. Henry and Will despair, but Beanpole ushers them under the ledge. It is barely big enough to squeeze under, and the three boys lie motionless, while countless Tripods rage around and over them. After hours of hiding, Will's muscles cramp and knot, and he becomes hungry and weary, but eventually, the Tripods give up searching and leave.

The boys then resume their journey. One day, they see two Tripods approaching. The Tripods are interweaving their tentacles and have some type of energy field shimmering in the air between them. The boys speculate that the Tripods might be mating or communicating. The Tripods ignore the boys though they pass within just feet of them.

Finally, Will, Henry, and Beanpole reach the freedom of the White Mountains and join with the free men they find there. The narrative concludes with Will commenting on the difficult but worthy life he is leading and how the free men desire and plan to rid the world of Tripods.

Chapter 10 The White Mountains Analysis

The narrow escape from the Tripod horde is the final exciting moment of the narrative. After the rampaging Tripods abandon the search, the narrative quickly concludes by noting Will and his friends have reached the White Mountains. The conclusion, though abrupt, is suitable and satisfying - Will, Henry, and Beanpole have escaped the Tripods and will live as free men.

The use of the ledge to escape is interesting. Will and Henry see that the ledge is tiny and offers only partial protection. Beanpole realizes, however, that the Tripods' enormous height gives them a different perspective and that the ledge, though small, will hide them from the towering Tripods.

Arrival at the snow-covered White Mountains, the Alps of Switzerland, is a suitable conclusion for the quest novel. Will and Henry travel perhaps 50 miles in England, and then cross the English Channel. Joined by Beanpole, the group then travels another approximately three hundred miles to the White Mountains. Even though nearly 1/3 of this distance was on the Shmand-Fair, the voyage spans a formidable distance over difficult terrain. The book, set on Earth, matches actual terrain and distances very well. The frequent health problems experienced by Will, coupled with persistent lack of food and shelter, give a gritty and authentic texture to the journey.

Characters

Will Parker

Will Parker is the primary character and the narrator of the novel. Will was born in Wherton, England, and is thirteen years old. Will describes himself as being of fairly average build for a thirteen year old, noting that his younger cousin is taller, heavier, and stronger. Although perhaps not exceptionally strong, Will does appear to enjoy reasonably good health and possesses a strong determination to succeed. Indeed, Will's name is indicative of his primary personality characteristic - a strong and forceful will. Will is inquisitive, intensely curious, and very independent. Will does not accept the established order simply because others do and yearns for a better way of living.

Will does not compare favorably to Henry in terms of physical ability; Will is sometimes injured and frequently sick, while Henry is constantly in good health. Will is not nearly as intelligent as Beanpole, but Will does have good leadership qualities and is very well liked by nearly everyone that gets to know him. Will also demonstrates exceptional honesty and is not afraid to question prior decisions when situations change. In the battle with the Tripod, Will also demonstrates a fierce streak of resistance and courage, which allows him to defeat the Tripod.

Will is a mature, consistent, and credible narrator. Will does not shy away from self-criticism, when deserved, and does not spend time finding fault with others. Will is sympathetic, believable, and engaging as he relates his personal story of adventure and escape.

Mr. and Mrs. Parker

Will Parker's parents live a traditional life in Wherton, England. Mr. Parker is notable as owning the only watch and one of only five clocks in Wherton. Mr. Parker operates a mill, and Mrs. Parker spends a good deal of her time visiting townspeople who are poor or sick. The Parker family appears to be fairly wealthy, lives in a house they own, and has livestock, pets, and servants. Mr. and Mrs. Parker are Capped, appear to be traditional townspeople, and have many relatives in the area. They take good care of their children but do not seem to be very affectionate toward them. Mr. and Mrs. Parker appear only in the first few chapters of the novel and are fairly minor characters.

Jack Leeper

Jack is Will Parker's cousin. Jack and Will are very close and grow up together. They spend some time speculating about the origin of the Tripods and the nature of being Capped. Both find the process mysterious and unappealing. Jack and Will have a secret getaway that they refer to as the den. Jack is one year older than Will, and is Capped by the Tripods. After Jack is Capped, he has little to do with Will. Will reacts to Jack's

Capping with fear and apprehension. Jack appears only in the first chapter of the novel and is a fairly minor character.

Henry Parker

Henry is Will Parker's cousin. Jack and Will grow up together in Wherton, England, but are not close and, in fact, generally consider each other enemies rather than friends. Henry is physically taller, heavier, and stronger than Will, and, in their frequent childhood fights, Will usually comes out the loser. Henry is one month younger than Will. Henry's mother dies just days before Will plans to run away from home. Henry's emotionally distant father sends him to live with Will's family. Henry and Will then fall in together in an unlikely alliance and decide to share their fate in common. Like Will, Henry does not want to be Capped and lose his individuality.

In addition to being hearty and strong, Henry has the constitution of an ox - on the several occasions that Will becomes sick or injured, Henry forages for himself and Will and manages to always get Will healthy again. For example, after Will turns his ankle, Henry carries Will upon his back for a considerable distance to an abandoned hut and afterward, secures food for several days until Will is again able to travel. Henry is never sick or injured and appears to withstand hunger and the elements without undue discomfort.

Even though Henry spends many days traveling with Will, the two never become truly close friends. Throughout the novel, Henry will tease and taunt Will about various things. Henry prefers the company of the intellectual Beanpole. Of the three main characters in the novel, Henry is the least developed.

Ozymandias

Ozymandias wanders into Wherton and is assumed to be a vagrant. He appears wild and unkempt, carries a pack like many vagrants, and wanders the streets, talking to himself and to children. Ozymandias approaches Will Parker and talks to him about Capping. Will feels intimidated by Ozymandias at first, but soon agrees to meet him privately for further discussion. Will then learns that Ozymandias is, in fact, not a vagrant, but is a free man who is not Capped. He wears a Cap taken from a dead man and presents himself as a vagrant so he may wander unchallenged through Tripod-controlled territory and recruit children to resist the Tripods. Much of Ozymandias' apparent babbling is, in fact, paraphrased quotations of poetry and scripture from the literature of the Black Ages, indicating that Ozymandias indeed has a notable amount of schooling. Ozymandias challenges Will to escape from the Tripods and provides him with a map, compass, and instructions. Ozymandias appears only in Chapter 2 and is a fairly minor, though memorable, character in the novel.



Captain Curtis

Captain Curtis commands Orion, a ship traveling between Rumney, England, and the coast of France. Like Ozymandias, Captain Curtis is not actually Capped. Instead, he relies upon a fake Cap and the anonymity of a life at sea to avoid detection. He is part of a network of free men that help people escape to the White Mountains. Captain Curtis appears only in Chapter 4 and is a fairly minor character in the novel.

Beanpole (Jean-Paul)

Beanpole's actual name is Jean-Paul. When Beanpole introduces himself in French, Henry hears the name as 'Zhan-Pole' and immediately Anglicizes it to Beanpole. Beanpole is an orphan and is almost old enough to be Capped. Beanpole is incredibly intelligent and has taught himself English from a book, has made his own spectacles, and has carried out experiments with small hot air balloons and steam kettles. Beanpole once broke his leg while inventing a type of pogo stick. Beanpole seems to have a good grasp of ancient history and geography and is very familiar with the area in which he grew up. Beanpole has noted that, once Capped, individuals lose all curiosity and inventiveness, and he is frightened and wary of the procedure.

Beanpole, one of three major characters, is introduced rather late in the narrative appearing at nearly the mid-point of the novel. It is thus necessary to provide rapid characterization to maintain the novel's fast pace. The nickname Beanpole, coupled with a rather comical demeanor, quickly helps to establish Beanpole as a distinct character. Beanpole complement's Will's leadership abilities and Henry's physical abilities without antagonizing either character, who, in turn, quickly realize Beanpole's vastly superior intellectual abilities.

Beanpole is generally careful and possessed of a great deal of common sense. However, he is very inquisitive and scientific-minded and when presented with some new piece of technology his curiosity quickly outweighs any good judgment. For example, after Henry accidentally detonates a hand grenade Beanpole quickly explodes another one even though there is considerable physical risk of doing so.

The Comte and Comtesse de la Tour Rouge

The noble Comte and Comtesse are the parents of Eloise. The Comte is a robust and hearty knight, full of a lust for life and jovial friendship. The Comtesse is gracious, educated, refined, and charitable. Unlike her daughter Eloise, Will notes that the Comtesse is decidedly not physically attractive. They act as surrogate parents to Will Parker while he recovers his health following a bout with a severe fever. The Comtesse's offer to stay as an adopted son is particularly appealing to Will.

Ultimately, however, Will realizes the Comte and Comtesse are merely caricatures of what a noble couple should be - robbed of their individuality and self-will they claim to

embody the principles of grace, gallantry, and egalitarianism of which the Tripods have ultimately denied them. Nevertheless, the Comtesse is the only fully developed adult character in the novel and serves as an excellent symbol of the gulf between not only the Capped and free but also between youth and maturity.

Eloise

Eloise is the Capped but beautiful daughter of the Comte and Comtesse de la Tour Rouge. Eloise nurses an ill Will back to health, teaches him to speak French, and teaches him about French culture. Will and Eloise develop a strong friendship and also spend many happy hours in each other's company. Will begins to fall in love with Eloise and considers giving up his quest to remain with her. Eventually, though, he realizes that because she has already been Capped, she is not free to follow her heart. Eloise is selected as the most beautiful woman at a tournament and subsequently is taken to serve the Tripods in their city.

Like Jack Leeper, Eloise is a pitiful and pitiable character. Her natural beauty, grace, and charm are robbed in their very infancy by the Tripods who turn her into an unthinking automaton. Although she develops deep and natural feelings for Will, when the Tripod masters summon her to serve them in their distant city, she is joyously ecstatic and immediately forgets her feelings for Will. In this way, she serves as a startling reminder to Will that freedom is preferable to any degree of comfort in servitude.

Objects/Places

Mr. Parker's Wristwatch

Will Parker's father owns a wristwatch - it is the only watch in Wherton and is a mark of wealth and distinction. The watch was made many years ago during the Black Ages and is inscribed 'Anti-Magnetique Incabloc'. A clockmaker from Winchester services the watch once every three years and it is otherwise kept locked away. To Will, the watch symbolizes the unknown past and its allure is very strong. Months later, Will acquires and subsequently loses his own wristwatch in an event symbolic of Will's continuing voyage into manhood.

Cap

When individuals reach the age of fourteen they are 'Capped'. The Cap is composed of a flexible mesh of metallic wires and is placed directly onto and into the shaved head by the Tripods. The Cap is fused into the head by a network of small wires that extend downwards through the skin. After Capping, the hair grows back through the Cap, partially obscuring it. The Cap can apparently be located by the Tripods from a great distance. The Tripods can also send messages to the Cap, which subsequently control the thoughts and actions of the Capped individual. Being Capped is a rite of passage - individuals change from children to adults when they are Capped. Capping is not always successful, however, and about 5% of individuals become mentally deranged after Capping. The process of being Capped is shrouded in mystery, because Capped individuals refuse to discuss the event with non-Capped individuals. A tripod takes the individual to be Capped inside of its hemispherical body, where their head is shaved and the Cap placed. Several hours later, the individual is returned with the Cap in place. Once Capped, a person loses their curiosity and much of their individuality. They subsequently hold the Tripods in awe as benevolent protectors and function somewhat like automatons.

Wherton, England

Wherton, the village where Will Parker, Jack Leeper, and Henry Parker grow up, is a small, rural village some distance from the ocean in the southeast of England. Wherton is located near the larger city of Winchester (which is probably in the general vicinity of present-day Winchester). Wherton is adjacent to a river, has several cross streets, at least one mill, a clock tower, and several outlying fields. The nearby river has a ford and also a small footbridge near the center of town. Wherton is also close to an old ruin, built during the Black Ages, called 'lect city' by Will - the city sign is missing some letters. The village celebrates at least two holidays, namely Capping Day and Harvest Festival. Wherton appears to be very similar to a rural English village of the eighteenth

century, where life is dominated by agrarian pursuits and the government is a form of Feudalism.

The Den

Will Parker and Jack Leeper have a secret hideout they call the den. The den is located in a collapsing building in the ruins near Wherton. The den is only a few minutes walk from Wherton, and Will and Jack have outfitted it with some furniture and other objects they have found in the ruins. They spend time there cooking, hunting, and talking. Near the den is a rusting sign that reads 'danger - 6,600 volts'. Although Will does not know what a volt is, he is intrigued by the supposed danger in the area.

Vagrants

About 5% of people who are Capped respond negatively. A few days after Capping they develop pain in the head, fever, and a general malaise. Soon, their mental faculties rapidly begin to diminish, and they become more or less insane. Afterwards, they begin to wander from town to town, babbling incoherently most of the time and behaving strangely. Each town has a vagrant house, a type of poorhouse, where vagrants can stay and be fed. After some days, the vagrant will wander on to the next village. It is safe to assume that most vagrants die quickly because there are only one or two vagrants in Wherton at any given time, nowhere near the dozens there would be if all vagrants survived with a normal lifespan. Most vagrants are male.

The Tripods

Tripods form a group of apparently mechanical objects that dominate humanity during the period of the novel. Tripods have a large hemispherical body standing on three massive mechanical steel legs. The tripod is perhaps sixty or more feet in height and can move rapidly over land by walking on its articulated legs. Several tentacles also extend down from the hemispherical body to ground level, and the steel tentacles can be used to grasp human-sized objects. Tripods are immensely strong and fast and can travel over land or the surface of water at great speeds. Tripods emit several mechanical sounds that Capped humans recognize. The hemispherical body is ringed with green glass windows and has at least one entrance. Some people think the tripods are machines that house living beings, while others think they are robotic. Some people think the tripods are alien beings while others think they are humanity's creation.

Tripods Cap individual humans when the human reaches their fourteenth birthday and thereafter. can control the thoughts and actions of the Capped individuals. Tripods often behave in ways that do not make sense to humans, and tripods also are notably careless about destroying property, crops, livestock, or even people, while they walk about through villages.



The Black Ages

The span of human history before the arrival of the Tripods is referred to as the Black Ages. Nearly nothing is known about humanity during the Black Ages because the Capped show little or no interest in that period of time. In fact, Capped people apparently deliberately avoid having contact with information about the Black Ages. In contrast, small artifacts from the Black Ages, such as Mr. Parker's wristwatch, are sometimes kept as valuable curiosities. Will Parker discovers some facts about the Black Ages and is very intrigued by humanity's prior history. The conventional wisdom about the Black Ages holds that they were a time of starvation, warfare, and hatred, although there is no actual evidence that this view is correct.

The Rusting Ship

Jack Leeper tells Will Parker about a huge rusting ship hulk that he saw in a ruin near Winchester. Jack had traveled through the area on a trip to Winchester. He tells Will that the rusting hulk of the ship was larger than the entire village of Wherton. Jack and Will speculate that humanity's past accomplishments must have been marvelous to construct such a huge ship. Jack and Will continue to speculate that the tripods must have destroyed humanity's primary accomplishments during the end of the Black Ages. The rusting ship becomes, to Will, a symbol of what humanity once could accomplish before they were conquered by the tripods.

The Shmand-Fair

An Anglicized corruption from the French *chemin de fer*, or railroad, the Shmand-Fair is a type of stagecoach on rails. It is pulled by several teams of horses and consists of several large boxcar conveyances coupled together and placed on the rails. The rails themselves date from the Black Ages but are still used. Beanpole also refers to the Paris Metro as a type of underground Shmand-Fair and a canal with water locks as a type of water Shmand-Fair. Will, Henry, and Beanpole catch a ride on the horse-drawn Shmand-Fair, hobo-style, and ride it nearly one hundred miles south from near the coast of France to the outskirts of the ruins of Paris, the City of the Ancients.

Exploding Goose Eggs (Hand Grenades)

While exploring the underground tunnels of the Paris Metro, Will, Henry, and Beanpole come across a cache of food and strange objects. Through an accident in which, luckily, no one is injured, they discover that some strange metal objects, roughly the shape and size of goose eggs, will explode violently. These objects are hand grenades left over from the Black Ages. Thinking they may come in useful, Beanpole packs several of them away. Will subsequently uses one of the hand grenades to destroy a Tripod that is attacking him.

The Chwteau de la Tour Rouge

The Chwteau de la Tour Rouge is the home of the Comte and Comtesse de la Tour Rouge and also of Eloise. Will is taken to the chwteau in a fever and subsequently recovers his health under the care of Eloise. While at the chwteau Will learns to speak French, becomes familiar with French culture, and becomes a friend with the noble family that lives there. The chwteau becomes, for Will, a pleasant and prolonged pause in his quest for the White Mountains. The chwteau is located on high ground between the confluence of two rivers. The castle is very ancient but has been renovated and recently expanded. The main tower is new construction from a red rock material giving the chwteau its name.

The White Mountains

The White Mountains give their name to the novel. They are white because they are high and Capped in snow. The Tripods do not go into the higher elevations and thus the White Mountains are the place on earth that is ultimately free from Tripod domination. Will learns of the White Mountains from Ozymandias and is determined to reach them and gain his freedom. Though the novel ends when Will, Henry, and Beanpole reach the White Mountains, they serve, throughout the narrative, as the symbol of the quest. The White Mountains are actually the Swiss Alps, approximately three hundred miles from the place where Will and Henry cross the English Channel.

Setting

The White Mountains and its sequels are set in the future, some one hundred years after aliens have invaded the earth. The great cities of the ancients lie in ruins, closed off to humans by command of the "Masters." Outside the cities people live a quiet rural life; the scientific knowledge that once permeated human society has been completely lost.

As the young protagonists travel across Europe to join a resistance group in the Alps, they come across many puzzling remains of ancient life, including a railroad. In one intriguing sequence they explore the city of Paris, entering the Metro, collecting supplies in a department store, and seeing traditional tourist sights such as the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Social Sensitivity

Religion is present in the world of The Tripods Trilogy. The Masters do not object to an active clergy, provided that they operate within fixed guidelines.

Will's parish church at Wherton is a central presence in local life, and the Capping festival—conducted by Capped clergymen—is an important religious ritual. The uncapped wandering stranger, Ozymandias, represents another kind of religious tradition. He identifies himself with the "Son of Man," and his gathering in of potential rebels among the children of Europe is presented as a Christ-like task.

Throughout the series, females are relegated to secondary roles. Eloise, Will's love interest, is tragically killed in the second novel so that she can become part of a museum exhibit; Eloise's mother, although kind and surprisingly self-determined for one of the Capped, nonetheless is essentially a conformist.

It is left to the young boys of the story to rebel against humanity's Masters.

Literary Qualities

Christopher's tendency to resist easy solutions to the moral dilemmas he dramatizes makes it particularly hard for him to contrive definitive endings to his science-fiction novels. At the end of *The Tripods Trilogy* the young heroes find that the forces of freedom are deeply divided. The peace that has been won at such great cost promises to be more difficult to preserve than it was to gain.

Christopher presents the reader not with the easy consolations of a fairy tale, but with the bittersweet realism of speculative fiction.

Christopher's plot line in *The White Mountains* is suspenseful yet straightforward. The nature of the tale requires Christopher to describe extraordinary events, bizarre creatures, and nightmarish locales, but he treats such subject matter in a surprisingly understated, matter-of-fact way. *The White Mountains* is essentially a quest story, featuring many of the traditional motifs of the romance novel: the calling of the companions, the road of perils, the encounter with the temptress, the journey through the wasteland, and the slaying of the monster. The novel is also rich in descriptions of everyday life—and this juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary makes Christopher's fantasy world both plausible and convincing.

The strange archaic jargon spoken by Ozymandias is rich in literary allusions that stress individual responsibility.

There are numerous quotations from the Bible and from English poetry ranging from Shakespeare to Shelley. Ozymandias's name is, itself, drawn from the title of a Shelley poem. These layers of allusion clearly link the wanderer to a past, almost vanished civilization, whose values are inaccessible to those individuals who have been Capped.

Themes

Freedom

The novel is a quest novel, where the main characters pursue a specific goal. Will, Henry, and Beanpole quest for the White Mountains not because of their physical geography but because of what the White Mountains represent - freedom.

The two countries in which the characters live, presumably similar to all countries on Earth, are not free. They are based around a feudalistic-type government structure with the strange race of Tripods dominating the top level of the government. All people age fourteen or older are taken by the Tripods and Capped. Once Capped, an individual's thoughts and actions can be, and often are, controlled entirely by the Tripods. Furthermore, the Tripods' goals, motivations, and plans are completely unknown to the humans, who are, in essence, their slaves.

Only humans of age thirteen or younger, considered to be children, are truly free. Only children can have their own thoughts and determine their own actions free of the mental domination of the Tripods. Furthermore, it seems that only children are creative, inquisitive, inventive, or Capable of durable and deep friendship and love.

The theme of freedom is the novel's dominant theme and provides the ultimate goal of the quest undertaken by Will, Henry, and Beanpole. The narrative considers the theme of freedom from several angles. For example, Jack Leeper is first presented as a freethinking and enthusiastic thirteen-year-old, and later, once Capped, he becomes a distant automaton without much time for his one-time close friend Will.

Ozymandias, the only free adult portrayed in the novel, must pretend to be deranged and insane to move about without being trapped and Capped. Eloise has deep feelings for Will until the Tripods decide she is to serve them in a new capacity, whereupon she immediately forgets her feelings and focuses entirely on the joy of being selected to serve the Tripods.

All of these examples, along with many others, motivate Will, Henry, and Beanpole to leave behind their families, friends, and villages to search out the only known place where they can retain their individuality and obtain freedom.

Friendship

The novel portrays numerous interpersonal relationships, and nearly all of those that are fully developed are between friends. The narrative begins with the close friendship between Will Parker and Jack Leeper. This close friendship comes to an abrupt end when Jack is Capped. Will subsequently develops a relationship with Henry Parker. Although the two had previously been antagonistic toward each other, their common goal of freedom unites them in a companionship that evolves into an uneasy truce and

then a true friendship. Later, when Beanpole joins Will and Henry, Will spends a large amount of time musing on the nature of friendship. For example, Will becomes concerned that Henry and Beanpole's developing friendship will exclude him from the group's dynamic.

Will learns of the White Mountains after he develops a brief but seminal friendship with Ozymandias. Will realizes that Henry is a trusted friend when Will is injured and relies on Henry to forage for food and shelter. At one point, Will considers abandoning his quest for freedom in order to remain with his friends at the Chateau de la Tour Rouge.

Indeed, the central turning point of the novel concerns the nature of the friendship between Will and Eloise. Will falls in love with Eloise and considers her to be a true and close friend. Eloise apparently reciprocates these feelings to Will. However, when the Tripod masters call on Eloise for special servitude, she immediately forgets all of her feelings for Will and can only think of her future service with the Tripods. This shift in Eloise's friendship is a parallel narrative element to Jack's earlier shift in friendship with Will, and causes Will to once again realize that true friendship can only be had among free-thinking people who have not been Capped.

Escape and Adventure

The novel is a narrative of escape and adventure. Will and Henry run away from home, escaping the confines of society and culture, in search of the freedom represented by the White Mountains, their ultimate destination. They have a series of exciting adventures, including injury, illness, and the constant evasion of Tripods. They meet rough individuals along the way and come in contact with interesting characters such as Captain Curtis. They cross the English Channel to a foreign land. They are imprisoned, and then are unexpectedly assisted to escape by a newfound friend.

After another series of adventures, Will, Henry, and Beanpole walk through a vast abandoned city of ruins. They make numerous observations, obtain several items of value and utility, and discover objects of an explosive nature. They adventure through the great ruined city and come to a castle filled with knights and ladies. Will falls in love and learns to speak a foreign language, while he dreams of one day competing in a tournament as a knight. Henry and Beanpole plan and plot another escape. The three characters then escape from the castle and are pursued by a stalking Tripod. In an exciting confrontation, Will destroys the Tripod. The three characters continue their voyage.

The novel's pace is constructed on the rapid presentation of exciting scenes and elements. Foreshadowing points toward excitement and most deep characterization is limited, to avoid slowing the pace. Indeed, the novel functions best as an adventure story and a gripping read, leaving one wondering what will next occur.

Themes/Characters

The Tripods Trilogy explores the significance of freedom of thought. In *The White Mountains* and its sequels, a small band of free people struggles against a race of alien invaders called Masters, who control humanity by "Capping" children around the age of fourteen.

Once Capped, humans are unable to resist the commands of the Masters.

People have lost not only their autonomy but also the knowledge of their own history, and the Earth has reverted to a rather primitive stage of technology.

The Masters appear to be extremely powerful, but they cannot breathe normally in Earth's atmosphere. As a result, they must remain within their domed cities; if they wish to travel they must do so within the mysterious Tripods, great metal machines that move on three legs.

The Masters' greatest weakness proves to be their conviction that human beings lack the will and ability to fight for independence. The Tripods Trilogy reveals that the pursuit of freedom can be painful and costly—and that the maintenance of newly won freedom can be the greatest challenge of all.

The focal character of *The White Mountains*, Will Parker, is a stubborn, independent thirteen-year-old. Will is sensitive and thoughtful, but also reckless, not perfectly honest, capable of petty jealousy, and a poor judge of character. During the course of his adventures Will learns many lessons about friendship, cooperation, and selfdiscipline. Will's companions—his unimaginative but sensible cousin Henry, and Jean-Paul Deliet, an intelligent French boy nicknamed Beanpole—are less carefully delineated as characters. During the course of the story, Henry, an old rival of Will's, becomes his good friend, and Beanpole's scientific cast of mind makes him an invaluable member of the team.

Early in the novel, a strange wanderer who calls himself Ozymandias comes to the village of Wherton. The stranger pretends to be mad, talking what sounds like gibberish whenever adults are near. In private, however, he explains to Will the cost of Capping: certain instructions are implanted in the mind, thus subjugating the individual to a small, "inescapable and irresistible" voice of authority. Ozymandias eventually gives Will an abbreviated history lesson, outlining world events since the arrival of the Masters—a period of about one hundred years that "to the Capped . . . is the same as ten thousand."

Will and Henry run away from home to escape their inevitable Capping and, along with Beanpole, make their way across Europe toward the "White Mountains." At one point, when Will falls ill, the boys are taken in by an aristocratic French family. The world of the Chateau de la Tour Rouge is a graceful one, with feudal courtesies and traditions. Will falls in love with the daughter of the household, who loves him in return, and he is

tempted to stay in this quiet, luxurious backwater rather than resume the struggle against the Tripods.

But he discovers to his horror that Eloise, the girl he loves, has already been Capped, and that she is joyfully bound for service in one of the Masters' great domed cities.

Before the boys reach their final destination, the Alpine headquarters of the freedom fighters, they face many dangerous challenges. At one point Will is captured by a Tripod and has a homing device implanted under his arm.

Beanpole discovers the device and performs a painful operation on Will to free him of its influence. Later, like knights who prove their worthiness by slaying a dragon, the boys encounter and destroy a Tripod using an ancient but effective hand grenade.

Style

Point of View

The novel is narrated from the first-person point of view by Will Parker, the primary participant in all of the novel's scenes. The narrator is reliable, intelligent, and sympathetic. The narrative is told in a personal and intimate style that allows the reader to vicariously experience a wide range of emotions, including apprehension, exhilaration, fear, and feelings of friendship and affection.

The first-person point of view is particularly suitable to the novel. It makes the narrator sympathetic and accessible. The narrator's inner thoughts and feelings are presented in a frank and believable manner. Although not always flattering, the narrator's actions and thoughts are always honest and clearly presented.

The first-person point of view also allows the plot to develop at a consistent and enjoyable pace. For example, routine actions performed by other characters are noted as happening but not fully described. This rapidly allows necessary plot development to proceed, without bogging down the story's pace.

Setting

The novel is set on a future Earth, perhaps approximately 2160 C.E. The geography of Earth has not changed, but the sociopolitical structure has been drastically altered. Humanity has been conquered and Earth dominated by an alien race of beings known as Tripods. The origin of the Tripods is obscure, their motivation is uncertain, and their behavior often erratic and unintelligible.

When humans reach the age of majority, fourteen, they are taken by a Tripod and Capped - that is, they have a metal Cap surgically implanted onto and into their scalp. The Cap allows the Tripods to control the thoughts and actions of the Capped individual. Thus, society is broadly separated into two classes of people - the adults, who are enslaved automatons without creativity or curiosity; and the children, who are free in thought and deed but are expected to submit to Capping once they reach an appropriate age. Needless to say, most children deeply mistrust and fear the process and yet are unable to avoid it.

The novel begins in southern England in a small rural community known, humorously, as Wherton. Wherton is noted as being near Winchester, which is presumably somewhere near modern-day Winchester, England. The characters then proceed south to a port city, perhaps near modern-day Portsmouth, and cross the English Channel to the coast of France. The voyage continues through the ruins of Paris to a small town known as The Chwteau de la Tour Rouge, perhaps near modern-day Troyes, France. The characters spend several weeks at the chwteau before continuing their journey south to the Swiss Alps.



The settings of rural England and France are well crafted and described in the narrative. The cultures in each region are very similar to the cultures that existed in those regions during Earth's medieval period, including a focus on subsistence farming, organized around servitude to a feudal Lord. However, there are, of course, notable differences, because near each rural community lies a vast and moldering ruin of an ancient metropolitan area and at the top of the feudal pyramid sits the master race of Tripods.

The novel's imaginative setting of a blending of a future Earth with the Earth's past is one of the strongest and most interesting elements of the narrative. The successful fusion simultaneously allows the novel to have the texture of science fiction and knightly adventure. The careful balance of fact and fantasy is appealing and particularly enjoyable.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in straightforward and accessible language, which is immediately engaging. The simple construction allows the plot and other narrative elements to dominate the book, making for a successful and easy reading experience.

Whereas the novel is written in English, the majority of the action takes place in France. Most of the characters in the novel speak only French, while Will Parker, the narrator, speaks only English for the first half of the novel and learns some French during the second part of the narrative. A few characters, such as Ozymandias, Beanpole, and the Comtesse de la Tour Rouge speak both English and French. Ozymandias notes that he speaks other languages also. Captain Curtis speaks English and, possibly, some French.

This interplay of language sets up some interesting elements in the novel. For example, when Will and Henry are apprehended in a French seaside town, they are unable to communicate with their captors. Later, while Will's feverish mumbling in English is understood only by the Comtesse, it does spoil Beanpole's plan on how to account for his deaf-mute cousins. Other interesting aspects include the Anglicized forms of *Jean-Paul* and *chemin de fer*, as Beanpole and Shmand-Fair, respectively, and the French inscriptions noted on a wristwatch. This interplay of two languages makes an interesting addition to the novel and highlights the linguistic elements used in the narrative's construction.

Another language of sorts presented in the novel is that used by the Tripods to communicate with humans. For example, the Tripods issue a loud metallic noise repetitively, which the humans understand to be the Capping Call. Other sounds made by the Tripods are understood to mean different things. This very rudimentary communication is clearly intended for mass address only, because the Tripods have some method, unspecified in the narrative, of directly communicating thoughts to Capped humans. Ozymandias surmises that, perhaps, the thoughts are broadcast in the local language rather than the language of a Capped individual. This language element additionally highlights the linguistic elements of the novel.

Structure

The 195-page novel is divided into ten chapters of roughly equal length. The novel's primary timeline covers less than one year, and the narrative describes a quest undertaken by the primary characters to travel a great distance to reach a place of freedom. The passage of time is not consistent and several days or weeks may be described in a single sentence while other events are described in detail. This allows the pace of the novel to remain consistently engaging, by focusing attention only on significant and interesting details.

The narrative begins at the static location of Wherton, England, and successfully develops character and a sense of place. The novel then shifts into a questing phase, while the characters move through a series of adventures and arrive at a second static location, The Chwteau de la Tour Rouge. Here, the characters are completely developed and the sense of place is fully expanded. After some plot developments, the novel again shifts into a quest phase, which continues until the end of the novel, when the characters complete their quest by reaching the White Mountains.

The ten chapters are named after the primary plot event that happens in the chapter. Often the chapter's concluding paragraphs give rise to the chapter title. In this way, the chapter titles provide a basic form of foreshadowing of the plot elements presented.

Quotes

"Why should the Tripods take people away and Cap them? What right have they?"

"They do it for our good."

"But I don't see why it has to happen. I'd sooner stay as I am."

"He smiled. 'You can't understand now, but you will understand when it happens. It's...' He shook his head. 'I can't describe it.'

"Jack," I said, 'I've been thinking.' He waited, without much interest. 'Of what you said - about the wonderful things that men made, before the Tripods.'

"That was nonsense," he said, and turned and walked on to the village. I watched him for a time and then, feeling very much alone, made my way to the den." (Chapter 1, p. 18)

"...But listen, and I will tell you. The Tripods first. Do you know what they are?' I shook my head, and he went on. 'Nor do we, as a certainty. There are two stories about them. One is that they were machines, made by men, which revolted against men and enslaved them.'

"In the old days? The days of the giant ship, of the great-cities?"

"Yes. It is a story I find hard to believe, because I do not see how men could give intelligence to machines. The other story is that they do not come originally from this world, but another." (Chapter 2, p. 31)

"He said, 'It was because of the Capping that I really wanted to get away. I didn't have any place in mind, of course, but I thought I might be able to hide, for a time at any rate.'

"I remembered Ozymandias asking me if there was anyone else who might be willing to go south, and my reply. I put my fingers down inside the lining of my jacket.

"This is the map," I said." (Chapter 3, p. 53)

"I hesitated only for a moment. 'We have heard of a place, in the south, where there are no Cappings, and no Tripods.'

"Cappings?' he repeated. 'Tripods?' He touched his head, and said a word in his own language. 'The great ones, with three legs - they are Tripods? A place without them? Is it possible? Everyone puts on - the Cap? - and the Tripods go everywhere.'

"Perhaps not in the mountains."



"He nodded. 'And there are mountains in the south. Where one could hide, if no more. Is that where you go? Is it possible that I can come?'" (Chapter 4, pp. 68-69)

"Twice we saw Tripods in the distance. It struck me that, being more numerous in this country, they must do a great deal of damage to crops. Not only crops, Beanpole said. Animals were often killed by the great metal feet; and people, too, if they were not quick enough to get out of the way. This, like everything else, was taken for granted. But no longer by us; having started asking questions, each doubt set loose a score of others." (Chapter 5, p. 76)

"I supposed I was a little confused still. I said, 'Then they might help us!'

"Beanpole shook his head, sunlight flashing from the lenses in front of his eyes.

"No. After all, they are Capped. They have different customs, but they obey the Tripods. They are still slaves. They treat us kindly, but they must not know our plans.'" (Chapter 6, p. 108)

"The bitter thing was all the spirit, all the gallantry, was wasted. For even more than their inferiors, they accepted and looked forward to being Capped. It was a part of becoming a knight, or of turning from girl to lady. Thinking of this, I saw how good things could be meaningless in isolation. What value did courage have, without a free and challenging mind to direct it?" (Chapter 6, p. 111)

"She shook her head. 'I shall not see you again. Did you not know?'

"But I am to stay here. Your father said so, only this morning.'

"You will stay, but not I. Did no one tell you?'

"Tell me what?'

"When the tournament is over, the Queen goes to serve the Tripods. It is always done.'

"I said stupidly, 'Serve them where?'

"In their city.'

"But for how long?'

"I have told you. Forever.'

"Her words shocked me, but the look on her face was more shocking still. It was a kind of rapt devotion, the expression of someone who hugs in secret her heart's desire." (Chapter 7, p. 135)

"I remember almost nothing about the next few minutes; partly because I was in such an extremity of fear that I could not think straight, and partly, perhaps, because of what happened after. The only thing that comes back clearly is the most terrifying of all - the



moment when I felt a band of metal, cold but incredibly flexible, curl around my waist and lift me from Aristide's back. There was a confused impression of rising through the air, feebly struggling, afraid both of what was to happen and, if I did free myself, of falling to the ground already dizzily far below me, looking up at the burnished carapace, seeing the blackness of the open hole which would swallow me, knowing fear as I have never known it before, and screaming, screaming ... And then blackness. (Chapter 7, pp. 140-141)

"It was a vantage point. We could see down the slope of the land, over the dark green tops of the standing trees, to other higher hills. And beyond them, so remote, so tiny seeming, and yet majestic, their tops white, flushed with pink by the setting sun, pressed against the deep blue of the sky - I marveled to think that there was snow ... At last we were in sight of the White Mountains." (Chapter 8, p. 160)

"I used my left arm this time, feeling into my armpit. I touched something whose texture was not the texture of flesh, but smoother and harder - something like a small metal button, on whose surface my fingertips traced faint corrugations, a kind of mesh. I craned my head around, trying to look at it, but could not. It seemed to melt into my skin, with no clear division between them. I looked up, and saw the other two watching me.

"What is it?"

"It is the metal of the Caps,' Beanpole said. 'It grows into the skin, as the Caps do.'" (Chapter 9, p. 167)

"I got rid of the gag, and looked at what he was holding in his hand. It was silvery gray, about half an inch in diameter, thicker in the center and tapering toward the edge. It was solid, but gave the impression of hundreds of tiny wires just below the surface. Attached to it were the bloody scraps of my flesh, which Beanpole had cut away." (Chapter 9, p. 173)

"Darkness was falling by the time we made up our minds to go on, and it was an indication of our wretchedness and confusion that we should have done so. We were weak from hunger, and utterly weary. A mile or two farther on, we collapsed and lay all night in the open, with no hope of concealment if the Tripods came back. But they did not, and dawn showed us an empty valley, flanked by silent hills." (Chapter 10, p. 190)

Topics for Discussion

1. How does the first chapter of *The White Mountains* prepare you for the rest of the story?

2. What kind of a person is Will? What are his strengths and weaknesses?

What does he learn about himself on the journey to the White Mountains?

3. Describe Will's relationship with Henry at the beginning of the story. How does this relationship change? How do the boys feel about each other by the end of the book?

4. What are Beanpole's special contributions to the boys' quest?

5. The boys do not understand everything that they see when they visit Paris.

What do you recognize that they do not?

What does the Paris sequence tell you about the world of *The White Mountains*?

6. How do you account for the differing reactions of Will, Henry, and Beanpole to the temptation of the Chateau de la Tour Rouge? Compare life there with life in Wherton.

7. How satisfying is the ending of *The White Mountains*?

Essay Topics

Ozymandias speculates that the Tripods are either from another planet or are a human invention gone awry. Which of these two explanations seems most plausible?

Why would the Tripods enforce a feudal government on humanity? How is Feudalism more appropriate to the Tripods' goals than Democracy?

Would you rather live like Jack Leeper and Eloise or like Will Parker and Beanpole?

The novel is set on a futuristic Earth. The distances and places noted in the narrative can, for the most part, be easily located in a standard Atlas. How does the setting of Earth contribute to the dark tone of the novel?

For most of his life, Will Parker has held a wristwatch to be a desirable object of value. After he meets Eloise, however, his personal watch becomes less and less valuable. When Will subsequently loses his watch in a simple accident, he does not appear upset. Why does Will's desire for the watch decrease so markedly?

The novel is narrated from the first-person point of view. How would the novel function differently if it was told in the third-person point of view?

Consider the descriptions of objects in the City of the Ancients that the characters walk through in Chapter 5. Can you recognize what present-day objects are being described? What objects do the characters discard that potentially would have been useful to them on their journey?

Consider the surgical procedure that Beanpole used to remove the metallic button from Will's arm. Does it seem possible that a person could be surgically 'un-Capped'?

In Chapter 10, the characters observe two Tripods performing a strange interactive activity, involving some type of energy field and complicated tentacle manipulations. What do you think the Tripods were doing?

What difficulties are Will, Henry, and Beanpole likely to encounter living in the White Mountains? What language is probably used at the White Mountains?

Ozymandias speculates that the Tripods do not enter the White Mountains because of the altitude of the mountains. If Ozymandias is correct, where else on the Earth might humans live free from the influence of the Tripods?

Will, Henry, and Beanpole hide from searching Tripods by squeezing under a slight ledge in a big rock. Will is certain they will be discovered because they seem to be very exposed. However, the Tripods do not see them due to their different vantage point atop their huge mechanical legs. In what other ways do the Tripods and Will see the world differently?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. How does Christopher use Ozymandias to explain things the reader must know? Read Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," and discuss why Christopher's choice of name for this character is appropriate. Can you identify any of the other literary references in Ozymandias's conversations with Will? How do these allusions enrich the novel?

2. Some critics have suggested that the original concepts introduced in *The White Mountains*—Capped human beings living in a semi-medieval society, forced to do the bidding of Masters—left no surprises for the second book in the trilogy to explore. Read *The City of Gold and Lead*. What contributions does this book make to the trilogy in terms of plot?

In terms of character development?

3. Christopher has acknowledged a debt to H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds* for the idea of "Tripods." Read Wells's story and compare it with Christopher's trilogy. Are the alien races at all similar in their objectives on Earth? In their ultimate fate? How does the human response compare in these books?

4. Do you think that Christopher's *Tripods Trilogy* presents an oversimplified political situation? What—if anything—do you think might need to be changed if the books were rewritten for an adult audience?

5. Midway through the novel, Will and his companions explore a deserted and ruined Paris. Choose a town or city that you are familiar with and imagine what it would look like in a future world similar to that of *The White Mountains*.

Write a short account in which you explore this place. What do you find? How do you interpret what you see?

Further Study

Carpenter, Humphrey, and Mari Prichard. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. Includes a brief biographical and critical note on Christopher.

Crago, Hugh, and Maureen Crago.

"John Christopher: An Assessment with Reservations." *Children's Book Review* 1 (June 1971): 77-79. This article finds *The Tripods Trilogy* predictable, lacking in conviction, and lacking real literary excellence.

Crouch, Marcus. *The Nesbit Tradition: The Children's Novel in England, 1945-1970*. London: Ernest Benn, 1972.

Christopher's novels are treated briefly in a chapter devoted to science fiction.

Gough, John. "An Interview with John Christopher." *Children's Literature in Education* 15 (Summer 1984): 93-102.

This article is based on the author's correspondence with Christopher.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*. 2d ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Contains a short critical commentary with an extensive bibliography.

Milner, Joseph O. "Oathkeepers and Vagrants: Meliorists and Reactive World Views in Science Fiction."

Children's Literature Association Quarterly 10 (Summer 1985): 71-73.

This article divides science-fiction writing into two camps, classifying Christopher's fiction as "reactive" for projecting a view of humankind as ultimately flawed.

Townsend, John R. *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children*. New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1971. Includes a favorable chapter on Christopher.

Written for Children: An Outline of English Language Children's Literature. New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1974.

Discusses Christopher's books in the context of British science-fiction writing for children.

Williams, Jay. "John Christopher: Allegorical Historian." *Signal* 4 (January 1971): 18-23. Williams sees Christopher as a fantasist writing about present critical and ecological dilemmas.

Related Titles

The White Mountains is the first book of Christopher's Tripods Trilogy. In the second book, The City of Gold and Lead, Will and a friend, Fritz, enter a domed city as slaves in order to explore the alien culture of the Masters. Will finds that Eloise has been killed by the Masters in order to preserve her appearance for a museum exhibit called the "Pyramid of Beauty." Although his mission in the city is not altogether successful—due to carelessness, he is threatened with discovery as a spy—Will does escape the city and provide valuable information to the resistance forces.

In The Pool of Fire, the freedom fighters wage a war against the Masters and manage to regain control of the Earth.

The end of the trilogy is somewhat inconclusive, with Christopher suggesting that the task of establishing peace and understanding among the victors will take all of the young heroes' devotion and ingenuity. Beanpole puts the challenge this way: "Are you ready for a new fight—a longer, less exciting one, with no great triumphs at the end? Will you leave your seas and islands, and help us try to get men to live together, in peace as well as liberty?"

Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996