

**DOCTOR™
WHO
NOVELLAS**

TIME AND RELATIVE

KIM NEWMAN

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Kim Newman

Justin Richards

Bryan Talbot

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For Jerome

FOREWORD

In the Beginning

Justin Richards

Setting a story before the opening of the *Doctor Who* series opens up endless possibilities.

The fact that *Time and Relative* is set only just before the opening episode of *100,000 BC*, that it utilises the same environment, is a testament to two things. One of them is the strength and persistence of the format established for *Doctor Who* right from the start. The other is Kim Newman's depth of perception — rather than play against the success of the format he has chosen to use and expand it.

In doing so, Kim gives us a depth of character and background never afforded to Susan within the series. He gives us a new beginning — using the benefit of hindsight to fill in gaps that have opened since the series started as well as a few that were always there. And he does it all within the context of a story rather than as throwaway novelties or gratuitous references.

Of course, we should expect no less. Kim Newman is one of Britain's foremost film and television historians — he knows his *Who*. And he is also the novelist who brought us *Anno Dracula* — maintaining the form and the fashion of the original Bram Stoker novel, but updating the theme and the content. If anyone is well-placed to make an informed re-assessment of the opening 'history' of *Doctor Who*, it is Kim Newman.

What better way to celebrate than to settle down on a cold winter's night with a good *Doctor Who* story. Let the dark shadows in your mind

lengthen, and the snow pile up on the window sill. Are you sitting comfortably? We'll soon put a stop to that...

Justin Richards

BBC Books — Doctor Who Range Consultant August 2001



TALBOT 2001

Time and Relative

The Diary of Susan Foreman

Wednesday, March 27th, 1963

Hate, hate, hate! I hate Coal Hill School. I hate Year Four. I hate London. I hate pretending. I hate the *cold*.

Sometimes, I hate myself. Especially my whiny voice. When I hear it tape-recorded and played back, it doesn't sound like the me I hear in my head. My tiny little face has wrong-sized eyes and a funny chin. How could I have ever thought I'd fit in? It's a wonder that they don't point in the street and shout 'invader from space!' at me.

I don't hate *him*. I can't.

Without Grandfather, I'd be alone. In the hateful universe.

Alone! A difficult word to write.

When I think about *aloneness*, my head hurts. If I think near the fog-patches in my mind, my thoughts skitter away. I try to picture something else, like five-dimensional equations or Peter O'Toole in *Lawrence of Arabia*. It's best not to go there.

Jean-Paul Sartre says we are *all* alone in the universe. I wonder if he means it literally. He could be One of Us. Grandfather and me (and I?) aren't the only exiles (*runaways*).

Ouch! Do *not* think about that.

Hate is easier. It brings so much to mind. It cuts through the mind-fog.

I hate the School Rules. By mediaeval law, children must write with stupid old-fashioned pens! Classroom desks have inkwells stained blue with generations of use, and we all have to carry little bottles of Quink Ink, which are forever popping open in your satchel, causing blue and

black catastrophes. They have ballpoint pens in 1963 – I checked at W H Smith's, and I'm using a sensible biro to write this diary. We're supposed to use antiques for schoolwork because it's 'beneficial for our developing hand'. Fountain pens have more design faults than useful functions. My fingernails are permanently stained blue. My homework always gets marked down for blotchiness.

By the end of the day, I have ink-smears on my cheeks. John the Martian calls these 'Heidelberg duelling scars'. He's Official Class Oddity, so I pay no attention. And he is by no means free of Quinkstains.

I told Mr Grange, our form master, that pens will become obsolete. Everyone will mind-dictate into machines that write out what we say: correcting grammar, translating perfectly into another language or setting down what we meant rather than what we said. He called me 'Mother Shipton' and the rest of 4G laughed.

But I am right. I know.

I must keep my mouth shut. People don't like being told what's coming next. It makes them uncomfortable. Ask Cassandra. She saw the future and was kicked to death for it.

I hate Double Geog on Friday mornings, and 'Games' all afternoon (forms of gladiatorial combat called 'netball' and 'hockey'). I hate school liver.

I especially hate F.M.! He's a dangerous thug, worse than the leather-jacket louts who go to the Pump. His personal mission is to make the lives of everyone else in our year wretched. He has a gang.

We've been in 1963 for five months, I think. It seems like five months. But anywhen we stay, it *always* seems like five months. You might not think it possible to have spent five months in 1963 when it's only March, but that'd only go to show how hidebound you are by the chronological system of ordering time.

'Continuity, bah!' Grandfather said yesterday or the day after. 'Doesn't exist, child. Except in the minds of the cretinously literal, like the singlehearts who clutter up this planet. Trying to sort it all out will only tie you up in useless knots forever. Get on with it and worry afterwards if you can be pinned to someone else's entirely arbitrary idea of the day-to-day progression of events. Without contradictions, we'd be entirely

too easy to track down. Have you ever thought about that? It's important that we not be too consistent.'

What Grandfather means is that he's tinkering with the Box, and that throws timekeeping out. It's one reason I've started writing this diary. I can see that keeping the dates straight will be a major effort. I'll probably give it up. Grandfather says I always want to give up when things get difficult, and then snorts about my generation. Hundreds of years ago, teenagers were supposedly angelic and contemplative, eagerly absorbing the wisdom of their elders. Hundreds of years ago and in an alternate universe, perhaps ...

It's not as if he isn't a Rebel too.

That I have to go to School is my fault. It was my idea: I thought it important to 'fit in, struck with some Pinocchio notion of being a 'real live girl'. Grandfather made it tiresomely clear that he thought I was being silly. Faking the records, documents and forms that got me enrolled at Coal Hill wasn't easy. Grandfather insists I stick by what he calls my 'immature whim' so all that work won't go to waste. Little complicated tasks like forgery always get him enthusiastic. He loves fiddly problems that test his cleverness, and gets so caught up in details that he often forgets what the purpose of it all is.

Grandfather got hold of an Eleven Plus exam paper and made me sit it. I failed, by trying to argue with the stupid questions. Because of that, he put me in a Secondary Modern School rather than send me to a Grammar – which means mixed boys and girls (socially healthy, I suppose, though there are drawbacks – like F.M.), being called by your first name (unless you're being shouted at), no uniforms (though there is a prehistoric dress code – no trousers for girls) and one everything-lumped-in Science course (rather than separate classes for Chemistry, Physics and Biology). We're all expected to leave at sixteen and get jobs. Most of us can't wait.

I can be so *stupid* sometimes. School!!! What a pointless, miserable idea! It's Absurd (my Word of the Week). I don't see Grandfather going out and getting a job on the buses or as a solicitors' clerk to go unnoticed among 'the indigenous population'. Perhaps he just wants me out of his long white hair in the daytimes. It's not as if School could actually *teach*

me anything.

Yesterday, in Science, we spent forty minutes establishing that magnesium burns. A revelation that rocks established beliefs about the nature of the universe to the core. I was tempted to strike one of Grandfather's everlasting matches, and see what poor plodding Mr Chesterton made of that.

I especially hate Mr Grange. 'Ghastly' Grange. He is our form master, which means he has us in his total power first thing in the morning and afternoon as he calls out the register. I'm in Form 4G; 4 for the year, G for Grange. He runs down the names and puts attendance ticks in the register, as if hoping each night or lunch-break will reveal heavy casualties so he can draw a thick black line through the name of the departed. He has hair growing out of his ears and teaches my least favourite lesson, Geography. Whenever I use an out-of-date place-name or get a capital city wrong, he chants a line from a horrible song, encouraging the others in class to sing along – 'it's Istanbul, not Constantinople'!

From the first time I sat in his classroom (at the back), Ghastly Grange disliked me. I don't know why and I'm not especially interested, but I just put his back up. Because I joined School after term started, he has me classed as a latecomer and I've never managed to catch up. He objects to inkiness on principle. And he either doesn't like girls at all or likes them too much in a way that would Get Him Into Trouble.

Today, I forgot myself and Got Into Trouble.

Not like *that*! Ugh, gack and yuck, no! Never like *that*!

There was another thick fall of fresh snow last night, which settled over the frozen slush that's been around for weeks. In dinner break, we built a snowman in the playground. Gillian Roberts noticed a gaggle of Year One kids doing a bad job of snowman-construction and rounded up John the Martian and me to pitch in. Gillian sits next to me at the back of the class and is clever in ways School isn't set up to recognise. Give her Maths homework and she makes a hash of it, because to her logarithms are just nonsense numbers in books. And she always falls down in English because she has a mental block about spelling even the simplest words. However, if Gillian gets interested in a complicated, short-term

project, she can organise the whole thing on the spot, handing out work assignments to the most qualified, inspiring others to do their best.

When the snowman had risen taller than John, the tallest of us, Gillian hoisted up a Year One girl called Sadie Lederer, smallest of the group, and let her make the face. She stuck on black pebbles, for a nose and eyes. After she'd put Sadie down, Gillian fixed tiny clusters of twigs to the sides of the football-sized head.

'Look, Forehead,' Gillian said to me, 'he has hair growing out of his ears. Just like Ghastly Grange.'

We all chortled. Even the littler kids, who hadn't yet been exposed to Mr Grange.

The name stayed in my head after the bell went. When the afternoon register was called, I said 'here, Ghastly' instead of 'here, Mr Grange'. Calamitous mistake! Form 4G laughed in the fakey way children do when they're mocking rather than amused. Mr Grange – ghastly Mr Ghastly – gave me Lines.

I have to write 'I will show respect at all times for the teachers of Coal Hill Secondary Modern School' a hundred and fifty times.

I'm writing this to put off doing the lines.

I had better get on with it.

Later –

Grandfather looked in while I was doing the Lines.

He saw the half-covered paper and harrumphed.

'Can't see the point of that homework, Susan,' he said. 'Surely they don't use by-rote subliminal commands to enforce mental discipline in this day and age? It's brainwashing, that's what it is. And very dangerous. Your mind is like a fine watch. It shouldn't have sand poured into it.'

I told him it wasn't homework, but punishment.

'Ah, that's different. Carry on, convict.'

Grandfather never stands up for me. He has no idea what it's like in School. He said he'd go to the parents' evening last month, but forgot.

That's a black mark against me. He forgets a lot of things.

He's in a completely different world. I really mean that.

I don't forget things, but sometimes I can't *remember*.

There are white gaps in my head. When my train of thought leads into one of the fog-patches, pain flares up behind my forehead as if I'd eaten ice cream too fast. If my mind is a library, there's a roped off grown-up section where I can't go. I know day-to-day things like when we need to get a pinta from the shops or that I should take plimsolls in on Tuesday and Thursday for P.E., but beyond that the fog gets thicker.

Some questions are dangerous to ask. Even of yourself.

Like 'where do we come from'?

A burst of pain behind my eyes stopped me from thinking dangerously, and I got back to the Lines. When my mind strayed momentarily, I lost count. In the end, I did a hundred and fifty-three lines. I scissored the extras off the last sheet of paper. Ghastly is so ghastly he'd probably add extra punishment for exceeding orders. The point of Lines is to instil mindless obedience. You're not supposed to ask questions.

'And how did Constantinople get the works?

That's nobody's business but the Turks!'

Last week, Gillian slammed her desktop up and down in a rage and it came off at the hinges. Ghastly gave her the Strap, three times across the palm of the hand in front of the whole class. It didn't matter that she was ill-treating the desk because she was angry with F.M. for jabbing her b*m with his protractor. She was taking it out on something she couldn't hurt because she was really, sincerely trying not to get in any more trouble for fighting. As it turned out, she should have given F.M. a black eye – she'd have had the satisfaction of getting the protractor-stabber back and she'd have been punished less severely. According to the rules, attacking School Property is worse than anything you do to another pupil. When F.M. thumped Little Titch Critchley and broke his glasses, he only got Lines.

I can't write any more. My hand is wrung out.

I will show respect at all times for the teachers of Coal Hill Secondary Modem School.

I will show respect. I will hide my True Feelings.

Thursday, March 28th, 1963

Morning Assembly. Hymns murdered by the whole School to the piano poundings of Mrs Bellwether, the Music Teacher: 'He Who Would Valiant Be', which is about being a Pilgrim (and Means Something Secret to me), and 'There Is a Green Hill Far Away, Without a City Wall', which is about Easter, which is coming up fast (in this context, 'without' means 'outside'). A Bible reading from Leslie Culver, a Year Five R.E. swot who stammers. Cold weather additions to the School Rules from the Headmaster, Basil James Carker (M.A., Oxon). No running, no snowballs, no skating, no whistling. No exceptions and no complaining.

'Jawohl, mein Führer,' mumbled Gibson from Year Five.

After Assembly, I handed in my Lines and got a nod of acknowledgement from Mr Grange. Doing a punishment should wipe the original offence from everyone's minds so you get treated normally again. There are ways of making everyone (even you) forget what you've done and why you did it, but it doesn't work like that on Earth. Mr Grange knows what the children call him, but has picked on me to be blamed for it. Children nicknamed him Ghastly years ago, long before I ever came to School. You can get Lines for whistling 'Only the Lonely' within earshot because an earlier 4G made up a lyric about him that went 'Lastly the Ghastly'. He looks at me and sees all the children down through the aeons who didn't show respect.

Someone should teach him that respect has to be earned.

Later —

The *cold*.

I don't understand it.

London is in a relatively temperate climatic zone. The United Kingdom is characterised by short, mild winters.

Spring should have sprung, but there's no sign of a thaw. Not a single

snowdrop.

Snow has been on the ground for months, since well before Christmas, thick and settled, with new falls most nights. In streets and playgrounds, the white carpet has been mashed to slush and frozen, then snowed on again, slushed and frozen again, over and over. Dangerous layers of ragged ice lie beneath the dusting of soft, white snow. The football pitch is ploughed clear so the boys can troop out to battle on Friday afternoons. The grassless earth is as hard as playground asphalt and the boys crawl scraped and bleeding to the showers, bare legs and arms blue. Because the boiler is acting up, the showers last week were cold and there was very nearly a mutiny.

Clear, sharp, thick stalactites hang from all the ridges of the buildings, forming draperies and traceries. Children melt messages into the ice with matchflame-heated pen-nibs: initials (never mine) in hearts, 'Long Live the Hotspurs', 'Girls Beware — Dirty Gertie at Large!'. The caretaker goes into the loos first thing in the morning and has to smash the ice in the toilet-bowls. The heating, dependent on a pre-war furnace and boiler, is often on the blink. Heavy iron radiators in all the classrooms make snapping, fizzing and drumming sounds all day but don't give out proper warmth. Children cluster close and press themselves against the thick-painted metal, which doesn't help.

In Foreman's Yard, snow drifts higher than my shoulders. A clear path leads to the Box, with banks that threaten to collapse every day. If anyone ever did want to buy any of the scrap in the Yard (no-one has ever asked), they'd have to wait until glaciation receded.

Early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when there's no sun, you can breathe in the cold and feel microscopic ice-chips in your nose, windpipe and lungs. Tears freeze like sleep-sand. You mustn't touch the iron railings with bare fingers, because of black ice. Supposedly, you'd leave skin behind. It's a fearful temptation to try — just a fingertip, to see if what they say is true.

Every class has two or three children with splints. Gillian and John the Martian are plotting to give F.M. an undetectable shove one break-time, hoping to slow him down with a broken bone or three.

Have I written about Francis Minto? I hate him!

John the Martian showed me a book he likes, called *How to Be Topp*, written by Geoffrey Williams with pictures by Ronald Searle. In the book, there is a picture captioned ‘every skool hav a resident bully who is fat’. Ronald Searle must know F.M., for the picture of the ‘resident bully’ is Francis to the life. I expect he also knows Gillian, because he spells just like her.

At morning break, F.M. assaulted our snowman.

Gillian was putting an old flat cap and a scarf on the snowman’s football-shaped head when Francis turned up with his gang of smaller boys. He sneered at us for being ‘infants’ and ‘loonies’, then took a cricket bat from his gym bag and swatted off the snowman’s head. Sadie cried, which made Francis back down before a teacher came over to ask what the matter was. When Miss Wright asked, John told her the Year One girl had slipped on an ice-patch. No matter how much we might loathe F.M., none of us wants to get a reputation for snitching. Miss Wright asked Francis what he was doing with a cricket bat out of season, but didn’t pursue that line of questioning. The teachers all know what F.M. is like, but he sucks up to them so doesn’t often get into trouble. If there were any justice, he’d get a million Lines a week, plus the Strap every day and the Cane in front of the whole School at Thursday Assembly.

At lunch, Gillian and I made the snowman whole again. He looks more like Ghastly than ever.

Later —

The heating went off. We had to sit in class with coats, scarves, mittens and caps on. When anyone talked, their breath frosted. In the Science Lab, Mr Chesterton had all the Bunsen burners going full blast. It didn’t help.

It was better outside, in dinner break. The skies were clear and the sun bright, though with a cold light. All day, the ice melts slowly; then, at nightfall, it freezes again, in strange sculpture shapes.

‘Dad tells me it’s the bloody Russians,’ said John the Martian.

He doesn't usually speak to girls, except Gillian. But we were working on the snowman. I added scraps of black bark to the face to make a smile, while Gillian and John packed the body with fresh snow. The Head has decreed that a School snowman is a good idea, like a mascot, so a teacher is on guard against Francis's gang now. Our work is likely to stand until spring.

If there ever is a spring.

'Atom missiles are hot,' said Gillian. 'That's daft.'

'It's not missiles, Dad says. It's a freezing ray, pointed at England. It's called "the Novosibirsk Project" and we've been onto it for quite some time, thanks to that low-temperature physicist who defected.'

'You don't half talk rubbish, Martian,' said Gillian.

'No it's serious,' said John, intent. 'There was a *Panorama* on it. There really is a Novosibirsk Project. Even the Kremlin admits it now. They say it's about climate control, making the steppes into arable land. If you hadn't bunked off Geog, you'd know about it.'

'So why is it cold here?' I asked. 'Are they taking England's spring for Siberia and unloading their winter on us?'

'Something like that. Kruschew is trying it on again with Kennedy. He needs to show he's a strong hand or else he'll be overthrown by a *coup d'etat*. The Generals didn't like him backing down over Cuba. *Coups d'etat* is what you get when the army takes over. They don't happen here, though Dad says one'd be a good idea since the mob in parliament can't tie their own shoelaces without calling out the troops.'

John's father is in the army. To hear John tell it, Captain Brent is in on all the secrets they keep from the Prime Minister. He's put John in the R.O.T.C. (which stands for Royal Officer Training Corps, I think), which means he has to stay behind after School on Mondays and Wednesdays. He does 'square-bashing' and polishes things, so that if he ever goes in the army he'll be an officer. I get the impression that John doesn't do well under military discipline. His mind doesn't work that way, and his feet aren't arranged for close-order drill. He would design the bombs, not drop them.

'How could the Russians point a freezing ray at England?' I asked John. 'The Earth curves, so if they pointed a ray it would go straight up

and out into space. A ray isn't like a missile, which would describe a parabola.'

John looked at me funny (funnily?).

'From Sputnik, Forehead,' he said, superior and certain. 'Sputnik is just a small ball,' I said, describing its size with my hands.

'A *mirrored* ball, like in the Palais Dance Hall. The Russkis can shine a ray off it, reflect it down on us.'

I had to admit that was possible, but unlikely. I could see John was impressed that I knew the size of Sputnik.

'Pay attention to the face, Martian,' said Gillian, looking at me strangely.

I shouldn't have said anything, as usual. Gillian isn't like Ghastly or most of the children. She genuinely listens to what people say, then thinks about what it means. Mostly, she thinks about how much of a threat people are to her. John is harmless, obviously.

Now, she is wondering if I'm not.

Later –

Gillian started calling John 'the Martian'. She says he looks like the Mekon, Dan Dare's enemy in *The Eagle*, which annoys John because the Mekon (apparently) is Venusian. When Gillian says 'same difference', John delivers an illustrated lecture about the Solar System and the respective places of Venus, the Earth and Mars. Gillian thought Pluto was a cartoon dog and laughs out loud whenever Uranus is mentioned. John gets frustrated when Gillian pretends to be stupid to cover up for her ignorance. It's not her fault that she's grown up in a house without books or proper newspapers, where the telly is always tuned to the channel with adverts.

Gillian calls me 'Forehead'. When she first did it, I went home and examined my face in a mirror for hours, combing my fringe different ways. Finally, I realised Gillian was making a joke about my *name* not my face. There's nothing unusual about my forehead.

I live under the name Foreman like Winnie-the-Pooh lives under the

name Sanders. It's written up on the gates of the junkyard. I don't know where it comes from, and I only started using it because Grandfather needed two names to put on the forged documents.

If I think about it, it's funny that the children say that *John* is from outer space. He wears thick specs, which he tampers with –using transparent pink Sellotape to make them sunglasses (or 'anti-snowglare' glasses, though they're also the proverbial 'rose-coloured spectacles') or wiring two thin torches to the arms so he can see in the dark. In every subject, he's either second from top or second from bottom.

Unlike me.

I'm top in Maths and Science and bottom in everything else, though I was top in one History test when the question was about Renaissance Italy. I'm hopeless at Geog – I always forget what countries and capital cities are calling themselves this year ('even old New York was once New Amsterdam ... why they changed it, I can't say ... people just liked it *better that way*'). Mademoiselle ('Madame Weasel') Quelou says my French sounds like it comes out of the middle ages (I get Latin mixed up with it). I am only picked for netball when Gillian is captain. My English is 'all over the show', as you, dear diary, must have noticed. I have to concentrate hard when doing essays not to lapse into Fonetik Speling, which is a lot like Ronald Searle Meets Gillian. Somehow, writing this is different. Maybe because I'm doing this by choice not because I have to.

I was sent to the Head for saying that Religious Education is just History with more blatant fibs. I'm much better on the Gods that came from Outer Space than the ones people made up so they would feel better. Mr Carker consulted the list of permissible punishments in the School Rules, as if hoping to find public burning of heretics still on the books.

When Grandfather asks me how I'm getting on in School, I lie.

Friday, March 29th, 1963

A morning of eternal torment. Double Geography. Ghastly made us draw diagrams of a *barkhan*, the distinctive type of crescent-shaped Saharan sand dune I recognise from *Lawrence of Arabia*. All with the prospect of an afternoon of Games to make things worse.

But a miracle came about: Lo, Games was called off. The showers couldn't be used because of the frozen pipes.

Gillian says parents have complained about the cuts and scrapes. Not her parents, though. She always has cuts and scrapes. She lives with just her Dad, because her Mum took off when she was little.

The whole of Year Four was put in the Assembly Hall and given board games. Only the most suicidal soccer players among the boys complained. Wendy Coburn asked Mr Chesterton if we could play records on her Dansette, and he said it would be all right and that we could even dance to keep warm. He would be only too happy to keep an eye on us and had to be persuaded not to join in.

Some of the girls danced to Susan Maughan ('Bobby's Girl'), Neil Sedaka ('Breaking Up is Hard to Do') and Chris Waites and the Carrollers ('Christmas Caroline'), but I played Snakes & Ladders. Up the ladders, down the snakes –comforting, meaningless movement.

Wendy Coburn put on 'Love Me Do'.

'You can't call that din music,' said John the Martian, who only likes classical. 'It's just a bunch of yobs making a noise.'

'You're not "with-it", Martian,' said Gillian, teasing.

'This is the best and most important 45 single of the last five years,' I said. 'For the rest of your life, you'll remember that you were there when the Beatles started.'

Wendy and her clique were dancing dreamily. Even without the benefit of the long view, it was obvious that The Beatles were special. Poor Chris Waites wasn't even playing in the same division.

'It isn't exactly Mozart,' John snorted.

'Grandfather says Mozart was a bad-mannered show-off with a silly hairstyle,' I said, 'who made a racket just to get attention.'

Grandfather has longer hair than the Fab Four, I should mention.

‘It’s what grown-ups say about pop groups we like,’ I carried on. ‘It’s always been like that. It’s because adults are threatened. When music changes, it means that we’re taking over. The young.’

John was looking at me oddly.

‘Where did that come from, Forehead? Deep thoughts. And they call me “the Martian”?’

I must be more careful.

Later –

The door of the Box was iced over when I got back to Totter’s Lane. Before I could get inside for my tea, I had to use a scraper from the junkyard to chip it free.

Grandfather didn’t notice.

At the moment, he’s interested in the *cold*.

‘John’s Dad says it’s the Russians,’ I told him.

‘Hardly likely, child.’

‘He says the Russkis only ever win wars when they have the snow on their side.’

‘Don’t take that too literally.’

Even in the Box, it’s cold. And that shouldn’t be possible. ‘Snow, Susan, isn’t on anybody’s side.’

Saturday, March 30th, 1963

No School today. And I did my homework yesterday evening.

Grandfather is busy.

When he thinks about the cold, he *becomes* cold.

Sometimes, he's just normally grumpy and crotchety, which is what you expect from grown-ups throughout the universe.

But now he's *different*.

It's as if he's an organic machine, doing what he was designed to do. Calculating and tabulating but not connecting, not caring, not feeling.

Even being irritated is feeling *something*.

This is standing outside a window, looking in, watching a child being beaten but not smashing through to do anything. Finding it *interesting*, but having no reason to change it, as if the whole universe were a big painting in a gallery, to be admired for its technique but which we should never think to add a brushstroke to, not even to repair damage or improve on a shoddy bit of work.

Where we come from, all people are like that. I worry that if the fog ever clears, I'll find that I'm like that too.

Grandfather can't be like that at bottom, or we wouldn't be here.

We wouldn't have run away.

I have a headache, a bad one. I must stop thinking about this.

Later –

I went out, wrapped up warm and being careful on the iced pavements. Safety notices are up everywhere.

The British government likes nothing better than telling people what to do for their own good. And the British people like to grumble, ignore the Men from the Ministry and make do with cups of tea.

Since we're here, I suppose Grandfather and I are honorarily British.

We both like tea, and I suppose we grumble and know better than officials too.

It could have been a lot worse. We could be honorary *Americans*. I expect we'd be noisier, smile more and have guns.

The snow-cleaning crews have stopped coming down Totter's Lane. They have to concentrate on the High Street and the arterial roads, which mean streets where people only live have to get by as best they can. A few humps in the Lane show where parked cars are buried, awaiting archaeologists from a future society. Mrs Faulke at Number 79 stubbornly clears off her front step and a path to the kerb every morning. She told me she was writing to the council to complain.

The drifts in the gutters and on the pavements are several feet thick. Dogs and cats are frozen solid under some of them, probably not in suspended animation.

The *Star*, *News* and *Standard* each give different figures, but people have *died*. Every day, there's a story about a pensioner expiring in a fridge-like flat, or a lost child turning up white and lifeless. There is skating on the Serpentine, but a student rag crew has been banned from doing a charity walk on the Thames. Current still runs under the floes, and the ice in the middle of the river is dangerously thin.

Our School snowman isn't the only one. Parks and allotments are full of the fellows. Some kids have dressed up their creations like bishops or bowler-hatted gents and ask passers-by for pennies, like for Guy Fawkes' Night. At the bus stop, children have shaped a drift into a row of fat folk waiting for now-rare buses.

The High Street is swept and salted. It was busy today. A lot of shops close most of the week, because of the quiet crisis, but open on Saturday morning. That means people have to get all their things at once.

The Pump, the pub on the corner, has newly-raised prices for brandies and spirits chalked up outside. In opening hours, there are always motorbikes parked outside The Pump, with lads in black leather jackets comparing the noises they can get out of their machines and jeering at anyone who complains about the racket. They call themselves the Ton-Up Boys. Apparently, you can't get into the gang unless you've driven your bike at over a hundred miles an hour ('the Ton') and lived to tell the tale. Now, the motorcyclists all wrap their bikes up in canvas shrouds and make even more noise getting them started because the

points ice over. I'm always sure to cross the road so as not to walk past the pub when the Ton-Up Boys are out and about. They say horrid things to any girls in sight, even those as tiny and unnoticeable as me.

I went to the shops for Grandfather, with a list. There are shortages, and I couldn't get everything. Eggs, bread and tea are difficult. In the queues, women were talking about rationing coming back. Milk is impossible to find. The float stopped coming round two weeks ago. Bottles left on doorsteps froze and the pintas popped top-bursting white fingers. A lot of shops have policemen supervising the queues, with thick capes and helmets. Some people get shirty. Truncheon-prods are not unknown.

I spent my pocket money (6d) on chocolate, but it was frozen and I hurt my teeth eating it.

'Hello, Forehead,' called a voice.

It was John the Martian, sitting in the passenger seat of a jeep. At weekends, he wears a woolly army jumper instead of a blazer. Today, he wore a black balaclava that bulged out at the sides over his glasses-arms.

The balaclava didn't cover enough of his face to conceal scarlet blushes.

'Hello, John,' I said. Since the business with Ghastly, I'm careful not to use nicknames when talking to people. (I don't know how Gillian gets away with it.)

I was puzzled about the blushes. Then I realised John doesn't naturally talk to girls. It's only when Gillian is around that it seems the done thing. Out of School, he isn't sure if he should admit I exist.

'I'm here with Dad,' said John.

Soldiers were in the High Street, setting up an inspection point. Captain Brent, John's father, was bossing the soldiers about, doing his best to be polite to women in queues who asked him questions. He was better at the bossiness than the politeness.

'We're taking over from the civilian authorities for the duration of the Emergency,' said John

'What Emergency?'

'The cold. It's an Attack. Anyone can tell that this isn't natural. It's being done to us. It'll be official, soon.'

John's father came back to the jeep. He had a younger soldier with him, his driver.

'Who's your little friend, Johnno?'

'Uh, Fore ...'

'Susan Foreman,' I said.

'Same school as Johnno?'

I admitted it.

'Good-oh. Keep out of trouble.'

When they drove off, veering around snowy lumps in the road, John looked back at me.

I think he likes me.

Later –

I like Peter O'Toole and John Lennon and Patrick McGoohan. I love *Lawrence of Arabia* and the Beatles and *Danger Man*.

I *don't* like Albert Finney, except I don't like him in a special way that might mean I like him more than any others I mention.

Because it had an X-certificate, Gillian and I had to dress up like Year Six girls, with high-heels and make-up and scarves, to get into *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* at the Rialto. We sat in the back stalls and two lads tried to chat us up, but they were horrible and Gillian saw them off. The big scandal was that we saw Mr Chesterton and Miss Wright from School in the audience, and had to hide because they might give our ages away.

I keep thinking about Albert Finney. Or maybe Arthur Seaton, the man he plays in the film – which comes from a book by Alan Sillitoe that I haven't finished yet. Ghastly confiscated the paperback because I was reading it when I should have been studying Swiss crop-rotation. When he dropped the rat on the factory conveyor-belt or broke windows by throwing stones, I could see that he was wrong and right at the same time. I think I like rebels, being at least an honorary one myself.

I don't like Cliff Richard and I'm *quite sure* about that. Ugh! As far as I'm concerned, it's no surprise that he's likely to stay a bachelor boy.

Of course, these aren't people I know personally. I've only seen and heard them in films and magazines or on television and the wireless.

I don't *know* them. (Like I know John and Gillian and teachers and Grandfather.)

At my apparent age, in some earthly cultures, I'd be married and have children. Even here and now in England (with my forged birth certificate), I could be married a year and a half from now – though that seems hardly likely. Gillian says Year Five girls who leave School to get married usually have a bun in the oven.

John likes me. Do I like John?

That's a question I don't feel like answering here.

Later –

After John left with his Dad, I hung about the High Street for a while. I have a sort of weekend job on Saturday afternoons, looking after Malcolm, with a lavish take-home wage of five shillings. Gillian calls Malcolm my boyfriend, but he's six years old and babyish even for his age. His Mum works in the newsagent's and his Dad's on the buses. They're from Trinidad and were complaining about the climate even before it got cold. Malcolm likes going to the pictures, especially cowboy films (which are boring) and cartoons (which make more sense). Sometimes, I take him to the zoo or a museum, but mostly I stay in his parents' flat with him, playing games and telling stories.

Malcolm likes being told stories. I've told him that I'm a runaway princess from outer space. He pretends to believe me. Or maybe he's not pretending. When I'm talking with him, I can tell him things I'm not supposed to tell anyone else. My head doesn't hurt. It's as if Malcolm doesn't count.

Children are different.

Malcolm has toy robots and spaceships and is fascinated by what's up there, beyond the sky.

His favourite toy is a gonk. They're a craze at the moment: stuffed Humpty Dumpty-like things, huge eggheads with exaggerated faces and

tiny limbs. His is a cowboy with a black moustache, a tiny stetson and holsters around its jowls.

Cowboy Gonk goes everywhere with Malcolm.

Today, I took Malcolm – mummified in layers of coat, scarves, boots and mittens – from his Mum at the newsagent. He insisted we watch the soldiers, though they weren't doing anything that interesting.

'Keep your golliwog out of the way, miss,' said a soldier, a private.

That was nasty. Malcolm may be only six, but he went quiet when he heard the soldier, holding Cowboy Gonk tighter, eyes on the pavement.

And we weren't in anybody's way.

'Little blighter ought to go back where 'e came from,' said the squaddie.

If that's what people think about Malcolm, who was born in Britain, imagine how they'd feel if they knew where I came from!

The soldier glared at Malcolm.

'I think you should go back to where you come from,' I said.

'And where's that?'

'Primordial ooze, from the look of you.'

'Don't cheek me,' he said.

'What's all this?' asked a sergeant. 'Malingering again, Mooney? If we didn't have so many on the sicklist, you'd be up on a charge p.d.q.'

'He called my friend a "golliwog", sir,' I said.

It wasn't like snitching in School. It was something that ought to be known.

The sergeant looked at Malcolm and smiled.

'You have to admit there's a resemblance. Now clear off out of it and let us get on with our business, there's a good little bint.'

My cheeks burned. Tears pricked.

'Come on, Malcolm,' I said, taking his hand. 'Let's leave these primitive lifeforms to evolve.'

That made him laugh a little, though he didn't understand.

Why do people here think small variations in skin-tone are important? Or the way people think? Or where they're from?

When the soldiers were rude to Malcolm, I wanted to open my mouth and breath freezing death, crystallising them into breakable statues. I

can't actually do that, but I am different.

If I put my mind to it, there are things I can do.

I think I can, anyway.

But I don't. I can tell Malcolm as much as I know, but only because he thinks I'm telling him stories.

Malcolm is the best they have here.

I must try to think of that. There's F.M. and Ghastly Grange and Double Geog, but there's also Malcolm.

When I tell him about other planets, his eyes expand with wonder. Those are his favourite stories.

Malcolm was quiet all afternoon. When I dropped him off at his flat, his Mum saw at once how he was but didn't ask why. I'm sure she can make a pretty good guess. If I were from here, I'd be ashamed. But I'm not, so I'm only angry.

Later —

Saturday night, as in 'and Sunday morning'. Grandfather lets me come and go as I please. John, who receives 'house orders' from his father every morning at breakfast and has to account for every minute of every day, is envious of the freedom — but it isn't always a blessing. I sometimes worry that while I'm out of sight, Grandfather will forget who I am. He could easily take the Box away and strand me here. Then I'd probably have to grow up, get a job, get married and have children. Not exactly an exciting prospect. Maybe I'd be better off as a beat girl, making up poetry in an Old Compton Street coffee bar, zipping in and out of traffic on a Lambretta and wearing only black clothes. Thanks to Vidal Sassoon, I've got the hairstyle for it.

Tonight, I met up with Gillian. We were going to the pictures.

It's awkward. Gillian can't come to Foreman's Yard (for obvious reasons) and she doesn't want me going round her flat (for reasons I can guess but won't go into). We have to find somewhere with a Ladies, so we can change.

At the foot of Coal Hill, there's a Youth Club attached to the church,

where only the weediest Year Three kids would consider going. Mrs Haigh, the Vicar's wife, doesn't approve of music with a beat, which allegedly encourages licentious dancing, and so plays only light religious records. 'Michael, Row the Boat Ashore, Hallelujah', et cetera. The vicar serves the captive youth ginger beer, which he makes himself from Earthling organisms that fester in jars, which often detonate spectacularly. Normally, Gillian and I wouldn't be caught dead there, but the club has a good-sized loo with proper mirrors.

There's not much I can do to appear older except wrap a scarf around my head, totter on heels, and put on a long coat. Gillian pads her bra with handkerchiefs and lets out her ponytail into this brilliant mane. She also has a pleated green skirt that shows her knees and a neckscarf that matches.

We worked a long time, doing each other's faces with war paint. I wound up with scarlet lipstick and heavy blue eyeshadow and looked like a tribal princess prepared for sacrifice to the volcano gods. Gillian has a much better face than me: a little eyebrow pencil and a dab of lipstick and — *voila!* — a double for Shirley Anne Field.

'Cool, man,' I said, examining her beat style. 'Straight from the fridge.'

'Don't talk to me about fridges, Forehead. Not in this weather. Two minutes outside and I can't feel my knees.'

Then we got out of the Youth Club, avoiding Mr Haigh and his ping-pong table. We passed the Vicar's wife on the way out, and she gave us a Look. When we were well away from the club, we both had the giggles.

'Did you see that?' I said.

'The poor woman thinks we're on the Road to Wrack and Ruin.'

'Well, aren't we?'

'Not half!'

By the time we got to the Rialto — *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, with Tom Courtenay — the picture had started. Neither of us was that interested in seeing it anyway. In the framed photographs outside, Tom Courtenay looked a bit too much like John the Martian and we saw enough of him at School not to need a feature-length reminder.

So, there we were, all dolled up and nowhere to go.

‘I’ve got an idea,’ said Gillian. ‘We can obviously pass for over eighteen, so let’s go to The Pump. I hear they have a really super jukebox. It’s near where you live, isn’t it?’

I didn’t want to seem timid, so I agreed.

I thought we’d never be allowed in, because pubs are stricter than the Rialto about how old you are. So there wouldn’t be any harm in it.

As we got near The Pump, Gillian told me to walk older.

‘How do you do that?’ I asked.

She demonstrated: sticking her padded chest out, pointing her chin up and adding inches to her height by keeping her legs straight and stretching her spine. I tried it, but it wasn’t comfortable and got the giggles again.

Gillian was a bit annoyed, but had to giggle too.

‘Something funny, girls?’

The boy who asked was outside The Pump, tying the covers on a motorcycle. He wore a black leather jacket and gauntlets. A checkered Rupert scarf flopped out from under his crash helmet.

‘Only the way you look, Mr Spaceman,’ said Gillian.

I was tense inside. It wasn’t sensible to cheek one of the Ton-Up Boys.

He took his helmet off and wiggled his eyebrows.

‘Take me to your, leader,’ he said. ‘I’ve come to Earth to harvest your girls. The women of our planet are used up, and we’re searching for volunteers to replace them.’

‘Good luck, chummie,’ said Gillian.

‘The name’s Zack, not “Mr Spaceman”, not “chummie”.’

‘Izzat so?’

‘You girls have names?’

‘Might do,’ said Gillian.

‘For instance ... ?’

Zack wasn’t alone. He had a group of friends with him, lounging about outside the pub like F.M.’s gang, all in motorcycle gear. The Ton-Up Boys. There were even a couple of sharp-faced girls, in big bloke-sized jackets and spray-on jeans, ponytails tied back with pink gauze.

Zack put his helmet on his bike and took a flick-knife out of his pocket.

They're banned in School, but some older boys carry them anyway. With a smile, Zack pressed the stud and the blade shot out – only it wasn't a knife, but a comb. His dark blond hair was pressed out of shape by the helmet, and he began to sculpt a wave into it.

'Enough grease on that to fry bacon,' said Gillian.

I thought she was risking death or worse, especially when some of Zack's Boys laughed. But he just smiled, finished with his hair and put his comb away.

'How gorgeous is that, love?' he asked.

'On a scale of one to ten, about thirty below.'

'Like the weather, then. You look like you could both do with a warm-up. How would you like double brandies?'

I had a precognitive vision of being very sick later.

'Are you buying, Flash?' asked Gillian.

'Might be,' he said.

'Don't believe a word Zack says,' said one of his friends, who had what seemed like a tire-mark down one cheek. 'He's always skint by Saturday night. Blows his whole wage packet on Friday's boozing.'

'That's not true. I save a ten-bob-note for emergencies, and the chilling of these angels is clearly an emergency.'

'Sum-Mooth,' chanted several of the lads.

'Don't pay any attention,' said Zack. 'They're jealous of my winning ways.'

'You don't half fancy yourself, don't you?' said Gillian.

'If I do, then I have to go to the back of a very long queue. Behind you two, for a start.'

He had a big smile, but crooked front teeth.

'Dream on, Flash.'

'Can't blame a fella for trying. What school do you go to?'

'Coal Hill,' I said, without thinking.

The lads laughed, and Gillian gave me a dangerous look.

'Jailbait,' said Zack. 'Thought as much. Good night, ladies. See you around ... in a couple of years.'

Zack and his friends trooped into the Pump, leaving us standing outside in the cold.

Gillian gave up standing tall and glared electric fury at me.

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘I didn’t think.’

When angry, Gillian’s ‘older’ disguise slipped. She seemed like an infant on the verge of a tantrum, face purplish in the dark.

‘What do you look like, Forehead?’ she said, putting a thumb on my lips and smearing. ‘A sad clown.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said again, hearing myself whine.

Gillian walked off without saying anything else.

I assume that this is the end of my short career as a beat girl.

Later –

Trudging from The Pump down Totter’s Lane to Foreman’s Yard, I was miserable. Grown-up shoes weren’t suitable for the iced-over pavement, which made it hard to keep a balance. The sound of music (something rocking) and conviviality from the pub just emphasised how shut out I was. Now, I was even shut out from Gillian’s little gang of weirdoes. I knew she’d make John side with her. I had become the outsiders’ outsider.

I heard a whispering, crackling sound unlike a human voice.

It made me cold inside. It took a few moments for me to realise I was afraid.

Usually, I get annoyed, not scared.

There was no one out on the street. Only a few lights on behind curtains.

The whispering again.

I looked around. Several of the street-lamps were dark.

Icicle stalactites hung from them. I wondered if what I’d heard was the wind in the icicles.

I’m sensitive. I admit it.

Sometimes, I can feel things others can’t.

I *knew* I wasn’t alone on the street. And the other presence wasn’t a person. Not being a proper person myself, I can recognise things with intelligence that aren’t human.

I was being watched. By eyes in the ice.

I tried to walk faster, but slipped, losing a shoe. My stockinged foot touched frozen pavement and a cold shock shot up my leg. I wobbled, but didn't fall over.

My worst fear: the Truant Officer has come to take us Home!

I was in a panic, for Grandfather. I thought I knew what the Masters would do to him.

After our trial, I wouldn't be allowed to remember him or he me. It would be as if we weren't related. No, it would be more than that: we *wouldn't* be related. The whole of time and space would shift, so that we both still had lives, but separate and different, lived by the Rules.

The gates of Foreman's Yard were open. The blue light shone on the top of the Box.

My panic passed. I knew we hadn't been found.

But there was still a new presence in Totter's Lane. An intellect vast, cold and ... unsympathetic?

I picked up my shoe and hobbled into the junkyard.

Sunday, March 31st, 1963

I stayed home, in my room.

Home is the Box.

It's not just a Box. It's also a Ship. It might well be a Ship inside a Box. The thing is that the Inside is an Outside. It's outside everything.

You wouldn't understand. I can set down the Physics, filling in the rest of this diary with diagrams, but you still wouldn't understand.

Trust me.

Of course, you're probably me. In the future, grown-up, reading back on what you were like when you were my age. Will the white fog have lifted?

Grandfather still has missing parts in his mind and memory. Whenever people ask his name, he gets out of saying it. Lately, he gets out of being in situations where people might ask his name.

I should know Grandfather's name, but I don't.

It's as if he had a name once but it was taken away, not just from him but from everyone.

I used to think I was unique.

But Grandfather is like me. And so is Gillian – when anyone asks about her cuts and bruises, I sense her getting something like the mindache I have when I think too near to the fog.

After last night, I don't think Gillian is my friend any more. She went home angry. I was being a complete child, speaking without thinking. What I did wrong actually *mattered*. Though she was giving Zack a hard time, cheeking him back, I could tell Gillian was testing him, throwing remarks to see how they bounced. I think she'd like to be a Ton-Up Girl when she leaves School. Not the sort that sits on a pillion or flutters a scarf to start a race, but the sort with a motorcycle of her own – or at least one of those nippy little Italian scooters – who keeps up with the Boys.

It took *ages* to take off that 'sad clown' make-up. Gillian was right about that: I did look stupid. What could I have been thinking?

I accept that there are things missing inside my head.

Memories are like newspapers and magazines. You can't keep them all, but you can cut out the articles and pictures to put in a scrapbook. Only it's not your choice. It's like someone else does the cutting and pasting. They put in things you'd rather leave for the dustmen and throw away things that would have been useful or your favourites.

When I read this, will I know the answers?

Or will I need this to remind me of the questions I've forgotten?

Thinking about Grandfather, I'm sometimes worried – *terrified* – that the fog-patches get bigger as we grow up.

Not for people in general, but for people like Grandfather and me. If we count as people.

There are times when Grandfather doesn't know me or himself. He arrives at the end of a sentence having forgotten how he began it, and then gets flustered. He tries to cover his lapses with bad temper, but I see how they hurt him. I can feel his frustration and pain.

Then again, there are times when Grandfather isn't a person.

Living in a Box, rarely stepping outside, looking at screens and dials. It's not what people are supposed to do. I don't think it's what Grandfather wants, but his fog-patches are larger than mine and are growing.

(Sometimes, I can feel inside Grandfather's head. It doesn't work with anyone else. The sad thing is that it's easiest when the least is there, when he's less like himself. Then I get frightened. There's a black void inside the white fog and that's dangerous. Fall into that and we might as well never have run away.)

At home, they have rules we can't live by.

Later –

According to the *Sunday Express*, which I nipped out to the newsagent's to buy from Malcolm's Mum, the Russians and the Americans blame each other for the worldwide adverse weather conditions. Apparently, it's unseasonably wretched even in the Southern hemisphere – there are snowstorms in Australia and icebergs near

Polynesia. President Kennedy's scientific advisers are insisting on an international investigation into the Novosibirsk Project, but the Kremlin's scientists claim that American oil drilling in Alaska is as likely to be behind the disaster. Both sides have had to admit that they've bored deeper than they said they would. But it should be hotter inside the Earth, not icy. The Giles cartoon, the main reason for buying the *Express*, shows Granny on ice-skates leading a crocodile of scruffy children on a reckless career around the iced-over Serpentine while Mum and Dad try to melt bottles of frozen stout over a fire made with deck-chairs.

I'm not sure if John isn't right about the cold being an attack. But there's something else too.

I'm worried that it's our fault.

I think the Box may have broken something.

It stands to reason that the space has to come from somewhere. The Box doesn't work properly. Could it be that it is turning heat into dimension? And it's out of control, increasingly drawing all the warmth out of the planet, adding more and more *space* to its insides?

We only use a few rooms. There may be as much to explore inside the Box as out.

Grandfather is always tinkering. Trying to cover our tracks.

It's coldest near the Box.

The junkyard is an ice grotto.

It's quite pretty, I suppose. Sparkling white and blue, with light trapped inside the pearly slabs of ice, and the buried shapes of the scrap iron vague behind the semi-transparent frozen thickness.

Early in the evening, after listening to Alan 'Fluff' Freeman's Top Twenty on the wireless ('Foot Tapper' by the Shadows is Number One – *yuck!*), I went searching for Grandfather.

He wasn't in his laboratory or the Control Room.

Away from the fan-heater in my room, the Box is cold enough to frost my breath. I followed the cold to the door, which was open a crack, and peeked out. Thick cables ran from Grandfather's laboratory out through the door, so I knew he was experimenting nearby.

I was chilled by more than just the cold.

In the junkyard, Grandfather was talking to someone.

Through the door-crack, I saw Grandfather – wrapped up with a Russian fur hat and woolly cloak – holding up what might have been a large loudhailer or a small observatory dish with a crystalline filament extending from its centre.

I could only hear odd phrases. I wasn't sure if he was having a conversation or muttering to himself.

‘... an act of usurpation ... pestilential invaders ... “original tenant”, eh? ... it'll get colder, of course ... big ball of intelligent ice ...’

He *was* having a conversation. I saw him nod and listen, but couldn't make out another voice, just a sound like someone gargling with ice-cubes.

I recognised the whispering. The presence I had sensed last night. I should have known that Grandfather would have felt it too, and taken steps to make contact with it.

He often says that Earth is no place to go for a decent conversation.

Grandfather was looking *up* at whoever – whatever – he was talking with. He pointed his apparatus.

I risked opening the door a little wider.

There was no one with Grandfather, but he stood in front of a wall of glistening, shifting ice. Inside were shapes, like the Palaeolithic men sometimes found in glaciers. The shapes weren't moving, but the ice was. Its surface was fluid, but not liquid.

Last night, I had thought there were eyes in the ice. Now, there were faces too.

‘And so you wish to rid yourself of this infestation, my friend,’ said Grandfather. ‘What do the pests call themselves? Human beings? Clearly, no loss at all to the greater scheme of things. Prior right of occupation, in this case, is certainly on your side. We shall see what can be done, my dear fellow. I regret having caused you any inconvenience. It's not my place to get in the way, not at all, not at all.’

I let the door shut, pinching the cable.

My hearts were racing.

Later —

Grandfather came in. He didn't speak to me.

I worry about him.

I worry about why we are here, and what we might do. I'm more like him than them, the people he calls 'the infestation'.

I might seem to fit in, if only marginally, but it's just pretending.

I am not of this Earth. Like the Mekon.

The only person I've told is Malcolm, because he accepts *everything* as a magical mystery. Yesterday, he asked me whether if there was still snow on the ground Father Christmas would come again at Easter. He thinks a race of tiny people live inside television sets, ruled by giant bodiless heads called Announcers. I've told him about other planets, other places. When he grows up, he'll think I was just telling him stories.

That makes me sad.

Human beings – *people* – are aliens. Singlehearts who race through their lives, grow up and old fast, wear out their faces without ever changing.

But they're *not* an infestation.

This is their home, and we are their guests. Nobody even invited us.

I think, fighting mindache, we ran away from School. Where we come from, the Masters are angry with us.

I can get round the mindaches. There's a way to remember without hurting, by thinking in equivalents. So long as I dress up what lies beyond my mental fogs with the scenery of the Here and Now, I can remember Home.

Because of persistent talking-back in class, a Teacher wanted to give Grandfather a million Lines and the Cane. Grandfather appropriated School equipment (the Box) without a note from the Groundskeeper, and bunked off Double Geog, persuading me to ditch Games and come along with him for a half-holiday. We're off the grounds, and the Truant Officer is on the case. We've been on a spree of rule-breaking: smoking behind the bikesheds, running in the corridors, stealing from the tuck-shop, laughing in Assembly, appearing improperly uniformed.

If we get hauled back to School, it'll be worse than Detention.

There's one last rule Grandfather hasn't broken. A big one, a defining rule that is written into his (my?) brain, like the impulses that keep the lungs breathing and the hearts pumping. The primary rule says we mustn't *meddle*. We live outside time and space, looking in, observing, noting, taking an academic interest. But we do not *meddle*. The theory is that it is all none of our business. We accept no blame or credit. We know everything but affect nothing.

Here, I can admit this: I am a rebel. Like Arthur Seaton. Like Lawrence of Arabia.

I don't think I believe in rules at all. Even – *especially* – the primary rule.

I think *meddling* is an obligation.

I want to be a part of time and space. When we left Home, machines in the Box came to life: clocks, to tick away the seconds; odometers, to measure the miles. Grandfather put those devices there, though they had no purpose until we ran away. Home isn't a place where anything happens. Space there is like it is inside the Box – if you're measuring all the dimension in the universe, the space of Home doesn't count. When we left, we winked into existence, entering the steady stream that runs from past to the future, emerging from the Box to become dimensional. Before that, I don't even know if we qualified as being *alive*.

I worry that Grandfather has the primary rule still in his head, that running away from Home hasn't helped him run away from his conditioning. In the Box, we may always have Home with us.

(Maybe the Box is still at Home; what we stole might only be the Door.)

I have the no-meddling rule in my head too, but because I'm young (only on my first face), it hasn't taken root. Something always tells me not to interfere, but I can argue against it. Even at the cost of losing memories, I can resist the School's discipline.

I think this is why Grandfather took me with him.

There are things I can do that he can't.

Monday, April 1st, 1963

April Fools' Day. Stupid jokes at School. A sign up on the notice board promised champagne and chips for the first twenty pupils who ask the dinner ladies for the 'special menu'. Mr Chesterton sent Little Titch out of the classroom to fetch a 'left-handed blackboard rubber' from the supplies cupboard. Year One kids ran about, attacking each other and then chanting 'pinch, punch, first of the month, no return of any kind.' What's the point of that? Does saying 'no return of any kind' really oblige someone who's been pinched and punched not to retaliate?

Spring is supposed to be here. No fear of that.

Later –

Gillian sat next to me in English as usual, and chatted as if nothing bad happened between us on Saturday night. If she's chosen to forget, then I will too.

It doesn't matter that she called me a 'sad clown'.

She's my friend. I'll hang on to that. All my doubts and fears were wasted. I should be used to it.

People are changeable. Their lives are so brief and busy that they have to crowd all the emotions they could possibly feel into a short time, like a thirsty man drinking in a pub after last orders have been called. It explains a lot about the way human beings have run the Earth.

Besides, I'm more concerned with what happened afterwards, with the presence in the ice.

The thing Grandfather was talking with.

Now, I feel it at School, on the street, everywhere. It's less obvious when the sun's out, but it's still there.

I have become afraid of the snow.

Later –

At morning break, there was a big snowball battle.

It was viciously cold. Thick, gloomy cloud cover made mid-morning seem like nightfall. A sharp wind blew darts at exposed skin, driving children into sheltered corners.

I had a dreadful feeling, an after-the-iceberg, before-the-sinking numbness.

Officially, Mr Carker has banned snowballs, but teachers started this to-do. Mr Chesterton caught Ape Okehurst, who takes Games, on the back of the head, and shouted ‘April fool!’ Mr Okehurst swore bloody revenge, authorising his soccer pets to pitch in and support his cause.

F.M., no teacher’s favourite (though his ‘resident bully’ position is at least tolerated at Coal Hill), made a small, hard-packed ball and tossed it as if shot putting, hitting Gillian in the head. I was standing close to Gillian, near the original snowman, and heard the crack of the ball hitting her. It fell apart. A couple of marbles were clustered in the middle.

What a rat! A rat’s rattiest rat!!

Gillian, red-faced with rage, made fists.

‘Anything your old man can do, I can do better,’ said Francis.

He had his gang with him.

Gillian gets in trouble for fighting. She could charge through a pack on the hockey pitch, even without a stick. Sometimes, she loses control and goes berserk. I know she tries not to. She was trying now. If she forgets herself, she hurts people. She once won a fight with a Year Six lad who touched her chest.

‘If your old man can put you in hospital,’ said F.M., ‘I can put you in the undertaker’s.’

If Gillian went wild, the F.M. gang would have an *excuse*.

Instead, she picked up one of the marbles – a green glassie – and *flicked* it at him. I don’t know if she was aiming for his eye, but she bopped him just above the eyebrow. F.M. yelled and found he was bleeding.

The snowball fight was making so much noise that no one noticed.

Mr Chesterton tried to call a truce, but Ape was being merciless. They had big boys' games to play.

F.M. took out his cricket bat and grinned, nastily. Half his forehead was blue, and a crust of frozen blood marring his temple like a birthmark.

I stood in front of Gillian, hoping F.M. wouldn't hit me with the bat.

'You stay away,' I told F.M.

There are rules in the playground. Not School Rules, Kid Rules. There are things boys can't do to girls in fights. For the purposes of fighting, Gillian isn't a girl. But I am. Rules get broken all the time, though.

F.M. took a swing. I was sure my head was about to be knocked for a six.

The bat whistled past my face and F.M. turned round, gaining momentum. The bat slammed against the snowman's head.

His gang cheered.

A flurry of ice-drops came off the snowman.

The cheering died.

The snowman wasn't beheaded. The impact hammered one of the pebble-eyes deep into the head and left a flattened mark.

F.M. dropped the bat and held up his hands, wrists badly jarred.

He said words I won't write down.

I went near the snowman, puzzled. It must have become an ice statue, solid as marble.

There was a creak inside the snowman. Its head turned. F.M. screamed like a girl.

I got out of the way.

The snowman came to life. It rose a couple of feet into the air, fused-together legs extending into a thick column. Arms came away from its sides, outsized hands sprouting a dozen icicle-barb fingers. Powder snow clung to the surface of the body, but the insides were clear ice, cracking and knitting.

F.M. was crying, and no wonder.

The snowhead still bore the mark of his bat. The cap and scarf gave it a jolly look.

The snowman flowed across the playground, more like a giant white

slug than a tubby cartoon person. It towered over F.M., pointing an arm down at him. Spears of ice shot out and went into his leg, shearing through his trousers.

Bright red blood spattered across the footprint-studded white ground.

F.M. screamed again, like an infant, like a *baby*. He wet himself.

(It'll be hard hanging on to the 'resident bully' office after wetting himself in front of the whole school. Do I sympathise? No fear.)

The snowball battle was suspended.

The snowman froze.

Mr Okehurst came over and asked what had happened. Mr Chesterton went for the nurse.

'Out with it, Minto,' demanded Mr Okehurst. 'Who did this to you?'

Sobbing, F.M. pointed up at the snowman.

It had shifted maybe five feet across the playground and was tilted over, but its arms were by its side. The bark-pieces smile I'd put on its face was elaborately innocent. Ape had missed it coming to life.

F.M. couldn't speak. He was shuddering into shock. Mr Okehurst gripped the bully's leg with both hands, stemming the flow of blood, keeping clear of the other wetness. The F.M. gang had scattered to the winds.

The bell went, for afternoon lessons.

'It ... it was th-th-them, sir,' said F.M.

It took me a moment to realise he was pointing at us.

'*Girls*,' said Ape, in disbelief.

I was about to protest, but Gillian held my arm.

This wasn't justice, but she knew how it would come out. If we explained, it would be worse for us.

The nurse turned up, with bandages and liniment. The other children had gone in.

'You two juvenile delinquents are going straight to the Head's Office,' said Mr Okehurst. He looked down at his bloodied hands, and shook his head. 'I don't know what things are coming to. I expect this sort of idiocy from the lads. But ... *girls*!'

Later —

We got DT (Detention). Not just today, but all week. If Mr Carker could keep us in over the Easter holidays, he would. The Strap was mentioned. If it weren't for the fact that the teachers knew F.M. had most likely started any fight he was in, we'd probably be for the Cane. Gillian is the only girl ever to have been caned at Coal Hill.

'Your parents will be informed,' said the Head. 'I shall telephone.'

Gillian was suddenly frightened, more than when the snowman came alive. More than when she had to step into the Head's Office for punishment.

'Dad isn't on the phone,' she said.

The Head glared at me.

'I live with my Grandfather.'

'And is there a telephone in your house?'

'I've never seen one.'

Mr Carker slammed a ruler down on his desk, as if a child's hand were held out in front of him. In his small study, the sound was loud and echoey.

'Do you think you're being *funny*, Foreman?'

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't explain. A lot of things can be found in our 'house', many of them surprising to most people (an elephant's foot umbrella stand full of *assegais*, a chrono-synclastic infundibulator), but the one thing anyone might expect to find (a telephone) seemed to have gone missing. I couldn't say for certain that there *wasn't* a phone somewhere, but it had never come to light.

'There's a boy in the hospital. I won't put up with jokes.'

'No, sir.'

Neither Gillian nor I tried to tell about the snowman.

There's no point with grown-ups. They live on a different plane of reality. I don't know if they choose to or not, but they have a strange ability to ignore what's going on in front of them.

Mr Carker compromised and gave us sealed notes to be handed over to our 'parents or guardians'.

'I trust that the punishment levied on you in School for this atrocity

will be doubled when you get home.'

Gillian didn't say anything.

If she handed over the note, she'd be in a worse state than F.M. tomorrow morning. It was the thing we didn't talk about, but which I knew. In a flash, I understood that the Head knew it too, that everyone *knew*. He was just going along with it, not saying anything.

'You can't do that, sir,' I said. 'Gillian's Dad will ...'

Mr Carker examined at me like a specimen.

'Will what, Foreman?'

Gillian also looked at me, startled and with real hate, *much* worse than when I gave our age away in front of the Ton-Up Boys. Even she would rather go along with it, take a belting, than say out loud what it was like for her at home.

'Nothing, sir,' I said, ashamed.

Later –

I'd never had a DT before, but I knew what it would be like. A group of pupils, convicted of minor offences (ie: not worth the Strap or the Cane but worse than Lines), were kept in School after the end of lessons for two hours and used as slave labour for dirty jobs.

One of the others on DT today was Joe Gibson, whose Dad is a shop steward. He said Detention is a way of saving Coal Hill money on proper handymen. He was a DT veteran, mostly for talking back and questioning School Rules – John once called him 'a typical barrack-room lawyer'.

The DT crew was five boys – all from Year Four and Five, mostly for ill-timed, after-twelve-noon April Fool jokes – and Gillian and me, under the supervision of Ape Okehurst. We had to report to the Assembly Hall when all the other pupils were leaving for their buses or walking home, and be given our tasks and equipment.

'I hear you put that Neanderthal Minto in hospital,' said Gibson. 'Well done, ladies. Someone had to teach that porky git a lesson.'

Gillian wasn't talking to me.

She was thinking a lot. About what I'd nearly said to the Head. That was more important to her than the snowman.

I couldn't help but think of the snowman, though it made my head hurt.

It wasn't anything to do with my usual fog-patches, but it was in a related area. Unexplained phenomena are short-cuts into the fog. Whenever John wants to talk about flying saucers buzzing the RAF or Stonehenge being an ancient spaceport, I get an instant migraine as my brain warns me not to join in.

The snowman came alive.

The presence wasn't just in Totter's Lane. It was here, too. And it was getting frisky. Showing itself. Flexing icy muscles. Mr Okehurst had us put on our coats, scarves and gloves and took us to the equipment shed and issued heavy-duty gear. Picks and shovels. Blowtorches. Ladders. After consideration, he even doled out oilskin slickers to wear over our coats. DT regulars groaned, sensing an unpleasant chore in the offing.

The job today was to attack the ice. The build-up was so heavy that there was a risk the gutters would be ripped off the walls. Mr Okehurst didn't quite know what to do with Gillian and me, assuming (wrongly!) that we'd be useless with picks and shovels. In the end, he decided we were light enough to go up ladders and use torches on thick ice-patches.

'And Hatcher doesn't hold the ladder,' he ordered.

Dudley Hatcher, a spotty Year Five boy, was on DT for looking up girls' skirts. His nickname was 'Dirty Gertie'.

We trooped out to the gloomy playground. By the time our two hours was up, it'd be night and the freeze would be on.

I kept away from the snowman. A scraped trail in the snow marked where it had moved. It was bigger than it had been, as if children had added to its bulk with padded-on snowballs. Barbed ice branches sprouted from its sides. A beard of icicle tusks fringed its head. It seemed less like a snowman, despite its cap and scarf, than some species of dangerous tree.

The boys held the ladders against a wall and Ape pointed up.

Where gutters met over a pipe there was a clump of ice. It was a blooming mass, a dirty white jellyfish trailing thick streamers down the pipe and along buckled gutters.

‘Looks like a ton of frozen tripe,’ said Gibson.

‘Up there and at it, girls,’ ordered Mr Okehurst. ‘You lads be ready to smash and shovel the lumps that fall. Gertie, you’re on wheelbarrow duty.’

On DT, teachers can call kids what they like.

I was worried for a moment that Gillian would take her torch to me when we were up there, but I knew her anger wouldn’t last. Not with me. She wouldn’t forget, but she was sensible about it. She had got over Saturday night at the Pump; she would get over this afternoon in the Head’s office.

We climbed up the ladders.

‘Race you,’ she said, speaking to me again.

She scrambled ahead and won. I chose to be careful. The boys down below made comments but looked anywhere but up our skirts.

(Mr Carker has turned down dozens of petitions that girls be allowed to wear trousers to School. I think he’d be happiest if we had to wear Mohammedan veils and Idaho potato-sacks.)

At the top, up near the roof, we perched and aimed flame at the ice.

I was glad of the blowtorch, which at least kept my fingers warm. The meltwater soon soaked my mittens, which began to crackle as the wool iced.

Inside the ice was the blurred shape of the gutter-joint. Water flowed where the torch-flames played.

‘Watch out below,’ said Gillian out loud. A large chunk detached and avalanched to the ground, smashing into jagged ice-cubes.

‘The snowman’s dangerous,’ I said to Gillian, quietly so the others couldn’t hear.

‘We should melt him,’ she said, holding her blowtorch steady. ‘With these.’

‘That’ll get us more than a DT,’ I reminded her. ‘Mr Carker likes the idea of the snowman, remember.’

‘Crusty Carker doesn’t know what planet he’s on.’

A cracking ripple ran along the iced gutter.

My ladder slid out under me. Gibson and two other boys struggled to hold it upright. My blowtorch fell, and the boys had to get out of the

way. The ladder wavered in the air and crashed away from the wall.

I held the ice-coated gutter with unfeeling fingers. My insides turned around.

I didn't understand why I wasn't falling. Then I realised Gillian had a hold of my shoulder, fist tight around a fold of my slicker.

'Get your feet on the other ladder, Foreman,' shouted Ape. I saw Gillian's screwed-up face, remembering how she'd looked at me in the Head's study.

'Don't worry, Susan,' she said. 'I won't let go.'

I hadn't thought that she would.

But I still got my feet on the ladder and found hand-holds. It was awkward for both of us, but we clung together to get balance. Mr Okehurst and all the boys were holding the bottom of the ladder. Even Dirty Gertie was needed.

The gutter was rippling. Close up, I saw ice moving like sludge, wriggling in waves, not liquefying but flowing. It was crackling, like the snowman.

Gillian and I looked along the gutter.

All the ice was alive, hanging from the window-frames and eaves and tiles. It was moving. Even frost on the windows shifted, reflecting the sunset, making transparent star-shaped rainbows.

There was a scream from below.

Gillian and I looked down.

The snow carpet writhed, swarming up over the boys' shoes and socks, rising to knee-level. The ladder swayed as the boys let go and started dancing and stamping, trying to escape.

I saw blood blotting Dirty Gertie's turn-ups.

The snow was full of spiny ice chunks.

A fist of ice shot out of the mass wound round the gutter and whizzed just past my face, aiming at Gillian. It was at the end of a solid tendril. I saw through the ice-arm, with its near-molten centre and iron-hard outer skin. Deadly diamonds scratched for my face like fingers. Gillian shoved her blowtorch at the attacking arm, and its claws went to water.

The ladder wouldn't stay upright much longer.

We were just by a big window, panes frosted over. I nodded at the

glass and shouted ‘Torch it’.

Gillian, forgetting any rules about damage to School property, played the flame over a stretch of the glass.

The frost, which seemed about to make a hideous face, melted instantly.

I kicked at the pane. A bad idea. My weight pushed the ladder away from the wall without breaking the window.

Gillian held onto the ladder with both hands, dropping her torch, and stiffened her body, pointing her feet at the window like a pole-vaulter. The ladder swayed out, away from the wall, then pendulumed back. I swung round to the other side to help with the momentum, bringing Gillian’s stiff-legged weight against the window.

The glass broke inwards, and Gillian’s bare legs hooked on the sill. She was scratched and bleeding.

She slipped through into the classroom, and pulled me with her. The ladder fell away. We huddled by the window for a moment, hugging, then poked our heads up over the sill.

Down in the playground, Mr Okehurst and the boys lay in scatters of blood, living frost swarming over them, icicles through their clothes and bodies. Spikes rose and fell from the ground, moving the corpses.

Gillian had never seen anyone dead before.

There was no point in wasting time on asking what was happening.

‘We’ve got to get out of here,’ I said. ‘Grandfather will know what to do.’

Gillian shook her head.

‘No grown-up knows what to do, Forehead. Look at Ape down there. My Dad won’t be able to cope with this. Neither will your Granddad.’

I couldn’t tell her that she didn’t know Grandfather.

Also, I wasn’t sure whether Grandfather would want to help ‘the infestation’. He might be on the side of the snow. Or he might want to fold his arms and watch what was happening. Helping could come under the category of ‘meddling’.

‘If we get out,’ said Gillian, ‘it’ll be up to us. No parents, no teachers, no policemen. Just us.’

There was a scraping noise in the now-dark classroom.

We both turned. Gillian picked up a chair, like a lion-tamer.

‘It’s me,’ said a voice. ‘Gillian, Forehead, it’s me. John.’

He came forward. He wore his coat over a khaki shirt and trousers.

‘R.O.T.C. was called off. Due to the weather. There was no way of telling Dad to come and collect me early.’

‘A lot more is going to be called off due to the weather,’ said Gillian. ‘Look out there.’

The snowman was on the move again. And it wasn’t alone.

Other, lesser snowmen were on the grounds. They assembled, like troops. Some weren’t made by human hands. A drift detached itself from the side of the bikesheds and formed into a legless shape, an ice skeleton cloaking itself with powdery snow.

‘They look like knights in armour,’ said John.

‘Cold Knights,’ I said.

Gillian laughed and punched my arm. Her laugh was slightly cracked.

‘Are there people inside?’ asked John.

‘No, they’re just ice,’ I said.

The Cold Knights reviewed the fallen, Mr Okehurst and the DT boys.

‘What’s happening?’ John asked.

He was looking at me, expecting I’d know the answer. ‘This isn’t normal,’ he said.

‘And neither am I? So I should just *know*?’

‘No, Fore ... Susan. It’s just that, well, you know funny things sometimes, things most people don’t.’

‘This from “John the Martian”. Thank you very much.’

John was crestfallen. I’d made a mistake and used his nickname out loud. Gillian called him ‘Martian’ all the time and it didn’t matter, but he hadn’t expected it of *me*.

All this is very complicated. Emotions, illogical reactions, the who’s-in-who’s-out game, who likes who, who hates who, who used to hate who but now likes who. I’m not a singleheart but I’m not left out of it. I can’t help thinking that things are done more efficiently on more rational worlds.

The thought was like a needle in my brain.

Sometimes, along with the pain, come true glimpses. Not paraphrases,

but the unearthly actuality. The fog clears momentarily and I see or remember something. Rarely anything useful. It adds to the confusion, really.

There is a rational place somewhere. Grandfather didn't want to live there. Given the choice, neither did I. Though I felt the appeal of serenity, of calm, of dispassionate observation, I also knew it wasn't for me.

My hearts were beating out of time with each other. 'Susan ... Susan, what happened?'

John was staring into my face, eyes huge behind his specs. My face stung. Gillian had just slapped me.

'You went away for a second,' said John. 'Into the Twilight Zone.'

I gulped and apologised.

'It's all a bit much,' I said.

'The Cold Knights are on the march,' said John.

I looked out of the window. It was full night now, and the streetlamps had come on outside the school. A dropped blowtorch still burned, spreading a fan of firelight across the playground. The snowman led his troops away from the building. They moved in unison, more like one many-bodied creature than individuals. Without legs, they couldn't walk so they crept, sometimes rolling over like balls, gathering scraps and pebbles to snowy hides, stretching out icy tentacles.

'What I wouldn't give for a flamethrower,' mused John.

The Knights halted, near the school gates.

A vehicle was turning into the driveway, headlights freezing the army of snowmen.

'It's Dad!'

The vehicle was a Jeep. Captain Brent was in it, with his driver.

John's father hopped out of the Jeep, snapped an irritated glance at the Cold Knights as if they were just obstacles, huffed plumes of white exhalation and stamped a bit.

'Dad, Dad,' John called.

The Captain heard something, but took a moment to realise where the noise came from and what it was.

'What are you doing up there? You should be ready to go. We're

behind schedule.'

'Dad, stay away from the snowmen.'

He had walked across the playground. He stood over the blowtorch.

'Damned dangerous, this,' he said, picking it up. 'What fool left it lying about?'

'Dad, the snowmen! Watch them.'

Captain Brent was irritated and puzzled at the same time. Then the penny seemed to drop.

'Oh yes. April first. Hah bloody hah.'

'Dad ... '

John was almost crying, trying to get through to his father.

The blowtorch cast light around the playground. Captain Brent saw the dead bodies. He whirled around. There was a scream.

The Cold Knights were attacking the Jeep.

They were like a wave, flowing over the driver. They snowmen suddenly melded, a living glacier rising up and crashing down. The driver was trapped inside, a blurred scarecrow in a semi-transparent block. I don't know if the soldier was crushed or drowned, but it was over quickly.

'Let's go,' said Gillian. 'We're no safer here.'

Tentacles of ice had twisted through the open window, and were pulsing, weaving together.

We clattered out of the classroom, down the stairs and out through the Crush Hall onto the playground. Captain Brent still held the blowtorch, perhaps the most useful weapon in the circumstances, but its flame was guttering.

The giant ice fist that had gripped the driver was around the entire Jeep, lifting it off the ground. Its bonnet buckled under the pressure, tires crushed, doors burst and broken.

Captain Brent had nothing to say.

'Dad, it's an attack,' John explained.

That got through to him.

'You little idiot,' he snapped at his son. 'What have you done now?'

John was brought up short. Behind his glasses, his eyes were watery.

'It's not my fault,' he wailed.

‘Whenever there’s a ruckus, you’re in the middle of it, Johnno. Who else’s fault would it be? You’ve torn it now.’ A trickle ran down John’s face.

There was a loud crunching noise. The Jeep was in pieces now, some forced out through the ice. The Cold Knights reformed, emerging from their morass, more human-shaped. Most had two stiff legs, and could march. They were sleek rather than tubby.

Gillian looked at the Cold Knights and at John’s Dad. Captain Brent stood stiff and stern, refusing to acknowledge the ice creatures.

‘You’re mad,’ Gillian said to the grown-up. ‘Completely mad.’

‘Don’t you talk to my Dad like that,’ said John, wiping his face with his sleeve.

Gillian looked up at dark skies in disbelief.

The Cold Knights were coming for us.

We had to pull the Captain into the Crush Hall, then barricade the entrance by hauling a heavy cabinet of sport trophies across the doormat. The grown-up wasn’t any help, but didn’t try to stop us. Some of the windows either side of the doors smashed. Snow blew in.

I felt tiny stings and wiped my face. My mitten came away bloody.

The snow was sharp. Each flake was a tiny, malicious razor.

We retreated from the Crush Hall into the Assembly Hall.

‘I’m completely off schedule now, Johnno,’ barked Captain Brent. ‘This won’t do at all. Your mother will have something to say. And the C.O.’

‘Keep your Dad quiet,’ Gillian told John, ‘I need time to think.’

John’s father didn’t believe a child had spoken about him like that.

‘Now see here,’ he began.

‘I know how to see off the Cold Knights,’ said Gillian, interrupting, eyes shining. ‘We should burn down the school!’

Instinctively, I loved the idea!

‘Uh-huh, no-can-do, girly,’ said Captain Brent. ‘Public property.’

Tuesday, April 2nd, 1963

We slept in School. Working out that the furnace must be kept on overnight to stop the pipes freezing (some hope!), we broke into the boiler room and made shelter there.

I fetched my satchel from my desk to write my diary.

I'm still leaving a record for the future. Only I'm not sure any longer that I expect to be in it. If the Cold Knights get us and another ice age descends, trapping all of 'the infestation' like glacier men, maybe it'll be millennia before these frozen pages are found.

Hello, posterity.

Um, posterity implies I have children, which I don't. So it's: hello, futurity.

We found food by breaking into the tuck shop, on the assumption (which I wouldn't expect Mr Carker to go along with) that the Emergency suspends the Rules. We made a feast of cold Cadbury's chocolate and Smith's crisps. John and Gillian were content to drink Tizer, but I ventured into forbidden territory (the Staff Common Room) and found an electric kettle to brew up a pot of tea. The Common Room stinks of stale tobacco. I didn't find the fabled library of confiscated *Liliput* and *Health & Efficiency* magazines or Hank Jansen and Dennis Wheatley paperbacks. My missing *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* did show up, with the bookmark moved on – which means that someone's been reading it! I needed the tea for the warmth as much as the taste. Only by wrapping both hands around a steaming mug could I unfreeze my fingers to the point of managing tiny feats of dexterity like uncurling the little blue-paper twist of salt to shake into a bag of crisps.

Captain Brent snorted disapproval of 'looting', but still ate his chocolate and drank his tea.

John's Dad really is completely mad. He can't accept what he's seen, so he's chosen to ignore it. Grown-ups can do that. Children can't.

Gillian doesn't waste time questioning what she's seen. She concentrates on coping with it.

Wrapped up in blankets from the nurse's cupboard, we slept by the

clanking, spitting furnace. It was actually too hot in the boiler room, and I couldn't do more than doze in spells, troubled by vivid dreams.

Running from the Masters, with Grandfather. Scarecrows in gowns and mortar boards always at our heels. Being shut up in smaller and smaller boxes. Time slowing and speeding and space folding on itself. The Rules throbbing in my mind, like a brain tumour. Never entirely caught, never entirely free. Endless corridors. Captures and escapes. My throat raw from screaming. Infinite homework. Being ignored by the grown-ups. Rasping voices. Clutching hands. Everything changing around me. Bloody torn-out hearts. Heads in baskets.

In a nutshell, a nightmare.

I was haunted by the half-memory of a particular Master, the Truant Officer. When they were in class together, he was everything Grandfather wasn't. They were the Teacher's Pet, awarded Gold Stars, and the Class Dunce, stood in the corner. At Home, the Truant Officer was highly regarded. He dressed smartly and knew the Rules by heart. His reports were covered with orderly ticks. His Box was full of silver cups, awarded for punctuality, self-discipline and meritorious conduct. He was a chap on the rise, a stickler for the Rules, a Good Man to have On the Team, in line for the Headship. When Grandfather ran away, our folder would have been turned over to the Truant Officer for action. He was after us and wouldn't give up until we were caught and Punished. His career depended upon catching us, on not letting there be any exceptions to the Rules.

We would get Detention. And the Truant Officer would become Head.

In my dream, I saw his face, smiling blandly through a neat black beard, cleverness sparkling in his cold, cold eyes. I heard him laugh, and for a moment remembered *everything*.

I woke up in blue light. The slit-windows were iced over. And it was all gone, except for a headache.

Later —

By default, Gillian is in charge.

I've said we should go to Grandfather, but Gillian won't listen. According to her, no grown-up will be any use. She has Captain Brent on hand as a living example.

The telephones are out of order and we can't find a wireless. The caretaker hasn't come to open up the school, which at least puts off the trouble we'll be in for breaking locks and doors.

In the night, I thought I heard noises from outside. Screams. Breakages. The Cold Knights are on the march.

Later —

Breakfast: more sweets. It's funny how you can get fed up with chocolate.

After dawn, we emerged from the boiler room, and looked around cautiously. The bodies and the broken Jeep were still in the playground, half-buried under fresh snow.

John is the most upset by the corpses.

I worried the whole city would be dead, but plenty of people were milling about even before nine o'clock Assembly. Some children and teachers arrived as normal, full of stories about things they'd heard in the night or rumours going round the district. Supposedly, there is some big snow-related fuss up the West End. There were many absences. It obviously wasn't going to be a normal school day, but most people were trying to pretend otherwise.

The Year One and Two girls played skipping games, as usual. Boys skidded around on the patches of dangerously slick ice in the car park, arms out for balance. Some took nasty spills, but no bones were broken.

The Head flapped around, infuriated by the damage to various doors and windows. Rules were bending, ready to break. It was obvious that it wasn't all down to the weather. According to conventional wisdom, snowstorms don't kick in locks.

Mr Carker saw Captain Brent, and came over, glowing with relief.

'Thank Heavens someone's in charge,' he said. 'What on earth has been going on?'

‘Vandalism and indiscipline,’ said the Captain. ‘Of the worst sort. You have my permission to give the boy the Cane. It’s what he needs to get him back on track. I was flogged at my school and it never did me any harm. It’s all this permissiveness and laxity, you know. Late night so-called “satire” programmes on the BBC. That’s what causes chaos like this.’

The Head noticed the dead people.

‘Is that Okehurst?’ he said.

I looked at Gillian and John. These grown-ups weren’t going to help.

The snowman stood over the corpses. In the daylight, he wasn’t moving. The sun shone through a chink in the clouds. The snowy face sparkled with innocence, smiling blandly.

There were pink streaks in the ice-white. Blood.

‘Get up, Okehurst,’ shouted Mr Carker. ‘What’s the matter with you, man?’

John reached into his coat and brought out a pistol. I noticed the holster on his father’s belt was empty. John had appropriated the gun while Captain Brent was sleeping.

‘What are you doing with that, Johnno? Give it back at once.’

John clicked the safety catch and worked the slide. He’d obviously learned something in R.O.T.C., or at least from reading Commando Library comics.

John pointed at the snowman.

‘It comes alive,’ he said, and fired.

The gun kicked in his hand. The noise got everyone’s attention.

A chunk was blown through the snowman’s torso. The bullet shot straight out of its back, momentum barely slowed. A bright orange crater exploded in the wall beyond the snowman. I wondered if John had considered what would have happened if someone were standing behind his target.

The snowman didn’t react. It still smiled.

Mr Carker and Captain Brent, both incandescent, stared at John in gasping fury.

‘It was alive,’ he insisted.

The whole playground was quiet. The shot still rang incredibly loud

inside my skull. A lot of children had clapped mittened hands over their ears like muffs and were crouched down low, against walls to make smaller targets. Last autumn, during the missile crisis over Cuba, a craze for special air raid warning lessons had struck the school. That was before I came to Coal Hill, but John had said the lessons would be starting up again soon, to deal with the Emergency.

I stepped close to the Cold Knight, to investigate. I touched the snow-and-ice chest. It was just a snowman.

Last night, yesterday, it had been different.

‘It’s not cold enough,’ I said, thinking aloud. ‘It has to be below freezing. Remember, at break yesterday, when it moved for the first time, there was that chill wind. And after dark, when they all came to life, it was well below.’

‘What is this nonsense?’ asked the Head.

‘We should have the whole day,’ I said.

‘Unless it gets colder,’ said Gillian.

‘Of course. Unless it gets colder. If it snows, we’ll know.’

‘You’ll all report to my office after Assembly,’ said Mr Carker. ‘To get the Cane. Six strokes. I don’t care if you are Girls. This behaviour can’t be tolerated. It’s barbarous.’

John pointed the gun at the Head.

If they allowed Capital Punishment in schools, that infraction would earn the Chop.

‘There’s no School today,’ said John. ‘No School, ever.’

Some kids cheered.

All the children gathered around, and some of the teachers. Having a gun was like holding the conch in *Lord of the Flies* (which we’re reading in English Lit). Everyone had to pay attention.

‘There’s an Emergency,’ announced John.

‘Everyone should get home,’ said Gillian. ‘Before it gets cold again. And stay indoors. Keep the heating on full blast. Make your parents listen, if you can. Look after yourselves, if you can’t.’

Even the kids who didn’t like Gillian much were listening. Everyone had seen and heard things that worried or puzzled them. Now someone was talking sense.

‘This is unprecedented,’ said Mr Carker. ‘To Assembly, everyone.’

‘People have been killed,’ said Gillian. ‘Look.’

The Head stood over the corpses, but the sight didn’t fit into his idea of the world. A massacre was no reason to disrupt the time-table.

‘Anyone who leaves School grounds in lesson-time will get a Detention.’

A stuttering dread ran through the crowd. DT, DT, DT.

‘I am prepared to Detain the whole school,’ said Mr Carker.

A gasp. I wanted to scream. Why was anyone still taking the Head seriously? He wasn’t even wearing the gown of authority he put on for Assembly, just an old mackintosh and wellies.

‘I think Gillian has the right idea, Mr C,’ said one of the newer teachers, a youth with a beatnik beard who took Art. ‘Last night, there was a riot in town. The army are all over the streets. The wireless is off the air. There were no papers this morning. It’s like the Blitz.’

‘You’re dismissed,’ snapped the Head.

‘Beats being killed, Daddy-O,’ said the teacher.

‘We should call the police, John,’ announced Wendy Coburn, after some thought. ‘And an ambulance.’

‘The phones are dead,’ said John. He’d sat three desks away from Wendy for four years but she’d probably never talked directly to him until now. ‘It’s best you get home.’

Wendy thought it over and agreed. When she moved for the main gates, her entire clique went with her. That left a hole.

‘Detention, Coburn,’ shouted the Head.

Wendy, with her spotless attendance record, hadn’t earned so much as a single Line in her whole School career. She flinched, but kept walking, working out a route for her group, to drop everyone off at their homes in strict order, picking up waifs and strays and stragglers.

Then, everyone started leaving.

The only children who’d turned up were the ones who lived close enough to Coal Hill to walk. The buses and the tube were probably stopped. Mr Carker tried to issue more orders, but nobody paid attention. He kept shouting ‘Detention’, and even ‘it’s the Cane for you’.

‘Go home, Crusty,’ said Gillian, not unkindly.

Following Wendy's example, knots of children formed into big parties for safety, with teachers nominally in charge, and set out for their homes. Mr Carker joined one group of Year One kids and was whisked off, 'infants' tugging at his arms.

In the end, we were left alone. Me, Gillian, John. And Captain Brent.

'Johnno,' he snapped, staring down his son, holding out his hand.

There was a long moment of eye contact between them. Meekly, John gave his father back the gun.

Gillian yelped in outrage at John's stupidity. Captain Brent put on the safety and holstered the gun.

With a hole through it, the snowman was like a Henry Moore sculpture.

'Good shooting, Johnno,' the Captain approved. 'You're finally getting your eye in. I knew R.O.T.C. would whip the dreaming out of you, get you into proper shape.'

Gillian pointed to her head and made a circular finger motion.

'I want to get home before it gets dark again, before it gets *cold*,' I said.

'I'm no safer at home than anywhere,' said Gillian.

'Come with me, then. We can look after each other.'

Gillian thought it over. When I worked out that the Cold Knights were most dangerous when the temperature was below freezing, she had started thinking I might be worth listening to. I was already walking towards the school gate.

'Martian,' said Gillian. 'Are you coming or staying?'

Captain Brent was inspecting the damage, clucking to himself about the side being let down.

'I can't leave him,' John said. 'He's my Dad.'

'Useless,' hissed Gillian, exasperated. 'Bring him along if you must. But be quick about making up your mind.'

I didn't think Captain Brent would come, and knew he would be a deadweight if he did (and with his gun, dangerous?). John spoke softly to his father, hauling him out of his muttering mood, then was firm, as if issuing orders. It got through.

'Military escort,' said the Captain. 'Jolly good idea.'

Gillian held out her hands in wonder.

'You're the leader,' John said to her. 'Let's go.'

‘She knows the way,’ said Gillian, meaning me.

‘Where do you live again?’ asked John.

‘Totter’s Lane.’

‘I know it,’ said John. ‘By the junkyard.’

‘That’s exactly it,’ I said.

‘Good position,’ said John. ‘Defensible.’

‘You live in a *junkyard*?’ asked Gillian.

‘Sort of.’

‘And I thought our gaff was a tip,’ said Gillian.

Later –

It’s a short bus ride, just five stops, from the High Street to Coal Hill. I can leave the Box at half past eight in the morning, catch the bus at the stop outside the Pump and be at School in time to mill around and gossip for a few minutes before nine o’clock Assembly. Usually, I don’t even bother to get the bus and walk, saving the pennies for chocolate. But the buses weren’t running today.

The early morning sun disappeared. Grey cloud churned. A chill wind started blowing.

Before leaving School, Gillian thought to break into the Science Laboratory – kicking in locked doors was addictive –and ‘requisitioned’ a small thermometer.

As long as the mercury was above 32° Fahrenheit, the Cold Knights would be asleep. No matter how gloomy it might get, it rarely froze in England in the day-time.

John said the thermometer wouldn’t be accurate.

‘There’s the wind-chill factor.’

‘Okay, cleverclogs, how would you tell if it were freezing?’

‘When it’s snowing,’ said John, looking up.

I felt cold specks on my face.

The school is away from the shops, in a quiet residential area, next to a park. Front gardens were thickly carpeted with snow, and dune-like drifts humped in the park. The miniature boating lake was frozen solid.

As we made our way down Coal Hill Road, a long sloping street of back-to-back houses, it was impossible not to notice things. Smashed windows and open doors. Prone lumps in the snow. Masterless dogs dragging their leads. A cat licking the face of a frozen woman slumped at a bus stop, her eyes open, her hands like claws. Overturned cars, snowdrifts piling against them.

The snowfall got heavier and we made slow progress.

Everywhere, there were snowmen. Some child-made Frosties, like ours at School – with old hats, pipes, coal-lump buttons, carrot noses, brooms tucked under their arms. Others were dormant Cold Knights, having hauled themselves together and stood to attention. They were icier, more substantial, with great glassy slabs like armour. Some sprouted approximate faces. All had icicle beards. Many were streaked red.

‘It’s like an army of occupation,’ said John.

It couldn’t be much past ten o’clock – we should have been finishing R.E. and going off to Science. But the sun was gone. High up, white clouds were swirling, thickening, becoming grey.

Gillian kept shaking her thermometer.

The wind whipped my face like stinging nettles. It was against us. Loose snow from last night’s fall whisked up into the air and flurried at our faces. My shoes were full of ice and my skirt and socks soaked. My knees were blue and the cold in my toes was more than pain. At least my duffel coat was warm. I kept my mittened hands deep in the pockets. I still wore the oversized slicker Mr Okehurst had issued, like a poncho. That meant I had appropriated School property and taken it off the grounds.

‘I don’t think we can do this trip in one go,’ I said.

We looked back at the school, still in sight at the top of the hill. Our footprints in the snow were filling in.

‘This is pathetic, Susan,’ said Gillian. ‘It’s only a little snow.’

Captain Brent had an ice moustache and white eyebrows.

We pressed on, struggling to the bottom of the hill and a usually busy main road.

Four soldiers in arctic gear – fur-lined parkas and enviable boots – manned a check-point. A fire burned in a barrel, as if for roasting

chestnuts. An armoured car was making its careful way along the road, steering around abandoned, snowed-in vehicles.

A soldier saluted Captain Brent.

‘As you were, man,’ he said. ‘I’ve been incommunicado. What’s the sit-rep?’

The corporal, an acne-pitted youth, didn’t know what to say.

‘We were ordered to maintain this point, sir. Last night. After the incident in Piccadilly Circus.’

‘Incident?’

‘Some sort of ice-storm, sir. They say it was like a glacier, but alive. A lot of casualties. Most of our mob were sent over there, to pitch in. Then reports started coming from all over London. Same sort of thing. A lot of confusion. We got a general order to crack down on looters and rioters, then comms went up the spout. A lot of dead air. Lieutenant Perkins authorised us to use live ammo, then went off to get more orders from HQ.’

‘Scarpered, more like,’ someone muttered.

‘We battened down the hatches here,’ said the spotty corporal, ‘but only had a couple of false alarms in the night.’

The soldiers must have huddled round their brazier while the Cold Knights were killing people in Coal Hill Road.

‘We should have been relieved at zero three hundred hours,’ said the corporal.

‘Are you our relief, sir?’ asked another soldier, a private. ‘Only we’ve not had so much as a cuppa.’

John, Gillian and I gathered around the barrel-brazier, extending our hands over the burning coals, trying to get as close to the heated rusty metal without actually touching it.

‘Is this some sort of an exercise, sir?’ asked the corporal. ‘Surely, we’re not at War?’

‘I’m supposed to have leave today,’ said the private.

‘I imagine all leave is cancelled,’ said the Captain. There was grumbling.

‘All tea is cancelled,’ said Gillian. ‘The army is cancelled.’

Corporal Spots goggled at Gillian.

‘Don’t talk daft, miss. Listen to this officer. He knows the score. Sorry, sir, but some of these kids ...’

Captain Brent beamed indulgently. His cheeks were purple with cold.

‘It’s best not to talk to Dad, Corp,’ said John.

It was sleeting badly, lumps battering down.

Through the roaring wind, I heard a sound. I turned and looked back up the hill towards the school.

‘Flamin’ Nora!,’ said Gillian.

Three snowballs were rolling down the road in formation, picking up snow and grit as they tumbled. They were the spearhead of a deliberate avalanche, a purposeful wall of white.

The snowballs grew.

The ball in the lead, which had ice-spikes protruding from its sides, weaved around a stalled car, but the avalanche swept over everything. A startled man, stepping out of his front door, was borne under, incorporated into the snowfall, disappearing in a tumble of limbs.

We all got out of the way, abandoning the post.

The avalanche hit the checkpoint, smashing the wooden barrier to pulp, and knocked over the brazier, instantly extinguishing the coals. One soldier, clumsy in his winter gear, tripped. Snow slammed down on him. The avalanche growled like a thousand lions, hurling wickedly curved chunks of ice out of its heart.

Rather than fan out when it hit the level street, the avalanche *turned* away from us, led by the three huge snowballs, and ran up against the armoured car. I saw the metal deeply scored by ice-daggers, then the vehicle was buried. Machine-gun fire came out of the white whirlwind. We all threw ourselves to the ground.

Corporal Spots didn’t get out of the way fast enough.

Bullets hauled him off his feet and tore him up. Friendly fire.

(I wish I hadn’t seen that, but wishing is no use.)

My ears hurt with the noise and the cold.

I found myself holding hands with John, gripping tight. We were wadded together, between a fixed cement rubbish bin and a red telephone box. The phone box was almost entirely filled up with soft white snow. A pale human hand was pressed up against the glass from

inside.

Gillian tried to help Captain Brent stand up.

A couple of soldiers ran off, into the snowstorm. I thought I heard screams.

The three snowballs, each about as tall as a pony, rolled lazily out of the storm that was settling around the wreck of the armoured car. The first advanced to Gillian and the Captain and stopped, and its comrades darted around, surrounding them. The ball shifted its insides and a smile came to the surface.

The tree-bark smile I had made.

‘That’s our snowman,’ I said.

John’s father took out his gun and shot the ball. This time, the bullet speared through like a very long finger. The tunnel filled in instantly.

I stood up, tugging John, and we ran towards Gillian and Captain Brent.

The balls settled, rising like dough, forming Cold Knights.

A lot of them were on the streets.

Gillian held out her thermometer, like a charm to ward off evil. Suddenly, she was lifted off her feet.

I screamed.

But Gillian wasn’t in the grip of the Cold Knights. Captain Brent had taken hold of her by the waist and held her up, above the snowy masses. He tossed Gillian into the air.

Her arms and legs cartwheeled.

She shot out of the encirclement, but the icy blocks slammed together on the Captain, smashing into clear pebbles slick with blood. John’s father was down – John’s hand crushed mine, forcing a yelp out of me – before Gillian came to earth. John and I tried to catch her, but instead broke her fall by being under her when she landed.

We fell in a clump and took moments to sort ourselves out.

More Cold Knights piled on Captain Brent.

He bent the wrong way at the waist. His arms kept flailing, but only with the repeated impact. The Cold Knights kept jostling around, pouring ice blows down on John’s father.

‘Dad,’ he shouted.

‘Come away, John.’ said Gillian, quietly in his ear.

‘But ...’

‘There’s no time.’

Both children were shocked by what Captain Brent had done and what happened to him. Gillian knew how to make herself calm for the moment, to get through the next minutes and think about it later, if ever. I knew she was storing up too much, that it would have to come out. John had to be helped. This wasn’t the world he had expected, even waking up this morning. A world without his father.

We ran away, down the street.

Later –

A third of the way down the High Street, we were stopped. The storm threw whirls of diamond-sharp snowflakes at us, tiny razor-edged throwing stars. I could no longer feel my feet, my hands or my face – except for a light, disturbing tingle I was horribly sure was the first symptom of severe frostbite. We were walking on the spot, gaining inches only by leaning dangerously into the blizzard, then driven back by the force of the storm, slid in the grooves our trudging made in the packed snow. It was a struggle not to be tipped over and blown backwards.

We cast around for somewhere to shelter.

‘The Wimpy Bar,’ shouted Gillian over the roar of the storm, pointing.

I remembered the place, and saw its red sign under a dusting of white. It was an American-style hamburger restaurant, named after the character in the Popeye cartoons Malcolm loves. Wimpy Bars were popping up all over the city, replacing greasy spoon Gaffs and Lyons Corner Houses. Everything inside was brightly-coloured plastic, including the waitresses’ uniforms, the tomato-shaped ketchup squeezebulbs and the squares of cheese melted onto the patties.

We had to link arms and wade through drifts to cross the pavement. Gillian put her shoulder to the doors, but John and me had to help her push them open. We tumbled into the restaurant.

The sudden absence of snowblast and din was a shock.

My tingling turned to a pricking, then the beginnings of a burning. I was worried that within minutes my face would be hanging off in red ribbons.

I thought we'd got through most of the day and that it was near nightfall, but by my watch it was only just after twelve.

'Children,' said a man as we came in, alarmed.

'There's no room here,' said another voice. 'This is our place. It's good here. There's food.'

'Shut the door after you,' said the first person. 'Were you born in a stable?'

All three of us had to push to get the door closed against the blowing, drifting snow. No one came forward to help.

The café was gloomy, with no lights on, the big front windows white with drifted snow. My eyes got used to it.

Half a dozen people huddled by the counter.

'Susan, Susan,' said a tiny voice.

A small person dashed up to me and threw arms around my neck, pressing damp kisses to my face. I weaved a little, but didn't fall over.

It was Malcolm.

'I got lost, Susan,' he said. 'On the way to school.'

I hugged and kissed him. I hugged and kissed Cowboy Gonk too. I realised I was crying.

I hadn't dared think about what had happened to Malcolm.

'Your face is red,' he said.

'Thank you very much,' I replied, trying to sound indignant.

He padded the melted snow and tears off my cheeks with a paper towel. I wondered again what I looked like and decided I didn't want to know. As Malcolm cleaned my face, I started to get feeling back in my skin.

'It's Forehead's boyfriend,' said Gillian. I didn't mind being teased.

I put Malcolm down. I wiped ice-chunks out of my hair with a wet sleeve.

'The icicles hurt,' said Malcolm. 'I got scratched, see.'

He had red lines on his wrists. Not deep, but nasty-looking.

‘But I was brave.’

‘I’m sure you were, Malcolm,’ I said. ‘Your Mum will be proud of you.’

Suddenly, I was worried about Malcolm’s mother. When — if ever — this was over, there’d be a butcher’s bill to pay, a long list of casualties.

I held on to Malcolm as hard as he held on to Cowboy Gonk.

‘I know these girls, Henry,’ said the woman who thought there was no room for us. ‘A thoroughly bad lot. Remember, I told you about them on Saturday night. Painting themselves, at their age.’

It took me a moment to recognise the stout woman, who wore a fur-collared coat and mauve gloves. She was Mrs Haigh from the Youth Club, and the tweedy man with her was her husband. The vicar’s white hair was an uncombed nest around a red egg of bald scalp. One lens of his glasses was cracked across.

‘I know them too,’ said another of the group. ‘From the Pump.’

It was Zack, from the Ton-Up Boys.

The whole of last Saturday was playing itself back.

Zack still wore his black leather jacket and motorcycle gauntlets, but seemed younger today, less threatening. And he was on his own.

‘Oh it’s you,’ groaned Gillian. ‘Talk about bad pennies.’

‘If I was picking angels to emerge from the snow,’ he said to Gillian, ‘I’d have chosen Brigitte Bardot over you.’

‘Sarcasm is the lowest form of comedy, Flash.’

‘You’ve obviously never seen a Norman Wisdom flick.’

It struck me that Zack and Gillian *liked* each other. Even in this blizzard, they had time to feel something apart from fear.

There were new faces: a waitress in Wimpy uniform, with a blonde beehive hairdo, and a policeman, with his arm in a makeshift sling and his helmet missing.

The Haighs seemed to be in charge.

Everyone had obviously suffered through Adventures —which had changed them and the way they felt about the world. Or maybe just gave them an excuse for acting the way they had always wanted to.

‘Constable,’ ordered Mrs Haigh. ‘Throw this shower out on their ears.’

The policeman gave no sign that he’d heard her. His eyes were empty. I

recognised the symptoms of shell-shock. Of all the people here, he was the most broken.

Except perhaps John.

‘If it’s anybody’s place, it’s mine,’ said the waitress, a woman not much older than a Year Six girl. She was holding a bread-knife like a sceptre of office. ‘And I say they can stay.’

‘You just work here, young lady. I’ve eaten enough meals to pay your wages.’

‘You can say that again,’ said Zack.

Mrs Haigh had a meat-skewer. I pictured her and the waitress squaring off like Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham.

‘It’s cold in here,’ said Gillian, looking at her thermometer as if her body were no longer reliable. She exhaled, and her breath frosted. ‘It shouldn’t be.’

‘‘Lectricity’s off,’ said the waitress.

‘It’s only a power-cut,’ said Mr Haigh. ‘It’ll come back on soon. Someone will have telephoned the Electricity Board.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Gillian.

‘What’s she rabbiting on about?’ said the vicar’s wife. ‘Horrid girl.’

‘You can’t talk to people like that,’ said the waitress.

‘I pay my taxes and I can say what I want. It’s a free country, not Russia.’

‘Though we’ve got their weather at the mo,’ said Zack. ‘You girls never did tell me your names the other night.’

‘Susan,’ I said, tapping my chest, ‘and this is John and Gillian.’

‘Gillian,’ said Zack, ‘nice name.’

‘Don’t wear it out,’ said Gillian.

‘This is Dolly,’ said Zack, introducing the waitress. ‘You obviously know little Malc, and the Haighs.’

‘If you want food,’ said Dolly, ‘there are buns. And ketchup in those plastic tomatoes. The hamburgers and the chips are here, but they’re frozen and there’s no way to defrost them without power.’

‘Mrs H is all for sucking on burgers like ice lollies,’ said Zack. ‘It may come to that.’

Gillian rummaged behind the counter, searching the cooking area.

‘You’re not to touch anything, young lady,’ said Mrs Haigh.

‘Oh shut up,’ said Dolly.

‘Well I never ...’

‘... if you mean never tipped, that’s true.’

‘You’re paid adequate wages, I trust. I don’t see why I should augment them just because you grudgingly do your job.’

‘So you don’t pass the collection plate on Sundays?’

‘That’s different.’

‘Stop arguing,’ said Malcolm, quietly.

Strangely, the grown-ups did shut up.

Malcolm had a lot of quiet force. He didn’t often get angry or frightened, just closed himself up and got through it. He was used to people treating him like an alien, and had learned how to use it to his advantage.

A lesson worth learning.

‘Eureka!’ said Gillian.

In a locker of cleaning things, she’d found a rack of overalls. She tossed one set over the counter to me, and struggled off with her slicker, coat and shoes, then stepped into them, not bothering to take off her skirt or cardigan, then fastened the baggy overalls up tight and put her shoes, coat and slicker back on. The mismatched layers made her into a fat clown. The cold added to the effect by giving her a red nose and half-crown-sized roses in her cheeks.

Zack tried a wolf-whistle, but it didn’t come out right.

‘Hardly becoming for a young lady,’ said Mrs Haigh. ‘What school do you go to? I shall write a letter to the Head. Shouldn’t you be in lessons?’

‘Skirts aren’t practical in this weather,’ I said.

I detached myself from Malcolm and also got the extra layer of clothing on. I rubbed fabric up and down over my calves and knees, trying to get feeling back.

John laughed.

‘It isn’t very stylish gear,’ he said. ‘You look like Daughter of Scott of the Antarctic.’

His first words since what had happened to his Dad.

‘What’s happening out there?’ asked Dolly. ‘Has the city gone mad? There was something about Piccadilly Circus on the news last night. Some sort of rampaging ice-monster, they said – people thought it was the BBC’s idea of an April Fool, like the spaghetti trees. Then the wireless went off with everything else.’

‘It’s a Judgement,’ said Mr Haigh. ‘We are being punished for our sins. We have trespassed, and the Lord is pouring down fire and ice.’

‘I haven’t seen any fire,’ said Zack. ‘We could use it.’

‘You can sneer,’ said Mr Haigh. ‘But you should look to yourself and consider the state of your soul.’

‘It’s people like you,’ said his wife, ‘who brought this down on us.’

‘Tearaways, vandals, barbarians, savages, heathens.’

‘Listen, I ride a motorbike, all right,’ said Zack, irritated. ‘That doesn’t make me Attila the Hun. I earn my wages and I pay national insurance just like you.’

‘There’s a reason for all this,’ said the vicar.

One thing that worried me was that he might be right about that.

Later –

‘He was mad,’ said Gillian. ‘John’s Dad. That’s why he did it. He didn’t know what he was getting into. You saw that.’

Gillian and I were alone, away from the seating area, scavenging.

‘He saved your life,’ I said.

That made Gillian angry. She couldn’t understand.

‘Why should John’s Dad save *my* life. I wasn’t anything to him.’

‘Duty?’ I suggested. ‘He was in the army.’

She shook her head.

‘My old man would never ... ’

She didn’t finish the sentence.

‘Do you think Martian will be all right?’ she asked.

Her eyes were big and wet. Sometimes, it’s easy to forget that she’s a child too. She’s no more capable than any of us.

‘It’ll never be the same,’ I said. ‘But he’ll go on.’

‘Why should we go on?’

‘Because if we don’t there’s no point to what his father did.’

‘I’m cold, Susan.’

‘So am I.’

Later —

The original idea was to shelter in the Wimpy Bar until we got our wind back or the blizzard died down, then set off down the High Street again. The storm showed no sign of letting up, and it became obvious that this refuge wouldn’t be safe for much longer. A long crack appeared in the thick glass windows. A sheet of ice oozed under the door, thick and shiny and purposeful.

‘We should leave,’ I told Gillian and John. ‘Soon.’

‘Where have you got to go?’ asked Zack.

‘Susan’s grandfather,’ Gillian explained.

Zack raised his eyebrows.

‘He can help,’ I said, not sure even as I said it.

A section of glass fell in and snow cascaded.

‘I’ll come with you,’ said Dolly. ‘We should get Malcolm out of here. He won’t be safe with *them*.’

Dolly nodded at the Haighs.

‘You can’t leave,’ said Mrs Haigh. ‘You’re on duty. I still haven’t had my Wimpyburger and chips.’

‘I should tell you what you can do with your Wimpyburger and chips, but I won’t since these are unusual circumstances.’

Dolly put on her cloth coat and wrapped a scarf around her peroxide tower of hair.

I took off my slicker and gave it to Malcolm, tucking it tight around his chest and legs, stuffing Cowboy Gonk inside his jumper, giving him a bird’s breastbone.

I’d be all right in just my duffel coat and the Wimpy overalls.

‘We should pray,’ said Mr Haigh. ‘For Deliverance.’

‘You can pray if you like,’ said Gillian, kindly. ‘It can’t hurt.’

‘There’s a way forward, to Salvation,’ said Mrs Haigh. ‘We’ve discussed it, and now it has come to the moment. We must cut out that part of our society that has so offended God that He has visited this Judgement upon us.’

The vicar’s wife had the bread-knife. Dolly had put it down to tie her scarf.

Mrs Haigh snatched Malcolm from me and held the blade to his throat.

‘It’s the fault of the Young,’ she ranted.

‘With their pagan music, irreverent ways, provocative clothes and rebellious attitudes,’ explained the vicar. ‘We fought a War for you, you know. You ought to be grateful.’

‘This Judgement is upon You!’

I didn’t know what they were thinking. It was the usual grown-up game of Let’s Pretend, with rules that weren’t disclosed to the Young.

‘I think you should calm down, Mrs H,’ said Zack. ‘You don’t want to do anything you’ll be sorry for later.’

The serrated edge of the blade pressed into Malcolm’s skin. He was a neat little boy, not a scruff. His hands were knotted around the bulge of Cowboy Gonk.

‘The child is an Abomination, an Unbeliever ... ’

‘Malcolm’s family are C of E,’ said Dolly. ‘Like you.’

Mrs Haigh looked up to the ceiling, held up the knife and declaimed ‘Unto you, O Lord, I sacrifice this ... ’

Dolly took a plastic bottle of mustard and squirted it into the woman’s face. A bright yellow stream hit Mrs Haigh in the eyes.

Zack pulled Malcolm away from the woman. She sliced down, stabbing into Malcolm’s chest.

I screamed.

Zack got Malcolm free. The knife came out of Malcolm.

Mrs Haigh slashed, scraping the knife down the arm of Zack’s jacket. The blade scratched the leather but didn’t cut through, then got snagged on a zip with a rasp that set my teeth on edge.

Mrs Haigh raised the knife again.

‘Drop it,’ said Zack, waving his flick-comb, pressing the stud.

Mrs Haigh threw down the knife before she realised Zack wasn’t

coming at her with a switchblade. Dolly kicked the knife into a corner.

I grabbed Malcolm and started pressing around the tear in his slicker. He was shaking.

‘She hurt Cowboy Gonk!’

I pulled out the toy. There was a knife-slit in the fabric, white stuffing bulging out of an eye.

Malcolm looked at his beloved gonk, lower lip going in and out, tears starting.

‘Cowboy Gonk is fine, Malcolm,’ I said, trying to head off a crying spell. ‘It’s easily fixed, easily. A few stitches and he’ll be good as new.’

‘Suze is right, Malc,’ said Zack. ‘Cowboy Gonk is on the mend. Listen to him.’

Malcolm’s ears pricked up like a dog’s.

‘Ah’m a-fine, pardner,’ said Zack, ventriloquising out of one side of his mouth. ‘Sure as shootin’ and a-rootin’ tootin’. Now let’s a-mosey out of this here saloon and hit the trail for Laredo.’

Malcolm laughed, astonished.

‘That tears it,’ Gillian announced. ‘We’re leaving.’

We started turning up collars, pulling down caps, winding scarves like bandages.

I hauled open the door, flinching at the icy blast, and held it as Zack and Dolly got Malcolm outside, then watched the Haighs as Gillian and John left. Mrs Haigh stared like a vulture frustrated of carrion.

‘Don’t go, child,’ said the vicar, pleading. ‘Pray with us.’

I felt awful inside. These people had been pushed into a box and reacted in a way no one would have expected. Just as John’s father had.

‘We’ll be safe, Henry. We have a policeman with us.’

I left the restaurant and joined the others.

Visibility was down to nothing. The blizzard was, if anything, worse.

Zack found his motorbike in a drift, crushed by ice, wheels buckled. He siphoned petrol into a milk bottle and stuffed the neck with his Rupert scarf.

‘Just in case,’ he said.

It was so cold the cocktail turned into a Molotov sunrise, petrol decocting into its constituent ingredients, making different-coloured

layers.

‘Which way?’ asked Gillian.

For a moment, I didn’t know. No recognisable landmarks were left.

But I remembered which side of the road the Wimpy Bar was on. I pointed forward, into the wind. We put our heads down and trudged.

Some people must have had the idea Gillian had about the school, and set fire to buildings to keep the Cold Knights away. The front window of the Green Shield Stamps Centre was blown out. The show goods on display were melted or blackened. The blaze hadn’t lasted long enough to burn down the building or spread to the shops next door. Snowdrifts already piled up around the wreckage.

‘Anyone want to loot a fridge?’ asked Zack. ‘It’s normally fifty-eight books.’

No one was interested.

We were on foot and against the wind.

In normal conditions, even on an absolutely miserable day, it should have taken ten minutes to stroll from the Wimpy Bar to Totter’s Lane. With time to stop off at the newsagent’s, to buy a *Bunty* and some sweets from Malcolm’s Mum. Today, it was a two hour forced march.

I checked the newsagent’s. It was locked up.

‘Your Mum must have stayed at home,’ I told Malcolm.

Later –

After the newsagent’s, we came to the Railway Bridge. A curtain of clear ice hung from it, entirely blocking the road. People were caught in the ice, like big insects in white amber. Giant faces on the ice surface slowly made mocking masks.

‘We’ll have to go up and cross the platform,’ said Gillian.

‘We haven’t got tickets,’ said Malcolm, solemnly.

‘I expect they’ll let us off, just this once,’ I told him. ‘It’s not as if we’re going to catch a train.’

‘I don’t think there are any trains, pardner,’ said Zack.

‘What about ghost trains?’ asked John.

The steps up to the platform were inside the station. We passed an

unmanned ticket barrier and looked around, relieved to be momentarily out of the windblast. Somebody had smashed the ticket window. The emptied cash register was up-ended on the floor.

‘Blooming liberties,’ said Dolly. ‘Some people just make you give up hope. I hope the threepenny bits froze to their hands.’

An I-Speak-Your-Weight Machine coughed to life as I brushed past. The cold had got into its mechanism, I suppose. It repeated ‘ten stone, five pounds, two ounces’ over and over.

The harsh metallic voice gave me the horrors.

‘Let’s get a move-on, Forehead,’ said John. ‘That thing can’t hurt you.’

I had to agree with him. But something in the mechanical voice talked to the part of me lost in my mindfogs. I shut it out.

The steps were icy, but not much snow had blown into the stairwell.

Zack led the way. I held Malcolm’s hand and helped him.

We came out onto the platform. The sky was a uniform grey-white, with no sign of the sun.

Looking across to the other platform, you wouldn’t know there was a five-foot trench for the railway lines. Smooth, unmarked snow was packed down. The waiting rooms were blown in, snowdrifts filling them to the ceiling. I saw a black bowler hat lodged in the snow.

‘A snowman’s lost his titfer,’ said Malcolm.

‘Yes,’ I agreed. ‘That must be it.’

‘Do snowmen get cold?’

‘No, pardner,’ said Zack, holding up his Molotov cocktail. ‘They worry about getting hot.’

John tentatively stepped to where the edge of the platform must be and put his foot out, bringing his weight slowly down. He was held up.

‘We can just walk over,’ he said. ‘No need to go to the crossing.’

The foot-crossing at the end of the platform was under five feet of snow too.

Zack and Gillian weren’t happy with the prospect. Zack picked up a heavy bucket of frozen sand and tossed it out onto the rails. It thumped into the snow, but didn’t disappear.

‘Okay,’ he said. ‘Let’s move out.’

It was like walking on a frozen lake, not knowing whether the ice was

safely feet thick or a flimsy crust. In ones and twos, we crossed the buried tracks.

John, venturing on his own, stepped into a quicksand-like patch. With a squelch, he lost his leg up to the knee. My hearts clutched. John gingerly extracted his leg from the hole.

‘I’ve got snow in my sock,’ he complained.

‘It could be worse, Mars-man,’ said Zack.

‘A fellow without snow in his sock might find that easy to say,’ said John.

‘Come on, children,’ said Gillian, sharply. ‘No squabbling.’

John shook his foot and limped across to the platform. He sat on a bench, and examined his frozen foot.

Zack picked up Malcolm and carried him over.

We all made it across the railway lines.

‘Thank the Lord for that,’ said Dolly.

A cadre of Cold Knights loomed out of the drift-filled waiting room and took her. They were fast now, like ghosts with white enveloping sheets. Dolly was pulled off her feet, icy ropes winding about her, constricting and cutting. She was more surprised than scared.

I hugged Malcolm’s face to my chest so he wouldn’t see. John threw himself off his bench and scrambled away, avoiding white scything tentacles.

The Knights, more massive and less ungainly than last night’s crop, barely paused to crush Dolly – embedding her in ice and squeezing her like an orange, so she leaked red – and moved towards us, dropping the leftover in their wake.

We had no time to react, to scream, to help.

The Cold Knights were between us and the steps down to the High Street. They let Dolly go, abandoning her body like a broken toy, and spread out along the platform, soldiers again.

Behind us, from the rail-bed, drifts shivered into life, rising in shaggy, snow-feathered lumps, extending ice-barbs.

We were caught between the drift masses and the Knights.

‘Burn them out, Flash,’ shouted Gillian.

Zack flicked his Ronson lighter a dozen times before he got a flame,

then touched it to his Molotov cocktail. He shook well, scrambling the ingredients back into fuel, and lobbed the bottle. It arced, burning fuse fluttering like a banner, and smashed against the Cold Knight who stood between us and the stairwell.

A fire-shroud instantly melted the Knight's head and arms to stumps. The snow evaporated and the ice core dwindled in seconds, empty gaps appearing and water gushing. Burning petrol splashes sank through the Knight's body, like acid through a paper flower. A circle of bare grey tarmac appeared as the liquid flame soaked through to the platform.

The effect wouldn't last.

I picked up Malcolm and ran.

The drifts and the Knights came after us, converging and combining into one huge, thundering glacier.

We all squeezed into the stairwell and the glacier shattered against the brickwork doorway behind us. I slipped and took a tumble, still wrapped around Malcolm. Zack went over his feet too. Snow and ice poured around us as we rolled down the stairs. I took my lumps, half-falling and half-rolling down the steps. I landed badly.

Someone – John – took my hand and hauled me up. We ran away from the station exit.

Later –

The army isn't on the streets any more. The council isn't clearing up the snow. There are no policemen, postmen, milkmen, binmen. People peer from barricaded upper storey windows, wrapped up warm but not daring to go out. Long-unused chimneys pour thick smoke into the grey sky. Whatever came to hand is being burned in grates left over from before the Clean Air Act.

I don't know how much longer anyone indoors will be safe.

Snow and ice are everywhere, and anywhere they are there can be Cold Knights. Eventually, it will be night again and the general temperature will plunge well below freezing.

Then we might all be for the Chop.

By day, with the temperature just hovering about freezing point, the Cold Knights are like individuals in an army; at night, when all water is ice, they are more purposeful, like one being, one hostile intelligence – a living, thinking, malign glacier.

Gillian still has doubts about going to Grandfather, but she needs something to do, something to fight. She keeps us going, head down with determination, refusing to accept obstacles. John took Malcolm from me and is carrying him. It helps John to have someone to look after.

I keep seeing Dolly, her open-mouthed expression of *surprise*.

The Cold Knights didn't need to march out of the station after us. They can spring up from anywhere.

Later –

We passed three snowmen by the War Memorial. Frozen heads swivelled, carrot-noses pointing at us. One wore an oversized tam o'shanter.

After this, if there is an after this, I promise I promise I promise I will never make another snowman.

The turn into Totter's Lane was blocked by a twenty-foot-high drift. The tops of lamp-posts stuck out of it.

'I suppose we have to get over that,' said Zack.

He put his foot on the slope of the drift. It sank in below the ankle. The snow here was looser than in the rail-bed.

'There's never a pair of tennis rackets handy when you need them,' said Zack.

Powdery snow closed around Zack's foot and became an ice mantrap. He reacted fast, pulling back, but his boot was still stuck.

'It's making teeth,' he said.

I knelt and saw he was right. Triangular ice wedges scraped the leather of his motorcycle boot.

'Give me your lighter,' I said.

He handed the Ronson down to me. I flipped the top and worked the

flint. This time, the flame came quickly. I let it grow to an inch or so, using up fuel fast, then played it around Zack's gripped boot.

The ice jaws melted enough to loosen and Zack got his foot free.

'Thanks, Suze,' he said.

I gave him back his Ronson. He shook it. All the fluid was gone.

'Time I gave up smoking, anyway,' he said.

We all looked up at the snow wall. Mouth-like traps opened and closed, mocking.

'You have to be flaming joshing,' said Zack.

The ice-mouths smiled, showing jagged teeth.

'This is not going to be easy,' said Gillian.

'If you can't go through, below, or over, go around,' said John. 'Elementary tactics. The Pump has entrances on the High Street and in Totter's Lane.'

'How do you know so much about a pub?' asked Gillian.

John blushed and led us into the public bar, which was dark and abandoned, snow on the tables and carpet.

'So, you two have finally got into the Pump,' said Zack, to me and Gillian. 'Disappointed?'

'I expected more red velvet tassels,' said Gillian. 'And framed pictures of fat naked ladies.'

'Anyone want a drink?' asked Zack. 'Brandy, whisky ...'

'We should get a move-on,' said John.

Zack went round behind the bar, searching for spirits. He found glasses, then reached up, but held back. The row of upsidedown bottles had exploded and frozen into amber and green cascades, jewelled with glass fragments.

'Ah,' he said. 'Problem.'

Zack exhaled, breath frosting.

'Even indoors, it's too cold,' said Gillian.

'The temperature dropped as we went along,' said John. 'Didn't you notice?'

I remembered the ice was thicker nearer Foreman's Yard.

We went through to the saloon bar. Bodies sat at tables, faces frosted.

'Snowmen,' said Malcolm.

The door John had been counting on was locked and chained from the inside. One pane of glass was smashed, showing a wall of snow beyond.

‘Seems like we’re stymied,’ said Zack.

He looked for unexploded bottles, picking them up and shaking to see if any had liquid inside. John made a disgusted face.

‘Not to drink, Mars-man,’ Zack explained. ‘To burn.’

‘We can’t just give up,’ said Gillian. ‘Not after getting this close.’

Tired, Gillian and I had sat down at a table. Only when I stopped moving did I realise how my arms and legs ached. I took off my mittens and counted my frozen fingers, trying to wrench feeling into them.

‘I’d like to ask Susan something,’ said John.

Gillian was surprised. John wasn’t his old self again, and never would be.

‘Ask away, John,’ I said, weary to the bone.

‘Why is it so important we get to your Grandfather?’

‘I think he can help.’

‘Help? Help *us*?’

‘Help everyone.’

John took off his glasses. His eyes were watery. He pinched the top of his nose and put his specs back on.

‘Susan, this is an Attack,’ he began. ‘It’s all over the city. Perhaps the country. Hundreds, maybe thousands, have been hurt or killed. You’ve seen those things, the Cold Knights. Where do they come from? What are they? They’re not the Enemy we were expecting. We’ve been moving too fast, staying ahead of them, not thinking about them. Now, I’d like to ask questions. Susan, *what do you know about all this?*’

I had no answer. I worried that, pressed further, I’d break down.

‘Lay off her, Mars-man,’ said Zack. ‘It’s not her fault. She’s just a kid.’

I resented that but didn’t say so.

‘You don’t know Susan,’ said John. ‘Even before this, she was strange ...’

‘Thank you very much,’ I snapped. ‘*Martian!*’

‘I’m not from Mars. I’m from Northumberland. What about you, Susan? Where are you *from*?’

Cold went to my head, an icepick through an eye.

‘What is all this rot, John?’ asked Gillian.

‘Ask *her*.’

‘Ask her *what*?’

‘Where she’s *from*?’

Gillian looked at me, wondering what all this was about. ‘Outer space,’ said Malcolm. ‘Susan is a Princess. She’s run away from Home.’

Everyone heard him.

Zack cracked a grin. ‘Anything you say, pardner.’

John fixed his eyes on me. Gillian looked between us.

‘You must have noticed, Gillian,’ said John. ‘She goes away sometimes, inside her head, to the Twilight Zone. She *knows* things. The mask slips.’

‘You’re saying Susan is a Space Princess.’

‘No, of course not. Grow up, Gillian.’

John took a seat and sat at our table. He folded his arms.

‘I’m saying she’s a spy,’ he announced. ‘This Grandfather no one has ever met or seen is her Control. She’s using us to get back to him. Sacrificing people along the way. She hasn’t been harmed, you notice. She hasn’t lost anyone.’

‘I’m sorry about your Dad, John,’ I said. ‘Really, I am. And Dolly, and ... these people, and everyone. But Grandfather can make a difference ...’

John stared at me, hard.

‘She’s *fourteen*, Martian,’ said Gillian, thumping his arm. ‘There are no fourteen-year-old spies!’

‘Except in Enid Blyton books,’ said Zack.

‘*You* read Enid Blyton?’ gasped Gillian.

‘To my little sister, before her bed-time.’

‘This is all very sweet,’ said John, rubbing his arm, nodding at me, ‘but you’ll notice *she* hasn’t denied anything.’

It was as if a wall had been thrown up between me and the others. A see-through wall, but impenetrable. John’s gaze was fixed on me. A glance passed between Zack and Gillian, wheels turning behind their eyes.

‘Don’t talk as if I wasn’t here,’ I said. My voice sounded tiny.

‘Why are you upsetting Susan?’ asked Malcolm. He walked across the bar and took my hand. ‘She’s my friend.’

The wall was gone.

I was crying again, holding on to Malcolm.

‘She knows something,’ said John, quietly. ‘She does.’

‘I know you’ve had a bad day, John,’ said Gillian, conciliatory. ‘But you mustn’t take it out on Susan.’

‘Had a bad day! I saw my father killed! Saving you!’

It was as if he had slapped her. Gillian would never forget what he’d just said.

‘Just what I was searching for,’ said Zack. Rooting around behind the bar, he’d found a ring of keys. ‘Good thing they chained the doors from the inside.’

He began testing keys in the padlock.

‘They locked up for a reason,’ Gillian warned, still distracted. ‘Be careful.’

A key turned. Zack loosed the padlock and unthreaded the chains from the double-doors. He tried keys again, in the door-lock. The third key worked.

John and Gillian and I were a triangle, each fixed on the other two.

Before the Cold, we had been friends.

‘John’s right,’ I said. ‘I’m not from here. I’m not a spy or a princess, but I’m not from here.’

Zack pulled the doors open. A wall of white outside was over his head, but there was daylight visible over the top.

‘Trust me, John, Gillian. Please.’

Zack battered the snow-wall with the chain. It was like iron.

I felt calm, for the first time in hours. I felt the presence of Grandfather, not in my head but nearby.

‘This flaming thing won’t budge,’ said Zack, kicking the snow.

‘Let me,’ I said.

I held Malcolm’s hand and walked up to the exit. As I neared, the snow melted away, like doors opening.

Zack whistled. John tried to say something but Gillian shushed him.

I didn’t know why the ice-mind let me pass. But I had known that it

would. Grandfather wouldn't let the Cold hurt me.

We stepped out onto the street again, in Totter's Lane.

'Is that your Grandfather's place?' Zack asked.

'The junkyard,' I said. 'Yes.'

'What's going on there?'

I looked. The drift was a windbreak, which should have made Totter's Lane less blizzardy than the High Street. But a snowy tornado rose, funnel pointed at Foreman's Yard. Lined along the pavements were Cold Knights, at attention.

'Seems like we've come to the right place,' said Zack. 'Whatever is going on, this is where it's going on from.'

'Be careful,' said John. 'Be careful of *her*.'

Later –

I led them to the Box.

'I don't think phoning the coppers will do much good, Suze,' said Zack.

Bundled cables ran out of the door, into the Yard.

It was a grotto of living ice, glassy fronds moving like transparent, crackling anemones, white and turquoise and blue.

Grandfather, wrapped in furs like a Tartar chieftain, sat on a shooting stick by a Heath Robinson contraption. It was a composite machine, scavenged parts wired together, built around the skeleton of a fairground pipe organ. He'd cannibalised elements from half a dozen coffin-sized abandoned fridges, those favourite monsters of classroom safety filmstrips. Like all of Grandfather's 'inventions', this machine consisted of bits and pieces held together with pink string and masking tape, with no thought for design. The organ was decorated with cherubs, painted skins flaking to show blue undercoat, chubby limbs hung with twisted icicles. The inventions worked, most of the time –which was the best that could be said of them. This one was certainly doing *something*, generating a ball of cold blue light, into which the tail of the tornado swirled.

‘That’s your Granddad?’ asked Gillian.

I nodded.

Grandfather was humming to himself, twiddling knobs and pulling levers, checking gauges and dials.

‘What’s he doing?’ asked John.

Good question.

Later –

‘It’s all quite simple, child,’ said Grandfather. ‘This fellow, the Cold, was here first. It wakes up after a lengthy snooze to find its homeworld crowded with Johnny-come-latelys. No wonder it’s on a bit of a tear. Life takes many forms; here it is active in ice, dormant in water. Fascinating. Unique. I’ve yet to determine whether the animus is inherently embodied in the H₂O or a bodiless energy that happens to be able to shape frozen water. Millennia ago, in the First Great Ice Age, the Cold was the dominant lifeform of the Earth. One of Evolution’s first experiments with Intelligence. A remarkably successful one at that. It’s given me the best argument I’ve had since I came to this backwater.’

‘The Cold Knights aren’t from Outer Space?’ asked John.

‘Good lord, no. Why would you think that?’

‘Or from Russia?’

‘Certainly, it’s been dormant in Siberia. It may have been awakened by those Soviet refrigeration experiments. Something to do with freezing their cosmonauts for long space voyages. Or perhaps storing populations underground after nuclear war until the country is inhabitable again. It isn’t very clear on what the point of the Novosibirsk Project was. And that Alaskan deep probe was a jab to the sleeper as well. Then again, it may be that when the Cold sensed warmth coming, the phenomenon which enabled the rise of mammal sapience, it set an alarm-clock in the geology, as it were. Whatever reason, the Cold is back, it’s flexing its mind and wants to settle in again. Can’t blame it.’

‘It’s an “it”,’ I said. ‘Not a they.’

‘Indeed, Susan. Very perceptive. In its present stage, the animus of the

Cold – its essential self, its brain and eyes – isn't everywhere, just where the ice is moving. It has to concentrate itself to take action and it needs the right conditions to develop. If left alone, it will consolidate. All the ice in the world will become its brain and body. It'll be quite something to see.'

'That means it will get stronger?' I asked.

'If all goes well. If I make some corrections.'

'You're *helping* the Cold Knights?' said Gillian.

It took Grandfather a few moments to hear what Gillian had said. He didn't exactly ignore the people I'd brought with me, but treated them as if they were stray dogs or pieces of furniture. Only when they spoke directly to him did he have to concede that they represented a species of intelligent lifeform.

'Not exactly, child,' he said, holding his furry lapel. 'I'm merely doing my best not to get in its way. My time-space machine is a little leaky, I'm afraid, and that affects the natural cooling/freezing process. An enormous amount of energy is being expended and we're inadvertently in the way, leeching off the Cold. This little contraption here is just a dampener, to vent the dimensional overspill. We operate on the principle of non-interference with indigenous populations, and it would ill behove us to take sides. It's the first thing we're taught: don't *meddle*. Clearly, this fellow has a strong prior claim on the planet. If you two can come to an accommodation, it would be best for everyone. If not, I don't think the Earth will miss you people overmuch. That might seem harsh, but if you were to think it through I believe you'd find the argument had a lot of merit in it.'

'You're an alien,' said John, accusing Grandfather but looking at me.

'Um, what, an alien? No ... there's no such thing. There's only life.'

'It's all true,' said John. 'Aliens are here, from flying saucers, living among us, undermining our society.'

Grandfather snorted. 'I am not from a flying saucer! What would be the point of that? You'll be seeing flying teacups and creeping pepperpots next, and a whole animated dinner service. The human race's capacity for believing silly things is one of its least appealing traits.'

'You lost me miles back,' said Zack. 'Flying saucers?'

‘Grandfather,’ I said, ‘you must help these people.’

‘Of course, Susan. Just wait until I’ve sorted things out for the Cold and I’ll give it some thought.’

‘They’ll be dead ... extinct!’

‘Yes, quite possibly. Not my fault, though. Not our business, Susan. You know that as well as I do. We’re not to meddle, remember. Time must take its course.’

I felt in Grandfather’s mind. His fog-patches were bigger than mine.

Things were missing. And imperatives burned, stronger with age. He might have been a habitual rule-breaker, but he was set in his ways.

I was angry. This was not his character. This had been done to him.

‘It’s not *fair*.’ I said. ‘What did these people do to deserve extinction?’

Grandfather considered my friends as specimens.

‘These individuals? Nothing at all, so far as I know. As for this human race, well ... consider the record. When the Cold was sole tenant, this was a peaceful planet, devoted to abstract thought, to learning and expression. Since the rise of mammal bipeds, there’s been a lot of squabbling and blood-letting and general brouhaha. Best thing for the universe if our chilly friend takes up where he left off and got on with his business. The Cold built living ice cathedrals, and could sculpt on the level of an individual snowflake. Have you ever seen anything as perfect as a snowflake?’

‘Yes,’ I said, pointing at Malcolm.

Grandfather considered the little boy. Malcolm tried a smile. He had no front teeth.

‘Very nice, I’m sure.’

He got back to the dials and switches.

‘Now, be off with you all,’ he said, ‘and let me get on with my work.’

A fissure in my mind cracked open, leaking memories and pain. The primary rule of non-interference had been impressed upon me, as it had been impressed upon Grandfather. It was instinct and implant and tradition. Our heritage is of awesome power, the ability to master time and space, but our cultural imperative is not to use that power in any but the most trivial ways. To think anything different is to risk madness and mindwipe.

Grandfather and I had run away, had broken all of the rules. Except one.

We did not *meddle*. We observed.

Nothing we did affected anything.

I held my head and doubled over, leaning against the Box.

‘What’s wrong with Suze?’ asked Zack.

‘She gets these headaches,’ said Gillian. ‘She goes away sometimes, into the Twilight Zone.’

‘She’s *from* the Twilight Zone,’ said John. ‘Haven’t you been paying attention? Her and this old man. They’re not from here. They’re not like us. They’re not human. It’s why the ice let her through, why it hasn’t hurt her. The Cold Knights are after us, human beings. She isn’t one. It has nothing against *her*.’

My head hurt so much I couldn’t speak.

Gillian stood and thought, mulling over what John had said, over what she was seeing and hearing. Of them all, she was the sharpest, quickest to grasp what was happening.

I gritted my teeth and fought the pain.

‘Sir,’ said Gillian, addressing Grandfather as if he were a teacher she wanted to get around. ‘May I ask a question?’

‘Ask away. I shan’t promise to give you an answer you can comprehend, though.’

‘Could you stop the Cold Knights if you wanted to? Make them go away?’

‘It’s an it, not a them. Singular, not plural. I thought I’d made that entirely clear.’

‘But could you?’

Grandfather pondered a moment. ‘Oh yes, I think so. Quite a simple problem. This gadget turned the other way could siphon much of the cold force. Exacerbate the unintended effect of my time-space machine and drain off almost all of the Cold’s energies. Make it draw in its horns, as it were. The animus could be localised, perhaps even confined to a single snowflake. An ice crystal would be quite complex enough in its configurations to be at least a temporary receptacle.’

Gillian held me, hugging me, and put her hands on my forehead. She

was so close she could feel the beating of my hearts.

‘Then do it, or I’ll twist Susan’s head off!’

My mind cleared, suddenly.

Everyone looked at Gillian and me. Her hands were over my ears, in a firm grip. She was strong. She probably couldn’t twist my head off, but she might well be able to break my neck.

Her eyes were grim. I believed she would do what she said.

Grandfather peered down his nose at us.

‘Why ever would you want to do that, girl? Sheer perversity? It just goes to illustrate what I’ve been saying about your species. Murderous barbarians, for the most part.’

‘Susan’s my friend,’ said Gillian. ‘But she’s not like me. You’re not like me. If you don’t help us, there won’t be anyone like me left. No one like John or Zack or Malcolm.’

I foresaw several futures branching from this point. In most of them, I wasn’t alive.

‘She doesn’t mean it,’ said Zack.

‘That’s all you know, Flash,’ said Gillian.

‘This is most irregular, most irritating,’ said Grandfather.

‘Kill it,’ ordered Gillian. ‘End the Cold Knight.’

‘I doubt if I can do that. You can’t ask me to choose between the survival of two vastly different but essentially equivalent terrestrial species. Threatening murder is hardly likely to persuade me that the human race is the worthier contestant.’

‘Then put it to sleep then, turn it off.’

Grandfather thought hard.

Gillian kinked my neck, stretching.

‘No,’ said Grandfather, at last. ‘Mustn’t meddle.’

The shutters had come down in his mind. I could follow his thought processes. I was the only person in the universe to whom he had anything like an attachment (a *human* attachment!), but the law against meddling took precedence, overriding his feelings. His (our?) conditioning was so extreme that the crime, even the *contemplation* of the crime, invoked its own punishment – creating the fog-patches, blotting memories, shutting down whole aspects of personality.

I've always feared Home. Now, at the point of death, I had learned to hate Home. Not for what would happen to me, or even the Earth, but for what had been done to Grandfather.

'Aren't you even sorry?' asked Gillian. 'If not about us, about Susan?'

'It doesn't work like that. You wouldn't understand.'

Gillian let go of my head.

'I'm glad I don't understand,' she said. 'You're a monster. You're worse than the fanatics who wanted to sacrifice Malcolm. You're worse than ... than *my old man*. You'd let your own granddaughter die rather than throw a switch. You're worse than anyone in history ever. Don't you have feelings at all?'

Gillian was crying. My neck still hurt, but I tried to comfort her.

For the first time, Grandfather was bewildered.

Certainties in his mind were breaking down.

I knew he does have feelings. If I have them — and I certainly do, to the point of being driven mad by the irreconcilable emotions swarming through me every minute of the day — then so does he. We aren't human, but we are people.

'You broke all the other rules, Grandfather,' I said. 'And you were right to break them. Break this last one. Nothing stays as it is forever, except at Home and that's not really a part of this universe. The Earth has changed since the Great Ice Age. It's not suited to the Cold. It'd be happier somewhere else, with a more congenial climate. There are colder planets.'

Grandfather thought a while, then said, 'Pluto.'

'There's ice on Pluto,' said John.

'Not much else, my boy. And Nitrogen ice too. Next to that, hydrogen ice is just pretending to be cold.'

'If you helped the Cold emigrate to Pluto,' I said, 'everyone would be happy.'

'It wouldn't be natural, though. We'd be *meddling*.'

'Have you never wanted to meddle? We watch so many things. We could change them, you know. For the better.'

'And once we started down that road, where d' you think we'd end up?'

‘A part of things, not apart from them.’

‘Indeed. Dreadful state of affairs, hmm?’

‘Mister,’ said Malcolm, ‘Please ...’

Grandfather noticed the boy. Malcolm held out Cowboy Gonk.

‘Please make the snowmen go away. You can have my gonk. It’s my favourite one.’

Grandfather solemnly took it, and considered the stuffed toy.

‘His name is Cowboy Gonk,’ said Malcolm.

‘Does this represent an actual earthly lifeform?’ asked Grandfather. ‘Arms stick out where the ears should be. Where would a digestive system be located in this giant skull, do you think? The legs wouldn’t support the weight of the head. No, it’s most impractical. It’d never survive.’

‘It’s a toy, Grandfather,’ I said. ‘It’s not supposed to be practical.’

The gonk struck him very strangely.

More than Gillian’s threat to me, the gonk got through to him.

‘It’s a feat of the imagination,’ he said. ‘Unusual.’

‘Unique,’ I insisted. ‘To them, humanity.’

He smiled, showing his crooked teeth. Inside his mind, a wall collapsed.

‘It’d be a pity to lose this quality. A great pity. The universe would be a drabber, duller place without it. At the very least, the human race deserves further study. I shall see what I can do about the Cold.’

Later –

‘Ahem, there seems to be a problem,’ said Grandfather.

He had been in communication with the whispering ice.

‘The Cold is very grateful for our suggestions and much appreciates the offer of alternative accommodation, but on the whole would rather continue with its original intention ...’

‘Wiping out the human race?’

‘Yes, child. Most regrettable.’

Grandfather gave a well-I-did-my-best shrug, and rearranged some

levers.

‘So, reverse the polarity, or whatever it is you need to do,’ said John. ‘Make the Cold Knights do what you want.’

‘John Brent, isn’t it?’ said Grandfather, peering at the boy.

‘That might be a name to be reckoned with. In some futures.’

‘Yes. I’m John Brent.’

‘And you’re at school with Susan. Interesting. Knowing your mental inclinations, you should be able to understand that the course of action you’re proposing is not quite as simple as one might hope.’

‘Susan said you could see off the Cold.’

Grandfather looked at me, trying not to seem pleased.

‘Did she now? The child has a great deal of faith in her aged relative, it would appear. It wouldn’t do to let her down.’

All the while, he’d been playing with the keyboard of his machine, pretending to be casually fiddling but actually making crucial adjustments.

‘Now,’ he said, loudly, addressing the Cold. ‘I think you should concentrate.’

There was a cracking in the ice, a grumbling inside. Grandfather put on a pair of tinted spectacles, and made adjustments to the multiple lenses.

‘Is that load of old rubbish wired together supposed to save us all?’ asked Gillian, incredulous.

“‘Load of old rubbish’”? Indeed! What do you take me for, a rag and bone man? This is a highly sophisticated instrument. But it’s just a machine. It only functions on this plane. It can perform certain pre-ordained tasks. That’s about it. But, and this is highly significant – John, pay attention, you should learn something of interest to you – this machine doesn’t have to exist only on this plane. It has multi-dimensional mass. What do you think of that, then?’

He held the lapel of his frock coat and made a sign for applause. None came.

‘Don’t you see? By stretching into other planes, we can, as it were, enfold the Cold. A classic stratagem, from the repertoire of the Great Khan. Of course, he was a proponent of encirclement, a two-dimensional tactic. What we intend might more accurately be called enspherement.

By using certain elements from my space-time machine, I can grasp the animus of the Cold inside a few seconds. But there's something I need to complete the device.'

'What?' I asked.

'Your friend, who so kindly offered his gonk. Malcolm, come here, would you?'

He smiled alarmingly. Malcolm hesitated. I realise Grandfather can be quite frightening if he doesn't work against it. Malcolm decided and walked over to join Grandfather.

'Hold these, please.'

Grandfather gave Malcolm what seemed like a pair of metal skipping-rope handles attached to cables that wound into the machine.

'Now, Malcolm ... make a wish.'

Malcolm closed his eyes.

There was a quiet moment, when the storm outside seemed to fade.

'Motive power has to come from somewhere,' Grandfather lectured. 'In this instance, our young friend Malcolm. I shouldn't be surprised if he were born with a caul. He has a capacity most of you people lose as you grow up. With these spectacles, I can see the last of it vaguely shimmering around John, Gillian and Zack. But it's a shining bubble around Malcolm. Its focus isn't his brain, but his heart. Susan, there are advantages to having only one heart. A reason we are discouraged from having feelings is that the ancients were correct to locate the emotion in the heart. You have already found out how troublesome it can be to have two or more feelings jostling for attention inside your ribcage. Energy is dissipated. What we are attempting here is a feat of concentration.'

A great chord tooted out of the organ-pipes.

Malcolm opened his eyes and put the handles down. 'Is it done?' he asked.

Grandfather patted his head and looked to us for approval.

Then the cataclysm started.

All the ice in Foreman's Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us. I covered my head with my arms.

'Keep wishing,' Grandfather ordered, thrusting the handles back at Malcolm.

The murderous hail vanished, reconstituted as ice. Then the explosion came again. And was taken back, and came again.

As Grandfather had said, the Cold was trapped *inside seconds*. A time-scratch playing over and over. On the fifth or sixth replay, hail-claws scratched me.

The Cold was resisting Grandfather's enspherement.

'You three, human children, come here,' ordered Grandfather. 'Who knows how to play the organ?'

John and Gillian looked aghast at each other.

All the ice in Foreman's Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us. I covered my head with my arms.

'I was in a skiffle band once,' said Zack.

'Capital, capital. Take the higher registers. That's this keyboard here. Set up a roundelay effect, something like Ravel's "Bolero" ... '

'Don't know that number.'

'Maurice Ravel was a French composer,' put in John, annoyed. 'The "Bolero" is his most famous work.'

'Can you play it on the joanna?'

John shook his head.

'Then the set-list is up to me, Mars-man.'

All the ice in Foreman's Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us.

I felt the beginnings of a fatal flaying, but they were taken back.

'Stop bickering,' said Grandfather. 'Anything simple and repetitive will do, Zack.'

Zack edged Malcolm to one side, and began to lay down a bass line.

'Now, you two, let's see what you can do.'

Grandfather took John and Gillian's hands and wrapped them around Malcolm's knotted little fists.

'Think of warm summer days,' he told them. 'Tropical beaches, heat-strokes, burning buildings, the surface of Mercury, the heart of the sun. Don't just think, *imagine!* You've not lost your shining yet, though it's in a sorry state.'

All the ice in Foreman's Yard exploded into diamond-shards and flew at us.

It was as if I'd been shot through with cold shrapnel. Then, it wasn't.

I could see what the spectacles helped Grandfather see in Malcolm, a kind of golden glow inside his chest, pulsing out through his whole body, lighting up the inside of his skin, pouring through his eyes, nostrils and mouth. John and Gillian, to a lesser extent, were the same.

The machine was shaking and tooting through its steam-whistle.

Zack, transported by his simple bass line, began to throw in improvised flourishes.

'Susan, I want you to do something very important,' said Grandfather. He was tugging at switches and levers. 'Both my hands are busy.'

'Yes, Grandfather.'

'Put some tea on would you, my dear.'

All the ice in Foreman's Yard exploded ...

And folded in on itself, funnelling into a glittering spiral, like a huge seashell, then coiled and dwindled, sucking droplets from everywhere. Frozen speckles of blood and dirt flew off my face and hands. It felt like a severe eyebrow-plucking over every square inch of exposed skin.

Something inside the contraption burned out. Golden fire-arcs leaped between the pipes. The eyes of the cherubs blazed, and trickled liquid metal.

All the ice ...

... crackled, fighting Grandfather's machine, but the pull was irresistible. Cold Knights stumped to the gateway of the Yard, then shivered into inanimate snowflakes. The snow tornado funnelled down into something the size of an ice-cream cone, sucking in more and more of swirling ice-chips.

The sun broke through the clouds.

It was only late afternoon.

The machine collapsed with a burst of turquoise energy. Zack, quiff straightened into a Bride of Frankenstein frizzy perm, was hurled away from the keyboard. John, Gillian and Malcolm huddled low, to avoid flying bits of mechanism.

Grandfather stood in the middle of it all, pleased.

Later —

Water dripped around the junkyard. A thaw was beginning.

‘There,’ said Grandfather, holding up a diamond-shaped lump of ice. ‘The Cold is in here. It has withdrawn its animus. It was stretching itself, trying to inhabit all the ice in the world straight away. In a month or so, perhaps ... but it was impatient. The whole of its Intelligence is here. Pretty thing, isn’t it?’

‘And now you’ll make a rocketship?’ asked John. ‘To send it to Pluto?’

‘What? Um, no, of course not. What ever made you think that? I’ll just pop inside for a moment. I shall be back directly.’

He stepped into the Box.

‘I still don’t think calling the coppers will help,’ said Zack.

The Box shifted. It dematerialised then materialised again, seeming to waver but not disappear. In between, Grandfather went to Pluto in the Far Future. He claimed an uneventful trip, but I later checked the log and saw he needed five goes to get there, hopping around the solar system and the centuries, and more than a dozen shots to get back to Foreman’s Yard an instant after departure.

Grandfather popped out.

‘What was that noise?’ asked John.

‘Too complicated to explain, boy. The Cold is on Pluto. I think it has seen reason, and will thrive in the new environment. It has no major competitors there. Your species can get on with what it does best, making a racket and squabbling.’

‘And releasing beat records and painting sunsets and making gonks.’

He was caught up sharp.

‘Yes, Susan, indeed. I feel a strange, I don’t know how you’d put it, *satisfaction*. Why didn’t I ever think before of this *meddling*? Perhaps for the first time, I feel free of *them*. Quite a case can be made for it. I should experiment further along these lines. A great many matters throughout space and time might benefit from a little discreet shove in the right direction. The Dark Ages, for instance ...’

‘Grandfather,’ I scolded.

‘Too much, you think, Susan? You’re probably right.’

Tuesday, April 3rd, 1963

No school today. Or the rest of the week. And then it's the holidays. But after Easter, it'll be back to normal.

It's still cold, but sunny.

I tested a couple of snowmen. They're empty of intelligence.

The electricity is back on, and the gas and water and the BBC. A lot of people died in the 'cold snap', but no one is mentioning the Cold Knights. Grandfather and I aren't the only people on the planet who remember selectively.

Grandfather, at least, is remembering a lot.

By breaking the rule of non-interference, he seems to have dispelled his own fog-patches. I'm frustrated that it doesn't work that way for me.

I don't think I ever *believed* in the rule.

It was just something written into my brain with all the other stuff I've spent my time on Earth discarding. Grandfather stayed in the Box, but, despite qualms, he let me go to School. He must have had a reason for that.

I think he was using me to test the human race, sending me out among them to make a decision for him, to think through a problem he was too old to tackle by himself. If so, it was a close thing.

There's Gillian and John and Zack and Malcolm. There was John's Dad giving up his life for a girl he probably wouldn't have liked if he'd thought about it. There was Dolly, feeling responsible for a little boy because he wandered into a café on her shift. There was Malcolm offering up his most treasured possession for a cause he didn't understand. And there's 'Love Me Do', Albert Finney with an air-rifle, *The Magic Flute*, Lyon's Maid ice cream, St Pancras Station, *Hancock's Half-Hour*.

But there's F.M. and Mr Carker and the Haighs. And that's not counting Nazis and atomic missiles and Double Geography.

I could have gone the other way.

If Gillian hadn't talked to me on my first day at Coal Hill School, I might have been with Grandfather, standing back and letting the Cold

Knights retake the planet and good riddance to bad rubbish.

Wednesday, April 4th, 1963

I met John at the Lyon's Comer House – *not* the Wimpy Bar –and we had tea and cake. Very grown-up.

The Cold may be banished to Pluto, but things were broken during its attempt to regain mastery of the planet that will never be fixed. In the end, it was a matter of throwing a few switches on Grandfather's machine and the Cold Knights melted away, but I still don't feel as if we won anything. John's father and Mr Okehurst and many others are still dead, and people like Mr Carker and the Haighs are still alive, still insisting that they were doing the right thing.

Deep down, John would rather Grandfather had *killed* the Cold, as it killed his father and so many others. Its emigration to Pluto might have been a neat solution, avoiding genocide, but it didn't satisfy his human need for ... justice? Revenge? Not admirable, I know. But I feel its appeal.

Grandfather was tinkering with a machine, seeing a problem and finding a solution. I wasn't. I saw people hurt and killed for no reason except that they were in the way. Grandfather says loftily that the Cold had no grudge, no capacity for cruelty. It was ridding its home of humans in the way a person might clean algae out of a fishtank or take medicine to purge a germ colony. But that's not how it *felt* in the School playground, out on the streets, in the Wimpy Bar, at the railway station. The cold Knights seemed to enjoy their mission: setting traps, springing surprises, making a *game* of it.

If I'm pleased that Grandfather didn't kill the Cold, it's because I wouldn't want him to live with the guilt I know he'd feel at the extermination of an intelligent life-form. I certainly don't want to go to Pluto to visit, to see how 'the Cold fellow' is getting on in its new home.

The big thing is that I don't have a secret any more.

My friends know I'm not from this planet.

The only one who treats me as he always did is Malcolm, and I didn't really have a secret from him. I don't look after him on Saturday afternoons any more. His Auntie Junie has come to live with them, and

so my weekend job has disappeared – I miss it, and not just for the five shillings. I still see Malcolm around the High Street quite often, with his Mum or Auntie Junie. He always has a big smile and a bigger hug for me. He has a new gonk now, Spaceman Gonk, but Cowboy Gonk is still his favourite, even with the woolstitch scar over its eye. His Mum disapproves when he ‘makes up’ stories about me, but it doesn’t upset me. His wild tales might be true, for all I know – maybe he’s wound up with the memories sponged out of my mind. But I have to be careful with him.

Older children, even as old as Zack, know to keep quiet about us. But the little ones are different. They don’t know not to tell grown-ups. Now he’s gone against the meddling rule, Grandfather is a little bit paranoid about grown-ups finding out we’re not human. He says the Truant Officer will have agents on our case, alert for the slimmest rumour. He is especially wary of the teachers at Coal Hill, because he has this strange idea that educators are the sharpest, most dangerous intellects on the planet. I mentioned that he has never been to a parents’ evening, didn’t I?

I don’t see Gillian.

John says Gillian likes Zack now. It’s because he has a motorbike. John says he doesn’t mind, but he does.

He used to like *me*, until he found out I had two hearts.

(The Box is better than any bike, even a Norton – but that’s not a topic likely to come up.)

It’s not that John doesn’t like me now, it’s that he knows too much about me.

Nobody fancies the Mekon. Not even a Martian.

When it was cold, John said things I wish would vanish into my fog but which stubbornly remain lodged in memory. I understand the shock he was suffering from after his father’s death, but that he could think even for a minute that I was responsible for it all makes things awkward between us. It’s strange – Gillian came close to murdering me, but I was more hurt when John called me a spy.

Next year, when she’s sixteen, Gillian plans on leaving home and getting engaged to Zack. She wants to leave School too and get a job in

a shop. Zack might secretly be an Enid Blyton-reading softie, but is still officially a Ton-Up Boy and can take care of himself. The new white lightning- strike in his hair is an intimidating touch. I think he has made Gillian's Dad think twice about belting her.

Gillian *couldn't* kill me, even to save the world. That means her old man hasn't taught her to be like him. I hope she and Zack can be happy, but I know they'll steer clear of me in the future.

They're growing up and want to pretend some things never happened. I just remind them, every time they look at me, that the universe isn't what you see on telly or read in the papers. To get on, they have to believe that it is, or they'll be as outcast here, where they have to live, as Grandfather was back Home.

John isn't like that. He's full of questions about us, but the answers still aren't all there in my head.

I can't name the planet I come from, if it actually is a planet –it might just be a plane. I don't know my Grandfather's name. And 'Susan Foreman' is an alias, at least the Foreman part –which was written up on the gates of the scrap merchant's yard when the Box arrived.

As for the Box, I can explain the Physics, but not in any way John would understand, even if he goes to Cambridge and wins the Nobel Prize. Which, a little bird tells me, is quite likely.

The most upsetting thing is that John is afraid of me. As if I might shoot death-rays out of my eyes.

I'm not sure that I can't do that. Or won't be able to when I grow up.

'I'm leaving Coal Hill,' said John. 'To live with Mum in Northumberland. After what happened with Dad, I won't have to do R.O.T.C. any more. Do you have parents?'

'I don't know.'

'Do you just grow in bottles, or something? Like in *Brave New World*?'

'I don't know.'

'It's weird, Susan.'

I shrugged.

'I mean, even for an ... well, for what you are ... you're weird.'

'Unearthly?'

He looked away.

‘Will you stay here?’ he asked.

‘For a while. It’s up to Grandfather. And the Box. It’s not very well at the moment. What Grandfather did with the Cold Knights wasn’t as easy as he might have made it seem. He had to ignore safety procedures.’

‘I still don’t understand how the Box can be a spaceship.’

‘It’s not. It travels through time and relative dimensions.’

‘In space?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘So you can go anywhere at any time?’

‘Ordinarily. A filament burned out. A replacement isn’t going to be easy to find. We’re not stranded or anything. But we are limited.’

‘And your people will be searching for you now?’

‘Grandfather is afraid so.’

I thought once I could picture the Truant Officer’s face, but it’s fading. I have an image of a smile, smug and nasty and clever. Ghastly Grange’s sneer, on the face of a blurred Satan.

‘You’re criminals?’

‘More like political exiles. Though that doesn’t mean they wouldn’t haul us back and put Grandfather on trial. Especially now. What he did, going to Pluto and all, will have set alarm bells ringing at Home. They’ll *know*. If you interfere with history, it jangles the web. The officer on our case will be more determined than ever. They can take away our memories. Not just from our heads, but from yours. From everybody’s. I think they’ve done that before. Of course, no one would remember.’

‘They sound awful.’

‘Not really. Just old ... set in their ways.’

‘Not “with-it”?’

‘Not at all.’

John looked at his wristwatch. ‘I’ve got to go. I’m meeting Mum at the station.’

We said goodbye. John left.

Later –

Back in the Box, with Grandfather.

He's annoyed. On his trip to Pluto, he broke something serious. Grandfather hasn't tested it yet, but he believes the Box won't follow a course set for it.

'It will go where it wishes, at random, whimsically,' he said, grumpy.

I think the rule in Grandfather's head is broken. He won't follow any course set for him either.

'Typical,' I said.

'Nonsense, Susan. I'll have it fixed in no time.'

AFTERWORD

Elemental, My Dear Susan

Justin Richards

Despite being set before *Who*-proper even started, there is never any doubt that what you have just enjoyed is a *Doctor Who* story. There is something unique about them — something which makes *Doctor Who* a sub-genre in its own right. Something that, like the ‘Cold’ itself, almost defies analysis. Only in *Doctor Who* can walking snowmen be at once absurd and frightening. Only in *Doctor Who* is school detention as chilling as the advancing alien menace. Only in *Doctor Who* can your school friend’s grandfather live in a police box inside a junk yard. The way the images and the imagination are layered is unique.

Time and Relative, like the series it prequels, works on many levels. It gives us something new, something informed with a modern perspective. But it is told from a viewpoint that captures and enhances the child-like, adolescent sense of awe with which many of us were introduced to the Doctor and his adventures. Like Susan, we know more than the other characters. But we are also caught up in the excitement, the tension, the fear and the *wonder* of it all. It’s a Journey of discovery for us all.

Although the Doctor himself is scarcely featured, his presence is felt throughout. He is always there, always in control, always casting a shadow across the ice-white pages. In this sense, as in many others, *Time and Relative* is reminiscent of those early *Who* adventures.

Here too is the Doctor himself of those very first, uncertain times. He is

a background figure — an enigma even to Susan. His motives are dubious, his actions and affiliations unpredictable, lost in the swirling fog. But in this story we get the sense that for the first time he is assuming the mantle of *Humanity's Champion* — of the elemental force that he will become. That the fog is starting to clear a little and afford him glimpses of what he should be.

Within the context of the Universe, like Susan within the context of Coal Hill School, the Doctor is essentially a loner. He walks forever in eternity and he walks alone, lost in his own wanderlust and rocked between boundless enthusiasm and numbing ennui. Companions may come and go, but he is never close to any of them. He never talks of his inner turmoil in detail; he never unburdens himself emotionally; he never opens up whatsoever.

The only *real* feeling the Doctor demonstrates at all is his utter abhorrence of evil. Yet even this and his contention that life is sacred is secondary when the need arises and circumstances conspire to make it so — secondary to some higher calling which is never spelled out, a Greater Good that remains unarticulated and perhaps inarticulatable. A calling that in Kim's story he has yet to come to terms with.

At his most successful times, and here at the start of his adventures, the Doctor is a mystery. We know next to nothing of his feelings and motivations. We discover we know less than we thought about his origins and background. We find that even our trust is not immutable.

But over the years the Doctor's background and his soul have been laid bare. He has become metaphorically as well as narratively more human. And as he becomes better defined, more accessible, so he loses his mystique and appeal. The Doctor of today is in danger of becoming merely a hero like any other. By returning to the roots of *Doctor Who*, Kim is able to recapture so much that we have subsequently lost. *Time and Relative* is a startling demonstration that less is more.

There is something elemental about the Doctor. Especially presented as he is here, the Doctor becomes a *force* rather than a personality. It is not by accident that Kim's 'villain' is also an elemental force — the most appropriate of opponents.

It is unfair to describe any *Doctor Who* story as an archetype. But Kim

has given us something that touches on so many of the nerves of *Doctor Who*, yet which offers us so much that is new. It is deep and thematic, enthusiastic, well-written and expertly-presented. Yet at the same time the story drives it onwards, the excitement pulls us in, the fear makes us shiver with cold realisation.

Because that is what the *Doctor Who* format is really about, what makes it so successful on so many levels for so many people. It is about telling the most exciting and interesting stories in the best possible way. It is a cause for celebration that this format is inexhaustible. It is heartening that so many of us appreciate being drawn into the endless worlds that it opens up. And it is a testament to the power of that format that it is strong enough to appeal to writers of the calibre and talent of Kim Newman.

Justin Richards

BBC Books – Doctor Who Range Consultant

August 2001

About The Author

Kim Newman is an author, film expert and critic, an enthusiastic pundit of SF writing and one of Britain's great eccentrics. Born in Brixton in 1959, he grew up in Somerset and graduated in English at Sussex University. He came to London in 1980 and worked with a Bridgwater Arts and Entertainment Collective called Sheep Worrying as a Kazoo player and cabaret performer.

Kim has published several highly successful novels with Simon and Schuster: *The Night Mayor*, *Bad Dreams*, *Jago*, *The Quorum*, *Life's Lottery* and his earlier reworkings of the Dracula mythology *Anno Dracula*, *The Bloody Red Baron* and *Dracula, cha, cha, cha*, plus four collections of short stories: *Famous Monsters*, *The Original Doctor Shade*, *Seven Stars* and *Unforgivable Stories*. He has also published a collection of his *Where the Bodies are Buried...* stories in one volume and is a regular contributor to several anthology series. He is the author of several specialist film books and is a regular film reviewer for *Empire* and *Sight and Sound* magazines.

Anno Dracula won the Children Of The Night Award for Best Novel from the Dracula Society and the Best Novel Award from the Lord Ruthven Assembly. It was also shortlisted for the Bram Stoker Award and the World Fantasy Award. The *Where the Bodies are Buried* book won the British Fantasy Award for Best Collection. *The Quorum*, *Dr Shade* and *Anno Dracula* have all been optioned for movies.