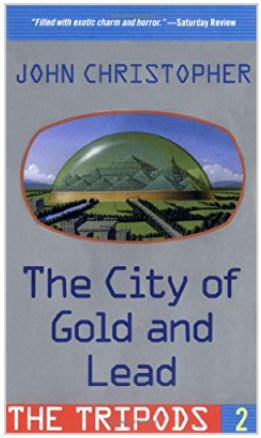

The City of Gold and Lead

By John Christopher

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Long ago, the Tripods--huge, three-legged machines--descended upon Earth and took control. Now people unquestioningly accept the Tripods' power. They have no control over their thoughts or their lives. But for a brief time in each person's life--in childhood--he is not a slave. For Will, his time of freedom is about to end--unless he can escape to the White Mountains, where the possibility of freedom still exists. The Tripods trilogy follows the adventures of Will and his cohorts, as they try to evade the Tripods and maintian their freedom and ultimately do battle against them. The prequel, When the Tripods Came, explains how the Tripods first invaded and gained control of the planet.

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The City of Gold and Lead By John Christopher Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #841504 in Books
- Brand: Simon Pulse
- Published on: 2003-04-01
- Released on: 2003-04-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.00" h x .70" w x 4.19" l, .29 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 224 pages

Editorial Review

About the Author
John Christopher was the pseudonym of Samuel Youd, who was born in Lancashire, England, in 1922. He was the author of more than fifty novels and novellas, as well as numerous short stories. His most famous books include *The Death of Grass*, the Tripods trilogy, *The Lotus Caves*, and *The Guardians*.

Chapter One: Three Are Chosen

Even when we first came to the White Mountains, in summer, the upper reaches of the Tunnel looked out over fields of snow and ice; but at the lower end there were rocks and grass and a view of the glacier, stained brown with mud and dripping into rivulets that ran down to the valley, far far below. In September there was a fall of snow which did not lie, but in the early days of October the snow came again, more heavily, and this time remained. The grip of winter tightened around us, and it was to be more than half a year before those white bony fingers unclenched.

Preparations for the siege had been made long before. Food had been stored, cattle and winter fodder taken into the inner recesses of the mountain which sheltered us. We did not need a great deal by way of heat, protected as we were by dozens, hundreds of yards of solid rock. Cool in summer, our deep caves were warm, by comparison, in winter. We wore furs when we were outside, but the rest of the time our normal clothing was enough.

Our lives were confined, but by no means idle. Reveille, for those of us in the training cadre, was at six, and was followed by half an hour's brisk exercise. After that came a simple breakfast, and then the first study period of the day, lasting three hours. There were more exercises before the midday meal, and in the afternoon exercise and instruction in our particular sports. If the weather were fine, this took place outside in the snow; otherwise in the Great Cavern. There was a second study period before supper, and afterward generally there was discussion among our seniors, to which we listened but in which we did not presume to join. It had one subject -- the Tripods -- and one purpose: their overthrow.

The Tripods had been rulers of the earth for more than a hundred years. They governed simply and effectively, by dominating the minds of men. This was achieved through the Caps, meshes of silvery metal which fitted closely around the skull and were woven into the very flesh of their wearers. Capping occurred in one's fourteenth year, marking the point at which one ceased to be a child and became an adult. It was taken for granted, an expected, looked-for thing, attended by feasting and celebration.

A few months earlier I had seen my cousin Jack, a year older than myself, go through the ceremony, and had noticed the change in him afterward. I was to be Capped the following year. I had some misgivings, but I kept them private -- no one talked much about Tripods and Cappings and, of course, no one ever queried the rightness of these things. Not, that is, until the Vagrant, Ozymandias, came to the little village where I lived.

The Vagrants were those for whom Capping had not worked properly. Their minds had refused to accept the conditioning of the Tripods and, in refusing, had been broken. They wandered from place to place, never resting long, and were looked after but pitied and disliked by normal Capped men and women. Now, though, I found myself more interested in them; particularly in the one who called himself Ozymandias, a big, red-

haired, red-bearded man who sang strange songs, and spoke lines of poetry, and mixed sense and nonsense when he talked. Defying my parents, I invited him to come to the den which Jack and I had made just outside the village. He told me a strange story.

He was, in the first place, not really a Vagrant, but posing as such so that he could travel through the land, unchallenged and unremarked. The Cap he wore was a false one. He explained that the Tripods were enemies of men, not benefactors, invaders, perhaps, from another world, and how, through Capping, minds which were just beginning to think for themselves were subdued and harnessed to the worship of their oppressors.

He told me, too, that although the Tripods ruled the planet, there were a few places where free men survived, and that one of these was among the White Mountains, across the sea from England far to the south. He asked me if I would be willing to make a difficult and dangerous journey there, and I said I would.

He himself traveled on in search of more recruits, but I did not go alone. Another cousin of mine, Henry, an old antagonist since before our schooldays, saw me leaving the village and followed me. We crossed the sea together, and in the land called France found a third, Jean-Paul -- whom we named Beanpole. Together we made our way south. It was as difficult and dangerous as Ozymandias had promised. Near the end, we fought a battle with a Tripod and, by luck and a weapon of the ancients which we found in the ruins of one of the great-cities, destroyed it.

So, at last, we reached the White Mountains.

There were eleven of us in the training cadre, being prepared for the first move in the counterattack against our enemies. It was a hard schooling, in body and mind alike, but we knew a little of the task before us, and how heavy the odds against success were. The discipline and hardship we had to endure might not shorten those odds by much, but every bit counted.

For we -- or some of us -- were to conduct a reconnaissance. We knew almost nothing of the Tripods -- not even whether they were intelligent machines or vehicles for alien beings. We must know more before we could hope to fight them successfully; and there was only one way to get that knowledge. Some of us, one at least, must penetrate into the City of the Tripods, study them, and bring back information. The plan was this:

The City lay to the north, in the country of the Germans. Each year some of the newly Capped, chosen in different ways, were brought there to serve the Tripods. I had witnessed one such way at the ChÂƒteau de la Tour Rouge, when Eloise, the daughter of the Comte, had been made Queen of the Tournament. I had been horrified to learn that at the end of her brief reign she should want to be taken to be a slave of the enemy, and go gladly, thinking it an honor.

Among the Germans, it seemed, there were Games each summer, to which young men came from hundreds of miles away. The winners were feasted and made much of after which they, too, went to serve in the City. At the next Games, it was hoped, one of us might win, and gain admission. What would happen after that was unknown. Anyone who succeeded would have to rely on his wits, both in spying on the Tripods and in passing on what he had learned. The last part was likely to be the hardest. Because although scores, perhaps hundreds, went yearly into the City, not one had ever been known to come out.

One day the snow was melting at the foot of the Tunnel where we exercised, and a week later it lay only in isolated patches, and there was the green of grass, dotted with purple crocuses. The sky was blue, and sunlight flamed from the white peaks all round, burning our skins through the thin pure air. During a break we lay on the grass and looked down. Figures moved cautiously half a mile below, visible to us but taking cover from those who might look up from the valley. This was the first raiding party of the season, on its

way to plunder the fat lands of the Capped.

I sat with Henry and Beanpole, a little apart from the rest. The lives of all those who lived in the mountains were closely knit, but this strand was a more tightly woven one. In the things we had endured, jealousies and enmities had worn away and been replaced by true comradeship. The boys in the cadre were our friends, but the bond between us three was special.

Beanpole said gloomily, "I failed at one meter seventy today."

He spoke in German; we had learned the language but needed to practice it. I said, "One goes off form. You'll improve again."

"I'm getting worse every day."

Henry said, "Rodrigo's definitely gone off. I beat him comfortably."

"It's all right for you."

Henry had been chosen as a long-distance runner, and Rodrigo was his chief rival. Beanpole was training for long and high jumping. I was one of two boxers. There were four sports altogether -- the other was sprint running -- and they had been arranged to produce a maximum of competitiveness. Henry had done well in his event from the start. And I myself was fairly confident, at any rate, as far as my opponent here was concerned. This was Tonio, a dark-skinned boy from the south, taller than I and with a longer reach, but not as quick. Beanpole, though, had grown increasingly pessimistic about his chances.

Henry reassured him, telling him he had heard the instructors saying he was coming on well. I wondered if it were true, or said for encouragement: the former, I hoped.

I said, "I asked Johann if it had been decided yet how many were to go."

Johann, one of the instructors, was squat and powerful, yellow-haired, with the look of a bad-tempered bull but amiable at heart. Henry asked, "What did he say?"

"He wasn't sure, but he thought four -- the best from each group."

"So it could be us three, plus an extra," Henry said.

Beanpole shook his head. "I'll never do it."

"You will."

I said, "And the fourth?"

"It might be Fritz."

He did seem to be the best of the sprint runners, as far as we could tell. He was German himself, and came from a place on the edge of a forest to the northeast. His chief rival was a French boy, Etienne, whom I preferred. Etienne was cheerful and talkative, Fritz tall, heavy, taciturn.

I said, "As long as we all come through."

"You two will," Beanpole said.

Henry leaped to his feet. "There's the whistle. Come on, Beanpole. Time to get back to work."

The seniors had their own tasks. Some were our instructors; others formed the raiding parties to keep us supplied with food. There were still others who studied the few books that had survived from olden days, and tried to relearn the skills and mysteries of our ancestors. Beanpole, whenever he had a chance, would be with them, listening to their talk and even putting up suggestions of his own. Not long after we met he had spoken -- wildly, as I thought -- about using a sort of gigantic kettle to push carriages without the need for horses. Something like this had been discovered, or rediscovered, here, though it would not yet work properly. And there were plans for more remarkable things: making light and heat through something which had been called electricity was one.

And at the head of all the groups there was one man, whose hands held all the threads, whose decisions were unquestioned. This was Julius.

He was close on sixty years old, a small man and a cripple. When he was a boy he had fallen into an ice crevasse and broken his thigh: it had been set badly and he walked with a limp. In those days, things had been very different in the White Mountains. Those who lived there had no purpose but survival, and their numbers were dwindling. It was Julius who thought of winning recruits from the world outside, from those not yet Capped, and who believed -- and made others believe -- that some day men would fight back against the Tripods, and destroy them.

It was Julius, too, who had worked out the enterprise for which we were being trained. And it was Julius who would make the final decision on which of us were chosen.

He came out one day to watch us. He was white-haired, red-cheeked like most of those who had lived all their lives in this sharp, clear air, and he leaned on a stick. I saw him, and concentrated hard on the bout in which I was engaged. Tonio feinted with his left, and followed up with a right cross. I made him miss, hammered a sharp right to his ribs and, when he came in again, landed a left to the jaw which sent him sprawling.

Julius beckoned, and I ran to where he stood. He said, "You are improving, Will."

"Thank you, sir."

"I suppose you are getting impatient to know which of you will be going to the Games?"

I nodded. "A little, sir."

He studied me. "When the Tripod had you in its grasp -- do you remember how you felt? Were you afraid?"

I remembered. I said, "Yes, sir."

"And the thought of being in their hands, in their City -- does that frighten you?" I hesitated, and he went on: "There are two sides to the choice, you know. We old ones may be able to judge your quickness and skill, of mind and body, but we cannot read your hearts."

"Yes," I admitted, "it frightens me."

"You do not have to go. You can be useful here." His pale blue eyes looked into mine. "No one need know if you prefer to stay."

I said, "I want to go. I can bear the thought of being in their hands more easily than of being left behind."

"Good." He smiled. "And you, after all, have killed a Tripod -- something I doubt any other human being can claim. You know that they are not all-powerful. That is an asset, Will."

"Do you mean, sir...?"

"I mean what I said. There are other considerations. You must go on working hard, and preparing, in case you are chosen."

Later I saw him talking to Henry. I thought it was probably much the same conversation as mine had been. I did not ask him, though, and he did not volunteer anything about it.

During the winter our diet, although adequate, had been very dull, the staple item dried and salted meat, which, however hard the cooks tried, remained stodgy and unappetizing. In the middle of April, though, a raiding party brought back half a dozen black-and-white cows, and Julius decreed that one should be killed and roasted. After the feast, he spoke to us. When he had been talking a few minutes I realized, the excitement almost suffocating me, that this, almost certainly, was the moment for announcing the names of those who were to make the attempt at penetrating the City of the Tripods.

He had a quiet voice, and I was with the other boys at the far end of the cave, but his words were clear. Everyone was listening, attentively and in silence. I glanced at Henry, on my right. In the flickering light, I thought he looked very confident. My own confidence was ebbing rapidly. It would be bitter if he went, and I were left.

First, Julius talked about the plan in general. For months those in the training cadre had been preparing for their task. They would have some advantage over competitors from lower lands, because it was known that men in higher altitudes developed stronger lungs and muscles than those who lived in the thicker air. But it had to be remembered that there would be hundreds of competitors, drawn from the best athletes all over the country. It might be that, for all their preparation, not one of our small band would wear a champion's belt. In that case, they must find their way back to the White Mountains, and try again, next year. Patience was as necessary as determination.

Contestants in the Games must be Capped, of course. That presented no great difficulty. We had Caps, taken from those killed in forays into the valleys, which could be molded to fit the skulls of the ones chosen. They would look like Caps, but they would give no orders. Here, though, a problem did present itself.

We who had never been Capped could not know just how men's minds were controlled by them. It might be that they simply fixed the wearers in an attitude of uncritical obedience, of devotion, to the Tripods. In that case, our spies only needed to put on the appearance of willing slaves. But there was the possibility that the Tripods could talk to the minds of the Capped through the Caps, without the need for speech. That, it was plain, would mean discovery, and either execution or Capping. The former was the better fate.

Not only for the individuals but for those who stayed behind. It had been objected -- I wondered who had dared to object to a plan put forward by Julius -- that this involved the risk of betraying our existence to the Tripods, of provoking them to bring their power to bear and crush us. The risk must be taken. We could not skulk forever in the mountains. Even if we hid in holes all the time, eventually they would ferret us out and exterminate us, like vermin. Our hope of survival lay in attack.

Now to the details of the plan:

The City of the Tripods lay hundreds of miles to the north. There was a great river which covered most of that distance. Barges plied up and down it in trade, and one of these was in the hands of our men. It would sail to a spot within easy reach of the place where the Games were held.

Julius paused, before going on.

It had been decided that three should be selected from the training cadre. Many things had to be taken into account: individual skill and strength, the likely level of competition in the event, the temperament of the person and his probable usefulness once he had penetrated the Tripods' stronghold. It had not been easy, but the choices had been made. Raising his voice slightly, he called.

"Stand up, Will Parker."

For all my hopes, the shock of hearing my own name unnerved me. My legs trembled as I got to my feet.

Julius said, "You have shown ability as a boxer, Will, and you have the advantage of being small and light in weight. Your training has been with Tonio, who would be in a heavier class at the Games, and this should help you.

"The doubt we had was about you yourself. You are impatient, often thoughtless, likely to rush into things without giving careful enough consideration to what may happen next. From that point of view, Tonio would have been better. But he is less likely to succeed at the Games, which is our first concern. A heavy responsibility may rest on you. Can we rely on you to do your utmost to guard against your own recklessness?"

I promised, "Yes, sir."

"Sit down, then, Will. Stand up, Jean-Paul Deliet."

I think I felt gladder about Beanpole than when my own name was called; perhaps because I was less confused and had been less optimistic. I had picked up his own gloom about his chances. So there would be three -- the three of us who had journeyed together before, who had fought the Tripod on the hillside.

Julius said, "There were difficulties in your case, too, Jean-Paul. You are the best of our jumpers, but it is not sure that you are up to the standard that will be necessary to win at the Games. And there is the question of your eyesight. The contraption of lenses you invented -- or rediscovered because they were common among the ancients -- is something that passed as an eccentricity in a boy, but the Capped do not have such eccentricities. You must blunder through a world in which you will see less clearly than your fellows. If you get inside the City, you will not perceive things with the clarity that Will, for instance, would.

"But what you see, you may understand better. Your intelligence is an asset which outweighs the weakness of your eyes. You could be the most useful in bringing back to us what we have to know. Do you accept the task?"

Beanpole said, "Yes, sir."

"And so we come to the third choice, which was the easiest." I saw Henry looking pleased with himself, and was childish enough to feel a little resentment. "He is the most likely to succeed in his event, and the best equipped for what may follow.

"Fritz Eger -- do you accept?"

I tried to speak to Henry, but he made it plain that he wanted to be left alone. I saw him again later on, but he was morose and uncommunicative. Then, the following morning, I happened to go to the lookout gallery, and found him there.

The main Tunnel had been built by the ancients to take horseless carriages up through the mountain to a point near the top, where the great glacier rolled away between snowy peaks to the southeast. We had no idea

why they had done that, but there was a big house at the top, and a building with a domed roof of metal that had a vast telescope pointing at the sky, and a cave where strange figures were carved in ice. On the way up, there were galleries, from which one looked out and down, and the lowest of these showed a rich green valley, thousands of feet below, in which one could see roads like black thread, tiny houses, pinpoint cattle in miniature meadows. There was a telescope here, too, a small one fixed in the rock, but one of the lenses had been broken and it was useless.

Henry was leaning against the low wall of rock, and turned as I approached. I said awkwardly, "If you want me to go..."

"No." He shrugged. "It doesn't matter."

"I'm...sorry."

He managed a grin. "Not as sorry as I am."

"If we went to see Julius...I don't see why there shouldn't be four instead of three."

"I've already seen him."

"And there's no hope?"

"None. I'm the best of my group, but they don't think I'd stand much chance in the Games. Perhaps next year, if I keep at it."

"I don't see why you shouldn't *try* this year."

"I said that, too. He says even three is really too large a party to send out. So much more chance of being spotted, and more difficult with the barge."

One did not argue with Julius. I said, "Well, you will have a chance next year."

"If there is a next year."

There would only be a second expedition if this one failed. I thought of what failure could mean, to me personally. The diminutive valley of fields and houses and ribboned rivers, on which I had so often looked with longing, was as sunny as before, but suddenly less attractive. I was staring at it from a dark hole, but one in which I had come to feel safe.

Yet even in the brush of fear, I felt sorry for Henry. I could have been the one left behind. I did not think I would have borne it as well, if so.

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