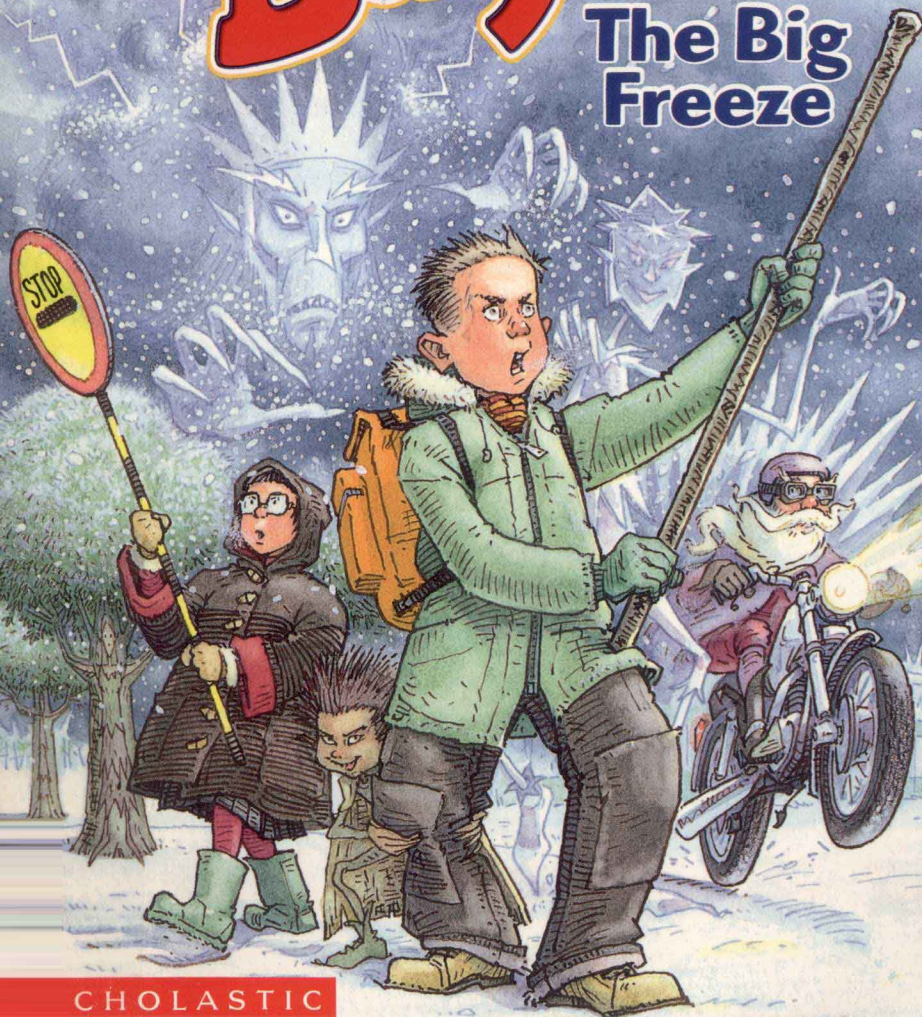


PHILIP REEVE

Buster Bayliiss

The Big Freeze



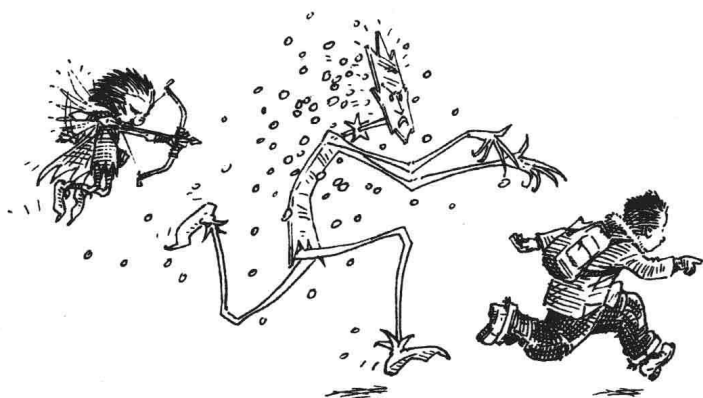
CHOLASTIC

PHILIP REEVE

Buster Bayliss

江苏工业学院图书馆
The Big Freeze
藏书章

**Illustrated by
Graham Philpot**



SCHOLASTIC

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Mr Bayliss's hair by his mum.

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No children's TV presenters were harmed during the making of this book, but
we'll try to do better next time.

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So there.

Buster Bayliss

The Big Freeze

"The earth is already growing cold. The frost will spread, and the snow will fall, and the glaciers will wake and come grinding down from the deep north again, and soon the whole world will be one big snowball, spinning round a cold sun."

"You mean there's going to be an ice age?" asked Buster. He had done ice ages in school, but he'd never imagined them starting in Smogley. "Wicked! Will there be mammoths?"

"You really are thick," sighed the dryad. "I mean, even by human standards. I've known mushrooms with better brains than yours."

Look out for more books in this series:

Night of the Living Veg
Day of the Hamster



1

HANGING AROUND THE MOUND

"So we're halfway through the first day of our dig here in Smogley," shouted Quentin Quigley, "and so far we still have **ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA** what this ancient mound here on the playing field at Crisp Street School actually *is*!"

He jumped across one of the little trenches where the archaeologists were hard at work and hurried excitedly around the base of the mound, while a cameraman ran ahead of him to make sure the camera stayed trained on his grinning face.

"Is it the remains of a medieval rubbish tip?" he asked. "Is it a bit of a Norman castle? Or is it really much, much older, as local legends say? Well, so far we haven't unearthed a single find

from any of our trenches. But one person who might be able to give us some clues is local lollipop lady, Erica Bayliss!"

"Mum!" hissed Buster. "That's you!"

Buster's mum straightened her spectacles and looked nervous as Quentin Quigley came bounding towards her with his cameraman and sound-person scrambling behind him. The TV people had told her to wear her school crossing warden's uniform, and she looked awkward and out of place in her shiny coat and little black hat, clutching her "STOP" sign.

"Now, Ms Bayliss," said Quentin Quigley, dazzling her with a gleaming white grin. "You're not just an ordinary lollipop lady, are you?"

"Er. . ." said Buster's mum uncertainly.

"In fact," said Quentin Quigley, turning to the camera again, "Ms Bayliss is a keen member of the local history society, and she's the person who wrote to *Dig This!* and asked us to come and excavate this mound. But why?"

Good question! thought Buster. It was embarrassing enough having a history-mad mum who wrote to telly programmes and asked them to dig up mounds, but why had she had to pick on this particular mound? It was just a *mound*, steep and cone-shaped and covered in grass,

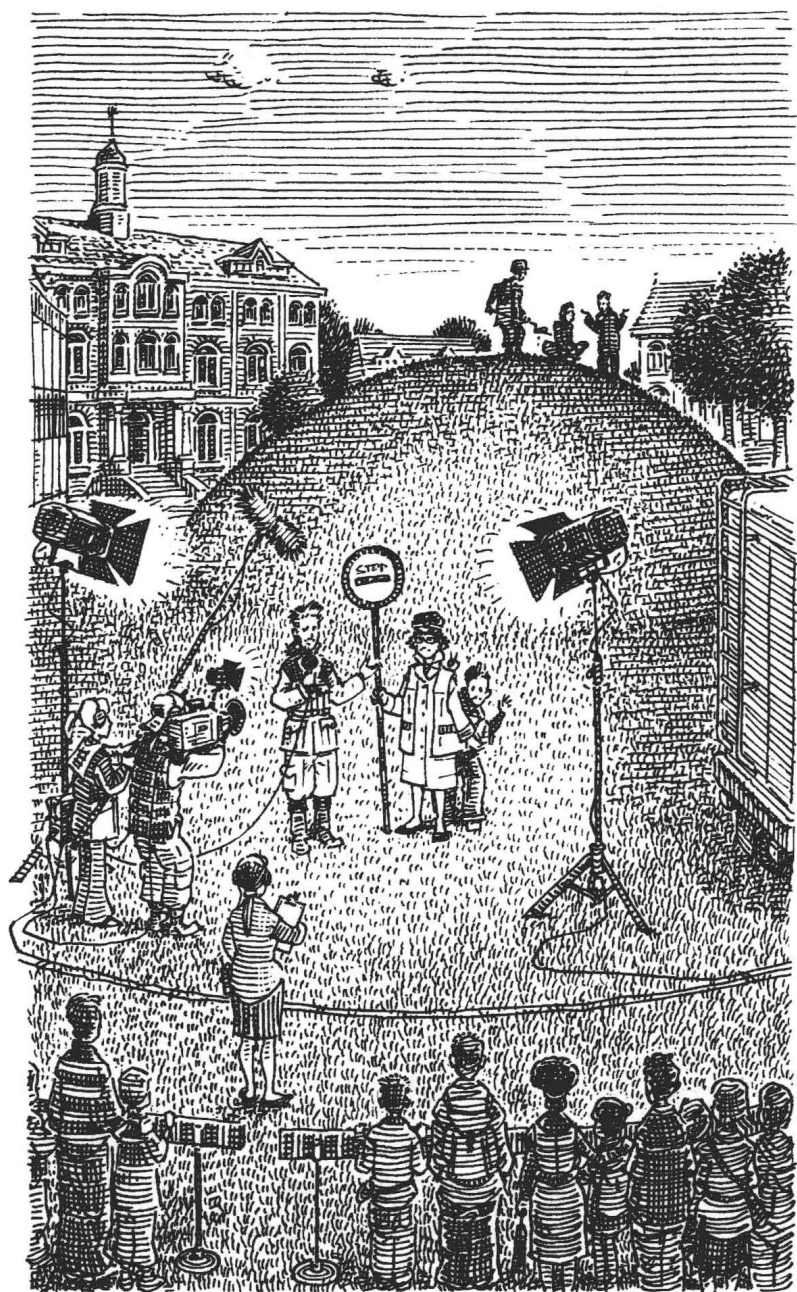
sitting among the weeds and litter at the far end of his school playing field. It was quite good for rolling down during the lunch hour and getting grass stains all over your shirt, but Buster couldn't see why Britain's third most popular TV archaeology programme thought it would be worth digging up. It wasn't as if it were a castle or something.

"Well," his mum was saying, smiling nervously at the camera. "Well, I've been doing a lot of research on this mound down at the local museum, and I'm sure there's something unusual about it. For instance, did you know that the Bishop of Smogley, writing in the fifteenth century, said there was once a standing stone on the top of it? And on a map of 1642—"

"Stop!" bellowed Quentin Quigley suddenly. "Cut! Hold it!"

The cameraman lowered his camera, the sound-person swung her big furry microphone away and Carla, the programme's producer, came stumbling down the side of the mound to see what the problem was.

"Fifteenth-century bishops?" wailed Quentin Quigley. "Local museums? Come on, Ms Bayliss! We aren't doing some dry old documentary here, you know! This is *Dig This!* We take history and



make it cool and kicking and something the kids will be interested in – and kids aren't interested in dusty old local museums and fifteenth-century bishops! You've got to give us something that will make them sit up and pay attention, Ms Bayliss!"

Buster knew what would make *him* pay attention. He tugged at Quentin Quigley's trendy combat trousers. "Scuse me," he said, "but what about if you got some blokes and dressed them up like knights and Vikings and stuff and they had a big fight?"

Quentin Quigley blinked at him.

"Buster!" hissed his mum.

"And you need some skeletons," Buster went on. "I mean, if there aren't any skeletons inside the mound to start with, maybe you could borrow one from somewhere else and pretend you found it here." Buster liked skeletons.

Quentin Quigley snapped his fingers at the producer. "Carla, give this kid a *Dig This!* pencil case and get him out of here." He turned back to Buster's mum. "Now, what was all that stuff you told us in your letter, about ghosts and witches and things?"

Mrs Bayliss looked uneasy. "Oh, that," she said. "Well, it's just a lot of silly stories really. Local folklore. Over the centuries, people have always

thought of the mound as a haunted place. The local name for it used to be Hob's Hill, and Hob is a traditional name for an evil spirit. . ."

"That's more like it!" whooped Quentin Quigley. "That's what the kids want! Something a little bit spooky."

"We certainly need *something* to spice this show up," muttered Carla as she thrust a pencil case into Buster's hand and pushed him away from the mound. "If the archaeologists don't find something soon we'll have to give up and cancel the whole programme. . ."

Buster watched from behind the barriers with the other spectators as Quentin Quigley went bounding back to his starting position and went all through his opening speech again. This time Mum told him all about the old legends and the hill's name, and he made scaredy faces at the camera and said, "So, join us after the commercial break to see if we find the first *Dig This!* ghost! Whooooooooohh!"

Buster sighed. He had thought it would be exciting, having the *Dig This!* team digging up bits of his own school playing field, but it was dull, dull, DULL. On telly, Quentin Quigley came across as funny and clever, but in real life he was just an idiot, always leaping about shouting and

flashing his perfect teeth and trying to make out that everybody was having a really good time. (And he was shorter in real life, too.)

The rest of the crowd who had turned up to watch at nine o'clock all seemed to feel the same way, and now the last of them were drifting away, leaving only Buster's brainy Fake Cousin Polly, who was still watching patiently in case something educational happened. Buster's friends the Quirke Brothers had long ago grown tired of waiting to see if the archaeologists dug up a skeleton. Even making faces at the camera had stopped being funny after an hour or so, so they had wandered off. "There's only five more weeks of the summer holidays left, Buster," Harvey had explained. "There must be better things to do with it than this. Come on, let's go down the swimming pool. . ."

Buster would have really liked to go swimming, but he felt he had to stay, out of loyalty to Mum. It had been her idea to bring the *Dig This!* team to Smogley, after all. "I'll try and come along later, maybe," he said, watching wistfully as his friends clambered on to their mountain bikes and pedalled away.

When she had finished saying her bit to the camera Mum came and found him and they both went over to the cluster of TV trucks where Ian,

the programme's head archaeologist, was deep in conversation with Carla.

"That's all very well, Ian," Buster heard the producer say as he drew near, "but this is TV, and if your diggers don't come up with something soon, nobody will bother watching the show! Our viewers want to see you solve The Riddle of the Mystery Mound! If you don't unearth a spectacular find before the first commercial break they'll turn over and watch *History Hunt* on the other side. That's why I've sent for a mechanical digger. We're going to stop scraping about on the surface and cut the whole mound in half. That's the quickest way of finding out whether it's really a burial site or just an old pile of earth."

She stomped off, muttering words that Buster wasn't supposed to know as her high-heeled shoes sank into the mud. Ian turned to Buster's mum with a helpless shrug. "I'm sorry about this, Mrs Bayliss," he said. "I've tried explaining to them that real archaeology takes time, but all Quentin Quigley cares about is making an exciting TV show. He says archaeology is the new rock 'n' roll. . ."

"It's all right," sighed Mrs Bayliss, looking up at the steep side of the mound rising behind the catering van. "The council is planning to build

houses all over these playing fields in the autumn, so the mound will be gone soon, anyway. And I really want to know what's inside it!"

"Me too!" agreed the archaeologist eagerly. "It's certainly very strange. At first glance I'd have said a Bronze Age burial mound – but where's the body? According to our geophysics machines the mound's solid; no sign of a burial chamber at all. Mind you, they don't seem to be working very well. It's almost as if something inside the mound is interfering with them. . ."

Buster was so bored by now that he couldn't stand up properly and had to slump against the side of a truck. He knew all too well that when Mum started talking about history she could go on for days. He was cold too, which was strange, for the sun was beaming down out of a clear blue sky. He tugged at Mum's coat. "Mum? Can I go home? I'm freezing!"

"All right," she said, handing him her spare keys. "But straight home, mind. I'm going to stay a wee bit longer. . ."

* * *

Buster left her to it. He walked down Crisp Street, past the deserted school buildings and out on to Dancers Road, the traffic-clogged main street

that ran ruler-straight through the middle of Smogley. It was warm again once he was away from the playing fields, and he was sweating by the time he reached his own house, number 21 Ashtree Close. He took a can of cola from the fridge and held it against his face before he drank it, staring out of the kitchen window at the back garden with its square of brown grass and its single starveling tree.

Then he ran up to his bedroom and switched on his computer game. He was almost as good as Harvey at zapping evil Zurgoids now, and he was determined to get in plenty of practice so he could beat him next time he came round. But the little screen stayed a dead grey colour, even after he had tried changing the batteries and flipping the "on" switch to and fro and banging it against the wall for a bit. He flung it aside in disappointment and waded through the clutter on his bedroom floor to turn on the telly – only to find every channel full of hissing, spluttering snow.

"Aaaargh!" he said.

It was as if something was interfering with all the electrical equipment in the house. He turned off the fizzing television and flung himself down on his bed to think about it. Outside, traffic

snarled and honked on Dancers Road. A train whistle shrieked in the sidings on the far side of the gasworks. A strange voice outside his window shouted, "Buster!"

Buster sat up, startled. His window looked out over the back garden, and there was no way in there from the street. There couldn't be anybody there! Had he imagined the voice?

"Buster!" it called again.

He scrambled over to the window and looked out. There was a girl in the garden, standing beside the tree. She was a funny-looking girl, about his own age but tall and skinny and dressed in a strange sort of old-fashioned, floaty dress. She was certainly nobody Buster knew. But when she saw him gawping down at her she beckoned to him frantically.

He ran downstairs and out on to the lawn.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What are you doing in my garden? How did you get in?"

The girl looked at him as if she was wondering how he managed to get this far through life without switching his brain on. "I live here, stupid!" she said.



2 TREE'S COMPANY

Buster knew that all girls were pretty weird, but this one really was very funny-looking when you saw her close-to. Her long scruffy hair was mossy green, and even her skin had a greenish tint to it. As for her eyes, they kept on changing colour, like sunlight flickering through leaves. She reminded him of something, but he couldn't quite remember what it was.

"Who are you?" he asked again.

"I'm a dryad, of course," she snapped, as if it were a perfectly normal thing to be.

Buster frowned. "We did them in school," he said, groping about in his memory for what the word meant. "In Greek Myths and Legends. . ." His brain cells, which had all been having a nice