



## The Ice People

*Maggie Gee*

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In this novel, Maggie Gee speculates about the survival of love between men and women in a frozen future world where children are rare, child-size robots run out of control, and homosexuality is the norm. Far into the 21st century, civilization has broken down in the face of the deepening cold. An old man, Saul, lives in a disused airport with a gang of wild boys, who spare his life only because of his skills as a storyteller. Saul tells of his youth, days of fierce heat and dwindling fertility. Men and women live separately, the women cluster around the rare children, and men turn to each other or to robot "pets." But Saul is different—he falls in love with Sarah.

## **The Ice People Details**

Date : Published May 1st 1999 by John Blake (first published December 31st 1998)

ISBN : 9781860661532

Author : Maggie Gee

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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## From Reader Review The Ice People for online ebook

### **Jayne Charles says**

This sounded like an interesting concept when I spotted it in the bookstore. While the current preoccupation is with global warming and the melting of the ice caps etc, what if the earth actually got colder, and the Northern lands became uninhabitable? Suddenly Africa would come into its own. This is the main theme of this novel, but there are others along the way. First of all, the novel takes us a few years into the future, where society has been split - acrimoniously - along gender lines. Fertility has decreased massively. Explanations were given for this state of affairs, but not really enough for my liking. It's a big jump from where we are now - ie record numbers of teenage pregnancies in the UK. Assuming belief can be suitably suspended, we are introduced to the central female character, initially likeable, who first opposes the status quo, gender-wise, but after a series of bizarre personality mutations ends up a harridan, leaving her former partner to, erm, bonk the family's robotic housekeeper. Oddly, I thought the robot stole the show. She got all the best lines. I didn't get the feather thing, though. Why did she have feathers?

What struck me most about the book was the way men dealt with the breakdown of traditional male-female relations by turning to robots who fulfilled all the traditional female roles (housekeeping, comfort, sex, reproduction) without the more modern ones (career, intelligence). It was a sort of consequences-of-extreme-women's-lib message that came out of this story, more than any tale of African world dominance. I would have liked to hear more about that, but still a good read, with reservations.

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### **Ulrike Böhm says**

Habe mich trotz der vielen schlechten Bewertungen voll Neugier ans Lesen dieses Romans gemacht, weil ich das Thema spannend fand. Und ich wurde nicht enttäuscht. In schnellem Tempo entfaltet sich das Bild einer Gesellschaft, die so unvertraut nicht scheint, denn Anfänge dafür lassen sich bereits heute erahnen. Oder man kennt sie aus der Geschichte und weiß, dass aus solchen Erscheinungen wie Apartheid und Sektierertum nichts Gutes resultieren kann.

Ich habe in einer Review gelesen, die Autorin hätte sich in diesem Roman zu vieler Themen angenommen. Aber die Welt ist nun mal nicht eindimensional. Viele kleine Probleme führen zum Zusammenbruch, das sollten sich die Menschen heute, wo es - vielleicht - noch nicht zu spät ist, hinter die Ohren schreiben.

In diesem Buch bekommen sie vor Augen geführt, wohin Ignoranz, Intoleranz, Egoismus, Gewalt und Lieblosigkeit führen können. Nicht nur die Erde wird langsam zu einem Eisklumpen, auch die Menschen selber werden eisig, ihr Herz zu einem Eisklumpen. Der Titel ist sehr gut gewählt!

Mir schien es, als ob das Buch ein Negativ der real existierenden Wirklichkeit ist. Was hier weiß ist, ist dort schwarz, was hier warm ist, ist dort kalt usw. Deshalb fand ich mich in dieser zeitlich und gesellschaftlich entfernten Welt spielend zurecht. Deshalb ist das Buch so erschreckend - weil man fühlt, dass es nur noch kleine Schritte bräuchte und wir wären mittendrin in dieser eisigen Welt.

Gut, dass die Autorin in ihr Weltuntergangsszenario einen Lichtblick eingebaut hat, vielleicht einen etwas naiven, aber es kann ja sein, dass nur die Naiven, die Idealisten die Menschheit vor sich selbst retten kann.

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## Pamela Scott says

This counts towards the Popsugar Reading Challenge 2016. The category is 'A Science Fiction Novel'.

The Ice People took a while to get going but once it did I couldn't stop reading. The novel reminded me of The Road by Cormac McCarthy (which I loved) at times when Saul, his son Luke and Briony are trying to find somewhere to live. The characters are very well-written, interesting and very real. I hated Saul at times which shows how human he was. The novel really picks up the pace when Saul, Luke and Briony are on the road. In one disturbing scene that made me shiver, the trio have taken refuge in a seemingly abandoned house only to be interrupted when they owner and their friend's return. Luke seems to be charming these potentially dangerous men by singing in his beautiful voice when they are attacked by mutated creatures. The trio flee while the others are slaughtered. The Ice People becomes quite dark towards the end. My heart was in my throat and I almost couldn't bear to read what was happening. The Ice People is a very different style than most science fiction novels, more literary but completely engrossing.

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## Hilary G says

I've always loved science fiction (though I don't like that term much) and The Ice People encompasses the best that science fiction can do. The best science fiction isn't about ray guns and matter transmitters and warp ten (though those things are fun), it's about PEOPLE and what happens to them when things change, how they adapt to change (or not). There were many kinds of change in the Ice People – biological change (difficulty in having children), societal change (the segging), technological change (the Doves) and climatic change (the new Ice Age) and it focussed fairly tightly on how all those changes affected one small family – Saul, Sarah, Luke and Dora. The changes must have affected every single living thing, but the way Maggie Gee kept her main characters centre stage the whole time (I can't remember a scene when one of them was not present) kept it on a human scale, instead of an epic disaster-movie scale. All of the other characters, except perhaps Briony, were peripheral. In fact, I never really got the point of Briony, as she was somehow superfluous to the story.

It was interesting that Maggie Gee (a female, presumably) chose to tell her story from the vantage point of a male. I thought she was quite successful. (Perhaps that was why she needed Briony, so that it wasn't TOO male or that the only "female" in half the story would be a robot). I felt a lot of sympathy for Saul without ever losing sympathy for Sarah. This was unlike books that polarise your feelings. Nobody was all good or all bad. Saul's biggest mistake – with Sarah, and with Luke – was not to realise that his hopes and dreams weren't necessarily shared by those that he loved (and he really did love them, I think) and it was a sin of omission not of commission. I don't think he ever arrived at an understanding of why either Sarah or Luke had left him or why the only "person" who remained faithful to him was an artificial life form that was programmed to please him. Saul was an idealist who thought that love was enough, but you don't need an ice age or mutated robots to tell you life's not like that.

Another demonstration of my concept of what is really good science fiction was that the ideas and inventions of the story were extensions or developments from current reality, rather than a completely imagined alternate reality. Of course, the future might not be like this (I hope not) but it COULD be. I mentioned on site that the very day I finished the book, there was an article in the Daily Telegraph about the Earth freezing, and also another that mentioned "rogue nano-machines that replicate catastrophically". Similarly, I believe

there are already robots in Japan that do housework and stuff (and certainly the idea of robots is not off-the-wall) and it is possible to see how lonely or sad people could get attached to something that isn't real - teddy bears have performed that function for centuries. The segregation of men and women seems a possible long-term outcome of all the single sex relationships, which sometimes seems to be a fashion statement rather than a biological urge. I'm glad it hasn't happened yet – I like men!

I thought the parts about children were very poignant. People longed for children and went to extraordinary lengths to try and have them. The Doves could be regarded as child replacements. Saul tried to live out his dreams through his son. Yet in the end it was the children who inherited the earth, as you would expect, and not the idealised, sentimental, yearned-for children of the adults, but real people who adapted to the changed world and grew away and separated and lived lives that were entirely different than previous generations. This was their world now.

It was interesting to contemplate what would happen after the story ended. Would societies in the sense that we understood them ever develop again or would bonking in the woods and cannibalising the old continue for centuries? Would humanity start again to climb up the technological ladder? Would they even survive until the thaw came? But I thought the book ended in the right place, leaving plenty of scope for the imagination.

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### **Paulina says**

Terrible, awfully misogynistic and simplistic. The main character is a sexist asshole who falls for a woman because she is feminine, and, "not like other girls". The whole social milieu of separated sexes based on their differences - which is nothing but utter bullshit (girls are not good at math, like to take care of the house, men have to carry things...I have no words) - has aged *horribly*.

After about 100 pages still not much about the climate change or the plot, so I just threw the book out.

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### **Joel Nichols says**

worldbuilding was interesting, but the constant switches from present to past took away some of the excitement of anything happening in the present of the novel; so the most interesting setting was quickly revealed to be a nowhere place where nothing was going to happen. Saul as a POV character was also too much for me--his gender regression was supposed to characterize him and help along the plot, but instead he just disgusted me. Would love to have switched to Luke's POV for last few chapters to see what it was he was up to with the Sauvages...

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### **Lisa says**

I'm about halfway through this book and really struggling to finish it. I started reading it a couple of months ago. I just can't stand the main character I suppose. Hmm, nah, I just don't like any of the characters. The main character is weak and whiney. I have many colorful words to describe his "wife" but I'll keep this clean. I guess I'll just pretend the people in this story are the way that they are because the climate is very hot. I

would like to know why the author chose to write from a male's perspective. This story maybe would have been better from a third person perspective.

I picked this book up because I thought it was going to be about people coping with the next ice age. The ice age hasn't begun yet. I guess it's more metaphorical at the point where I am now. A couple of other issues I have with the book is the jumping back and forth from future to past and how several words are joined together to make one word. I can't tell if it's a problem with editing or if the author is trying to be clever. I will eventually finish this book because I feel like I have to. I'll just be thinking of all the other books I could be reading though!

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## Virginia says

Oh my goodness. Where to start. I'm trying to process my thoughts and I really wish Gee had bothered to do the same. I think she took every idea about what could be going on in our dystopian future and mashed it together into one big jumble. This isn't too say that I didn't enjoy the book. I was nearly in the four stars camp, but as the story unfolded, I found my attention wandering.

Here's my problem. We know what's going to happen because it opens with our narrator Saul, alone in his dystopian future - except for the menacing boy savages - musing on how he got there. As he begins to tell the tale of his once happy family, Gee's job is to keep us interested in why it all fell apart. This requires us to feel sympathy for our narrator. Poor Saul, how could this have happened to you? I'm all ears. It's also helpful if we care about the society which has now been decimated.

Gee paints a picture of a society teetering on the precipice of climate disaster, but still not able to rally around the issue. I liked that instead of preparing themselves, politicians are preoccupied with a whole host of things that feel more controllable; fertility rates, the segregation of gender, political activism, robot malfunction crises. The proverbial deck chairs on the Titanic, but nevertheless a believable multiplicity of issues that human nature wouldn't allow us to ignore.

My problem was that Gee tried to give all these issues weight in the novel, but none was fully realised. I would have preferred if Gee had just picked one train of thought and fleshed it out a bit so we could have sympathized with what was going on. The Wicca (Sarah) were painted as crazy people, the men (Saul) were were pathetic and whiny, the Doves were a distraction. The whole lot of them were annoying. After a certain point I decided that the ice couldn't come crashing down fast enough.

At a personal level, as Saul recounts the unraveling of his relationship with Sarah and his son Luke, he tells us about all the signs he missed and recounts actions that scream of impetuousness and immaturity. He's a self absorbed man, who fails at every opportunity to redeem himself. And (apart from her glorious hair) Sarah seemed to have few redeeming features, so why was he so blind and prepared to put up with being treated as he was? This man did not deserve to succeed. Goodbye care factor.

All that said, the ideas in this book are very interesting. Any one of them could be stretched into a satisfying novel in its own right (three that come to mind immediately are, The Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake, I, Robot), so it's a shame that Gee didn't fully flesh one of them out for us. I was particularly fascinated by the gender issues and would have loved this quasi-segregated society to be developed further and without resorting to such obvious stereotyping. So despite only half caring about Saul's fate by the time it was finally revealed to me, I do give this three stars. For the quality of the thinking and the first three parts of the story, I am prepared to overlook the tediousness of the last quarter.

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### **Stephen Hull says**

I started this novel with the misconception that it was about climate change. That's kind of like saying that Middlemarch is about the coming of the railways or 2001: A Space Odyssey is about bad software design. Climate change is an element, an essential element, but it's most certainly not what the book is about.

So what is it about? Without giving anything away, it's about the divide between men and women, between the young and the old, between the certainty of the past and the mystery of the future. It's about how society could break down and what this could result in. It's about how our inability to understand the other destroys us all. It's about the unidirectional nature of parental love.

It's written in a very readable style, and the plot moves along briskly enough to keep the pages turning. If I have any criticism, it's that the female author's portrayal of the male narrator didn't always convince, but this isn't, ultimately, a big deal. However, whilst there's little I can say against this book, it still somehow didn't engage me as much as I'd expected it would, and I don't know why.

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### **Marg says**

Not as engrossing as I had thought from the comments and reviews. Slightly distasteful and long-winded though I usually enjoy post-apocalyptic scenarios! And he is such an idiot; self-obsessed and selfish! No wonder his wife left - and took the child! He's just so thoughtless! Not a nice book, but then people are not very nice, are we?

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### **Luke says**

A great read, turning the world upside down and seeing what falls out.

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### **Kay Smillie says**

This book kept coming up as a recommendation on Amazon, given my browsing and purchasing history on there, and I eventually gave in and bought it. Thinking it was a relatively recent publication, it came as a surprise that it was released twenty years ago.

In brief, it is about the breakdown of society due to global warming which is turned on its head by a sudden and unexpected ice age. A small number attempt to reach Africa, with the attempt to reach Ghana. It is safe to say that the journey is not without its woes and as the story continues we see who is going to inherit the planet.

An all too possible scenario unfolds as the narrative switches between the now of the story and how the main character ended up there.

### **Helen French says**

An old man living during an ice age in the near future narrates his tale, explaining how humanity didn't see the big chill coming at first, then how men and women segregated as life got harder, how his relationship with Sarah fell apart, how he tried to take his son to Africa, where it would still be warm, how he ended up alone and unloved.

The main problem is that the main character is a selfish, misogynistic, lazy asshat. His partner is a harridan. In fact, according to the narrator, pretty much all women are.

The interesting bits of the plot - the actual ice age, the larger tale of the 'ice people' - is ignored in favour of a smaller tale told in an extremely passive, reactive way.

I love science fiction, but I wasn't convinced by the robots (the doves). I didn't like the way the author hijacked Wicca to use it as a violent feminist movement. Or in fact her depiction of women at all. Men didn't come off much better, who were depicted as either lazy or bad tempered.

Just a weird book. The plot felt rather unfinished in the end. what was the point of it all? I only finished it as it was relatively short.

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### **Liam says**

A little over a month ago, novelist Maggie Gee came to visit the University of Nottingham. I happened to be invited to two talks she was doing, one purely for Creative Writing MA students, and another, more 'open' one for the students within the School of English (although with a strong showing from the third years dystopian module). The latter was hosted by Dr Waddell, a tutor of mine. Both talks were brilliant, and Gee is effortlessly charming.

I picked up 'The Ice People' out of courtesy more than anything else a day or two before the talks - something about my character told me that it would be impolite to turn up having not read anything Gee had produced. I chose TIP at the recommendation of Dr Waddell, and because of its dystopian leanings, although these two are very closely linked. I managed to read something like a chapter or two before the talks (which sounds pathetic, but is remarkable, given the other pressures and deadlines I had) and found the premise of TIP to be very interesting (I certainly wanted to carry on): utilising dystopia as a lens through which interpersonal relationships could be examined.

As I said, those two talks were fascinating, but it was the third, unexpected talk, that was by far best. After the second talk (ending somewhere after 5pm, I think), I was invited to sit, have a chat and drink with Dr Waddell and Gee about all things writing, academia and life in general. Things that were said during this chat moved me greatly and have potentially nudged me further along a certain path... anyway.

I am trying not to let my opinion of Gee cloud my review, and I'd rather keep the meat of this brief. TIP is a fantastic read. Curiously imaginative, yet conceivable. The weaving of backstory and present story is

seamless (something I struggle with). The prose is often beautiful, unwavering in its appeal. Perhaps lazily, I'd compare this to 'Oryx & Crake' by Margaret Atwood, but TIP has more of a heart to it, more of a feel for people.

In short: loved it. Such a shame that it's taken me so long to get round to finishing it, but that's life.

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## **Melanie says**

Global Warming, an Ice Age, the segregation of men and women, and little household robots that are as dangerous as they are cute - how many problems can you pack in a Dystopian novel? Perhaps never enough, and so I felt overly unsatisfied after reading The Ice People.

The narrator, Saul, introduces himself in a pompous manner, "I, Saul, Teller of Tales, Keeper of Doves, Slayer of Wolves, shall tell the story of my times." What follows are 300 pages of whining about the failure of being a father, the faults of women, and the general failure of society.

In a society where androgyny is the height of fashion, men and women keep among themselves and slowly begin to hate the other gender. Sarah's main attraction is her femininity, her way to wear skirts and her hair long and not shaved or short like the others. Her main fault is that she complains about doing all the household work, that she slowly becomes vocal about the women society, and that she starts to wear trousers and her hair short like other women. Or so thinks Saul, who does not even think of the possibility to help her even though she's tired as well and he supposedly loves her - we remember, this is not the past we are talking about, this is the near future, the 21st century.

And yet, it makes today's feminists, who fight for equality, look bad (Atwood criticized that kind of feminism in her novel, The Handmaid's Tale, published long before The Ice People).

It really bothered me that for the narrator, "being a woman" was equal with wearing certain clothes and having the hair cut in the certain way. The subjective point of view made it hard to be convinced by the society of the middle of the 21st century when the narrator is such an unsympathetic jerk.

People in the discussion at university thought the male narrator was well-written and convincing. Well, if you think that means putting sexist platitudes in his speech because all men do this, yes, then it is convincing.

But as if the gender discussion wasn't enough, little household robots gone wrong added the mix. Many people have criticized that the presentation of naive, and I have to agree - it was not only naive but also badly executed and unnecessary to add them to the looming catastrophe.

The main thing about this book should have been the ecological thriller that is referred to in the title - the ice people are the people from the north, the ones that seek refugee in the southern countries. And yet, almost nothing about that was in the book. Very little about the ice age (it got cold, yes), the importance of the ice people or the threat they might pose to the peace in southern countries ... when Saul took his son south and tried to get into Africa because of his heritage, where was the struggle? He had some problems with his son, he got scammed only not to go to Africa after all. His son got abducted/left him, but the political struggle that might have arisen didn't took place. Saul had given up, went back, nothing more happened.

That seemed to be the overall topic of the book: Giving up on life. The characters rarely tried to better their lives, and when they did, they were damned by the other characters.

Most of the action took place off-screen. We heard about changes and struggles through other characters or the media, but the narrator was rarely involved.

The best scene in the entire book was actually the execution of the main character at the end.

Also, the author seemed to be allergic to hyphens.

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