Introduction

People used to call them ‘friends’ and said how they were good for your brain. And then a day came when all that changed . . . when they became the enemy. Now, anyone found harbouring a rogue imaginary person is in for the Cosh, an operation that fries your imagination and zaps whatever’s in there, out of existence. That’s why Joseph wishes Klaris Cliff had never shown up. And why he knows that proving her innocence is the last hope he has of saving himself.
Synopsis

A short preface hints at the more sinister overtones of the novel, mentioning a newsflash about Shorefield, an unspecific crisis which appeared to have changed life completely and banished the potential for make believe. The first chapter, Monday, opens the story proper, introducing Joseph and his dad, and Klaris, an imaginary character who appears to be in Joseph’s head some of the time. Joseph’s mum disappeared when he was eleven, two years ago, and every day both Joseph and his dad miss her terribly and wait for her to return.

Next door live a family called the Cliffs; five children, their parents and two dogs. This is Joseph’s second home, and he’s best friends with Rocky. It’s the summer holidays and the boys are lazing in front of the play station, and playing pranks on Rocky’s sister, Pooh. We meet Flea, Rocky’s seven year old brother, who is a bit of a loner and is regarded by his brother as being a “crazy boy”. Flea is known by his family to have Klaris as his imaginary friend, and the Cliff family are concerned that she is beginning to be real trouble, that she’s going “rogue” and is in danger of migrating to another person. Joseph is alarmed that Klaris is communicating with him too, and that Flea knows this. He is also terrified that his dad will find out, and ultimately, so will the authorities. Klaris is being blamed for a number of unexplained incidents in the Cliff household. Dr Cliff is losing patience and has called in the authorities, RIPS (Rogue Imaginary Persons Section) at the Council to deal finally with Flea’s imaginary friend, and to cleanse the children who have her in their heads by a process called the Cosh. Flea is desperate about losing Klaris, and Joseph, drawn in because he “shares” Klaris with Flea, realises that he must take action. He knows in his heart that Klaris is not dangerous or malicious and sets out to find logical explanations for all the misdemeanours of which she is being accused, hoping...
to show that she is innocent and is being framed by someone else.
In his investigations and interviews with all the Cliff family members, Joseph gets to know Pooh better and learns that she too once played with Klaris at a time when she was excluded from her brothers’ games. Joseph’s friendship with Rocky is tested, as Rocky becomes jealous of his best mate’s protective relationship with Flea.

Joseph interviews the twins, Wills and Egg, the youngest members of the Cliff family. He suspects that they know something about some of the incidents which have happened. During the interview one of the twins swallows the padlock key for Joseph’s dad’s boat which prompts Mrs Cliff to take Wills to hospital. Joseph is left looking after Egg, and tries to find out more about what the twins think about Klaris.

At last Joseph feels he must confront Dr Cliff with the evidence he’s gathered, hoping it will be enough to convince him of Klaris’s innocence – enough to cancel the RIPS appointment and the Cosh for Flea and Joseph. Joseph has found out that Dr Cliff once had an imaginary friend of his own, so his first question is about this. Dr Cliff is taken aback, but we learn that as a child Dr Cliff was lonely, and crucially that he felt that his imaginary friend had played a part in the break-up of his own parents’ marriage. It is this which influences Dr Cliff’s feelings towards Klaris; that she must go because she is having an adverse effect on family life and more specifically, his marriage. Dr Cliff will not change his mind and time is running out for Joseph to provide evidence on all fronts. When Mr Jones, the man from RIPS, comes everything seems to go well. All of the evidence Joseph has collected proves satisfactory and it appears that we are approaching a happy ending. However, suddenly Mr Jones turns the tables completely and produces a file of further complaints from people in the village claiming that Flea is weird and dangerous and so is Klaris, and that there is no way out but to take drastic action. She must go, and Flea and Joseph must have medical treatment for their overactive imaginations.
He loads the children into his van, only to find that it has been sabotaged by Rocky. In the chaos which follows, Flea runs away.

A dramatic, against-the-clock search for Flea ensues. Joseph has a disturbing feeling that Flea has drowned in the river, attempting to swim across to the Island. Tension mounts when Joseph injures his foot trying to free the boat from its lock, and random gunfire is heard coming from hunters on the Island. The children fear for Flea’s safety. Miraculously, the missing padlock key is recovered in the nick of time, the boat released and the children cross the river. Joseph senses that Flea will be hiding at the old, lightning-blasted sycamore tree. He is there, but so also is the horrifying truth about Joseph’s mum’s disappearance. From the top of the burnt-out tree Flea shows Joseph below them the decaying remains of a birthday picnic...from three years ago. Joseph recognises the rug, the hamper, his mum’s sandals, and sees the branch crashed across the picnic place. As the reality of what had happened to his mum dawns on him, Joseph hears Klaris’s voice as his mother’s, speaking directly to him, telling the awful truth. Claire Reece was killed by a freak accident of a falling branch in a storm. Joseph, in his grief for his missing mum, has been imagining her and communicating with her as Klaris. It seems that his mum has been trying to reach Joseph to explain that she has always been there for him, that she never left him. She had also been a friend for Flea at his time of loneliness.

In the final chapter, a year has passed, and Pooh and Joseph are running through the extraordinary events of the novel, so that Pooh can record it in her book. The Island has been connected to the garden by a bridge, the dead sycamore has been cut down, Joseph’s mum’s ashes have been scattered there. Flea is happier, is growing up and no longer needs his imaginary friend. There is a special friendship growing between Pooh and Joseph. The imaginary friend has left them all.
“With imaginary people the party never ends...”

The novel is about imaginary friends. It’s not just Flea and Joseph who have one, but other characters have done so in the past too.

- Discuss the idea of having an imaginary friend. Have any of you ever had one?
- Flea, Joseph, Pooh and Dr Cliff seem to have needed an imaginary friend at certain times in their lives – perhaps when they felt bored, lonely, sad or insecure. Do you think it would be comforting to have the company of an imaginary friend at such times?
- Would a real life friend be better?
- Rocky and Joseph discuss the benefits of having an imaginary friend: “they could help you cheat in tests at school” and “they wouldn’t eat half the crisps and sweets”. Can you think of any other advantages?
- In the context of the novel, adults regard Klaris as potentially dangerous when she appears to be a “rogue” and to be on the point of “migrating” to the minds of other people. Can you think of any ways in which an imaginary friend could be harmful?
K for Klaris or K for Killer?

Klaris is not a straightforward imaginary person. By the end of the book we know that this is actually because she is a kind of spirit of Joseph’s mum, trying to reach her son to explain her disappearance and to comfort him. In the graveyard Flea and Joseph think about the people buried there, and the boys feel sure that Klaris knows some of them, and originally belonged in the village.

- Do you think that Klaris is really there, speaking to Flea and Joseph, maybe as a spirit or ghost? Or do you think that she is being conjured or imagined in their minds because they both need her (in different ways)?
- The bully Tyler marks K on Flea’s forehead in black pen. K for killer, he says, so that everyone knows “what’s hiding in your head – a killer”. Do you think Klaris is threatening in any way, or is she a force for good?

Zap and It’s gone

In the novel, the recommended treatment for Joseph and Flea is the Cosh, a laser which “fries your brain”, shrivelling up its capacity for make believe and therefore freeing them from their imaginary person. According to Mr Jones this leaves them “with just a slight headache, and no more imagination...than a potato”.

- Imagine life without imagination! What would you miss?
- When does your imagination help you?
- Joseph’s biggest fear of the Cosh is that afterwards he won’t be able to imagine his mum. What do you think would be your biggest loss, if you had your imagination taken away?
- Can you give a definition of imagination? If not, look it up in a dictionary.
Shorefield

"The day Shorefield happened" is often referred to in the novel. We hear about life before Shorefield, when imaginary persons were considered harmless, good for your brain, and often even had a place laid for them at dinner! And then there’s life after Shorefield, when people live in fear of an imaginary person going “rogue”, and there are sinister systems in place to deal with overactive minds...

- What is your understanding of Shorefield?
- Do you think people in the story are over-reacting to the potential dangers of Unwanted Imaginary Persons?
- What do you think about RIPS and its powers?

... A Dystopian novel?

- Look up what is meant by a dystopian novel, and discuss your findings in relation to this book. What elements make Who Framed Klaris Cliff? dystopian?
- Can you think of other novels - or films of novels – which are of a similar genre?
- Who Framed Klaris Cliff? has been compared to books by other contemporary novelists such as David Almond. If you have read Skellig by David Almond, think about how these books reflect each other. Or maybe you don’t agree?
Potter’s Lodge to Kiln Cottage

The settings for the novel are mostly domestic, the houses of both the families, and their communal garden set alongside the river during a hot summer holidays. Goat Island is across the river – known by some as Ghost Island – owned by both the properties, and at the very heart of the plot.

- Discuss ways in which an island is a perfect location for a mystery. Can you think of other books which feature an island and its secrets?
- Why do you think Dr Cliff decides to connect the gardens to Goat Island with a rope bridge at the end of the story?
- Islands are often remote and lonely places. Discuss the notion that Joseph, Flea and Claire Reece, all three troubled in different ways, feel drawn to Goat Island.
- Think about ways in which the old sycamore tree on the island is symbolic. Can you remember all the references to the sycamore (…and its seeds!) in the story?

Family Life

Flea, Rocky, Pooh, Wills, Egg – if you haven’t got a family the Cliffs must be good - and slightly eccentric - friends to have. Joseph gets on with all of them, and they seem to fill the emptiness which he has in his life.

- Pick one of the Cliffs and think about their characteristics, good and bad.
- Whose friendship in the Cliff family would you like most, and why?
- Joseph and his dad seem to be great friends and laugh a lot together, despite the sadness they share about mum. Find some of the funniest dialogues between the two of them, and act out a scene.
A Distant Woof

Never mind an imaginary person, many would say that a dog is a man’s best friend! There are three dogs in the novel: Henry, Annie and, less centrally, Digger, the threatening trophy dog belonging to Tyler and Ethan.

- Why do you think Dr Cliff appears to love his dogs “more than he loves his own wife and kids”? Do you think this is actually true?
- How important to the plot are Annie and Henry? Discuss some of their major moments.
- Find out about the inspiration for Digger on Nikki’s website http://nikkisheehan.com/ and discuss how real life can often be a catalyst for the imagination!

Saturday: Sunshine and Roses

Joseph reflects on his situation and says, “A happy ending? I couldn’t imagine it. I felt like we’d been trapped in the sad middle part for two years.”

- Is the ending of the novel a happy one, or is it the best outcome given the circumstances?
- Is an ending better than being trapped in “a sad, middle part”? Do you think it is important for Joseph to have closure about his mum’s disappearance?
- For other characters, the ending is a good one. Discuss the outcomes for Flea and Dr and Mrs Cliff.
- Is an ending often a beginning too? Is this the case for Joseph in particular?
- The ending resolves the different strands of the plot, in relation to each character. But do we ever know who framed Klaris Cliff, or if she was in fact framed?
About the Author

Nikki Sheehan is the youngest daughter of a rocket scientist. She went to a convent school in Cambridge and her writing was first published when she was seven; her teacher sent one of her poems to a magazine.

Interested in modern languages at school, Nikki read Linguistics at university and her first job was subtitling The Simpsons. Nikki then studied psychology, retrained as a journalist and wrote features about child psychology for parenting magazines and the national press. She now writes mainly about property and is co-founder of an award-winning, slightly subversive property blog. Nikki is married and lives in Brighton with her husband and three children and lots of pets.