TALES OF TECH DONN

PAST TENSE [is BORROWED TIME a better title now? Or BOOK WORM?]

JULIA ROUND

Plot summary:

Sandy (schoolgirl, aged 13 or so) steals an old book from her school library but when she gets it home she realizes it’s worthless as all the pages are covered in handwritten scrawls across the text, including the phrase ‘Trapped! Help me!”.

She argues with her friend Jess about it and, as she goes on to steal more and more stuff over the coming months, their friendship dissolves. Her mum isn’t around much and her thefts get more serious without anyone to support or guide her. Eventually she breaks into the old people’s home where her mum works, an old Victorian building, but dodges into a dark cupboard to hide when she hears a noise. She can’t find a light or doorhandle and so scribbles a shaky message onto a book she finds and pushes it out under the door – the final panel is a close-up of what she has written (‘Trapped! HELP ME!’) and the story ends with her (her skeleton?) still sat there, and the final narration: ‘Sandy realised eventually that the *time* for help was long *past*….’

Additional final panel, page 4: Oonagh: ‘It is said that ‘everything has returned’, but Sandy did not. She never left that room - or perhaps she had always been there. Time can be both friend and enemy, and we often say that our past comes back to haunt us, but can our future do the same? What do you think...?

---------

**Page 1**

**Panel 1**

(large, 2/3 of page or so, maybe forming backdrop to the bottom tier – panel 2, 3 and 4 embedded in main image)

*School library interior. There are some tables set up with older books on display. Most of the class (mixed group, aged 12-13 or so) are crowding round a display in the background of the panel, with others scattered around at various tables. Sandy and her friend Jess are in the foreground on the right, standing at a different table. Faces/posture shows they are bored. A teacher and an older woman dressed in black with hair in a bun are standing by the table with the main display.*

*In top left hand corner a ‘Misty’ type spooky girl is standing, she is not part of the panel but outside of it. She is speaking directly to the reader.*

***Oonagh:***

***(In a different font from the rest of the text in the story – wispy hand written)***

*‘Welcome to the shadow realm, a place of fog and fear, and spells and sorcery. I am Oonagh, your guide along the pathway. Some say I am of the Sidhe, or the fey, but in truth I am far older than both (should this be either)… Do not be afraid, take my hand and we will share this fearful fable - a tale of history and hysteria, where terror comes from the turn of a page…’*

**Caption:**

**Same font as Oonagh**

*…Sandy Techman was not impressed with much. Particularly the display of books her school library had borrowed from a local benefactor…*

**Teacher/Librarian:**

*‘Now class, as you can see, we are lucky enough to have a guest today. Mrs Webster has brought some very special books for us to look at.*

**Mrs Webster:**

*These journals have been in my family for more than 100 years. You can see from them what life was like for my family in Victorian times*

**Sandy to Jess:**

‘Ugh, this is so boring. Who wants to look at *old books* all day, right Jess?’

**Jess:**

‘Mmmmm’

**Panel 2**

*Close-up panel of Sandy and Jess. Sandy is holding a slim book and there are a couple of bigger ones on the table unopened. They are all hardback books with leather and gold leaf lettering, etc, of various sizes. “The Diary of Kate Webster”*

**Sandy:**

‘Mind you this one looks really *ancient*… and that’s *gold* on the cover? I bet it’s worth a *ton* of *money*!’

**Jess:**

‘You can’t *take* it Sandy! That’s *stealing*!’

**Panel 3**

(maybe borderless?)

*Close up of Sandy putting the book in her satchel (maybe just the book and satchel, with speech balloon coming from off panel?). In the background Mrs Webster is watching carefully.*

**Sandy:**

‘Come on, nobody’s going to miss one *mouldy old book*! Maybe I can *sell it* or something!’

**Panel 4**

*Sandy marching out of the library with her satchel, Jess following her looking miserable. In the background Mrs Webster is watching carefully and smiling an evil smile.*

**Jess:**

‘But…’

**Sandy:**

‘But nothing! Come on!’

---------

**Page 2**

**Panel 1**

*Teenage girl’s bedroom with Jess and Sandy hanging out. Sandy is lying on the bed reading the book with her legs crossed in the air, Jess is sitting on the floor leaning on the bedpost.*

**Narration:**

After school they went back to Jess’s house. But it turned out that the book wasn’t the prize that Sandy had hoped…

**Sandy:**

‘*Ugh*. Somebody has written all over it… and the pages. They’ve been *torn out* and stuck back in.

It’s basically *ruined*.’

**Jess:**

‘I *knew* you shouldn’t have *taken* it! What does it *say*?’

**Panel 2**

*Close up on open book. There is scribbling all over the page, in the margins, around and across all the typewritten text etc. Lots of it is illegible, but one bit is quite clear, and says ‘TRAPPED! HELP ME!’*

**Sandy**

(speech balloon from off panel): ‘Trapped?! Haha!’

**Jess**

(speech balloon from off panel): ‘I don’t *like* it. It’s *creepy*.’

**Panel 3**

*A panel from above, looking out of the window – the old lady should be outside looking up. Sandy is sneering at Jess as she throws the book back over her shoulder and out of the open window.*

**Sandy:**

‘*Rubbish*! It’s just someone having a *joke*, or some *little kid*. That writing’s so *shaky* I’m surprised *anyone* can *read* it!’

**Panel 4**

*Sandy entering through the back door of house. Interior of kitchen with a casserole and a note on the counter. Maybe quite a dark panel if possible? (lights are off etc)*

**Narration:**

Sandy’s mum was out when she got home...

**Sandy:**

‘Mum? Hello??’

**Panel 5**

(inset into panel 4)

*Sandy reading the note (can be illegible, and ideally handwriting should look spidery and a bit like the book).*

**Sandy:**

‘Sigh.’

**Sandy:**

‘She’s *never* around… always at *work!*’

**Panel 6**

*Wide panel, no borders between scenes. Captions at top left and bottom right of panels – maybe even bleeding into next tier. Montage of Sandy talking to a shopkeeper while shoplifting something small behind her back – maybe a lipstick or hairclip or badge? Taking something out of someone’s school bag and out of a handbag at a café. Get old lady or just her silhouette into background at some point*

*Wispy, ethereal writing should appear above her head at each theft. Make it as much a part of the art as you can. “Take it Sandy, take it!”*

**Narration 1:**

Over the next few months Sandy found herself stealing more and more...

**Narration 2:**

She couldn’t stop herself, there was that voice in her head, always the voice!

**Panel 7**

*Sandy and Jess arguing in Sandy’s bedroom. Jess is looking angry and holding a bracelet. Sandy looks guilty but defiant.*

**Jess:**

‘I can’t believe you stole that! ***From me***! You *know* how much I love it!’

**Sandy:**

‘But I…’

**Panel 8**

*Sandy lying on her bed, in tears she is looking at Jess as she, in turn, is storming out of the bedroom,*

**Jess:**

‘*Leave me alone! I* ***never*** *want to speak to you again!*’

**Sandy:**

*‘Please Jess, I never even wanted those things, I don’t know why I took them!!’*

**Panel 9**

(borderless narrow panel running across whole bottom tier)

*A jumble of random stolen objects (her stash): jewellery, badges, torch, key rings, hair clips, CDs, DVDs, etc.*

---------

**Page 3**

**Panel 1**

**(whole top tier!)**

*Sandy standing outside an old house. It’s an old Victorian building, in a badly overgrown garden grim looking. Outside a sign reads. “Webster Lodge”. That ethereal writing should be part of the panel as well. “Come, Sandy, Come” “Good loot here!”*

**Narration:**

Still Sandy couldn’t stop. It wasn’t long before her thefts started to become more serious.

**Sandy:**

‘Webster Lodge? Must belong to that old biddy from the school. She’ll have *loads* of stuff. I bet there’s some *good loot* here!’

**Panel 2**

*Interior of the house. A long corridor with dim lighting, lined with doors on either side. Sandy walking down it towards us, perhaps with a torch to cast some light. The old woman can be seen in the background looking out of a door.*

**Sandy:**

‘Creepy place! It feels like I’ve been walking down this hallway *forever*!’

**Panel 3**

(circular? Inset in panel 2?)

*Close up on Sandy – she hears a noise and looks startled.*

Sandy: ‘What’s that noise?!’

**Panel 4**

*She looks scared as she dodges through a door.*

Sandy: ‘I’ll hide in here!’

**Panel 5**

*She is inside a cupboard or small room, it’s very dark (darker than the dim lighting in previous tier). There are shelves of books in background and some piled up on the floor. Sandy is leaning with her back against the door. There is a shuttered window behind her, locked but with a tiny gap letting some light in.*

Sandy thought bubble:

‘Whew! But it’s so *dark*! Why isn’t there a *light*?!”

**Panel 6**

*She is feeling around with her hands/banging or pushing on the door, but can’t find a light or doorhandle.*

Sandy:

‘Who’s there? I can hear you!”

The door won’t open! Help! *HELP*! *HELP*!’

**Panel 7**

*Combined panel with number 6, the door acting as the break. The old woman is in the hall outside, leaning against the door. She has an evil smile or laugh.*

**Mrs Webster:**

Nobody can hear you, my dear. Nobody will help you. HAHAHAHAH!

---------

**Page 4**

**Three tiers of panels, the middle tier being a single image divided by panel borders showing time passing. Bottom tier no panel borders,.**

**Panel 1**

*Sandy sat huddled on the floor in the dark. She is dimly illuminated by the light from the shutters*

**Sandy:**

‘It’s so *dark*! All I can see is the *light* coming through the window…’

‘…I’ve got a pen, maybe if I write a *note* someone *outside* will *see* it!’

**Panel 2**

*Sandy groping around on the floor next to her and picks up a slim book.*

**Sandy:**

‘This will do!’

**Panel 4**

**Second Tier of panels – split up.**

*Single image split up into separate borders– showing and image from the corridor, past the door behind which Sandy is sitting, the cupboard with the bookshelves, the back wall with the small, shuttered window and outside, in a badly overgrown garden.*

*Split by broader panels we should see, 1 Sandy sitting with her back against the door writing in the book. 2. Sandy tearing a page out of the book. 3. Sandy putting pages through the shutters. 4. The old lady outside picking up the pages that are fluttering in the wind. One page is in the foreground and we can see that she has scrawled – “I’m trapped, help me” all over the page.*

**Panel 5**

*A wide panel taking up the whole of the bottom third of the page. The old lady is brushing the corridor that we saw earlier, muttering to herself. She has bin bags (body bags set out) All of the doors except the one closest to us are open. Behind the doors we can see skeletons in school uniforms both boys and girls.*

**Mrs Webster**

“So much to do… Have to put my little *book worms* in the ground… make room for some more *little guests*…”

**Panel 6**

*Small panel inset in panel 5. Oonagh speaking to the readers. Some wispy font as before. Be nice not to have any panel borders.*

**Oonagh**

(the wispy hand-written font):

Sandy’s dishonesty had brought her to the end of the line. But was she entirely to blame? Books have power, and perhaps these had cast their spell over Mrs Webster as well as Sandy. Be careful what you read…

---------