

Dragonfall Mountain: by Paul Collins & Sean McMullen

Paul Collins is the author of 140 books, including fantasy series *The Jelindel Chronicles*, *The Quentaris Chronicles*, and *The World of Grrym* (in collaboration with Danny Willis).

Sean McMullen is the author of over a hundred fantasy and science fiction novels and stories including *Souls in the Great Machine* and *Voyage of the Shadowmoon*. He was nominated for a Hugo Award in 2011.

Synopsis:

The second of six books in *The Warlock's Child* series, *Dragonfall Mountain*, is a fantasy fiction book for primary school aged children. The world in which it takes place is governed by magic and roamed by dragons. Throughout the book the narrative switches between the characters of Dantar, Velza, and the dragons, giving multiple points of view for the story.

As the Dravinian and Savarian fleets battle, the dragon Dravaud descends and begins burning ships of both fleets. The nearby Savarian city, Teliz, is defended by mirror towers, which can burn ships miles away. These towers dazzle the dragon, which crashes and dies.

When their ship is sunk, Dantar and his older sister Velza make it to shore. Velza joins a group of Dravinian survivors, and under Captain Parvian they attack the docks of Teliz and steal enough ships to escape. Velza and her friend Latsar get left behind in the confusion.

After being captured by the Savarians, Dantar discovers that his father Calbaras is not only betraying Dravinia, he also dabbles in forbidden magic. Before Dantar escapes into the sewers beneath the city, Calbaras uses the forbidden magic to make a copy of Dantar.

Three more dragons arrive, wanting to know how Dravaud died. While Velza and Latsar face the angry dragons, Dantar is below, cornered in the sewers by a pack of intelligent rats.

Presenting and reading *Dragonfall Mountain*:

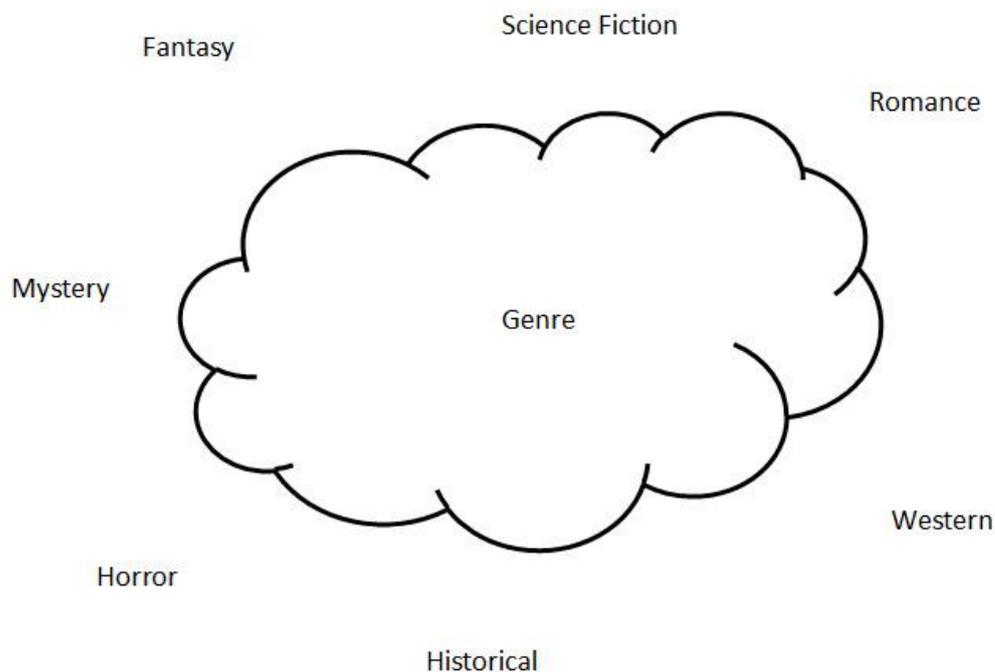
Judging a book by its cover

- Ask the class to describe the cover of *Dragonfall Mountain*:
What things stand out about it? What is happening? What kind of story (genre) do you think this is going to be? Does the cover give you a hint as to what you think will happen in the novel? Does it seem like the kind of novel you will enjoy? Why/why not?

Focus: What does the term 'genre' mean?

The Australian Curriculum describes genre as 'The categories into which texts are grouped. The term has a complex history within literary theory and is often used to distinguish texts on the basis of their subject matter (for example, detective fiction, romance, science fiction, fantasy fiction), form and structure (for example, poetry, novels, biography, short stories).'

- Ask the class to brainstorm all of the various genres they can think of. Make a mind map. This can be done either as a class or in smaller groups, who then report back to the class.



Focus: What is fantasy fiction?

Fantasy fiction is a genre of writing in which the plot could not happen in the universe as we know it. Often, the plot involves magic or witchcraft and takes place on another planet or in

an undiscovered dimension of this world. The overall theme of the setting frequently resembles medieval times, meaning that some combination of the architecture, clothing, language, and technology resembles the European Middle Ages. The plot also usually involves mythical creatures, and witches or sorcerers. Writers of fantasy fiction often devote a series of books to the same world or characters.

In her book, *A literary companion for teachers*, Lorraine McDonald describes the following conventions of fantasy:

- often includes a portal or an entry point characters have to cross between the primary and the alternative worlds
 - often constructs a journey or a quest
 - may use underground caves and/or passages
 - alters time – called 'time-slip' or time travel fantasy
 - often merges the past with the present
 - often has parallel primary and alternative worlds
 - often draws on myths and features of medieval traditions
 - can be set in the future, in a virtual reality, in the paranormal (ghosts present)
 - presents countries with their own history, geography, maps, legends and prophecies
 - portrays characters who can have powers and/or special qualities, can see the future, read minds
 - includes magical animals and beasts
 - gives animals human qualities, especially speech – called 'anthropomorphism'
 - introduces characters' names, habitats, clothing which are often unusual and different to modern times
 - can include formal language in the narration and the characters' speech
 - presents objects or clothing which have special powers
 - constructs codes and chants which often hold secrets
 - has a frequent major theme that evil exists in the world and needs to be overcome
- Ask the class if they can think of any examples of fantasy fiction, keeping the above conventions in mind. Some of the more famous examples are *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Reading the blurb

- Read the blurb either aloud or individually. Ask the class what they learnt from the blurb. Does it confirm ideas induced by the cover? Has it changed your mind about whether or not you will like the story? What words or sentences make you feel this way?

Inside the book

- Examine the various pages at the beginning of the book: imprint, title page, contents page. What information do we get from these pages? What is an ISBN? What does the

copyright information mean? Who is the publisher? Why is this information important?

- Look at the map at the beginning of the book. Maybe a larger reproduction could be used. Compare it to a real map. What is similar? What is different? Point out the various features of maps to the class, and discuss what features every map should have (Title, scale, orientation, frame).
- Read the first three chapters (Dragons, Dantar and Velza) either as a class or individually: Discuss first impressions and expectations. Does the opening grab you? What do we learn about the world that the novel takes place in from the first chapters? Who do we meet?
- Ask the class to create a Situation Change Chart for each major character as they appear. After the first three chapters there should be charts for Dravaud, Dantar, Parvian and Velza. Do a chart for each significant change in the situations of the major characters. How do you decide who are major characters, and what are significant changes in their situations?

Name	Impressions of character	Situation better of worse	What the character was	What the character becomes
Parvian	Ship's captain, Brave and resourceful, good leader, never gives up.	Worse	Captain of Dravinian fleet's flagship	Leader of shipwrecked survivors on enemy coast

- In the fourth and fifth chapters, we see Dantar and Velza dealing with new people. Who are the friends, enemies, rivals of Dantar and Velza? Are there any characters who cannot yet be classified?
- What do we learn about trust in these two chapters? Ask the students who they trusted on first appearance, and if they were disappointed when they did not measure up? Are Dantar and Velza being too trusting in general?
- Ask the class to begin a Trust Chart to keep track of who is friends with whom?

Character	Friends/Allies	Enemies	Rivals	Unsure
Velza	Parvian	Calbaras	Latsar	Dantar Pandas
Dantar	Parvian Marko	Calbaras Cago Kesp		
Parvian	Dantar Velza Latsar Pandas			Cago Kesp
Cago	Kesp	Dantar		

- Continue reading the story, adding more Situation Change Charts, and adding or moving characters in the Trust Chart. Some changes are clear (Captain Parvian escapes the Savarians) but others are not (Velza escapes the Savarian prison, but finds herself facing three very angry dragons. What sort of change is better for making the book exciting?
- What sorts of changes happen more often? Changes for the better or for worse? Why do you think the authors did this?

Language and structure

Dragonfall Mountain is set in a fantasy world, so many aspects and features of the story are unfamiliar to the reader as they can't be seen in the real world. To aid in the creation of visual imagery the authors have used a variety of language techniques.

Focus: Similes and metaphors

- Read the following sentences to the class and ask them to identify if they are similes or metaphors:
 1. '... it was like a village, except that it floated and visited villages in other kingdoms.' (p5)
 2. 'They felt like sandpits, and he thought it could not have felt worse if his head had been filled with broken glass.' (p17)

3. 'On Level Seconden he passed the hot, noisy kitchens that smelled as if they were cooking with rotten ingredients.' (p27)
 4. 'Kesp's voice was as warm and sweet as mulled mead,' (p30)
 5. 'The bottom of Dantar's stomach seemed to come loose and fall down a very deep hole.' (p31)
 6. 'For those on the wall, it was like having a blindfold ripped off and being made to stare at the sun.' (p50)
- Ask the class to find other examples of similes and metaphors in the book and to think of other similes or metaphors that would have worked to create the same imagery. E.g. 'His father's voice rumbled on like an approaching thunderstorm.' (p64), could be substituted for 'His father's voice rumbled on like a wagon loaded with empty barrels'.

Focus: nouns, verbs, and adjectives

- Ask the class to dissect the following passages, identifying which words are nouns, which are verbs, and which are adjectives:
 1. 'Nearly half the Dravinian fleet had not yet joined in the fighting. The dragon approached the reserve ships, skimming barely above mast height. Streamers of green flame lashed through the rigging of the warships and washed over the decks, killing everyone not under cover. Clouds of arrows, crossbow bolts and firepots smashed into his body, but he barely noticed.' (p2).
 2. 'Dantar had taken the warship *Invincible* for granted until it sank. It was solid underfoot, it provided meals, and he had a place to sleep. In a sense, it was like a village, except that it floated and visited villages in other kingdoms. Now it was gone, except for a few bits that broke off before it sank. Dantar was clinging to one of those bits.' (p5).
 3. 'Even though she was two miles from the city, she could hear the cheering. The Savarians had defeated a fully grown dragon, and had probably sunk the entire Dravinian fleet as well. Nearby, other Dravinian sailors and marines were struggling out of the water or lying exhausted on the sand. Several gigboats full of marines had even made it to the shore without being rammed or set on fire. For now, Velza was still among her own people.' (p13).
 4. 'Splendid work, Velza, you ought to be a diplomat. With two thousand men I can storm the walls of the port, and burn the warehouses, shipyards, shops and piers that the dragon missed, then seize enough ships to carry us home. The emperor will not be happy, but we will have done significantly more damage than the first invasion fleet, so no heads will roll.' (p37)
 5. 'They were not in immediate danger of being smashed up by the waves, but they were still trapped between high, jutting headlands. Dantar shot another look upwards, but the castle walls were definitely not visible from here. If their

pursuers could not be seen, then their pursuers could not see them, either. ‘
(p84)

6. ‘Marko and Dantar turned to flee back the way they had come, but thousands of little eyes gleamed in the light from a nearby ventilation shaft, blocking their way. The two youths stood back-to-back, each unable to think of any action that did not involve being swarmed over and bitten to death. Slowly, stealthily, the eyes began to close in. (p91).

Focus: Language for interaction

Age, status, expertise and familiarity influence the ways in which we interact with people, and these interactions influence the way people engage with ideas and respond to others.

- Ask the class to identify in the text dialogue between Velza and Captain Parvian, her father Calbaras, and her fellow officer Latsar. How is the language she uses different in these three conversations? Why do you think that is? What different ways do you speak to people in your life?

Focus: narration

There are three types of narrative technique:

1. First person, where the point of view character (the voice telling the story) uses the word ‘I’.
 2. Second person, where the point of view character addresses the audience directly and uses the word ‘You’.
 3. Third person, where the author uses the words ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘it’ to refer to the characters, including the point of view character. This type of narrator can be omniscient (all knowing like ‘the eye of God’) or can report events as they take place.
- Discuss with the class the narration used in this book. What method has been used? How can we identify this? Why do you think that the authors have chosen this method? How many different narrators are there? What are the similarities and differences between the narrators? Which do you like best? Why?

Further activities

- The lives and characters in books exist only on the page but authors often hint about what might have happened to them before or later. This is called extrapolation. Choose one of the characters from the book, take what you have learnt about them and use it as a basis to write a story about something that will happen to them a year after the events of the book.

- When Velza talks about reporting the truth about what really happened in the battle, Captain Parvian says: ‘. . . if the emperor hears you report that, Dalzico’s family will be arrested and sold into slavery as punishment for him issuing such an order. He has a charming wife; I danced with her at the farewell ball before the fleet sailed. She said they have twin daughters about your age and a white terrier named Moonlet. Do you want them sold as slaves and the terrier fed to the emperor’s pet leopard?’ (p37). Do you think lying to protect someone can be justified? Be prepared to present either side in a debate with other members of the class.
- The earliest cannons were invented around 1300. How did ships fight each other before cannons and gunpowder were invented? Pretend that the ship that Dantar and Velza were aboard was a European ship about a century before guns were invented. Describe how it might have been sunk in a battle.
- Velza is a young female warrior in a society a bit like medieval Europe. Can you find the names of four female warriors who lived before 1500? What did they do? What would it be like for Velza if she was in a modern navy today?

Curriculum Links

The Australian Curriculum: English asserts in its Rationale that it 'helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience.' One of its Aims is to ensure that students 'develop interest and skills in inquiring into the aesthetic aspects of texts, and develop an informed appreciation of literature'. To facilitate this the Content Structure of English is built around the three interrelated strands being: Language – knowing about the English language; Literature – understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature; and Literacy – expanding the repertoire of English usage.

Dragonfall Mountain is useful in exploring all of these elements in the curriculum. It uses many features of language, and can be used to explore vocabulary, parts of speech, and sentence structure as outlined in the ‘Language’ strand. The above activities focus especially on the ‘Language for interaction’ and ‘Expressing and developing ideas’ sub-strands.

Dragonfall Mountain also encourages critical engagement with texts. It inspires discussion of literary experiences, sharing responses, and expressing a point of view. It raises questions about social status and interaction, bullying, loyalty and heroism. In addition, it invites debate in a broader context about war and gender equality. These issues create links to the cross-curriculum area of Civics and Citizenship. It asks students to draw parallels between a fantasy world and their own world, placing emphasis on exploring decisions, values, rights, and responsibilities.

Dragonfall Mountain is aimed at 9-10-year-old readers, so is best used in conjunction with the Year 4/5 English curriculum.