

## *The Burning Sea*: 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 first of six books in *The Warlock's Child* series, *The Burning Sea*, 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 dragon Dravaud, giving multiple points of view of the same story.

On the warship *Invincible* there is no lower rank than cabin boy. As someone who is used to a life of luxury on land, this is something that is difficult for 14-year-old Dantar to deal with. But his father is the *Invincible's* battle warlock and in order for Dantar to travel with his family he must be put to work.

His older sister Velza is a shapercasting warrior and an officer on the *Invincible*. She is struggling to prove herself in an intensely male society, and to do this she has to be a stickler for the rules and play down everything that makes her a girl.

When a dragon attacks the fleet as it is heading in to war Dantar and Velza are thrown into a dangerous and unfamiliar situation. They must make quick decisions in order to save themselves and others, while at the same time trying to navigate their relationship with each other and their distant father. Together they must survive the battle with the enemy fleet and solve the mystery of who they really are.

## Presenting and reading *The Burning Sea*

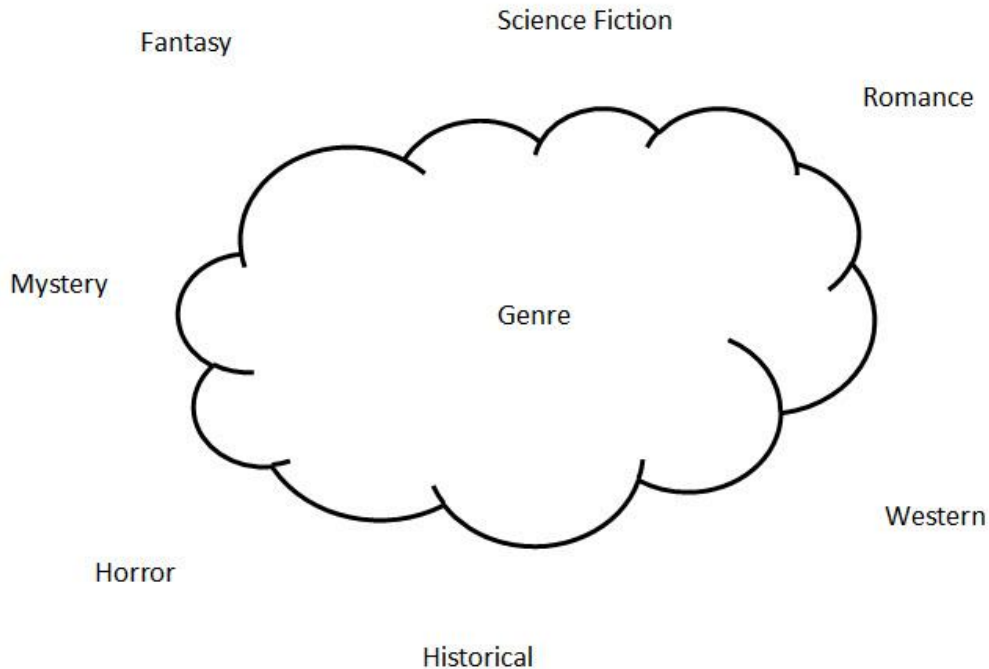
### Judging a book by its cover

- Ask the class to describe the cover of *The Burning Sea*:  
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 clues as to what you think will happen in the story? Does it seem like the kind of story 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 different 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 two chapters (Dragons and Dantar) 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 Character Chart, and add each character as they are introduced. After the first two chapters the chart should have Dravaud, Dantar, and Marko. Write some adjectives about each person. What are your feelings about them?

Name	Description	Information about the character	Impressions of the character	Point in the story
Dantar	short, wiry, thin, black hair	14 years old, cabin boy, from a rich family, likes to read	Privileged, not brave	When the dragon first attacks the fleet.

Note: Feelings about the characters may change as the students find out more about them so create a column for the point in the story they feel this way. As they progress the main characters will appear more than once and then at the end they can collate each entry.

- Read the next chapter. Here we are introduced to a new point of view character, Velza, who can be added to the Character Chart along with the characters of Pandas and Latsar.
- What else is revealed in this chapter? What new things are we learning about the world of *The Burning Sea*? What are the major differences between it and the real world? Are there any similarities?

- Ask the class to begin a Magic Chart to keep track of magic, how and when it is used, and by whom.

Type	Properties	Used by	Events
Fire	Green flames, does not work over water	Velza	Not actually used but explained by Velza as the dragon attacks the fleet
Water			
Earth			
Air			

- Continue reading the story, adding new characters to the Character Chart and adding new impressions and events for the existing characters. By the end of *The Burning Sea* the Character Chart should have entries for: Dravaud, Dantar, Marko, Velza, Pandas, Latsar, Gyan, Cook, Admiral Dalzico, Battle Warlock Calbaras, Meslit, Captain Parvian.
- Continue adding properties, rules, users and events to the Magic Chart as they are revealed. How is magic being used to further the plot and develop the characters?

## Language and structure

*The Burning Sea* 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 as tiny as a spark, yet a spark could set an entire city ablaze." (p1)
  2. "The shapers wore robes that flowed like silk yet gleamed in the sunlight like polished steel." (p5)

3. "Its scales were as bright as polished steel, and enormous eyes saw him yet looked through him." (p8)
  4. "With a movement as smooth as water pouring from a jug . . ." (p44)
  5. "Although Dantar now felt like a rabbit emerging from his burrow while a fox was nearby . . ." (p65)
  6. "His side felt like it had been punctured by a mass of needles." (p73)
- 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. "Its scales were as bright as polished steel . . ." (p8), could be substituted for "Its scales were as bright as the sun at midday in summer".

**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. "The threat of death did add some glamour to the job, but today it was hard, sweaty work. A huge number of smoking fragments had fallen after the dragon's breath blazed through the upper rigging. Soon Dantar's trouser legs were drenched, and his hands were red-raw from tossing the pail over the side on a rope, then hauling it up full of seawater." (p22).
  2. "Leaning heavily on a wooden crutch, Pandas followed the marshal and the officers of the court out of the cabin and onto the mid-deck. For a moment Velza was left alone with Latsar. Taking him by the arm, she leaned so close that her lips brushed his ear and whispered, 'Well done.'" (p33-4).
  3. "Through the smoke, she peered down into the oil store, now a shambles of smashed barrels and broken wood. Pinned under a heavy beam was her father, surrounded by spreading fires. Nearby was a body, dressed in the white tunic of the cook." (p67).
  4. "Stationed on the quarterdeck close to Admiral Dalzico and Captain Parvian, Velza saw and heard the preparations for the battle. Dalzico was a huge man with mutton chop whiskers. He towered over Captain Parvian, and the captain was not short. The marshal-at-arms called all the officers together." (p89).
  5. "As he waited, more charred cloth fell from the sleeve of his tunic. The fabric was blackened and crumbling from Deathlight's heat, yet his skin was still not blistered or red. He could hear the sounds of the battle from outside, and the windows showed burning ships and billowing smoke." (p109).
  6. "When he saw the girl swimming towards him, he thought that he had died already and that she was a blessed spirit come to take him to the afterlife. She was beautiful, pale and graceful, and suddenly Dantar realised that he was to be taken up to the clouds of the blessed, and not the fires of underground torment." (p117).

**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 Dantar and his father, Marko, and the marshal-at-arms. How is the language he 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. 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 happened to them before the events of the book.
- When Velza reports that Dantar disobeyed orders she firmly believes that she did the right thing because she was following the rules. However nobody else seems to agree with that, and she is told that 'the rules don't apply to heroes'. Do you think her demotion was justified? Write up a list for what Velza did and against. Be prepared to present either side in a debate with other members of the class.
- Dantar says at the beginning of the story that in the epics he had read, great battles happened under cloudy skies, with lightning flashing in the background. Research a

battle from history that took place on the sea. Who were the main 'characters' in this battle? Where did it take place? What are the similarities and differences between a real life sea battle and those in *The Burning Sea*?

- We are told that Velza downplays what makes her female because she lives in 'an intensely male society'. What evidence of this can you see in the book? How would things be different for Velza if she was a young woman in the society that we live in? Things were very different in our society than they used to be. Research what life was like for women 100 years ago.

### **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.

*The Burning Sea* 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.

*The Burning Sea* 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 values, rights, and responsibilities.

*The Burning Sea* is aimed at 9-10 year old readers so is best used in conjunction with the Year 4/5 English curriculum.