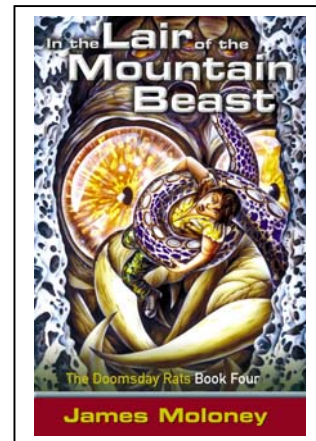


In The Lair Of The Mountain Beast

Doomsday Rats
by James Moloney

Teaching Guide



Synopsis

This is the fourth book in the *Doomsday Rats* series, which is set in a nameless city, at an indeterminate point in the future. The brilliant scientist, Malig Tumora has turned his genius against the city's people and enslaved them using a gas that steals away their will to resist. Only a ragged gang of children, 'The Rats', have been able to defy him by hiding in the stormwater drainage tunnels beneath the city.

The gas is produced in massive greenhouses filled with millions of purple flowers. Thanks to Berrin's courage in the earlier adventures, the Rats now know that this purple flower is vulnerable to a special moth said to live on mysterious Mount Windenbeck. Berrin and his close friend Olanda set out to capture specimens of this moth, along with their leader Dorian and a boy named Aden about whom Berrin knows a worrying secret.

Outside the city, they encounter a rag-tag band of adults who jeopardise their mission, but from whom they learn the whereabouts of Mount Windenbeck, an extinct volcano hollow at the centre. Despite the ominous growls that echo from the crater, they climb down and find the moth they seek, only to discover just as quickly that they have been tracked all the way by Malig Tumora's forces. An act of breathtaking self-sacrifice saves them from annihilation, but all the moths have been killed.

Or have they? Did some survive in a cave in the crater's wall? Dare the children enter the cave when all they can hear from it are the terrible growls of the mountain beast?

Writing Style

The writing style throughout this series emphasises adventure and the breathless pace of the action. The story is deliberately structured to create many points of high drama where the protagonists' lives are at stake and only their courage, determination and ingenuity manage to save them. In the classic style, many chapters end with cliff-hanger situations that demand the reader continue immediately. Many will read *In the Lair of the Mountain Beast* in one sitting.

In keeping with this genre, sentences are shorter and the dialogue succinct and snappy, reflecting the precarious nature of the characters' lives. Death could gobble them up at any moment and the characters have a hardened and frequently humorous cynicism about their continued existence as a result. The author has, however, been careful to avoid a purely generic vocabulary and a pleasingly high standard of language is maintained throughout what is essentially a Sci-fi adventure story.

Author's Inspiration

The *Doomsday Rats* series is the third project James Moloney has embarked upon in a deliberate attempt to broaden his audience and take on new challenges as a writer, after a decade of writing mainly serious Young Adult novels. The other projects have been the hilarious teenage novel, *Black Taxi*, and the fantasy for younger readers, *The Book of Lies*, for which he is currently writing a sequel.

One source of inspiration for the series was the author's own horror story, *The Pipe*, in which a boy encounters a ghost while riding his skateboard in the large stormwater pipes near his home. Another source was the range of newspaper articles in recent years about genetic engineering and the way that so much once deemed to be pure science fiction now seems possible. The ethical debates that have been generated around these rapid advances continue to interest the author. The painful and tragic consequences of mingling the DNA of many different creatures are drawn out strongly in *In the Lair of the Mountain Beast*.

Study Notes

- The hellish world of this series was generated through genetic engineering. Ask students to do some research on the advances this science offers with a view to answering the question, 'Could this really happen?'
- This research might lead towards discussion of the 'rights and wrongs' of altering the genetic make up of both human beings and other species. Students might focus on the fate of both Aden and the Mountain Beast. While these fates seem negative, could there be some positive consequences and ideas to be considered, such as the regeneration of nerve cells in the human spine? Point to the example of *Superman* star, Christopher Reeve, and his research and subsequent global campaign to help paralysis victims like himself.
- The cover for *In the Lair of the Mountain Beast* was done by Marc McBride, who also created the covers for the *Deltora Quest* books. Ask the students to compare the covers of *In the Lair of the Mountain Beast* and earlier *Doomsday Rats* books with those in the *Deltora* series, looking in particular at McBride's use of colour, his attention to details from the text and the overall 'effectiveness' of the covers. Students should aim to identify the elements in a cover that make it successful.
- The troubled character of Aden sacrifices himself to save the others. With reference to other books read by the students, develop a list of characters who have acted with similar selfless courage. Students could then expand the list by consulting the librarian and other adults (e.g. parents). Broaden the list to include 'true tales' of such heroism.
- When Berrin and the other children encounter a straggling band of adults, those adults immediately attempt to take on leadership roles, even though Berrin and his friends are better organised. Ask students to consider instances where this has happened to them, and talk about their resulting feelings. Consider when adult leadership is appropriate, and when there is a need for young people to act independently.

Other titles in the series:

The Tunnels of Ferdinand
The Scorpion's Tale
Malig Tumora

And the final book...

Doomsday

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