

# The Secret of Jelly Mountain

Author: Des Hunt

## Synopsis

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Jason and his twin sister Jessy live with their parents on a remote farm in New Zealand. They are home schooled and enjoy the picturesque surroundings and peaceful lifestyle of the country. That is until Shawn Morris crash-lands onto their property. Shawn works for Sudpak Oil and Gas and has been sent by the company to survey and drill on the family farm. He is unhurt from his misadventure but he immediately rubs Jason the wrong way with his rude comments and his flirtatious behaviour with Jessy. When Shawn shows an unusual interest in Jelly Mountain, Jason begins to suspect that he is far more concerned with his own personal gain than the interests of the company.

Jason needs to find a way to get to the top of the mysterious mountain that has fascinated him since he was a young boy. What did Shawn see from the air that distracted him so much he crashed the plane? Just as Jason begins to despair that there is no way to get to the summit his sister finds a journal that belonged to Maria Stockwell, a girl who lived on the farm in the early 1900s. Maria has provided Jason with a map and by following a series of caves and tunnels Jason finds his way to the top. There he makes a fantastic discovery. Jelly Mountain is home to many tuatara, a species unique to New Zealand which is in danger of becoming extinct. Unfortunately Shawn has also discovered the reptiles and Jason soon discovers that he will stop at nothing to sell them to the highest bidder. The fate of the last tuatara on earth rests squarely on Jason's shoulders.

## Text Type

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The Secret of Jelly Mountain is a fast-paced adventure mystery with enough action to keep even the most reluctant reader engaged. Set in rural New Zealand, the author Des Hunt has created a location that adds mystery and a sense of isolation to the story. The story is told in first person point of view and Jason is the narrator. Through his eyes we learn his thoughts, feelings and motivations as he fights to save the tuatara from extinction. He and his sister live on a farm and have an acute awareness of environmental issues such as global warming, the destructive use of pesticides and endangered species. Their schooling takes place via a video link and one of their regular tutors is Dr Joanne Petheridge, head of the endangered species institute. Their views are influenced by their lessons and the author creates tension in the story by contrasting their ideas and opinions with those of their father, who is a farmer concerned with making a profit.

Another interesting sub-plot is the story of Maria Stockwell, the girl who lived at the farm at the start of the 1900s. Through her diary the reader learns how difficult life was during this period and how the few joys in Maria's life often came from nature.

Jason is a likeable and credible character who shows daring and courage in a range of dangerous encounters with Shawn Morris, the antagonist in the story. Central to the story is Jason's relationship with his sister Jessy and his strong sense of morals and responsibility.

Themes include environmental issues and the novel highlights the responsibilities of humankind to try and repair the damage that we have already done to the planet. The story makes us think about the consequences of our previous actions and their disastrous effects such as the extinction of endangered species. Other issues raised are greed; good versus evil; trust; and family relationships.

## Sharing the Novel

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**The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 and 2 (pp. 5- 25), Chapters 3- 13 (pp.26- 122) and Chapters 14- 25 (pp. 123- 222).**

**During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Students should make inferences and predictions about what will happen next as they read.**

**It would be a good idea to do some research on the environmental issues raised in the story and about New Zealand's endangered species so that students understand the context of the story.**

**Encourage students to study the character of Jason and examine his qualities and characteristics as well as his motivations. Wherever possible, have students compare their own lives to Jason's experiences. Have students discuss their own views about the environment and endangered species and encourage them to form opinions and values of their own.**

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Describe the illustration on the front of the novel. Why does the mountain look so inaccessible from the ground? Why do you think it's called "Jelly Mountain"? What do you think caused the fire on the top of the mountain?
- Who is the main character in the novel? Who is Shawn? How does he come into Jason's life?
- What do you think the mystery of Jelly Mountain is?
- This story is an adventure-mystery. What do you expect from a novel of this genre?

**Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5- 25) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.**

### **Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5- 25)**

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- Where is the story set? Describe the farm.
- Who does Shawn work for? Why is Jessy annoyed about his interest in the farm?
- What causes Shawn's plane to crash? Why does Jason's dad tell him to clear the top-dressing strip?
- Describe what happens when the plane hits the ground. How do Jessy and Jason help the pilot?
- Why does Jason feel uncomfortable about the way that Shawn looks at Jessy?
- Why does Jason think that Shawn is lying when he says that he didn't see anything on top of Jelly Mountain?
- What does Jason notice about Shawn when he studies him in the ute?
- How do Jessy and Jason get into the Whareorino Forest? Where does Bush Road go? Why does Jason tell Shawn that he won't be able to go into the Forest to sightsee?
- How does Jason feel when he learns that Shawn will be staying on their property? Why does he feel like this?
- How do Jessy and Jason feel about Jelly Mountain? Why doesn't Jason want Shawn to go up there?
- Describe the old house.
- How does Shawn react when he learns that there is no cell phone coverage on the farm?

- Describe the clay figures that Shawn sees sitting on the step. Where did Jessy and Jason find them? What does Jason notice on the bottom of one of the ornaments?
- What does Shawn find in the outhouse? Why doesn't Jason challenge him about taking the ornament?

### Discussion

- What do we learn about Jason, Jessy and their life on the farm in the first two chapters?
- Describe Shawn Morris. How does he treat Jason? How does he treat Jessy? Why does he treat them so differently?
- What do you think Shawn saw on top of Jelly Mountain that caused him to crash?
- In what ways are Jessy and Jason isolated on the farm?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 3- 13 (pp. 26- 122) independently before the next shared session.**

## Comprehension Chapters 3- 13 (pp. 26- 122)

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- Why is the week after the plane crash so busy?
- How do Jessy and Jason do their schoolwork? Where is their schoolroom? What is VC gear? Who is Dr Joanne Petherbridge?
- Who is George? What do Jason and Jessy learn about him? What do they learn about the huia?
- What does Jessy find inside the house when she goes in looking for more ornaments?
- Who does the diary belong to? What do Jessy and Jason learn about her when they start reading the diary?
- What does Jason suddenly realise about the clay figures?
- How much money is Jason's father being paid for giving his permission for the trial?
- What does the twins' father think about Joanne Petherbridge's beliefs?
- What do the twins get for their birthday? How does Jason feel about his present? Why does he feel like a hypocrite for accepting it?
- What gruesome discovery does Jason make at the base of Jelly Mountain?
- Why does Jason find it so difficult reading Maria's journal?
- Who is Bert? Describe Jason's relationship with him.
- What does Bert tell Jason about global warming and the starlings?

- What does Maria call Jelly Mountain? What clue does she leave her father for discovering how to climb up there?
- What does Bert tell Jason about Professor Challenger? What else do they figure out about the riddle?
- What does Jason see when he goes to explore the base of Jelly Mountain?
- What do you think the stranger is referring to when he says, "you haven't got the contacts to get rid of the things"?
- Describe Casamorris. What presents does Shawn give Jessy and Jason after he gets set up there?
- What does Jason discover when he studies the huia statue? Why is he so excited about this?
- How does Bert know Shawn Morris? What does he think of him?
- Why does Jason become Shawn's gofer? What do his duties include? When does Jason get the opportunity to try and get the map out of the huia? Why doesn't he fix the statue before he leaves?
- Why is the way to the top of the mountain nothing like Jason expected?
- Why does Jessy want to tell Shawn about the map? How does Jason react to this idea?
- What bad news does Joanne give Jessy and Jason about the tuatara?
- Why is Jason so excited about climbing Jelly Mountain with his sister? Why do the twins have so much difficulty entering the cave?
- When does Jason realise that the bird he sees is not a huia? What do Jessy and Jason discover when they explore the top of Jelly Mountain? Why do they think that the clearing is filled with rats?
- How does Shawn know that Jason has tampered with the huia statue? Why does Jason tell him the whole story about the map? What does Shawn insist that Jason show him?
- Why is Bert surprised when Jason tells him about the rats?
- What is the cause of the tuatara deaths? Why is Bert adamant that no one will find a cure?
- Why does Jason find solace in Maria's journal? Why does he get so angry when he reads Maria's entry about the magpies?
- Why do Jason and Jessy get such a shock when they arrive at Dinghy Rock? What do Jessy and Jason do when they visit the mountain the second time? What further discoveries do they make? How does Shawn react when Jessy calls out to him? Who is the man with Shawn? Where has Jason seen him before? What does he tell the twins that they are doing?
- Why is Jason suspicious about what the men are doing on Jelly Mountain? What realisation does he come to about the burrows on Jelly Mountain?
- How does Shawn impress Jessy in front of the scientist?

- Why does Jason decide to return to Jelly Mountain alone and at night? What does he see at the top of the mountain? How does he feel about his discovery? Who does Jason see in the clearing? What does he overhear them talking about?
- Why does Shawn need to borrow Jason's computer?
- Why does Shawn threaten Jason? What effect does this have on him?
- What advice does Bert give Jason about how to deal with Shawn? How does this plan backfire? Why is Jason's dad so upset with him? How does he punish Jason?
- Why do Jessy and Jason argue?

### Discussion

- Brainstorm everything that you know about global warming. What other environmental issues are you aware of? What can human beings do to try and alleviate these problems?
- What is Jason's father's attitude to the environment? What reasons does he have for feeling this way?
- Jason feels like he has a connection with Maria even though she lived on the farm a hundred years ago. In what ways can Jason relate to Maria's life on the farm? Why does he think that he and Maria are alike?
- Describe Jason's relationship with Jessy. How does he feel that Shawn has affected their relationship?
- What do you think might have happened if Jason had been discovered in the bush by Shawn?
- Jason decides not to confront Shawn about the tuatara. Is this the right decision? Why/ why not? What would you do in Jason's position?
- Predict what will happen next in the story.

**Students read Chapters 14- 25 (pp. 123- 222) independently before the next shared session.**

### **Comprehension Chapters 14- 25 (pp. 123- 222)**

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- Who does Bert suggest that Jason contact about the tuatara? How does she respond to his email?
- What interesting information does Joanne give the family about the geckos? Why does Jason's family begin to feel less hostile towards him after talking to Joanne?
- Describe the discussion that Joanne has with Jason's dad. Whose point of view do you agree with the most and why?

- Why does Joanne think that she may be able to pin the attempted smuggling of the geckos on Shawn?
- What do Joanne and Jason do when they go to the top of Jelly Mountain? How does the tuatara lose his tail? Where does Jason decide to keep him? What theory does Joanne come up with to explain the tuatara's survival?
- How does Joanne lose the eggs from her car?
- Why does George become such a celebrity?
- Why do you think Joanne keeps the existence of the tuatara on Jelly Mountain a secret?
- What does Jason call his tuatara? How does he feel about the creature?
- How do the members of Jason's family react when Shawn returns from the States early?
- How does Shawn get Jason back for ringing customs?
- Why do the pictures of the cornfield cause such a media frenzy?
- Why does Bert think that Shawn might have bugged Jason's computer? Why does he suggest a trip to Te Kuiti?
- Why do Bert and Shawn decide to leave the bug on the computer? How does Jason decide to communicate with Joanne in future? Who does he see with her when he turns on the equipment?
- What does the letter from ChemAgriCo say? What do Jason's parents tell him he has to do before they can move on? What does the fact that Jason refuses to do this suggest about his character?
- Why does Jessy come and visit Jason in his room that night? How does this help repair the bond between them?
- What does Jason find out about Nigel Weatherly on the internet? How does Joanne react when Jason tells her where he has seen Nigel before?
- How do Jessy and Jason keep an eye on Shawn?
- What good news does Shawn give their parents about the project?
- What does Jason notice when the helicopter takes off for the fourth time?
- What plan does Joanne come up with to transport the tuatara?
- How do Jessy and Jason react when they hear the explosion on Jelly Mountain? Who does Jason call? What advice does he give them? Why does Jason have conflicting feelings as he climbs Jelly Mountain? Why is he so devastated when he sees where the helicopter has crashed?
- How does Jason feel when he sees the injured men? Why does the pilot say that Shawn is a hero?
- How does Jason try to regain respectability with his parents? What happens when he tries to show them Shaky?

- Why do all of Jason's dad's doubts about his story disappear when he sees the crash site? What startling discovery does Jason make when he begins digging in the burrows? Who finds the tuatara?
- What does the family decide to do with the tuatara that they find?
- What good news does Joanne give the family during the VC? When does she plan to come and get the remaining tuatara?
- What does Jason's father find under the desk? Why does this discovery concern Jason so much?
- Why does Jason decide to return to Jelly Mountain? Why do he and Jessy decide to turn off Jason's generator before they leave?
- What do Jessy and Jason see Shawn doing on Jelly Mountain? Why does he look like "something out of a horror movie"? Who does Jessy ring to warn about Shawn?
- Why do Jessy and Jason have so much trouble following Shawn? Describe their time in the water. How do they escape?
- Why do Jessy and Jason have so much trouble reaching Bert's caravan? Why is Jason so concerned when he realises that Jason has got all of the tuatara? How does Shawn escape from the roadblock? Why do Jessy and Jason want to stop him from reaching Bush road? Why does Jason decide to head up the Zigzag?
- How does Jason feel when he is waiting for Shawn's car to round the bend? What does Shawn do when he sees him there?
- How does Shawn get injured?
- Why do Jessy and Jason need to get the tuatara out of the car so urgently? Who arrives to help them? How does Jason feel when he finds Shaky?
- What does Joanne plan to do to ensure the survival of the tuatara species? What happens to Shaky? What does Jason call his mate?
- Where did the police find Maria's journal? Who is Maria Morgan? Why does Jason enjoy her visit to the farm so much? Whose remains do they find where the clay ornaments were buried? What does Jason give Maria as a memento?

### Discussion

- What will it mean for New Zealand if the tuatara does become extinct?
- Are Jason's parents justified in their attitude towards Jason? Why/why not? How does his parents' lack of support affect Jason?
- Do you agree with Jason when he says that Shawn was more of "a monster than a man"? What do you think motivated Shawn's actions?
- What lessons do you think Jason has learnt from his experiences?
- Identify the climax in the story. Explain why this event is important.

- What is the main idea or author's message and how is it developed in the novel?

## Activities

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**Research** - Conduct a research assignment on tuatara. Come up with 3 focussing questions to guide your research. Use a range of oral, verbal and written sources to gather your information. Keep a log to record the research project. Present your findings as a speech, on a poster or as a report.

**Newspaper Article** - Write a newspaper article about an exciting event that happens in the story. Remember to use the inverted pyramid style of writing where the 5 w's and h go in the first two paragraphs. Include quotes from people involved in the events.

**Static Image** - Design a static image that educates people about one of the environmental issues discussed in this novel. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

**Setting** - Based on the information provided in the story design a map that shows all of the important locations on Jason's farm.

**Plot** - Draw a flow diagram that shows 10 important events from the story in the order that they occur.

**Writing** - Imagine that you are Jason. Write a letter to Maria telling her about everything that has happened on the farm and your feelings about it.

**Review** - Write a review of *The Secret of Jelly Mountain* suitable for publication in a school magazine. Include information about characters, the style of the book, setting and themes. Discuss the issues raised in the novel. Remember to include your own opinion about the book.

**Personal Effects** - Put together a collection of Jason's personal effects (objects or things that are important to him). Explain the significance of these items to Jason.

**Character** - Imagine that you are Jason. Write an account of his experiences that you can present to the class in role.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd