

## Teacher's Notes

# *Mole Hunt*

**Paul Collins**

### **About the novel**

*Mole Hunt* is the first in an SF trilogy, *The Maximus Black Files*. The story is a cyberpunk adventure involving two extremely dangerous characters intent on destroying the other. Fast paced doesn't begin to describe this book. The story is pure adrenalin with chase scenes that will leave the reader breathless but anxious to find out what happens next.

The character Maximus Black is part of a tradition of charismatic villains that runs back at least as far as Shakespeare's Richard III. He is unapologetically evil and has no discernible qualms about his behaviour. 'Borderline psychotic' is what his file at the RIM academy says until he murders the psychologist and wipes the data.

The story is set in a far away galaxy in a time where life on earth is a distant memory. Maximus Black is a Special Agent for RIM, an intergalactic law enforcement agency. But he is also working for the Quesada Corporation. When it becomes clear that he is about to be exposed as a 'mole', he decides to kill his accuser, Anneke Longshadow. He is smart, talented, and ruthless. Normally, he would have little trouble destroying an adversary but Anneke is something else all together. Also an agent at RIM, she is just as smart, just as talented, and also prepared to do just about anything to survive. Unlike Maximus however, she is loyal to RIM. Maximus's mission is to deliver the location of an ancient but deadly fleet of space warships to Quesada. This coincides with a rumour that several corporations plan to form an alliance that will upset the balance and peace of the entire galaxy. Maximus and Anneke become mortal enemies whose paths cross spectacularly throughout this utterly engaging novel.

There are elements of several SF sub-genres here but there is a nod to the Western that will see two mavericks face off in a battle of wits. It is also a travelogue of sorts through a landscape that is technically sophisticated but plagued by many familiar dilemmas that should provoke plenty of discussion and good writing.

### **About the author**

Paul Collins is one of the most important figures in the development of homegrown science fiction in Australia. Both as a publisher and a writer, he has helped to forge a local tradition in this genre that has, in turn, encouraged countless other Australian writers to craft their own stories.

He has written more than 100 books and over 130 short stories, and edited numerous collections of science fiction and fantasy.

It is also worth noting that he has black belts in two separate martial arts traditions. He has also served time in the commandos and worked as a night club bouncer so he knows a thing or two about hand-to-hand combat. The fight scenes in *Mole Hunt* are simply electric!

His website is well worth a visit:

[www.paulcollins.com.au](http://www.paulcollins.com.au)

## Teaching *Mole Hunt*

*Mole Hunt* has plenty to offer teachers looking for an engaging, well written novel that touches on a range of contemporary issues. Paul Collins has achieved the impossible here with a novel that is as fast paced as any digital game or action film. For boys in particular, this book may be a revelation if they think novels by their nature move at a snail's pace. But girls will respond to this story, too. The protagonist is a young woman who is more than a match for the male characters in the novel.

The book can be approached from several angles in the classroom. As a science fiction novel, it presents the opportunity to look into this genre and the ideas that drive it. Science fiction is traditionally the most socially conscious of narrative genres so there are a number of contemporary issues that appear in this story. Readers will find here traces of espionage, corporate culture, biotechnology, and even wikileaks. At the same time, the battle between good and evil as it is played out in *Mole Hunt* goes back to the most ancient of legends. This novel should also inspire young writers to try their hand at science fiction and there are lots of possibilities for creative response between these covers.

But *Mole Hunt* may also be a great read in a wide reading unit or regular reading period. It is, from the first sentence, absolutely 'unreadable'. Teachers may find that the biggest problem is getting their students to stop reading it at the end of class.

This sophistication of the language and the ideas in *Mole Hunt* make it an ideal text for a Year 9 class though it is entirely appropriate for all Secondary levels.

National Curriculum Links:

The Literature strand of English for Years 7-10 suggests that *Students are introduced to increasingly sophisticated analysis of the differences between various kinds of literary texts, popular-culture texts, and everyday texts. Mole Hunt is a novel that challenges the idea that texts must be either literary or popular. It is a book that incorporates the pace and imagery of*

contemporary actions films and games but also utilises many traditional literary techniques. The strand also says that the “*notion of valuing of certain texts as literature is discussed*”. *Mole Hunt* provides an excellent example for a lively debate on the matter.

The Literacy Strand at this level advises that “*Students engage with a variety of **genres** and modes. They reenact, represent and describe texts in order to display their understanding of **narrative, theme, purpose, context and argument** and to defend their ideas in written and oral modes*”. *Mole Hunt* is a science fiction text and an excellent starting point for a discussion of that particular genre and genre in general. The structural elements described above are accessible to students in this engaging novel. Students will enjoy *Mole Hunt* and will be keen to explore the ideas that drive the narrative.

## Before Teaching

### Science Fiction

1 Research the following sub-genres of science fiction. Write a sentence that describes the sub-genre and give an example:

- Space Opera
- Scientific Romance
- Hard Science Fiction
- Speculative Fiction
- Military Science Fiction
- Cyberpunk
- Biopunk
- Steampunk
- Time Travel
- Fantasy/SF.

2. Which sub-genres do you think *Mole Hunt* may fall into? Why?

### Mole

1. What kind of an animal is a mole? What does it do?
2. When a person is labelled a ‘mole’, what does it mean?
3. What kind of stories would you expect to feature moles?
4. What is a mole hunt? Can you think of ways to catch a mole in an organisation?

### The Author

1. What can you find out about Paul Collins?
2. Check your school library. What other books by this author are on the shelves?

3. Paul Collins has worked hard to promote home-grown science fiction in Australia. Do you think that it is difficult for Australian writers to compete in this genre? If so, why?

## After Reading

### Characters

#### Questions

#### Maximus Black

1. Approximately how old is Maximus Black?
2. What does the reader learn about his background?
3. What is his position at RIM?
4. Why does he kill Dr Rodik?
5. Who does Maximus actually work for?
6. What is his mission at RIM?
7. How does he retrieve the files that the Envoy demands?
8. How does Maximus take control of Quesada?
9. What does he see in the Hub? Why might he find it disturbing?
10. How does he escape from Arcadia at the end of the story? Where does he go?

#### Anneke Longshadow

1. What information is given about Anneke's childhood?
2. What is significant about the fact that she has grown up on Normansk?
3. What is she doing when she first appears in the story in Chapter 2?
4. Why does Maximus decide that she must be eliminated?
5. What happens when Kilroy tries to kill Anneke?
6. How does she escape after she has stepped on the pressure pad?
7. What happens at the duel? How does she escape?
8. How does she get Maximus' e-pad?
9. Why is Fraddo indebted to Anneke?
10. How does Anneke win over the crew of the *Meteor*?
11. How does Anneke meet Deema?
12. Why does Anneke go to Lob Lotang?
13. What happens when she sneezes?
14. What happens to Anneke in the Hub?
15. What does Anneke do with Maximus' e-pad?
16. How does she save the floating city?

Identify the following characters and the role that they play in the story:

- Special Agent Luton
- Colonel Viktus
- Kilroy
- Esprin Harbage
- The Envoy

- Captain Arvakur
- Fat Fraddo
- Lob Lotang
- Quag
- Deema
- Ackie
- Alisk
- Bodanis
- Sasume

To Consider:

1. How are Maximus and Anneke different? How are they similar?
2. What motivates Maximus?
3. Why is Anneke loyal to RIM?
4. Why does Anneke take responsibility for Deema?
5. What is a borderline psychotic? Do you think Dr Rodik was right about Maximus? Why?
6. What is Anneke's most obvious weakness? What is Maximus?

Activity #1

A character in a story is revealed to the reader in many ways. Fill in the table below to show what we learn about the two main characters in the novel *Mole Hunt*:

	<b>What they say</b>	<b>What they do</b>	<b>How they relate to others</b>	<b>What others say about them</b>	<b>What the author says</b>
<b>Maximus Black</b>					
<b>Anneke Longshadow</b>					

Activity # 2

In partners, on paper, create Facebook sites for Maximus Black and Anneke Longshadow. Think carefully about what information they would provide and who their friends might be. Write one or two status updates for each of them and add comments.

Activity # 3

## A Letter

In pairs, write two letters. One person will assume the role of Anneke and the other, Maximus. Think about what they would say to each other at the end of the book. Write and deliver the letters to each other. Then write a short reply from each.

## The Story

Identify the following organisations and settings:

- RIM
- The Sentinels
- Quesada
- Myoto
- Majoris Corporata
- Reema's End
- Arcadia
- Lykis Integer
- Normansk
- Se'atma Minor

Questions:

1. All stories are based around a problem. What is the central problem in *Mole Hunt*?
2. What is the significance of the title, *Mole Hunt*?
3. Who is the hero of the story? Why?
4. What are the five major turning points in the story?

Activities

1. A Map

In small groups, using an A3 piece of paper, draw a map of the galaxy in the story. Make sure that you include all of the places that appear in *Mole Hunt*. Annotate your map with brief notes to indicate what takes place in each setting.

2. A Timeline

Each chapter, generally speaking, is either about Maximus or Anneke. Create a timeline on an A3 piece of paper that indicates briefly what happens in each chapter.

## Themes

Find a quote from the novel to go with each of the following ideas:

- Loyalty
- Identity
- Appearance and Reality
- Individuals and Organisations
- Humans and Machines

## Discussion Questions

### Loyalty

1. How is loyalty defined in *Mole Hunt*?
2. Is Maximus loyal to anything or anyone?
3. Is Anneke's loyalty to RIM or to Colonel Viktus?

### Identity

4. Why is identity a complicated issue in the society described in *Mole Hunt*?
5. How do Anneke and Maximus define themselves?

### Appearance and Reality

6. Who is more realistic about life in the galaxy? Anneke or Maximus?
7. Give three instances where a character in the story mistakes an appearance for reality?

### Individuals and Organisations

8. How does the author illustrate the conflict between individuals and organisations in *Mole Hunt*?
9. Why are people like Maximus and Anneke so dangerous to large institutions?
10. What is the difference between Lob Lotang and Maximus?

### Humans and Machines

11. Why is the line between man and machine less clear in the society described in *Mole Hunt*?
12. How is the question of technology linked to that of identity?

## General Activities

- Create a 'book' trailer for *Mole Hunt* using Powerpoint or Moviemaker.
- Write a point of view essay on one of the themes described above.
- Write a review of *Mole Hunt* and post it up somewhere in your classroom. Read your classmates' reviews.
- Use a minor character from *Mole Hunt* to write your own story.

- Write up a proposal for a film version of *Mole Hunt*. Consider the actors, the style, and the point of view. Draw a story board for one scene.
- Write an essay about ethics and technology using examples from *Mole Hunt*.
- Write down three things that you think will happen in the next book.
- Write the first chapter of the next book
- Create a poster for the book
- Create a website for the book
- Create a blog about the book
- Read another contemporary SF novel and write a short article comparing and contrasting the two
- Compare the novel to a recent SF film. What concerns do they share?
- Read *Frankenstein*, a novel sometimes considered the first SF story. What does it have in common with *Mole Hunt*?
- Research the cyberpunk genre and write your own story in this style.
- Create a short comic book based on one scene from *Mole Hunt*.