Contents

Page 2  Key Study Points
        Boy Appeal
        Stylistic Features
        Structure
        Synopsis

Page 3  Fictional Elements
        Characterisation
        Different Voices
        Activities

Page 4  Non-fictional Elements
        Cross-Curricular
        Activities

Notes by Anne Faundez, Education and Children’s Book Consultant
**Operation Red Jericho**

By Joshua Mowll

*Operation Red Jericho* is a sci-fi adventure story based on fact and possibility, in which scientific discovery and technological innovation make the extraordinary seem plausible. What makes it unique is the way it incorporates non-fiction texts into the story.

**Key Study Points**
- Sci-fi/adventure story
- Links to other curriculum subjects
- Blend of fiction and non-fiction genres

**Boy Appeal**
- Invention
- Piracy
- Treasure
- Sea and seafaring
- Islands
- China
- Warriors
- Quest

**Stylistic Features**
- Mix of fiction and non-fiction text types to create a narrative
- Fast-moving plot
- Vivid descriptions
- Cliffhangers
- Dialogue

**Structure**
*Operation Red Jericho* is the first in a three-part series: Book Two is *Typhoon Shore* and Book Three is *Storm City*. The “Note to the Reader” is crucial to understanding *Operation Red Jericho* and sets the story in context by explaining how it came into existence. It describes how the author, Joshua Mowll, came to inherit the extraordinary archives of his great-aunt Rebecca MacKenzie. These archives, sealed in a vault in her cottage in Devon, contain confidential material – letters, maps, sketches, photos, artifacts and, most important, her diary. From these documents, Joshua painstakingly reconstructed the story of his late great-aunt and her brother Doug and the mysterious events that followed the disappearance of their parents. In reconstructing their story, he uncovers the existence of an ancient secret society, the Honourable Guild of Specialists. The book weaves together the archival material, excerpts from Becca’s diary and storytelling. The non-fictional elements support the narrative by adding credibility to the story, making it seem real, while the narrative fleshes out the bare bones of the archival material, makes the characters come alive and provides the suspense of a plot that twists and turns.

**Synopsis**
The story opens in 1920 in Shanghai. Fifteen-year-old Rebecca and her thirteen-year-old brother have been forced to leave their home in Lucknow, India, since the inexplicable disappearance of their parents. The adolescents are now on their way to meet their uncle Captain Fitzroy MacKenzie, in whose care they are to be entrusted. Rebecca and Doug join their uncle on board his ship, the *Expedient*, an oceanographic research vessel, bound for the South China Sea. From the moment they set foot on board his ship, they are entangled in a web of intrigue. It seems that their uncle knows more than he lets on about their parents. A man on a stretcher, clandestinely smuggled on board, is familiar to Becca as the scientist, Chambois, whose lecture she attended with her parents many years ago. They soon discover that the *Expedient* is not what it seems and has two huge guns hidden below deck. They also spy on the Captain and by reading his private correspondence, learn that he is working with an ancient order, the Honorable Guild of Specialists. They are trying to recover a precious, highly volatile substance called zoridium, also known as Daughter of the Sun, from an evil pirate warlord, Sheng-Fat, who is misusing the substance as the explosive element of his torpedoes. Captain MacKenzie’s mission is to return zoridium to its rightful guardians, an ancient fighting order called the Sujing Quantou. What follows is a battle between Good and Evil as the Captain gives chase to Sheng-Fat, and Becca and Doug become increasingly embroiled in events.
The third-person narrative provides an overview of all that is happening. It allows the development of the plot by setting events in chronological order, it gives descriptions of characters and places, and it tells the reader about events that take place beyond Becca’s vision.

**Activities**

The students could complete some or all of the following activities.

Characters are portrayed through description, dialogue and action. Portray Sheng-Fat by writing a short imaginary scene that takes place between him and Captain MacKenzie, in which he describes the fortifications of Wenzi Island.

- **How does Sheng-Fat look?**
  (For example, he has jagged teeth and a facial scar.)
- **How does he talk?**
  (For example, he snarls, snaps and growls.)
- **What does he do?**
  (For example, he fiddles with his finger-bone necklace.)

Using different fonts and type sizes, design a “wanted” poster for Julius Pemberton-Crozier.

In small groups, discuss the character of Captain MacKenzie. Is he on the side of Becca and Doug, or against them? What might be the author’s intention in creating such ambiguity? (For example, to add suspense to the story.)

In small groups, discuss which character you would most like to be. Justify your argument by referring to the text.

**Fictional Elements**

The book is a work of fiction that describes a world in which scientific speculation becomes reality. While conflicts are resolved through technological and scientific means, the characters remain predictably real.

**Characterization**

A detailed picture of the characters is developed through the way they speak, act and look. Becca cares about her appearance. She has short dark hair, high cheekbones and intelligent eyes. She is serious, withdrawn and thoughtful. She has a passion for music and is expert in the art of swordsmanship. Her actions are driven by her desperate need to find out what happened to her parents. Mostly, but not always, she follows, rather than leads, Doug into action. She’s also hugely courageous and prepared to risk her life for others.

Doug is unkempt, with tousled hair and the same high cheekbones as his sister. He is enquiring and has a penchant for all things technological and scientific. He’s highly intelligent, able to find solutions to problems and explanations for seemingly unrelated facts. He’s outgoing, impetuous and ready for action. He sometimes loses sight of his ultimate goal of finding his parents.

Captain MacKenzie wears an eye patch and has a piratical appearance. He is authoritarian, forthright and learned. He is also fair, loyal and single-minded. At the outset, his motives towards Becca and Doug are ambiguous, and his secrecy arouses their suspicions.

**Different Voices**

The story is a mix of first and third person narratives. The first-person diary fragments that Becca writes provide a personal account of events. They allow the reader to identify with Becca and to understand the world from her point of view. They are also the means of breaking the narrative, to provide a summary of what has happened so far. They focus the reader’s attention on the central issue, which is the fate of the parents and the role of the Guild in their disappearance.
Non-fictional Elements
The “facts” in the non-fiction texts are both true and speculative. They take the form of explanations, newspaper clippings, biographies and diary extracts, drawings and photographs. They give geographical and historical information and explain scientific concepts and technological devices. The book even ends with an appendix and a bibliography. The purpose of these texts is to anchor the story into a larger framework, thereby giving it a greater semblance of truth.

Cross-Curricular
Scientific, geographical and historical “facts”, underpin the story so giving it further layers of credibility. Science and scientific discovery play an important role. At one level, the book is about a substance known as zoridium and its power to benefit or destroy mankind, depending on the use to which it is put. Scientific ideas concerning magnetism and gravitational forces are woven into the narrative and used to explain the powerful properties of zoridium.

Inventions, both real and speculative, such as the compass and Morse code, the molecular invigorator and the fog machine, are also important to the unfolding of events. They are presented largely through the characters of the scientist, Chambois, and Doug, who is receptive to his ideas.

Geographical facts anchor the story to specific locations. The events take place in and around mainland China. There are also specific references to Shanghai, Khotan, the Sinkiang, Lucknow and Florence.

Historical facts place the story into a vast time frame encompassing different civilizations. Piracy in the South China Sea, 1920s Shanghai, warrior orders dating back to the time of Alexander the Great and medieval theories of knowledge give the story a timeless quality that transcends the immediate nature of the adventure.

Activities
The students could be asked the following questions.

Zoridium is also known as Daughter of the Sun. What might this symbolize? (For example, energy, force or power to create or to destroy.)

In Chapter 3, how does Doug’s knowledge of scientific concepts help him to understand the reaction of the steel enriched fragments of zoridium?

Both the Sujing Quantou and Sheng-Fat have gadgets to foil their opponents. They are the battle discus and the Dragon’s tooth. Can you describe how each works?

In small groups, discuss the citation taken from Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum. Does it suggest that there are things in nature that are yet to be discovered? How relevant is this quotation to the MacKenzie family’s quest for the source of zoridium?

Debate the meaning of Francis Bacon’s citation. (For example, could it imply that we still have a lot to discover regarding the world; that, by extension, what may seem impossible today may one day be commonplace?)

Using reference books and the Internet, what can you find out about the inventor of Morse code? Using the Morse code instruction sheet on page 30, how would you tap out Becca’s message to the captain on page 220?

“If the source of zoridium could be located and harnessed with the molecule invigorator into something other than a torpedo, it could be used as energy to power everything from light bulbs to steel foundries, an alternative to petroleum and gas, space flight, end of world hunger and starvation.” (Page 80) Use this sentence as a starting point for debate. Does it imply that science can be a force for good or evil, depending on how it is used?

Can you think of instances when scientific advances may lend themselves to abuse? (For example, the atomic bomb, nuclear energy and stem cell research.)