

Loch Short Guide

Loch by Paul Zindel

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Loch Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	5
Social Sensitivity.....	6
Literary Qualities.....	7
Themes and Characters.....	8
Topics for Discussion.....	10
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	11
For Further Reference.....	12
Related Titles.....	13
Copyright Information.....	14

Overview

Loch is a suspenseful tale of adventure involving lake monsters and the effort to capture them. These lake creatures, elusive survivors from the age of the dinosaurs, are closely related to the ocean-going giant reptiles called plesiosaurs. They are surprisingly intelligent creatures, which may account for how they have managed to evade human beings for thousands of years. The novel tells of how three young people encounter the giant reptiles as they come into violent and deadly conflict with human beings.

About the Author

Paul Zindel was born on Staten Island, New York, on May 15, 1936.

His father abandoned the family, dogged by poverty and frequent moves in New York, when Zindel was still very young, and this abandonment may be the source of the many broken families in his writings. Zindel was diagnosed with tuberculosis at fifteen and was placed in a sanatorium for a year and a half, which delayed his graduation from high school by a year. He earned a Bachelor's degree in chemistry from Wagner College in 1958 and eventually a Master's degree in the same discipline as well. After a brief stint as a technical writer, he taught high school chemistry on Staten Island from 1959 to 1969.

Loch Zindel began writing plays in college, but it was not until his interest in writing merged with his concern for his teenage students that he became fully focused on writing for young people. *The Pigman* (1968; see separate entry, Vol. 3), a novel for young adults, made its way onto several bestbooks-for-children lists. Although he published other well-received novels for young adults, it was a play that brought him national stature as an important writer. Produced off-Broadway, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* was a notable success, winning several drama awards and the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for drama. Although generally regarded as a play for adults when it was first produced, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* has since been recommended as a best-of-the-best work for young adults by the American Library Association.

Zindel married on October 25, 1973, and has had two children. His family life seems to have been good and may be the source of some of the positive characters in his work. His own childhood experiences seem to have inspired many of the hostile adult figures in his fiction, and may be the source for the portrayal in *Loch* of Anthony Cavenger, a strange combination of romantic adventurer and mean-spirited skinflint. Sam Perkins, the figure of the father in the novel, is an ineffectual man who too easily submits to his overbearing boss. On the other hand, as Zindel's work has matured over the years, his adult authority figures have become more diverse in their temperaments and have acquired more depth of personality, allowing for the kind of growth Sam Perkins displays when he finally allies himself with his children at the novel's conclusion.

Setting

Lake Alban and its immediate environs form the setting for Loch, where plesiosaurs are trapped almost by accident. They have lived hidden for geologic eras, surrounded by an abundance of food, in the deep waters of Lake Champlain. They get into trouble through their avid pursuit of the salmon that make an annual run from the sea into Lake Champlain and then upstream into the smaller Lake Alban.

A family of plesiosaurs follow the salmon into Lake Alban and are trapped when a new salmon grid is installed, a device intended to help the salmon make their way upstream but which blocks the river to Lake Champlain.

The lake itself is a dangerous place since threatening plesiosaurs lurk under its surface; the menace is made clear early in the story when the photographer Erdon is killed by the angry patriarch of the plesiosaur family. An abandoned timber mill along the edge of the lake serves as a haven for the large reptiles. There are also docks, piers, and the encampment of the people who have come to capture the monsters of the lake as settings for the action of the story. Amid the tension and menace around the lake are places of peace, including a small pond where Loch, Zaidee, and Sarah learn that a plesiosaur can be both intelligent and friendly.



Social Sensitivity

Loch features a family broken by the death of a loving, patient mother—a family that has yet to heal. Sam Perkins has followed money and taken a job in which he must endure the belittling treatment of a self-absorbed boss. His children are not coping well with the situation, even though their father is earning enough money to provide them with luxuries such as hang gliders and laptop computers, and his job provides them with numerous adventures that most people can only dream about. The novel is partly about how the father and his children heal some of their wounds and find a common ground of understanding. Although the novel places the greater burden on the father for the family's difficulties, his behavior is well motivated and easy to sympathize with.

Much more likely to worry adults are the sharply delineated scenes of violent dismemberment such as when Erdon meets his end early in the narrative: The explosion from the water came quickly. What Erdon saw through the camera's lens was a shining mass of night erupting up toward him, a darkness hitting into him with such force he was airborne. The camera fell from his hands as he glimpsed a pair of huge, horrifying, yellow eyes and a gorge rimmed by jagged, dagger-sized teeth. The horror happened so fast—as if Erdon had been struck by the hood of a racing car, his feet torn from the rope webbing—he had but an instant to feel the impact on his face and chest. He was aware of a brief sensation of being turned, positioned, when a godless, fiery pain crashed simultaneously into his back and groin. Erdon's last conscious thought was the realization that he was being chewed in half.

Soon thereafter, Sarah "reached for the ignition key, but as her arm and hand went out she felt the warm, thick drops spotting her skin. When she looked at her arm, she knew it was raining blood. Now she could scream."

Sanderson is later attacked at the timber mill while on a pier: "Instinctively, he kicked his legs, attempting to throw the creatures off. When they finally dropped away, he drew his legs up to his body, reaching down to stop the terrible hurt. He stared in disbelief when he saw the dark and staining rush of blood on the wooden planks. Both of his feet were missing, severed at the ankles." These and other gruesome deaths are the stuff of nightmares and may prove disturbing to some readers. Older readers who have seen some monster movies may find the grisly scenes merely part of the conventions of the monster-story genre.

Literary Qualities

As literature, Loch has much to recommend it, with good dialogue, vivid descriptions, and a fine sense of humor. The descriptions are perhaps the most memorable aspect of the novel. A good example is this sentence which captures the atmosphere around Lake Alban: "Over all were the mountains rimming the lake, looming tall like protective, watchful giants." The descriptions are often charged by the tension of the action, as when doomed Jesse Sanderson goes outside and "The fog rushed at him as he checked the motorboat and canoe . . ." The anticipation of foreboding through description creates haunting effects. novel.

When a helicopter arrives, "its shadow falling on them like that of a great, brown wasp," this ominous description helps to create the atmosphere for the terrifying events to follow.

Loch and Zaidee are bright conversationalists whose dialogue sparkles with wit and irony. Their fondness for puns may linger in the minds of readers with a taste for wordplay. When Loch and Zaidee have a close call with Rogue: Loch turned, staring back with terror to see the creature erupting with a great roar from the water, the thrust from its powerful fins sending it hurtling toward Loch.

Loch looked for a weapon—the laptop!—grabbed it, and threw it.

The beast's teeth snapped closed, exploding the screen and case, which came whizzing back over his head.

Loch, soon after this traumatic scene, finds "the shattered case of the laptop.

He picked the case up and ran his fingers along the jagged edges made by the Rogue's teeth." Then, "'This is a megabyte,' he told Zaidee. 'A real megabyte.'" Loch features fast, wellrecounted action combined with witty observations by its young protagonists.



Themes and Characters

The novel begins at Scotland's Loch Ness with an event that foreshadows the future. A little boy wanders away from his parents and sees some sheep that are stuck beside the water of the loch. Several sheep are snatched by something in the water. This time the child noticed a great wake, a profound undulation of the water heading for the desperate sheep. Something dark and huge was coming. This event marks the boy for life, and his telling of what he saw earns him the name "Loch." Thus Loch is tied into the hunt for the lake monsters by both events and his name.

Loch is next shown to the reader as an adventurous young man flying a hang glider at Lake Alban. It turns out that his father's work has taken Loch to remote areas of the world where he has learned the survival skills he will need as the narrative unfolds. He is accompanied on his adventures by his sister Zaidee, a fifth grader who loves computer games and dislikes Sarah, Loch's on-and-off girlfriend. When she sees Sarah showing off for Erdon and Loch, Zaidee mutters her disgust: "Puberty must really suck." Life with Anthony Cavenger, her domineering and often unpleasant father, has taught Sarah a special survival skill: "Keep the unpleasant parts of life away, always replace them with thoughts of things you want to remember." This philosophy of coping helps her maintain control of her emotions after the nightmarish death of Erdon.

The adults in Loch are not as bright or as sympathetic as the young people, but they have complexities of their own. Anthony Cavenger leads an undaunted life of adventure and is something of a questing hero who always searches for mysterious life in remote parts of the world, trying to prove that creatures such as plesiosaurs still exist.

He owns a magazine empire whose publications feature weird stories about bizarre events and unusual animals; the profits from this business finance his searches for exotic life.

These traits of physical daring and indomitable curiosity seem positive on the surface, but Cavenger is actually an avaricious and cruel tightwad whose miserliness in buying supplies allows a young plesiosaur to escape from a net made from inferior materials, even though Sam Perkins had told him that steel netting was required.

Had the first netting of a plesiosaur been successful, the terrible events that followed might not have happened. Loch's observation of Cavenger is that, "He'd slowly coil like a rattlesnake, his eyes growing dead as if he were looking inward at his own pathetic soul."

Given their dislike of Cavenger, Loch and his sister Zaidee have trouble reconciling themselves to their father's subservient behavior toward him: the bottom line was that his Loch's father jumped whenever Cavenger blew his whistle. It seemed to be eating away part of his father's very being. This reflects on the theme of family reconciliation. Even while the intense action of the narrative rushes from one exciting event to another the relationship of the Perkins family evolves. The children must live with the death of



their mother, and their father must deal with the double cruelty of the loss of a wife and the excoriating realization that she was the better parent. The young people realize that the fancy toys their father can buy them from what he makes working for Cavenger are not worth his slow spiritual disintegration. They use the opportunity the stress of the hunt for the plesiosaurs provides to make this point. Loch says to his father: You saw a fish in the Mariana Trench with lights on its tail. You didn't call it a monstrosity—you said it was like a forbidden glimpse into the secret workroom of God, like it was proof that God wasn't clumsy or had lapses of skill, that everything alive no matter how freaky and frightening had some kind of purpose.

Dad, don't you remember that?

Recalling the ideals of scientific research forces Sam Perkins to reassess the worth of his work, and it also helps make credible his decision to leave his job with Cavenger for the sake of his children and the spirit of pure scientific inquiry.

Perhaps the star characters of Loch are the family of plesiosaurs. At first they are mysterious and monstrous: Sarah "glimpsed the knobby scales of a spine and a pair of monstrous ribbed fins churning the water slowly, powerfully." The plesiosaurs begin as mindless killers but evolve into intelligent, sympathetic creatures. In what may be an excess of sentimentality, Loch, Zaidee, and Sarah become friends with a baby plesiosaur that has become trapped in a pond near Lake Alban. It likes to play and enjoys being petted.

Loch and Zaidee, having grown fond of the animal, name it Wee Beastie. By the time they help Wee Beastie escape from the adults who are hunting it, the picture of the plesiosaurs has shifted from one of voracious monsters that chew people to death to wild animals attempting to survive. Rogue, the huge patriarch of the plesiosaur family becomes a father figure protecting his young from enemies. By the end of the novel, they seem to be soulful characters, as typified by how they communicate: "The sound they made now was like that of a thousand cellos, a series of low, haunting notes that slid upward into an increasingly profound and complicated harmony. The music of the plesiosaurs was penetrating, vibrating the air in a way that could be felt on the skin and in the heart."



Topics for Discussion

1. What are Anthony Cavenger's good traits?
2. Is Sam Perkins a bad father for choosing to work for Anthony Cavenger and earn more money than he would otherwise?
3. Why does Sam Perkins put up with Anthony Cavenger's abuse?
4. Is Loch too gory? 5. Are Loch, Zaidee, and Sarah realistic young people?
6. Is Zindel's explanation for how the huge plesiosaurs remained hidden in Lake Champlain a good one? Could you come up with better ones?
7. What happens now to Sarah with her father dead?
8. Why does Loch end with "We're a family"? How important is the idea of family to the novel?
9. Is Loch a good title for the novel?
Are there more appropriate titles?
10. Are the plesiosaurs the real stars of Loch?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Cavenger's expedition for capturing the plesiosaurs is not a scientific one. Describe what a properly scientific expedition to study the plesiosaurs would be like.

2. Loch, Zaidee, and Sarah have had earlier adventures that are mentioned in Loch. Choose one of them and write a short story about the adventure. You may need to do some research in order to make sure the setting is accurate.

3. What is a plesiosaur? When did it live? How did it live?

4. What is the history of the Lake Champlain monster? Who first wrote about it? What theories are there about what it is? Be sure to explain some of the reasons for each theory.

5. What is the history of Lake Champlain itself? When and how did it form? What lived around it when it first formed? Who were the first people to live around it? What is it like now?

6. How important are salmon runs to the economy and ecology of the Lake Champlain area? What are people doing to preserve the salmon?

What problems do the salmon need to overcome?

7. Describe in detail a salmon grid.

What is its purpose? Does it work the way Zindel says it does?

8. What instances have there been when people have discovered a living animal of a species that was thought to be extinct or a myth?

9. Cavenger publishes weird magazines that feature accounts of strange adventures and unusual creatures.

What are some real-life examples of such magazines? Who publishes them? What is their audience? How profitable are they?

10. Scientists study both living animals and the bodies of dead animals.

What are the advantages of working with a living subject? What are the advantages of working with the dead body of a subject? What do scientists hope to learn from observing a living animal? What do they hope to learn from studying a dead animal?

For Further Reference

Burns, Connie Tyrrell. *School Library Journal* 41, 1 (January 1995): 138. A short, very positive review that emphasizes Loch's attractions for young readers.

Publishers Weekly 241, 42 (October 17, 1994): 82. A review that finds Loch to be a lightweight work.

Sherman, Chris. *Booklist* 91, 6 (November 15, 1994): 591. A lukewarm review of Loch that finds little merit in the novel.

Related Titles

Loch is one of a series of thrillers that Zindel has recently been writing.

Reef of Death (1998; see separate entry, Vol. 9) is of particular interest since it also features an aquatic adventure involving a frightening beast lurking under waves. Unlike Loch, whose plot turns on the fate of the plesiosaurs, Reef of Death focuses on a conflict among humans, with the monster filling a secondary role as one among several sources of fear and trembling. In Reef of Death, two young adults and an old man take on a vicious scientist bent on illegally looting some of Australia's natural resources. Its bloody scenes are at least equal to those in Loch, and its protagonists are as appealing. Loch, however, has the greater literary merit, featuring as its does a more complex plot into which the characterizations are tidily woven. Reef of Death features a somewhat more common plot, familiar from numerous monster movies, but its thrills, chills, and adventure are nonetheless satisfying.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996