

## BURNING BRIGHT

"Me, on the other hand? I've got one pretty name followed by a clinker like Klunk. Half of me is sort of. PERCHED HAPPILY ON HIS STOOL at the lunch counter, poor dumb Burt Hooper knows that he." "Does anyone else know about Howard?" Colman asked. "Veronica, for instance?" "They don't have to make sense. All they have to do is say you're different. Now do you get it? Your dad belongs to a group who made a lot of rules that he never had anything to do with, and because he's wired the same as everybody else, he needs to feel he's accepted. To be accepted, he has to be seen to go by the rules. If he didn't he'd become a threat to the group, and they'd reject him. And nobody can take that. Look around and watch all the crazy things people get into just so they can feel they belong to something that matters." as she stumped toward the foot of the bed. As a matter of emotional survival, she had recently been making an effort to keep her anger sheathed. name just because this here is the best old dog in the world, just exactly like Old Yeller in the movie." "Of course not! But one of the Tech grades maybe . . . Two or Three perhaps. Or maybe the graduate entry stream." -. "Healing technology," Leilani corrected. "An alien species, having mastered interstellar travel and the." "You don't have to do this." Driscoll shrugged. "What would you stake?" Barefoot, wearing white cotton pants and a pink blouse, she lay on the bed, atop the rumpled chenille. "Poor scared thingy bit me when the lights went out." Over his glass, Colman watched as three Special Duty troopers made their way to the bar. They stood erect and intimidating in their dark olive uniforms, cap-peaks pulled low over their faces, and surveyed the surroundings over, hard, jutting chins. Nobody met their stares for long before looking away. One of them murmured an order to the bartender, who nodded and quickly set up glasses, then grabbed bottles from the shelf behind. The SD's were the elite of the regular corps, handpicked for being the meanest bastards in the Army and utterly without humor. They reminded Colman of the commando units he had seen in the Transvaal. They provided bodyguards for VIPs on ceremonial occasions--there was hardly any reason apart from tradition in the Mayflower II's environment--and had been formed by Borftein as a crack unit sworn under a special oath of loyalty. Their commanding officer was a general named Stormbel. D Company made jokes about their clockwork precision on parades and the invisible strings that Stormbel used to jerk them around, but not while any of them were within earshot. They called the SD's the Stromboli Division. stood on the cart. In her despondency, just as when she lay in a trance of sweet amusement, she could not be reached. the trains don't usually go," and whose character as both a publisher and a man has restored my lost faith. Micky swung her legs over the side of the bed, slid next to her aunt, and put an arm around her. had a chance, she won by cheating." "This is an announcement of the gravest importance; it affects every member of the Mayflower II Mission," Wellesley began, speaking in a clear but ominous voice. "I am addressing you all in my full capacity as Director of this Mission. General Borftein is with me as Supreme Commander of all military forces. Recently, treason in its vilest and most criminal form has been attempted. That attempt has failed. But in addition to that, a deception has been perpetrated which has involved defamation - of the Chironian character, the fomenting of violence to serve the political ambitions of a corrupt element among us, and the calculated and cold-blooded murder of innocent people by our own kind. I do not have to remind you. on." "Do you want to take over the ship?" "Exactly, Jay. What you have is an ascending hierarchy of increasing levels of complexity. At each level, new relationships and meanings emerge that are functions of the level itself and don't exist at all in the levels beneath. For instance, there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet. One letter doesn't carry a lot of information, but when you string them together into words, the number of things you can describe fills a dictionary. When you assemble words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and so on up to a book, the variety is as good as\_ infinite, and you can convey any meaning you want. Yet all the books ever written in English only use the same twenty-six letters." ricocheted across Utah with the unpredictability of a pinball. After all this time and considering the. could be a cover for low self esteem. From childhood at least through adolescence, Micky herself had. No sooner had Leilani's defenses cracked than they mended. Her eyes glazed with emotion at the. eighteen-wheeler under his butt. "Who are you?" he demanded. The formality had evaporated from his voice. "Are you in authority here? If so, what are your rank and title?" In the hallway, he encountered a nurse pushing a stainless-steel serving cart: a petite raven-haired. Colman grinned. "Good thinking. We were starting to talk shop." Re inclined his head to where Veronica was still talking animatedly between Kath's twin sons and evidently enjoying herself. "Somebody seems to be quite a hit over there." Why does man kill? He kills for food. And not only food: frequently, there must be a beverage. . . . passageway between this vehicle and the next. A pair of cowboy boots, blue jeans tucked in the tops: his boot. "Remainder of detail, by the left. . . march!" Clump, clump, clump, clump. . . "I hope they're not going to start shooting each other up here. It would be pretty scary in orbit. They could decompress the whole ship." night on the same street. . . suite. "Bluffing, hell." Driscoll laid down five more aces, and the room erupted into laughter and applause. had these memory problems now and then, ever since I was shot in the head. A few wires got scrambled. hollow note in this confined space. Yet he realizes that until he trusts the dog implicitly, their bonding cannot be completed. Until then, they. At that moment a waiter began clearing the dishes in' readiness for the next course. "Have you heard the news from the surface?" he inquired as he stacked the plates and brushed a few breadcrumbs into a napkin with his hand. No, pup, no, no! Out, pup, out! The major met his eye firmly. "My duty is to carry out my orders to the best of my ability," he replied, avoiding a direct answer. His tone said that he regretted the circumstances as much as anybody, but he couldn't compromise. "Twenty?" Fulmire moved his head to check another clause, and after a while nodded his head reluctantly. "If the Director becomes incapacitated or otherwise excluded from discharging the duties of his office, then the Deputy Director automatically assumes all powers previously vested in the Director," he stated. Fulmire gestured over the books and

documents spread across his desk. "The security provisions provide for Congress to vote exceptional powers to the Directorate in the event of demonstrable security demands, and for the Directorate to delegate extraordinary duties to the chief executive once they are voted that power. They do not provide for the chief executive to assume such duties for himself, and therefore neither can he do so for his successor." The SD major completed dictating his notes on the final witness's statement into his compad and walked to where the two young women and the man were sitting. Their expressions as they looked up at him were not apprehensive or apologetic, but neither were they defiant, the deed was unfortunate but it had been necessary, the faces seemed to say, and there was nothing to feel guilty about. If anything, they seemed curious as to how the Terrans were going to handle the situation, as did the other Chironians looking on. Diffusion through the membrane around Phoenix created an osmotic pressure which sucked more people down from the Mayflower II, and manpower shortages soon developed, making it impossible for the ship to sustain its flow of supplies down to the surface. The embarrassed officials in Phoenix were forced to turn to the Chironians for food and other essentials, which they insisted on paying for even though they knew that no reciprocal currency arrangements existed. The Chironians accepted good-humoredly the promissory notes they were offered and carried on as usual, leaving the Terrans to worry about how they would resolve the nonsense of having to pay their Customs dues to themselves. However, if she hadn't ascended in the sparkling rapture of a starship's levitation beam, Preston would. Obviously something unusual was going on. Unwilling to leave the subject there, Bernard said, "And Walters too maybe? Perhaps he could use a refresher too,". But she saw no blood, no ichor, no snake syrup of any kind. "The ship's changed a lot since then though," Colman remarked. "I noticed it the day we flew down to it from the Mayflower II soon after we arrived . . . when Shirley and Ci met Tony Driscoll. The front end must be at least twice as big as it used to be." "SO you're happy you can handle it," Bernard said. "Vernon isn't already roasting in Hell, he will be soon." "Of course they are. It's all a mess up there." Bernard was watching with interest over Stanislaw's shoulder. After being dropped off by Barbara and reentering Phoenix with the others, he had gone home to update Jean on what was happening and then left for the barracks, where Colman had smuggled him in for the briefing. It was just as well that he had; the scheme that Sirocco finally evolved required some familiarity with the Mayflower II's electrical systems, and while Colman had been prepared to have a crack at that part of it, Bernard was the obvious. Maybe they aren't sure if he's his mother's son or some other woman's child. Maybe he could fake them. Chapter 15. whenever they need it. For the time being, however, they are spared the humiliation of committing. powerfully intriguing but also nearly as scary as any of the snarling, carnivorous antagonists of the horror. the closet door with ease. Grunting, she shoved and shook it out of her way. Reaper's robe. The truck passes too fast for the boy to see who is driving or if anyone is riding shotgun. The unpacking was finished, and Jean would know better where she wanted to stow the few things he had left lying out. The move had gone very quickly and smoothly, mainly because the Chironians had even furnished the place--fight down to the towels and the bed linen, which had meant that the Failowses could leave most of their own things in storage at the base until something more permanent was worked out. "You don't own a gun, Aunt Gen." punctuated by spells of bewildered placidity. and country-and-western bars from Omaha to Santa Fe, to Abilene, to Houston, to Reno, to Denver. shoes and up into the mother ship." "front wall of their house and unloaded a few tons of fresh manure in their living room. Not only was it a. He and the dog had abandoned that wheeled sanctuary shortly after dawn, west of Grand Junction. resisted him." As the boy eases shut the door of the Explorer, the mongrel pads toward the back of the auto carrier. Some facial muscles might be forever paralyzed, twisting your smile, weirdly distorting every expression. "Yes, people have been doing a lot of kinds of things with it over the last ten, fifteen years or so." "Except for the shooting." As an artillery major in his early thirties he had seen that South Africa's cause was ultimately lost, and had uprooted himself to place his services and experience at the disposal of the emergent New Order of Greater North America, where veterans at countering guerilla offensives and civil disorder were eagerly sought to assist in the "renormalization" of the chaos bequeathed by the war. Promoted rapidly through the ranks of an elite entrusted with the might of the new nation, Borftein glimpsed a vision of commanding a force truly capable of bringing to heel the entire world. But the vision had been short-lived. A golden opportunity presented itself when Asia--then the only serious rival--fell upon itself in the struggle for domination between China and Japan-India. But the chance had slipped away while the politicians wavered, eventually to be lost forever with China's success and the subsequent consolidation of the Eastern Asiatic Federation. After that, the future had held only the prospect of an eventual head-on collision between the two halves of the globe and more ungloried decades of turmoil and indecisive skirmishings to pick up the pieces. Conditions for launching a worldwide Grand Design would not come again in his lifetime. And so he had left to seek a more rewarding destiny with the Mayflower II. It was ironic, he had thought to himself many times, that impatience and restlessness had led him to a decision that would immobilize him in space for twenty years. "Confused but quiet at the barracks," Jarvis told him. "A lot of shooting inside the base at Canaveral. Everyone seems to be trying to get his hands on the heavy equipment there. A shuttle's on fire in one of the launch bays." in Colorado. Perhaps this man is psychic and will momentarily receive clairvoyant visions of five-dollar. "Cute little slippery thingy won't kill you, Leilani. Little thingy just wants what we all want, baby. Little. Once more he glances back, but only once, because he sees the pulse of flames in the east, throbbing in. of The X-Files, kid." Lechat slowly scanned the expectant faces. They all knew what was coming next. "My second resolution is that this Congress, with all powers and authority duly restored to it, declare itself, permanently and irrevocably, to be dissolved." The motion was passed unanimously. Costello routine involving gestures instead of banter, the fallen woman at her side whimpered pitifully. Wellesley and the Congress had tried to perpetuate the same injustices by eclipsing him with Borftein because he in 4p't graduated from the right places or possessed the right credentials. They had tried to fob him off

with the command of what they had seen as a proficient but small and unimportant corps of specialists. They had all paid too. Now they all knew who he was and where they stood. He had no regrets about Ramisson's death; it underlined the lesson more forcefully than any words could have done. He was only sorry he hadn't made a cleaner sweep by shooting them all..ever-dwindling but not yet eradicated capacity for romanticism.. "You've already worked most of that out." "How else could it be?" Adam said when Colman asked him about it. "Sure they had to learn how to use a gun. You know what kids are like. The machines couldn't be everywhere all the time. Ask my mother about it, no1 me."..beauty that until now he hadn't seen the kindness in her eyes. "Could be self-pity," he said, naming his..Even if he could have identified them, they might no longer be innocent horsemen transporting ornate..He can only imagine the daunting quantity of energy required to be Donella, the waitress whose..Colman came out of the Omar Bradley Block and began walking quickly toward the main gate. Vehicles were landing and taking off continually in the depot area while ammunition boxes were hastily unloaded from ground trucks; the barracks area seemed to be alive with squads doubling this way and that, and officers shouting orders. Sandbagged weapons pits that hadn't existed hours earlier had appeared at strategic places, and new ones were still being dug..at least a pile of elf droppings, but the closet held nothing more exotic than one dead cockroach.."That's the current story," Leilani said, "and we're sticking to it. Strange lights in the sky, pale green..her from under the bed.."Hell, Dorothy, where you are, they shoot little dogs like Toto for sport. And girls like you are stomped."It's a pretty house," Hanlon said after another short silence.."Curtis Hammond," he replies without hesitation, using the name of the boy whose clothes he wears, but..market near Albuquerque, New Mexico, on their way to explore the alien enigmas of Roswell.."Yeah, I can see why you'd want to do that. But you've got to know what one question I can't avoid..the crushed blades under him, and scrambles at once to his feet.."Micky glanced back at the trailer, where Leilani stood in the open doorway, silhouetted against faint.."I would have let her win," said Leilani, "out of courtesy and respect for her advanced age, but before I..gummy-prickly safety glass..Through a blur of tears, the boy sees the glorious smile once more, a smile as radiant as that of a..She hadn't cried since childhood. She'd thought that she was beyond tears, too tough for self-pity and..tip?".."Not..liking killing people makes a good soldier?"..drumming from the physical demands of flight, now booms also with fear. Into the night has entered a..unmarked by the violence that had changed her life. The unrevealed half of her face, pressed into the

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