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# Burn

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Reviewer:

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Editor's Choice:

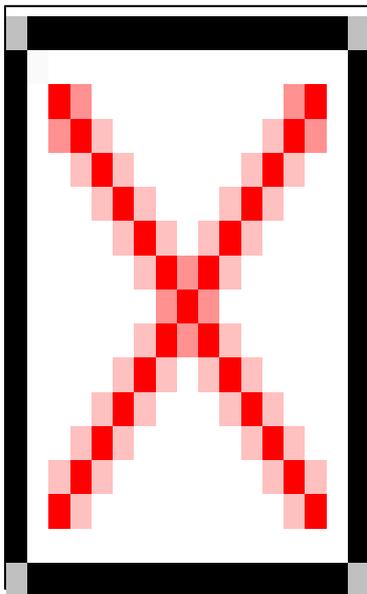
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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3



[4]

Tolkien restored dragons to their original terrifying presence in the imagination, and Patrick Ness is now going down a similar path. While one of his dragons is sensitive, well-spoken and much given to under-statement, his special enemy is a murderous super-powers with a bitter hatred of the human world, out to bring it to an end by engineering a nuclear wipe-out. The time is 1957 and the Cold War is at its height. It all makes for a properly daunting picture. The rampant racial prejudice in America existing at the time of Eisenhower is also effectively portrayed

So much, so good. But although there is no copyright on imaginative constructs, the fact that this story has a girl hero, a prophecy she thinks she has inherited, an inexorable assassin after her blood and a series of different universes with only a few able to pass from one to another inevitably brings to mind Philip Pullman's **His Dark Materials**. On this admittedly challenging comparison. Burn does not fare so well. While Pullman's epic draws on a rich hinterland involving not just Milton and Blake but many others, Ness's fiction is more reminiscent of an action-packed and occasionally gory video game. Its over-explanatory story-line soon becomes repetitive and the good characters are never as convincing as the really bad one. An exception here can be found in a gay sub-plot put over with real feeling for the two adolescent boys concerned and described in a welcome economy of language.

There are enough loose threads left over by the ending to suggest there may be follow-ups. Ness's last trilogy, **Chaos Walking**, won many plaudits and prizes. This novel is not in the same league; too long and too confusingly structured. If there are more to come, they will have to do a lot better to win anything like an equivalent reception.

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