

Burning for Revenge

A JOURNEY THROUGH FIRE

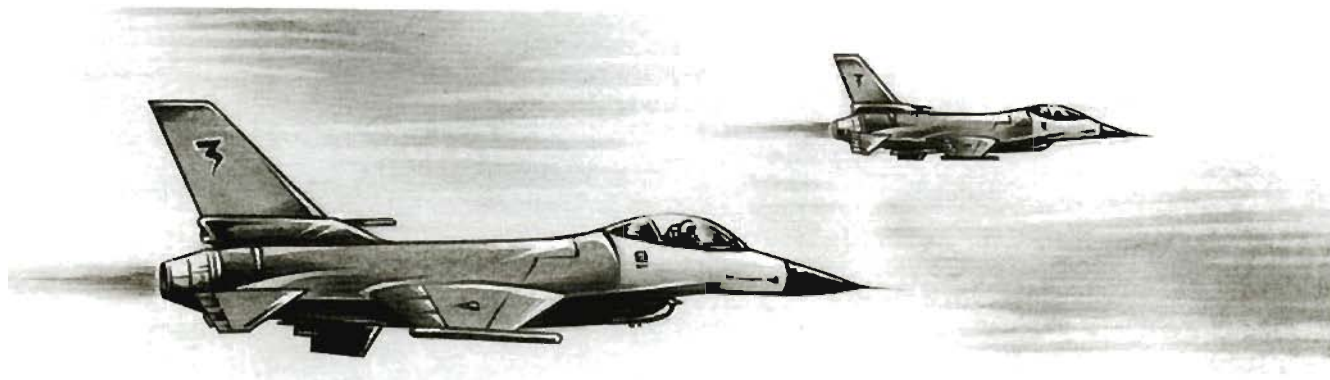
Throughout this novel, which is packed with descriptions of adventure, John Marsden writes of the friends' extraordinary feats of bravery and daring. Keep a log of these acts as you read, together with the similes and metaphors he uses in his descriptions. An alternative project could be to record the similes and metaphors and explain why you think they have been so effective. Discuss with your teacher how many entries you should make. Don't forget to record page numbers.

Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

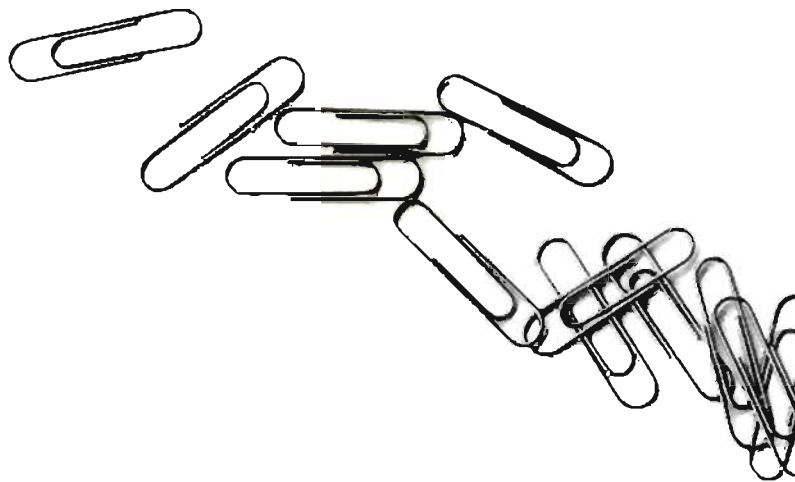
- ① Explain the significance of the author's description of the summer storm that opens *Burning for Revenge*.
- ② Ellie was 'burning about Captain Finley', Lee was 'burning for action', though not necessarily for revenge (pp. 3, 4). Explain what Ellie meant by 'burning'.
- ③ 'Maybe it's just a teenage thing, not being sure about stuff' (p. 6). Comment on Ellie's thoughts about not being sure about everything. Is it just a teenage thing? Are adults more confident? Do you relate to Ellie's feelings? Explain.
- ④ John Marsden concludes the first chapter with a further description of the storm (p. 9). How does his description reflect Ellie's thoughts in the last few pages of the chapter?
- ⑤ 'I'd just walked four k's without noticing anything except my boots' (p. 28). In your opinion, what was the reason for Ellie's preoccupation with her boots?
- ⑥ 'And giving up was still unthinkable. Even though there were moments when I almost wished we'd be caught — just so the whole thing would be over and done with — when it came to the crunch, I'd do anything not to be caught' (p. 42). Imagine you are Ellie and explain why you have those 'moments'. Have you ever had such moments? If so, what enabled you to continue?

Page references are to the Pan 1997 hardback edition of *Burning for Revenge*.



- 7 Ellie describes the furniture van as like a **'church, dark and silent'** (p. 41) and as a **'dark and musty cell'** (p. 46). Explain why Ellie changed her ideas after they had travelled further down the road.
- 8 John Marsden chose Ellie as the narrator, and her friends continually promote her to the position of the **'person with ideas'** and the one to **'have inspirations on cue'** (p. 57). What qualities does Ellie have that inspire confidence?
- 9 Often Ellie is the character who provides a humorous moment. **'They'll think they're knocking off each other's stuff ... It'll start a major fight and they'll kill each other and then we can take over the airfield'** (p. 71). Why is Ellie the character most often chosen by the author to create humour? Why not Lee or Homer?
- 10 There was **'no time for anything now except killing and dying'** (p. 90). Ellie was raised on a farm where the whole of her life would have been spent nurturing, building, repairing, planting. Imagine you are Ellie now, about to destroy and kill. Write a short reflection on the dilemma this presents.
- 11 **'But there was no doubt it was after us. It was openly menacing, racing at us so directly'** (p. 94). Imagine you are the driver of the car. What are you thinking about and what are your justifications for the action you are about to take?
- 12 In many of his books John Marsden writes vivid, electrifying, action-packed scenes (**read chapter 8**). The action is followed by passages of quiet personal reflection by Ellie. Comment on what the author achieves in these contrasts.
- 13 Study the language John Marsden uses in chapters 8–10. Ellie feels intense fear, shows immense courage and powers of concentration, and makes decisions that change everything in seconds. In the midst of all this frenetic activity she still manages some humour: **'Fi couldn't hit the Empire State Building at twenty paces'** (p. 102). Comment on the way the author creates the different atmospheres. Why does he choose humour in such a situation?
- 14 How does John Marsden open and close chapters 8–10? What does he do to sustain the momentum of the action?

- 15 'I don't know why boys like playing these tough-guy roles' (p. 121). How would you answer Ellie's statement?
- 16 'Maybe it wasn't entirely luck though. Desperation can take you a long way' (p. 131). 'Like I said, desperation can do a lot' (p. 133). Explain what Ellie meant.
- 17 'None of them saw what I saw... Lee lying there, waiting, ready to shoot them when he felt like it' (p. 152). The war is over, Lee has come to your school to do his final year. How would he fit in?
- 18 After all the killing and the carnage the friends had caused, Ellie said after one close call, 'We had survived, without hurting or killing anyone. It was a big break' (p. 164). Homer said, 'It looked like there was a good chance we could get out without any shooting, but only if we put the rifles back, so we took the risk' (p. 167). What do these remarks suggest about the friends and their values?
- 19 'I began to feel kind of empty. I wanted a whole lot of praise and gushing. All we ever seemed to get from them was this cool calm stuff' (pp. 170–1). Explain Ellie's feelings. Justify the response of the woman on the radio.
- 20 'After some time I'd find that three hours had passed, but I don't know where they went. Maybe into the limbo where lost hours are stored, where thoughts and feelings that can't be put in categories are sent for safekeeping' (p. 207). How do you account for these lost hours that all the friends seemed to have? What would happen if they got the thoughts and feelings out of 'storage'?
- 21 Homer and Ellie were making statements that surprised Ellie. 'I was horrified to hear myself say this: it sounded so like my mother. War sure changes your perspective' (p. 214). In what ways had Homer and Ellie changed and why?
- 22 'The real hurt was in my stomach ... Right in the middle of it ... It seemed to me Lee had betrayed us in every way possible' (p. 262). Explain why you do or do not agree with Ellie.
- 23 'We're home already' (p. 274). Imagine you are Homer. Write a diary entry about your statement, including your feelings on the response of your friends, silent or otherwise.



Think it through talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

1 Active – paralysed

On several occasions Ellie suggests that people 'freeze' or are 'paralysed'.

'We were all paralysed by the tension between Kevin and me' (p. 10).

'I had another rush of panic: paralysing, frightening panic' (p. 74).

'... sometimes our minds work and sometimes they freeze' (p. 96).

Do you ever panic and then freeze, or freeze then panic?

When you are feeling panic, does your mind really stop working?

If you freeze, what is your mind telling you? Explain.

How can you be frightened and paralysed at the same time?

If you are frightened, what stops you running?

How do you 'thaw'?

When you do thaw what is it that makes you effective?

2 Choices

'The main thing is that we're in a position to do something to help and no-one else can. I don't think we've got much choice' (p. 8).

'Kevin, can't you get it into your thick head that we don't have a choice?' (p. 26).

Do you think that the friends had no freedom of choice?

What sorts of issues influenced their choice?

What makes choice easy?
What makes it difficult?

Was the choice the friends had to make easy or difficult? Explain.

Do we always have the freedom to choose between two alternatives? Explain.

How important are the words 'ought' and 'should' in a choice?

If we 'should' do something, is there a choice?

3 Right – wrong

“Lee wants us to attack the airfield I suppose, does he?” I nodded ... “I thought he would.” To my own surprise I said, “I think he’s right” ’ (p. 61).

Must a choice always be either right or wrong? What else could it be?

How do you decide between right and wrong?

Are there degrees of right and wrong?

If something feels right, is that sufficient reason to conclude it is right?

Which alternative (to blow up or not blow up the airport) would you choose? Give reasons.

If you ‘do not have a choice’ does that make your action right?

Was it right for the friends to involve Kevin?

4 Automatic – decisive

‘Then it happened. I went into automatic ... I was a robot, a terminator’ (p. 79).
‘I didn’t spend any time thinking about what I’d done. I wasn’t a robot or terminator any more, but I wasn’t back to normal either’ (pp. 80–1).

Is there a connection between grave danger and automatic response?

How was Ellie able to kill the soldier without thinking?

Can you really do something as serious as killing without thinking?

Had the war and the constant danger programmed Ellie?

If Ellie was on automatic, what motivated her to kill?

Ellie was thinking very quickly as she was confronted by the second soldier. Was the second killing automatic? Explain.

What is the connection between the mind and behaviour?

Can behaviour be separated from the mind?



The images in John Marsden's *Burning for Revenge* should fire your imagination. Some of the scenes are as vivid as they are terrifying. Put yourself in the position of the friends, and think about the scenes and the different ways in which you could present them. Try one of the following activities for the scene you choose.

- 'With each shot came a huge flash of light, lasting a second or more, then a column of fire that went up a hundred metres, more blazing comets rocketing into the stratosphere, and a fireball that rolled across the ground like a giant blazing tumbleweed' (p. 104).
- 'Planes, tankers, hangars, sheds, barracks, everything must have been part of the blaze' (p. 108).
- 'The drum went up like a bomb: blazing fuel and bits of metal flew everywhere' (p. 124).
- 'It [the river] was a secret road taking us a long way from the airfield. It was quick and silent.' 'Most of the time the water carried us at a steady speed. Sometimes we touched the bottom, other times it got narrower and deeper' (p. 144).
- 'Looking back at the farm I saw four distinct towers of flame, like four fiery rockets each standing on a base waiting to take off' (p. 261).



music Select music you would use as a background to a film of the book. Tape the music, play it to the class and give the reasons for your choice.



collage Collect a variety of materials – fabric, paper, wool, plastic, anything you can find – and make a collage representing an image from the book.



advertisement Write a newspaper advertisement for the book.

board game

Construct a board game; keep it in the classroom for a rainy day.



poster Make a sandwich-board poster to promote the book.