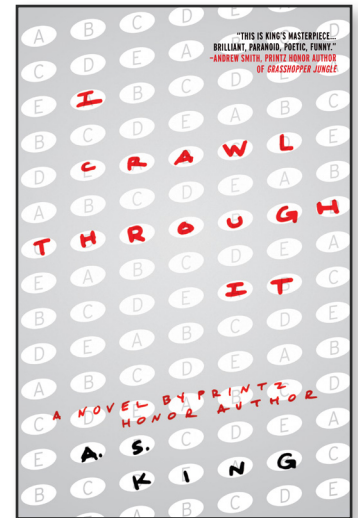


ABOUT THE BOOK

Four talented teenagers are traumatized—coping with grief, surviving date rape, facing the anxiety of standardized tests and the neglect of self-absorbed adults—and they'll do anything to escape the pressure. They'll even build an invisible helicopter, to fly far away to a place where everyone will understand them...until they learn the only way to escape reality is to face it head-on.



TALKING IT THROUGH

1. The novel's narrators are all burdened by unacknowledged trauma. How do they each attempt to cope with it? Why are their initial methods unsuccessful?
2. How do the characters' surreal descriptions of dealing with pain—for example, Stanzi "splitting" herself and China turning herself inside-out—hint at the root of their trauma?
3. Kenneth the bushman appears throughout the novel as an alternately menacing and understanding character. He sells letters for kisses but also offers cryptic advice. What do you think his character represents? Is he ultimately a helpful figure or does he signify a false solution to life's problems?
4. When describing themselves, the protagonists speak only of their inadequacies and low self-esteem. Yet they eventually reveal a deep love for one another. What do the outside perspectives on Stanzi, China, and Lansdale reveal about their true abilities?
5. Why do the characters send bomb threats to the school?
6. When Stanzi and Gustav travel to "The Place of Arrivals," they expect to find a land of geniuses—a paradise free of tests and absentee parents. Instead, they come to realize that the community is equally oppressive and its inhabitants look down on the outside world. What do you think this land represents?
7. Patricia is the only adult narrator and she appears later than the other main characters. The reader never learns her full backstory, but she is instrumental in helping Stanzi and Gustav realize the dangers of The Place of Arrivals. Why do you think A.S. King includes her perspective?
8. Near the end of the novel, China states in upside down text, "The world will be upside down forever. We have to come to terms with this." What does this statement suggest about her path towards healing?
9. How do you interpret the novel's title?
10. Rather than telling the story in a straightforward manner, King creates an incredibly surreal and dreamlike universe. Why might she have decided to frame the novel this way? What are the benefits of this writing style?