



## The Art of Uncontrolled Flight

By **Kim Ponders**  
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### Introduction

The long shadow of a charismatic father led Annie Shaw to decide, as far back as she can remember, to follow in his footsteps and become an Air Force pilot. Years later, after her mother's death and her own graduation from the Academy, Captain A. Shaw is now one of the first female pilots in American history to engage in active combat duty during the first Gulf War. But her pride at earning rank as the only woman in an all-male fraternity offers little solace as the realities of battle change her, forever, into a wary, combat-wise survivor.

### Discussion Questions

1. The novel both begins and ends with Annie sitting alone, waiting for the arrival of a man (her father in the first chapter and Dexter in the final one). How has Annie changed? How are the men in her life different?
2. Annie has a romantic view of war in the first chapter. Has her perspective changed at the end of the story (see both chapters nine and five)? How?
3. The author switches between first and third point-of-view and between present and past tense. Chapter five is even more fragmented and extends beyond the timeframe of the rest of the novel. Why does the author use this structure? What does it achieve? Does it enhance the novel's themes (war, survival, etc.), or does it distance the reader from the story?
4. How does Annie's guilt about her mother's death feed her character later on? Does it affect the way she makes decisions and interacts with others?
5. In some societies, fire is used as part of a cleansing ritual after battle. What role does fire play in this novel?
6. In chapter eight, Annie's father tells her (p. 165): "You needed a hero." Was he right?
7. "Uncontrolled Flight" is a technical flying term meaning, as you might imagine, a flight profile (stall, dive, etc.) that the pilot cannot sustain, often preceding a crash. How does "uncontrolled flight" serve as a metaphor in the story?

### About the Author

Kim Ponders, the 37-year old author, served active duty in the Air Force during the first Gulf War, and was one of the first female aviators in American history ever to fly in a war zone. She lives in New Hampshire and is still a member of the Air Force.