



CRASH AND BURN

BY MICHAEL HASSAN



ABOUT THE BOOK

On April 21, 2008, Steven "Crash" Crashinsky saved more than a thousand people when he stopped his classmate David Burnett from taking their high school hostage armed with assault weapons and high-powered explosives. You likely already know what came after for Crash: the nationwide notoriety, the college recruitment, and of course, the book deal. What you might not know is what came before: a story of two teens whose lives have been inextricably linked since second grade. And what you definitely don't know are the words that Burn whispered to Crash right as the siege was ending, a secret that Crash has never revealed. Until now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are Crash and Burn "oddly alike and yet completely different" (p. 12)?
2. What is ADHD? What controversies surround its diagnosis and treatment, particularly with regard to medicating—and perhaps overmedicating—kids? How do Crash's diagnosis with ADHD, his various treatments, and his categorization as a 504 student affect him?
3. What is bipolar disorder? How does Burn's struggle with being "Too Up" or "Too Down" affect him?
4. Eight-year-old Crash thinks, "Yeah, school sucked. Home sucked too" (p. 29). How is this sentiment a motif for the novel, and how does it apply to Crash? How does it also apply to Burn?
5. What's it like being Jacob Crashinsky's son? How is Crash influenced by his father's persistent question, "What the hell is wrong with you?" Even though Crash hates his dad, why does he not hesitate to put himself at risk to save his life?
6. On a related but different fatherly note, what's it like for Burn to grow up fatherless after 9/11? What changes for Burn when his mom and then his sister pass away as well?
7. Describe Crash's relationships with his mother and stepmother. How does Felicia get through to Crash? How would you explain Crash and Felicia's relationship? Why does Crash always refer to his mom as Caroline Prescott, and why does he consider her to be his "true hero" (p. 266)?
8. Crash's younger sister, Jamie, idolizes him, while his older sister, Lindsey, has no patience with him. Why?
9. Why is Crash such a player? Why do girls like him? Are there any girls whom Crash respects? How is Crash's relationship with Roxanne different from his relationships (i.e. hook-ups) with other girls?
10. How are Crash, Burn, and Christina all connected? Why does Burn become obsessed with Christina? Why does Crash pursue Christina? Why does Christina think she and Crash are in love? What about Christina might be irritating to readers?
11. What is the significance of Roxanne's guidance that "you can't make a fox into a dog no matter how hard you try. A fox is always a fox. And in the end, you have to let them go" (p. 445)?
12. Sally Levine asks Crash to make his book a "PG work," but Crash counters that "no way can certain words be avoided," (pp. 4-5). Why does Crash feel that he needs words like *fuck* to tell his story?
13. How are underage drinking and daily drug use an accepted and routine part of Crash's life? Do drugs help Crash or hurt him?
14. How does the media create a hero out of Crash? How does Crash embrace his heroism? Do you think he's heroic?
15. Do you like Crash? Why or why not?
16. The idea of saving lives acts like a refrain throughout the novel. How can "you saved my life" be an exaggeration, and how can it actually be true? Why do people use that sentiment so freely? How does its use as hyperbole shape its literal significance?
17. Is Crash a reliable narrator? Do you trust his version of events?
18. What do you make of Burn's "revenge is sweet" mantra?
19. What is the secret that Burn tells Crash? Why is it significant?
20. College-bound Crash denies ever having been friends with Burn, but his own account of their shared history suggests otherwise. Were Crash and Burn ever friends? If not, what were they?