

Life Among Giants: A Novel Study Guide

Life Among Giants: A Novel by Bill Roorbach

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Life Among Giants: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 3, Chapter 12.....	4
Part 3, Chapter 13 - Part 5, Chapter 24.....	9
Characters.....	13
Objects/Places.....	16
Themes.....	18
Style.....	20
Quotes.....	21
Topics for Discussion.....	23

Plot Summary

"Life Among Giants" is a novel by Bill Roorbach about the murder of David "Lizard" Hochmeyer's parents, and his determination to get in his life in order and find the killers.

When the novel begins, Lizard and his sister, Katy, have a seemingly idyllic life in Connecticut. They live with their mother and father, who are, by all appearances, normal parents. But one day, Lizard and Katy's father is arrested by the FBI, for it turns out he has been working for a fraudulent company run by Perdhomme, who carries out his operations with mafia-like efficiency. When Lizard's father decides to go state witness, he is ruthlessly murdered by an unknown assailant, as is Lizard's mother.

Lizard spends the next years of his life going to college and playing football for the Miami Dolphins, all the while keeping in touch with Katy. Lizard ultimately opens a restaurant with two teammates, and later moves back to Connecticut to start a new restaurant. There, he falls back in touch with Sylphide, famous and wealthy Norwegian ballerina, who has her own dance company following the death of her rock star husband, Dabney. She lives across a pond between her and Lizard's houses. Lizard, meanwhile, is determined to find his father's killers, and figures out that Perdhomme, and Dabney's brother, are behind the murder. They were seeking to exploit Dabney's wealth, and when it fell into Sylphide's hands, to exploit her wealth.

Using his culinary skills and poisonous mushrooms, Lizard crafts dinner for Sylphide, Perdhomme, and Dabney's brother, Brady. All three ultimately die - Sylphide having knowingly consumed poisonous food. Sylphide leaves everything to Lizard, who manages her estate, her arts foundation, and her dance company. Katy later dies when she drowns herself.

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 3, Chapter 12

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 3, Chapter 12 Summary

Part 1, Chapter 1 - David "Lizard" Hochmeyer likes to eat every single meal as if it is his last meal, for his parents are killed after a meal. Lizard's sister, Katy, is encouraged to play tennis by their mother, Barbara, while Lizard is encouraged to do gardening rather than football. Lizard and Katy's father, Nick, works in the corporate world, and the family takes trips to lakeside Michigan. As they go into high school, Katy becomes a stoner, and Lizard makes pipes for her. It is the 1960s.

The family lives in a stone house across a pond from a rich neighborhood in Westport, Connecticut, where High Side is located. High Side is the size of a mansion. In the mansion lives Sylphide, a world-famous Norwegian ballerina, and widow of the English rocker Dabney Stryker-Stewart, who was killed in a car wreck. They own many homes, but High Side is their base. Katy babysits Linsey, Sylphide's stepson, who has mental handicaps, and gets to know Sylphide well.

In October, 1970, when Lizard is a senior in high school, and Katy is at college, the FBI arrives to arrest his father. His mother explains there has been trouble at work. On the day of court, Katy arrives with her new boyfriend, who is also her professor, Jack Cross. Lizard's father goes the route of state witness, and he is released from custody for lunch under the protection of bodyguards. Nick intends to revive his good name by cooperating with the state. But then an assailant named Kaiser arrives, and shoots Nick in the face and chest, and shoots one of the bodyguards. He also shoots Lizard's mom.

Part 1, Chapter 2 - Dabney Stryker-Stewart dies six months before Lizard's parents, and it upsets Katy tremendously. Linsey is sent away to live in England with his grandmother. Lizard is cut from the football team because he refuses to cut his hair. Lizard recalls it as a seminal act. After Dabney's death, Sylphide loses his fortune to her step-son, and while she has High Side, she has to let all of the staff go because she cannot afford to pay them. The grass grows, and Lizard, without being asked, ferries across a lawnmower and sets to work on the yard. Sylphide comes out to say hello, and says she cannot pay him, and Lizard says that that's alright. They end up hugging, and Sylphide says she hates being alone. Lizard is meanwhile scouted by Princeton for football. Lizard's Dad takes him to scrimmage and meet with Coach "Rumbling" Rick Keshevsky.

A short time later, Sylphide wins a lawsuit, and her funding is restored. A butler, Desmond, brings over thanks and payment from Sylphide. The payment consists of a large check and a photo of Dabney and President John F. Kennedy. At school, Lizard falls hard for a girl named Emily, who is a mix of African and Korean. Emily does ballet. But she doesn't know Lizard exists. She writes anti-establishment pieces for the school paper, and attacks the football team, calling David "reptilian" -which is where the nickname "Lizard" comes from.



One day, while raking leaves, men from Syphide's come over, declaring that paintings are missing. They accuse Lizard of lifting them, but Nick bashes one of the men in the face, and Lizard tackles another guy while Nick locks his son out of the house. At last, Freddy - the head man - is admitted into the house to search for the paintings, and doesn't find them. As they leave, they make Nick give up his boots.

Part 1, Chapter 3 - Lizard cannot believe his father locked him out of the house. On the phone, Katy tells Lizard to stay away from High Side. Lizard's mother makes him return the Kennedy/Dabney photo, and Sylphide offers him old binoculars instead. Sylphide invites Lizard and a guest of his choosing to tea at the High Side the following Wednesday. Lizard wants to ask Emily. It does not work out. Lizard brings his Mom, instead. At High Side, Desmond gives Lizard a note, which instructs him not to follow in his father's footsteps.

Emily later talks to Lizard, telling him about a disastrous evening with Mark Nussbaum, who had attempted to force himself sexually on her, which she rejects. At home, Lizard helps his father do some more raking. From time to time, Nick explains his financial dealings, for he works with mob groups through fraudulent investment corporations. His boss, Perdhomme, has also been giving him some trouble, but he doesn't want to talk about it. A note arrives which says that Linsey and Sylphide will be attending an upcoming football game. Lizard is unhappy because his mother invited Sylphide behind Katy's back, and Katy now professes to hate Sylphide. Later, Lizard reflects on the note given to him at Sylphides, and realizes that Sylphide must think that it was Nick who stole the paintings, which is why the boots were taken. That night, Lizard watches through binoculars as Sylphide and Georges, a servant who plays the piano, have sex.

At school, Mark punches Lizard twice for moving in on Emily, but Emily says nothing of the sort is happening. The punches barely faze Lizard, for his size and his strength. Nick later goes missing for four nights, and it appears as if his wife has finally had enough. But the night before the Princeton-Yale game, he returns, claiming the car has been stolen. Emily will be attending the game in Nick's stead.

Part 1, Chapter 4 - The day of the Princeton-Yale game arrives, and the entourage picks up Emily. Katy is enraged that Sylphide has come along. By the end of the game, both Lizard's mother and Sylphide are drunk. Lizard is called to the locker room. The Coach wants to know if it really was Sylphide who was with Lizard. Sylphide and Lizard kiss that night, and she slips a heart-shaped stone in his back pocket. Over the next few days, Nick becomes more and more paranoid, and Lizard goes to visit Katy at college for game day. He talks to Katy about how he and Emily have gotten closer, and how their mother doesn't seem to have a problem with Emily. Lizard later learns that his sister and Dabney had been lovers. Katy is now living with Jack Cross, and the stolen paintings are there. They were paintings originally owned by Katy, sold by Nick for money, and stolen back for Katy.

Part 1, Chapter 5 - Emily and Lizard go on a date to the Rocks in the woods, a place of big boulders. There, they have Korean food for lunch. The kiss, and sexually experiment with touching. Later that night, Lizard overhears his father on the phone, talking about



taking the fall for something. Emily gets grounded following her involvement in the pseudo-fight incident at school between Lizard and Mark.

Part 1, Chapter 6 - Lizard reflects on his family not seeming so normal anymore. When Sylphide returns from a European trip, Lizard is summoned to High Side. Lizard asks Desmond if he knew about his sister and Dabney, and Desmond confirms this. Desmond also reveals the boots do not match the prints found at the house. Lizard wonders if his sister was involved. He meets Conrad, who is helping Sylphide to form a dance company to perform like rock concerts, to benefit Children of War. Lizard is tacked on as an executive assistant. He and Sylphide get together, and she tells him that a good boy cannot exist in her world. She strips naked and changes in front of him, and then puts him to work making calls to secure a theater for the performance. Lizard leaves Sylphide a heart-shaped stone.

Part 2, Chapter 7 - Eighteen years later, following an undistinguished career in the Miami Dolphins, Lizard opens up Restaurant Firfisle (Lizard in Norwegian) in 1989. In 1994, Lizard sees that Mr. Perdhomme has made reservations for dinner. With Perdhomme is Kaiser, the killer. Lizard believes they are there to threaten him. When they leave, Lizard pays Olulenu to follow them, and Olulenu reports they went to High Side.

Part 2, Chapter 8 - Lizard recounts a solid football career at Princeton, and that he is drafted in the seventh round to the Miami Dolphins. In June, Lizard rents out the family house and goes to Miami. He becomes third quarterback. He does well, makes it to two Super Bowls, and over time, he and Katy grow distant. Yet it is Jack who fills Lizard in on her life. She suffers a nervous breakdown, with paranoia helping to cause it. She goes through various jobs and careers, never holding anything down for long.

Although Lizard does well financially, he lives a quiet and Spartan life. He doesn't date much, but follows Sylphide's life and career. Katy comes to visit Lizard to see him in a game. She talks about Detective Turkle, whom she has been using to get information about their parents' murder. They were attempting to frame their father in Dabney's murder. Years pass, and just as Lizard believes he will become starting quarterback, he is passed over.

Part 2, Chapter 9 - Carter Jeffries and Lionel Smith open an upscale soul-food restaurant in Miami, and Lizard becomes the minor financial partner, and manager. The restaurant takes on a fantastic chef named Etienne for the Floridiana Restaurant, who amusingly happens to be a vegetarian.

Lizard goes to visit his sister and Jack in Boston. Katy is at a clinic, and is on all sorts of medication. Back at the Floridiana, everything takes off wonderfully. Katy comes to visit, and attempts to persuade Etienne to stop serving meat, for she has also become a vegetarian, but Etienne slowly bumps meat from the menu. Sales waver, and Carter and Lionel demand that the menu be returned, which it is. Emily Bright comes to town a few days later, and she now owns her own dance company. They agree to meet up for dinner with Katy. They go to see a performance of Emily's group, but aren't very



impressed. He later introduces Emily to Carter. When Lizard retires from the NFL, he and Etienne become closer friends as they work together at the Floridiana.

Eventually, Etienne is let go, and Lizard quits. He sells his Miami condo for a nice profit, and heads back north.

Part 2, Chapter 10 - Kate and Jack become the social world of Lizard, who has weekly dinners with them at their home. Lizard lends Etienne tens of thousands of dollars for a proto-vegan restaurant. While out jogging, Lizard comes across an old run down building, which was once Trompetta's, an Italian place. Lizard buys it, to turn it into Restaurant Firfisle.

Part 2, Chapter 11 - Etienne comes to stay with Lizard, and brings his girlfriend, RuAngela, who helps put in the bid on the building. The three go visit Jack and Katy, and secure Jack as a financial investor in their new restaurant. Katy reveals she has the key to Nick's lost briefcase, full of gold coins and other valuables. They need to find the briefcase. Meanwhile, Linsey's health declines sharply, and Lizard goes to see him in the hospital. At Linsey's funeral, Sylphide and Lizard catch up. The next day, the offer on the old Trompetta property is accepted. The restaurant comes together, slowly but surely. Katy continues to insist that the murder of their parents, and Dabney, are somehow related. Katy reveals that Dabney was found half a mile from his car in the woods. Two sets of footprints go in, one comes out. Katy believes the boots were taken from their father for the accident, to frame Nick. Katy tells Lizard not to open a restaurant.

Part 3, Chapter 12 - Lizard recalls how his grandfather committed suicide by drowning. Lizard reflects on his father, looking for the good in him. His mother brought a cultural refinement to the family. Katy also attempted to commit suicide four times. Lizard also reflects on helping out Sylphide at the Children of War foundation. One afternoon, Lizard fills in for Vlad, Sylphide's dance partner. Lizard becomes sexually aroused, and Sylphide has him relieve himself while she runs her hands over his body. It is that same day that Nick will be arrested.

Part 1, Chapter 1 - Part 3, Chapter 12 Analysis

The novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach begins humbly and simply enough. Lizard and his sister Katy seem to have a relatively normal childhood of sports, time spent at home, and good memories. But throughout the years, many things don't quite add up, and their father's activities with a fraudulent investment company eventually come to light - especially after he is arrested. When the father turns state witness, he is murdered, along with his wife, at lunch. Seeing their parents murdered in front of them causes Lizard and Katy to reel through much of their lives. Katy, already exhibiting some sort of emotional or mental problem, only gets worse as time goes on, to the point where she will ultimately attempt suicide four times.

Yet, despite all of this, the siblings grow closer together, and Lizard goes on to a undistinguished, but successful pro-football career. It is while he is playing football that he becomes involved with the restaurant business with two teammates. From there, he intends to move back to Connecticut, to open his own restaurant. All the while, Lizard looks back on the events of his life, including his seemingly bizarre association with famous ballerina Sylphide. This will have both negative and positive consequences for Lizard in the future. Indeed, the opening of his own restaurant will have both positive and negative consequences for Lizard in the future.

Part 3, Chapter 13 - Part 5, Chapter 24

Part 3, Chapter 13 - Part 5, Chapter 24 Summary

Part 3, Chapter 13 - Barbara insists that her life as normally as possible, including returning to school. Lizard reluctantly agrees to this. Lizard then goes to High Side after school, for his mother has gone to Danbury to visit Nick. Lizard watches a rehearsal. After, a man in a black suit grabs Sylphide, delivering a "message" from a friend, and Lizard jumps to her rescue, breaking bones in the man's hand and arms. But Lizard is sprayed in the face with something, and passes out. The police are called, but are too late. The assailant gets away. Back home, the assailant has thrown the lawnmower through Lizard's window. He spends a restless night in the attic, sleeping fitfully with a baseball bat in hand.

Part 3, Chapter 14 - Mark Nussbaum is beaten up to within an inch of his life, and he blames it on Lizard. But Lizard has an alibi, and Mr. Demeter, the principal, agrees to help clear things up. Meanwhile, Freddy, the head of security at High Side, vows to catch the assailant. Emily comes to see Lizard. They have sex. She says her parents found dirty love notes between her and Mark, and that she pretended to be innocent so Lizard would like her. Emily has run away, because her mother wants her to move back to Seoul. She and Lizard have sex again. It is Lizard who introduces Emily to Sylphide. They hire her for the show.

Part 3, Chapter 15 - Freddy stands watch outside of the house all night following the murder of Lizard's parents. Freddy vows to exact revenge. Lizard's grandfather comes in, to identify his daughter's body, and to attend the funeral. The funeral occurs on Monday. The funeral is uncomfortable, and cold. Lizard's grandfather believes the killer to have been an associate of Nick's, who wanted to keep him quiet. Lizard later learns from Desmond that Nick had been spending time with a man named Brady Rattner, who is considered a pariah.

Part 3. Chapter 16 - Children of War goes on at the Shoebox Theater in New York, and is a smashing, sell-out success. In the meantime, Lizard begins college.

Part 4, Chapter 17 - As the restaurant comes closer to being finished, Lizard and Katy grow distant. On a day off before the restaurant opens, Lizard is home alone, and his memories weight down upon him. Lizard speaks to Sylphide about Nick always begging Dabney to invest. Brady is Sylphide's brother-in-law, a former stuntman.

Part 4, Chapter 18 - In late October, Firfisle has a trial run with friends and family. The evening is a fun disaster, and the next dry run goes better. Katy and Jack attend that run, and Katy is visibly disturbed by it all. On Halloween, the restaurant opens for real. The previous morning, because Jack can't do it, Lizard brings Katy to McLean for readmission. Over the next ten months, the Firfisle becomes popular, and Katy is released from McLean.



Part 4, Chapter 19 - Another year passes. Sylphide and Emily continue their careers, and the restaurant becomes ever more popular. Sylphide has begun dating Daniel Tancredi, a Swiss financier. Another year goes by, and the restaurant becomes even more popular. Katy and Jack come once a month, and Katy seems to be settling down. A short while later, Desmond dies of HIV. Sylphide sends Lizard a note, saying she loves him, and she is his.

Part 4, Chapter 20 - Five years after Firfisle opens, Perdhomme and Kaiser come in for dinner. Lizard knows that they know each other, and that Perdhomme must have ordered Nick killed to save himself, and that somehow, they knew Sylphide as well. The newspaper carries news that Dolus, Perdhomme's company, is under investigation -and Lizard knows he is a witness to one of the fraudulent company's crimes. Etienne says he will have Lizard's back. They go sailing with Jack and Katy on Long Island Sound to Goat Island. There, Lizard reveals his theory to Jack and Katy. Katy agrees that they knew whose restaurant Firfisle was -because of Sylphide. They discuss what to do. They agree they need to get DNA from the restaurant.

Part 4, Chapter 21 - On the news that night, Lizard discovers that Emily and Carter have broken up. Emily and Lizard go on a trip to see the kitchen at the Riverkeeper Inn, owned by Jim Riverkeeper, friend of RuAngela. They also meet a man named Ferkie there, who delivers mushrooms to kitchens. He leads them on a hunt to find mushrooms for cooking. Ferkie explains to Jim and the others that sometimes the worst-looking mushrooms are harmless, while the nicest looking ones are very poisonous. Lizard researches poisonous mushrooms, to discover that some take as much as twenty-four hours to begin affecting people, to the point of death in most cases.

Part 5, Chapter 22 - Lizard remembers his father working his way through Concept Credit, which became Dolus Investments, pretending to have an economics degree from UCLA. Lizard goes to see Sylphide. Tancredi's estate, and Sylphide's, are being organized into the Tenke Thorvald Foundation for the Arts, which Lizard would be appointed director. He will also receive High Side to live in, with staff paid in perpetuity. Lizard agrees. She shows him a solid gold bust of August Bournonville, grandfather of modern ballet, which went missing, and was returned by Thierry Perdhomme.

Sylphide explains that Perdhomme is a major donor. She confirms she sent Perdhomme to the restaurant. An old photo of Dabney in his glory days confirms that Kaiser is Brady. Brady is killing for money -first for Dabney's, and now they have supposedly come back for Sylphide's. She reveals that Freddy went to Arizona to track Brady down, only to have his head cut off. They have attempted to snooker Sylphide into leaving her estates to Perdhomme and their fraudulent companies - if she dies. They wonder what they should do.

Part 5, Chapter 23 - Sylphide's retrospective show is a smash hit, and she and her friends plan an evening at the Firfisle. In eight days, Kaiser and Perdhomme would be at the restaurant again, and then Sylphide would be traveling with them in India to see about funding blood banks. Emily and Lizard get engaged. Lizard changes up the menu to include mushroom ingredient items. Lizard personally prepares the mushroom



sausages, uses poisonous mushrooms. Kate and RuAngela will be out serving as waitresses. Lizard goes out to meet Sylphide as she, Brady, and Perdhomme sit down for dinner. Their discomfort lets Lizard know they have something planned for him after Sylphide. Dinner is served, and Lizard nervously awaits news the next day. News comes a short time later. Sylphide dies in India, along with Perdhomme and Brady -supposedly of food-borne pathogens in unregulated Mumbai. Lizard is at once both overjoyed -and horrified at what he has done.

Part 5, Chapter 24 - Lizard is never even questioned in the deaths of Perdhomme, Brady, or Sylphide. Lizard suspects his sister is responsible for Sylphide's death, but doesn't say anything about it. He wonders if maybe Sylphide had simply known about the mushroom sausages, and eaten them regardless. Lizard is now well-off and does good work around the world. He marries a Sri Lankan woman named Aamani. High Side is the Foundation's headquarters. Years pass, and everything becomes normal in many ways. One night, Katy has an epiphany, and realizes she knows where the briefcase is. They find it at the pool house. The briefcase is empty. Both siblings laugh hysterically.

Years later, Katy dies unexpectedly. She takes a boat out sailing, and drowns herself. An envelope is later found, addressed to Kate, in the event of Nick's death. Lizard suspects Brady raced Dabney the night of his death, causing Dabney to crash on an unfamiliar road. In the envelope is a tape recording of a conversation with Perdhomme - or what is supposed to be a conversation with Perdhomme -but ends up being a recording of mock family interviews and singing. The envelope also contains a book about surviving in the woods, and two photos are tucked away inside, in the event of an escape. One is of Lizard's father and mother, and the other is of Lizard and Katy.

Part 3, Chapter 13 - Part 5, Chapter 24 Analysis

The seemingly bizarre association with Sylphide - at once sexual, romantic, and unusual - proves to be a blessing and a curse. Lizard is invariably drawn back into the world of Perdhomme and Kaiser by that association; yet it is Sylphide whom delivers Perdhomme and Kaiser to Lizard's restaurant. It is through Lizard's love of cooking, close friends, and a crude knowledge of mushrooms that he is able to plan how to dispense with Perdhomme and Kaiser, for he is acutely aware that he himself will be dealt with in the near future. Indeed, Lizard's plan goes off without a hitch - so much so that it almost appears to be anti-climactic. Nevertheless, Lizard is never even questioned about the deaths of Sylphide, Perdhomme, or Kaiser.

Interestingly enough, all of the open circles are closed through investigative work and hunches. Dabney's death was intended in order to steal away his money, courtesy of Dabney's brother, Brad -also known as Kaiser. When Sylphide became the owner of Dabney's estate, she was seized upon by Perdhomme and Kaiser. That is why Sylphide is more than happy to deliver Perdhomme and Kaiser into Lizard's hands - mainly because she knows her own life is in peril, and her money will be the source of her

demise. In the end, Lizard, Katy, and their close friends are all in on the plot to eliminate Perdhomme and Kaiser, which, again, is done flawlessly.

Characters

David Lizard Hochmeyer

David "Lizard" Hochmeyer is the main character, principal protagonist, and narrator of the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach. David exists in the novel as both a teenager, middle-aged adult, and later middle-aged adult, over the span of decades. He is the son of Nick and Barbara Hochmeyer, and is the younger brother of Katy Hochmeyer. Lizard, so-nicknamed for being called "reptilian" in a hit piece on the football team by an anti-establishment school newspaper writer, Emily, Lizard is horrified by the murder of his father and mother by a paid hitman. David also had a decades-long friendship and relationship with Sylphide, a famous ballerina, who is married to rock star Dabney Stryker-Stewart, who dies in a mysterious car crash.

Lizard ultimately goes through college at Princeton, plays football for the Miami Dolphins, and later becomes a restauranteer, opening his own place called "Firfisle". Yet, the murderers of his father, Perdhomme and Kaiser, come to visit one night, just to let their presence be known. Through Sylphide's help, Lizard learns that first Dabney, and now she is being exploited for her wealth by Perdhomme and Kaiser, for whom Nick worked and was ready to talk to the FBI about. Seeking justice, Lizard poisons food Perdhomme and Kaiser eat with mushrooms, ultimately killing them. Lizard is never questioned, and lives out his life relatively happily, marrying a Sri Lankan woman named Aamani. Katy later dies when she drowns herself.

Katy Hochmeyer

Katy Hochmeyer is the older sister of Lizard Hochmeyer, and the daughter of Nick and Barbara Hochmeyer. Along with Lizard, Katy sees their parents gunned down in a hit, and she spends the next few decades of her life trying to figure things out. Katy has an affair with English rock star Dabney Stryker-Stewart, and hates his wife, Sylphide. Ultimately, Lizard and Katy discover that their father's old boss, Perdhomme, and his associate, Kaiser, are to blame, wanting Nick dead before he could talk to the FBI about their illegal and violent dealings. Katy is mentally and emotionally imbalanced, and ultimately marries her Yale professor, Jack Cross, with whom she is in love. They, along with Lizard, help plot to kill Perdhomme and Kaiser. Years later, Katy commits suicide by drowning.

Nick Hochmeyer

Nick Hochmeyer is the father of Katy and Lizard Hochmeyer, and is the husband of Barbara Hochmeyer. Nick is a kind and caring father, though when push comes to shove, he wants to protect himself above his family. Nick works his way up through a fraudulent company, becoming a goon for the boss, Thierry Perdhomme. When Nick is



arrested by the FBI, he goes the route of state witness, only to be gunned down for his betrayal to Perdhomme.

Barbara Hockmeyer

Barbara Hockmeyer is the mother of Katy and Lizard Hochmeyer, and is the wife of Nick Hochmeyer. She is sweet, kind, caring, and very attentive to her children, and brings a sense of culture and sophistication to the household. She is gunned down in a hit when Nick agrees to turn state witness through an FBI investigation into the company he works for.

Sylphide

Sylphide is a beautiful Norwegian ballerina, known all over the world. She marries English rock star Dabney Stryker-Stuart. Sylphide is also viewed as a sex symbol by many men, including Lizard. They have a tense, sexual relationship, and a tense friendship that lasts for decades. Sylphide reveals to Lizard that the same men who killed his father are responsible for the death of Dabney, seeking to exploit his death for his wealth. Now that Sylphide is the owner of that wealth, Perdhomme and Kaiser are coming after her. She plots with Lizard to have them murdered, and, perhaps sensing her own life is nearly over, voluntarily consumes some of the poisoned food Lizard prepares. She dies on a trip to India, along with Perdhomme and Kaiser. In death, she leaves everything she has to Lizard.

Dabney Stryker-Stewart

Dabney Stryker-Stewart is an English rock star who is married to Norwegian ballerina Sylphide. He is killed in a mysterious car crash six months before Nick Hochmeyer is killed. It is later concluded that Dabney was brought to his death by his brother, Brad, also known as Kaiser. This occurs in an attempt to secure Dabney's fortunes for himself and for Perdhomme. Following the car crash, Dabney is left to die beyond the reach of help by Kaiser.

Jack Cross

Jack Cross is a professor at Yale, who ends up falling in love with and marrying Katy Hochmeyer. The two are inseparable, and he helps her to weather her emotional and mental instability. He becomes a willing participant and confidante in the killing of Perdhomme and Kaiser. Jack Cross is heartbroken when Katy commits suicide years later.

Etienne

Etienne is a vegetarian and an extraordinary chef. He is also a close friend of Lizard, and comes to work at his restaurant in Connecticut. Like Jack Cross and others, Etienne becomes a willing member of the plot to kill Perdhomme and Kaiser.

Perdhomme

Perdhomme is the principle antagonist in the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach. He heads up the fraudulent Dolus Investments company. Perdhomme becomes interested in the promise of Nick Hochmeyer, but when Nick turns state witness through the FBI, Perdhomme has Nick murdered by Kaiser. Perdhomme is later himself killed by poison mushroom at the hands of Lizard.

Kaiser Brady Rattner

"Kaiser" Brady Rattner is a business associate and hitman for Perdhomme at Dolus Investments. Kaiser is the brother of Dabney Stryker-Stewart, and is a former stuntman. He goads Dabney into racing cars, ensuring that he wrecks and dies on an unfamiliar road. He then brings Davney off by himself to die in the woods, hoping to come into possession of his fortune. Kaiser is ultimately killed by poisoned food prepared by Lizard.



Objects/Places

Connecticut

Connecticut is one of the states in the United States of America. It is the main setting of the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roobach. It is the location of Westport, and is where Lizard and Katy live for much of the novel.

Westport

Westport is the town in Connecticut where Lizard and Katy live for most of the novel. It is where Lizard opens his own restaurant, "Restaurant Firfirsle". It is also where Lizard poisons Perdhomme and Kaiser.

Staple High School

Staple High School is located in Westport, Connecticut. It is the high school that Katy, and later Lizard, attend. It is where Lizard plays football for most of his high school career.

Princeton

Princeton is the college that Lizard attends to play football. It is the college from which Lizard graduates, and is drafted by the Miami Dolphins.

High Side

High Side is the name of the beautiful, sprawling mansion opposite the pond where the Hochmeyers live. High Side is owned and lived in by English rock star Dabney and his Norwegian ballerina wife, Sylphide. When Dabney dies, Sylphide continues living there. It becomes the center for an arts foundation created by Sylphide and administered by Lizard.

Miami, Florida

Miami, Florida, is where Lizard lives while playing football for the Miami Dolphins. It is also where he manages the restaurant "Floridian", and meets and befriends Etienne.



Shoebox Theater

Shoebox Theater is located in New York City. It is where Sylphide's dance company, Children of War, performs to rave reviews and sell-out audiences.

Restaurant Firfisle

Restaurant Firfisle is the restaurant opened and operated by Lizard. It is located in Westport, and becomes a very popular place over the years. It is where Perdhomme and Kaiser are poisoned by food prepared by Lizard.

Photographs

Photographs of Katy and Lizard, and of Nick and Barbara, are kept by Nick in a wilderness survival book. These photos are to be his memories if he tries to escape. He never does. The photos end up back in Lizard's hands at the end of the novel.

Poison Mushrooms

Poison mushrooms are used by Lizard to make sausages. These mushrooms take a few days to kill the consumer, and are used to kill Perdhomme and Kaiser.

Themes

Family

Family is a major and dominant theme in the novel, "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach. Family, which includes mutual affection, caring, concern, support, and loyalty towards relatives and relations who may or may not be blood related, affects nearly every aspect of the novel. In particular, it affects the characters of Katy, Lizard, and their parents, all in different ways.

For Nick and Barbara, the parents of Lizard and Katy, family is a very important thing (more so for Barbara). Family is a beautiful thing, and a quiet refuge for Nick and Barbara, and they delight in their children, making sure they are well-versed in culture, athletics, and academics. Through Nick's troubles, Barbara does her best to keep home life as normal as possible for her children. Indeed, everything Nick and Barbara do is for their family. Yet, when push comes to shove, Nick's conception of family breaks down at once, as he sets out to save his own skin before that of his family. This is evinced by two situations. In the first, Nick locks his son out of the house when confronted by Freddy and his fellows from High Side; and it also occurs in the wilderness survival book Nick is planning to use to escape -and leave his family behind.

For Katy and Lizard, family is the only real thing either one or the other has, and it also presents a unifying cause for revenge. Without their parents, all Katy and Lizard have are one another, and they look out for each other and make sure to visit one another as much as possible throughout the novel, working together to unravel the mystery of the murder of their parents. Indeed, avenging their family solidly joins Katy and Lizard, leading to the plot to poison Perdhomme and Kaiser. While Katy and Lizard can turn to their respective spouses for comfort, neither one can take their spouses into confidence the way they can each other.

Justice

Justice is a major and dominant theme in the novel, "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach. Justice has to do with righting wrongs through various means. There are at least three types of justice present in the novel.

The first kind of justice present in the novel is that of legal justice. Legal justice includes the righting of wrongs through purely legal means. The injustices committed by Perdhomme's fraudulent investment firm are targeted by the FBI, and Nick Hochmeyer is swept up in their investigation. Hoping to protect himself and his family legally, and hoping to make sure Perdhomme is taken down, Nick goes the route of state witness to legally bring Perdhomme to justice. Unfortunately, this proves to be an ineffective method when Nick and his wife are gunned down by Kaiser.

The second kind of justice present in the novel is that of private investigation and retribution. This is done by way of auxiliaries and third parties. This sort of justice is meted out by Freddy, on behalf of Sylphide. Freddy protects Lizard's house following the murder of his parents, and later tracks down Kaiser in Arizona to seek justice. Unfortunately, Freddy is caught and beheaded for his efforts.

The third kind of justice present in the novel is that of personal retribution. This occurs at the hands of Lizard and Katy, who take justice into their own hands by making sure Perdhomme and Kaiser are at the restaurant. There, Lizard prepares a poisoned meal for them, which they consume, and later die from.

Love

Love is a major and dominant theme in the novel, "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roorbach. Love occurs in three ways in the novel: That of family, friendship, and romance. Each form of love primarily affects the character of Lizard, and each has different outcomes.

In terms of familial love, Lizard loves his father, mother, and sister, dearly. He watches out for them, helps his mother pay bills, and enjoys spending time with his father. He loves his family so dearly that, after they are murdered, he sets out with his sister to seek justice. When his parents are murdered, familial love for Katy helps keep Lizard close to her, and he helps care for her through her emotional and mental breakdowns. He makes sure to visit her, and to include her in all aspects of his life.

In terms of the love of friendship, love exists between Lizard and a number of individuals, including Etienne, the chef. Lizard and Etienne hit it off pretty quickly while working at the Floridiana in Miami together. When Etienne is fired, Lizard also quits. When Etienne tries to open his own restaurant, Lizard funds him. When Lizard opens up his own restaurant, Etienne comes to work for Lizard. When Lizard takes revenge on Perdhomme and Kaiser, Etienne is there to back up Lizard and keep the secret.

In terms of romantic love, love exists between Lizard and Emily, Lizard and Sylphide, and Lizard and Aamani. The love between Lizard and Emily lasts decades, from the time they are teenagers through the time they are middle-aged adults. They are on-again and off-again, and have sex frequently whenever they are together. They plan to marry, but it doesn't work out. Lizard falls in love with Aamani instead, whom he ultimately marries. Romantic love also occurs between Lizard and Sylphide, which is of a very sexual nature. Yet their romantic love ultimately gives way to friendship.

Style

Point of View

Bill Roorbach tells his novel "Life Among Giants" from the point of view of main character and principle protagonist, David "Lizard" Hochmeyer, in the first-person omniscient retrospective. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the story is about the life and times of Lizard, and his quest to avenge the deaths of his parents. It is only fitting and proper that such a grave story should be told by the main character. This allows the reader to get into the mind of Lizard, and to see and understand things as he does. The second reason is that, between Katy and Lizard, only Lizard is still alive to be able to tell the story.

Setting

Bill Roorbach sets his novel "Life Among Giants" mainly in the town of Westport, Connecticut. Because the area is near New York, and the area is extremely wealthy, it makes the setting perfect for Nick's father and the fraudulent investment company he works for to exert its influence. Indeed, the tranquil and quiet setting of Westport is the perfect facade and contrast to the seedy and violent underworld of money laundering and mob work.

Language and Meaning

Bill Roorbach tells his novel "Life Among Giants" in language that is simple and straightforward, but is well-formed and educated. This is done primarily because the narrator of the novel, Lizard, is a college-educated male who has little use for mystery or long-winded explanations, for he himself has had too many mysteries and long-winded explanations to contend with through his life. The language of the novel is also simple and straightforward in order to allow the reader to easily traverse the decades, people, and places the novel populates with ease. Further, it adds cohesion to the novel, and allows for transitions between times and events to be much easier.

Structure

Bill Roorbach divides his novel "Life Among Giants" into five parts, and each part into subsequent chapters. The chapters and parts are arranged sequentially in number, but are achronological. The parts alternate between the past and the present, and each of the chapters alternates between the past and the present as well. This is done because throughout the novel, Lizard is trying to make sense of his past. Alternating times allows the reader to see and understand things both currently and in retrospect with Lizard as he experiences things and recalls memories. Ultimately, a singular storyline emerges out of past and present.

Quotes

Therapy, medication -those things were uncommon back then, and were certainly not things we talked about in my family. Psychiatrists were for crazy people, not any of us. There were normal people and there were people with character issues. We Hochmeyers, of course, were the normal people.
Chapter 2, p. 18

Kaiser and Mr. P were connected. But their appearance at my restaurant wasn't a mistake, and it wasn't a confession, either. Instead, it seemed a calculated threat: We know where to find you.
-Chapter 7, p. 104

"I see you trying to erase yourself, all your accomplishments, all your sorrows, trying to slip into a new world where you can be a kid again, a figurative kid, learning new things, around new people, lessons from adults, a new school."
-Chapter 9, p. 129

You really had to get on to the next thing, and what better place than home?
-Chapter 9, p. 147

Our secrets gave us power. And then they took our power away. From whom had we learned that?
Chapter 12, p. 183

Nothing made sense. Nothing made sense at all and there was no sense in trying to think anything through, and there was no one who could help, no right question to ask.
-Chapter 15, p. 231

"People in prison? Most of them are guilty as charged. But they think they've done nothing wrong. At McLean? Everyone sick and blameless? They're sure they've done something wrong."
-Chapter 17, p. 240

You'd think I would have harbored a lot of resentment for Emily, but I didn't, not really. Her life had gotten too for her very quickly, and mine had always been too big for me.
-Chapter 21, p. 275

"Is all written out, you know. Everything is fate. All written out in Heaven, or written out in Hell."

-Chapter 22, p. 303

And rubbish like that, tears to my eyes: these lost voices. But more, of course, that Kate's was not among them.

-Chapter 24, p. 331

Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of family in the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roobach. What is family? How does family appear in the novel in relation to the characters of Lizard and Katy? How does family affect them? How does family influence the events of the novel? Is this for the better or the worse? Why? Explain your answer with evidence from the novel.

Was the killing of Perdhomme and Kaiser/Brady justified, or is it murder? Explain Lizard's position on the question, and then explain your own.

Discuss the theme of love in the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roobach. In what ways does love appear in the novel? Describe each of these ways, and provide examples for each of them. How does love ultimately affect the course of the plot of the novel? Explain.

Why do you think that Lizard and Katy's father decided to turn state witness against Perdhomme? What did he hope to gain by doing so? Was this out of compassion toward his family? Or was he more concerned about himself? Explain.

Explain the importance of the quote, "Our secrets gave us power. And then they took our power away. From whom had we learned that?" (Chapter 12, p. 183) To which characters does this quote refer? Why? What are its implications?

Discuss the theme of justice in the novel "Life Among Giants" by Bill Roobach. What is justice? In which three ways does justice appear in the novel? Which form of justice proves to be most effective? Is this form of justice legal? Is this form of justice justifiable in and of itself? Why or why not?