

The River Study Guide

The River by Gary Paulsen

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Plot Summary

The River by Gary Paulsen is the sequel to award winning novel, Hatchet. In this novel, Brian Robeson returns to the wild, but this time he goes to a new location with Derek Holtzer, a psychologist who works with a government program that teaches people to survive in situations similar to the one Brian experienced after a plane crash left him stranded in the wild. However, this trip is planned and seems too easy to Brian until a freak lightning storm turns the trip into a life or death struggle. The River is a fitting sequel to the Newberry Award winning novel Hatchet that will leave readers on the edge of their seats for a second time.

Derek Holtzer and two men from a government survival school come to Brian Robeson's house to ask him to do it again. Brian has just gotten past the notoriety earned when a plane crash left him stranded alone in the woods and now these people want him to do it again. Brian hesitates, but when he learns that the experience will be used to help others survive, Brian agrees. He only has to convince his parents.

Two weeks later, Brian boards another small aircraft, feeling a definite sense of déjà vu as he waves goodbye to his mother. Brian and Derek are going to an unnamed lake a hundred miles from the L-shaped lake where Brian's plane crashed. The idea is to survive the way Brian did, with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the items in their pockets. However, when Brian boards the plane he realizes that Derek has brought along a large assortment of survival gear. Upon landing, Brian insists that they send the gear back home with the plane. In a compromise, Derek agrees to only take the emergency radio and his briefcase filled with notebooks to take notes in.

On the first night, Brian and Derek endure the mosquitoes and cold because they could not find a flint to light a fire with. The next day, however, after a fall during an exploration of the area around the lake, they find not only a flint to start a fire, but a natural shelter created by a felled tree. Within three days, they have gathered enough food and firewood for weeks and created a comfortable shelter. With little left to do, Brian begins to worry that the entire episode has been too easy and Derek will never learn anything.

Late that night, Brian is awakened by the sound of distant thunder. Convinced a rainstorm will not reach them in their shelter, Brian goes back to sleep. When Brian wakes again, he hears thunder like he has never known. Brian immediately stands and moves further back in the shelter. Derek wakes as well, but he moves forward, reaching for the briefcase and radio. Suddenly lightning strikes a nearby tree and then Derek. Brian is hit to and wakes late the next morning to find Derek in a coma.

Brian does not know what to do for Derek. Brian tries to call for help, but the radio was fried by the lightning strike. Brian places Derek in a comfortable position and tries to feed him water, but it only causes Derek to choke. Afraid that Derek will die before anyone worries about them, Brian decides their only choice is to raft the river a hundred miles to a trading post.



Brian builds a raft and ties Derek to it. Within minutes they are on the river and riding the current toward help. However, the ride does not go as smoothly as Brian had hoped and he actually loses the raft for a time after he is thrown free while riding over some white water rafts. However, Brian eventually gets Derek to the trading post and help.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Brian Robeson first appears in Gary Paulsen's book *Hatchet*. In *Hatchet*, Brian was flying in a small plane to the Canadian oilfields where his father was working. The pilot had a heart attack and Brian was forced to crash the plane into a lake. Brian survived for fifty-four days alone with only a hatchet to help him. This novel is the sequel to *Hatchet*.

In chapter one, Brian is home alone when someone knocks on the door. Brian opens the door to find three men standing there. The men ask if Brian is the same Brian Robeson who survived in the woods alone. Brian thinks they might be from the press, but the men tell him they are from a government survival school and they want Brian to go back to the wilderness to help them learn how to teach survival better.

In chapter two, Brian makes dinner while waiting for his mother to return home. Brian thinks over the past few months since he returned from the woods, of how he became obsessed with food and now likes to cook.

In chapter three, Brian tells his mother about his earlier visitors just minutes before one of the men, Derek Holtzer, returns. Derek explains to Brian's mother that the survival school believes Brian could teach them more about survival than they could learn anywhere else. At first Brian's mother is unhappy and refuses to consider the idea of Brian returning to the wilderness, but Brian insists that he would like to go.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The reader meets Brian in the opening pages of this novel and learns how he survived fifty-four days in the wilderness alone, a feat that is impressive even to grown men. The adventure changed Brian in fundamental ways, making him look at all modern convenience in a new way. However, Brian has come back and gotten used to the real world again; therefore, he is shocked when the survival school men suggest he return to the wild.

Brian has survived something amazingly hard, showing the reader that Brian is a strong, intelligent person. The idea that he would even consider going back is amazing to the reader, but for those reader who are familiar with this character, it also seems within his character. Brian has a compassionate heart and he wants to help. Brian also wants to face his fears so they will no longer haunt him. These are admirable qualities in any character.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

In chapter four, Brian boards the bush plane and is amazed at how easy it is. Brian has a moment of fear when he sees his mother wave goodbye and he feels the plane begin to move. However, a close look at the pilot assures him that he is young enough to survive the trip without having a heart attack. As Brian settles in his seat, he notices all the equipment Derek has brought. During all their planning, reviewing the maps closely and exploring the area where Derek has chosen to go, no one ever said anything to Brian about equipment.

In chapter five, Brian sleeps through most of the trip. When he wakes, the plane is beginning to make its decent. Brian pays close attention and sees all the things he missed doing in his own experience attempting to land a plane. When they land on the lake, Derek directs the pilot to shore. Brian and Derek disembark. When Derek asks Brian to help unload the gear, Brian refuses. Brian insists that to make it authentic they should take with them only what is on their backs. Derek agrees, but insists on taking an emergency radio and his briefcase for making notes.

In chapter six, Brian and Derek barely have time to build a shelter before dark falls. The mosquitoes come, and with no smoke for protection, Brian and Derek find themselves doing all they can to keep the bugs off of them. Despite this, they both marvel at the beauty around them.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Brian and Derek begin their adventure, flying to a place more than a hundred miles from Brian's plane crash so that they begin in a place that is unfamiliar to them both. Derek wants to bring along a large amount of gear for emergency situations, but Brian refuses, saying it will not be authentic. While the reader knows that Brian is right about this, there is still some tension added to the novel when the reader realizes that things could go very wrong very fast. Leaving the equipment could be a mistake.

The first night is very difficult for both Brian and Derek, but Derek is less prepared than Brian. This starts the trip off on an interesting foot, creating a situation that is authentic to what Derek wanted to experience, but uncomfortable enough to make him question his decision to be there. The reader begins to wonder at this point just how long Derek will last in the wild.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In chapter seven, rain comes and soaks both Brian and Derek, despite their hastily built shelter. The next morning, they hang their clothes in the sun to dry and Brian focuses on his next move. Derek encourages Brian to think out loud so he can make note of his every thought, his every move. Brian tells Derek they need to find food and a flint to make fire. The two of them begin walking around the lake and look berries they can share.

In chapter eight, they separate to look faster. Brian climbs up on a small ledge, but it gives way under him, causing him to roll to the lake shore. There Brian finds multiple flints he can use to build a fire. As they continue to walk around the lake, Brian spots a natural shelter created by a felled tree where they can make their camp. Brian starts a fire and they build beds, spending a much more comfortable night than the one before.

In chapter nine, Brian and Derek have been in the wilderness for four days. They have gathered enough food and wood to last several weeks, and created a shelter that is warm and comfortable. Brian is beginning to think everything has happened too easily and worries that Derek is not really learning what he needs to to teach survival.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Brian changes into a different person when he arrives in the wilderness. Brian is focused and aware of everything around him, a change that Derek can see in Brian. Brian focuses on finding fire, food, and shelter for himself and Derek, suddenly aware that it would all be different now that someone else is with him. This begins a theme of Brian becoming the caregiver. It is a strange situation for Brian and it makes him nervous.

The whole point of this trip was for Derek to learn about surviving in the wilderness. However, Brian feels as though there is not the right type of tension to make this situation work, for Derek to learn. It has all been too easy, in Brian's eyes. The author inserts a comment at this point that suggests Brian will recall this conversation at a later date, suggesting tension will soon be coming for these two survivalists.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In chapter ten, Brian wakes to the sound of thunder, but is reassured because he believes they are well sheltered from a storm. However, when Brian wakes later, he discovers that a thunder storm has begun like one he has never seen before. Brian moves further back in the shelter, but Derek reaches for his briefcase and the radio. Then a white light fills the shelter and Brian is knocked unconscious.

In chapter eleven, Brian wakes to the memory of the storm the night before. When Brian sees Derek lying at a strange angle, he becomes frightened that he is dead. Brian hesitates to check, but when he does, he realizes that Derek is simply unconscious. Brian hopes he will wake soon. Brian grabs the radio to call in the situation, but the radio was rendered unusable by the lightning strike. That means that it will be more than a week before anyone worries about them.

In chapter twelve, Brian sits over Derek an entire day and night, waiting for him to wake. When he does not, Brian realizes that the lightning strike must have put Derek into a coma. Brian becomes aware that this will mean he will have to care for Derek completely, as though he were an infant.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

A storm causes Derek to be hit by lightning and puts him in a coma. Now Brian is once alone, essentially, and forced to make decisions in regards to both his and Derek's safety. This is an overwhelming idea that causes Brian some anxiety. Brian has never had to make decisions that involved anyone but himself.

Brian realizes the radio is useless and that no one will worry about them for at least a week, maybe longer. This means that Derek will go without food or water for a week unless Brian can figure out a way to help him. Now there is tension in the novel.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

In chapter thirteen, Brian attempts to give Derek water, but Derek immediately chokes. This confirms what Brian has feared, that Derek will have to go without water until rescue can come. Brian is unsure how long a person can go without water. Brian begins to search Derek's briefcase for something that might help, but all he finds is the map of the area. On the map, however, is a river.

In chapter fourteen, Brian studies the map and realizes there is a trader's post on the river about a hundred miles away. Brian at first thinks he might go get help and come back for Derek, but then he realizes that Derek would be eaten alive by wild animals. Instead, Brian thinks he should take Derek with him.

In chapter fifteen, Brian begins looking for wood to make a raft out of. Without an ax or a hatchet, Brian cannot cut down logs. Therefore, it is a blessing when he finds a group of poplar trees that have been felled by beavers. Brian picks out a few and takes them to the river to see if they will float. When they do, Brian returns to pick out eight logs he can make a raft out of. To tie them together, Brian fits braces made out of cut tree limbs, also thanks to the beavers, and ties them together at the ends. Brian then returns to the shelter to check on Derek. With Derek's condition unchanged, Brian decides they must go.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

In these chapters, Brian makes a decision that leads to action. Brian has always been a character who prefers action over anything else; therefore, he needs to do something to save Derek. Afraid Derek will die without the ability to drink water, Brian decides he must take him down river to a trader's post where he hopes people will be.

Brian shows his intelligence and ingenuity again as he builds a raft made from wood and limbs beavers have previously cut for their dams. Brian is able to build a raft that is big enough for him and Derek and one that will float well. The reader doubts just anyone could do such a thing and feels that Brian has again proven how extraordinary he truly is.



Chapters 16-18

Chapters 16-18 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Brian drags Derek to the raft, adds the paddle he made, and the briefcase before pushing the raft away from shore to test its ability to float. Before he leaves, Brian leaves a note stuck in the case of the radio in case anyone comes to rescue them before they reach people. Brian leads the raft around the lake to the river and begins the journey.

In chapter seventeen, Brian struggles to steer the raft, but after a time he gets it under control. They are not moving as fast as Brian had hoped they would, but he feels hope in the fact that they are moving at all.

In chapter eighteen, Brian is exhausted and finds it nearly impossible to fight sleep. Brian eventually falls asleep for a short time and when he wakes, he finds they are in a lake that was not marked on the map. Brian works to move the raft back into the current of the river, but again has to struggle with exhaustion. It is during this frustrating time that Brian has the thought that it would be easier if he dumped Derek off the raft, but he comes fully conscious and swears to get Derek help. Finally, they make it out of the lake and back into the river.

Chapters 16-18 Analysis

Brian and Derek begin their adventure on the river, but it begins roughly and promises not to get much better. Brian, who spent most of the night before watching over Derek, is exhausted and struggling to stay awake. This is where endurance comes in, but Brian is so exhausted that he cannot fight off the natural rhythms of his body. Brian falls asleep and wakes to find himself in a place that is not on the map. Frustration and exhaustion make him consider throwing Derek overboard, but this thought quickly disappears. Brian is only human, this thought tells the reader, but he is compassionate enough to ignore his basic instincts.



Chapters 19-22

Chapters 19-22 Summary

In chapter nineteen, Brian worries because the lake he just paddled out of was not on the map, that the map might be wrong and there might not be a trading post anywhere nearby. Brian picks a location further down the map to test the maps accuracy. Brian continues the journey, attempting to keep Derek cool as they move by placing a willow awning over him.

In chapter twenty, Brian and Derek reach the hilly place further down the map sooner than Brian expected. However, the fact that it is there reassures Brian that the map is accurate. They pick up speed and a moment later Brian forgets all his other worries as he hears what he thinks is a waterfall ahead.

In chapter twenty-one, Brian wants to take the raft to the shore, but he is afraid if he tries to steer it now, it will only turn it sideways and force it to face the waterfall sideways, a sure way to turn the raft upside down. However, as the sound of rushing water comes closer, Brian realizes it is a white water rapid. The raft goes through the first part fine, but then hits a rock under the surface and throws Brian from the raft. Brian is pushed under and banged around in the current until he is knocked unconscious.

In chapter twenty-two, Brian comes to in the shallows, but cannot see the raft. Afraid the raft turned over and drowned Derek, Brian begins to run after it. However, the river bottom quickly turns to mud and Brian is forced to swim.

Chapters 19-22 Analysis

The trip has been difficult up to this point, but suddenly becomes deadly as Brian and the raft come across some white water rapids. Brian does not know what to do, so he just hangs on and goes for the ride. This causes Brian to be knocked off the raft, allowing Derek to float downstream alone. The chances that Derek could survive are very slim, especially if the raft were to roll over with him still strapped to it.

Brian wakes and worries immediately about Derek, again showing the reader how compassionate and serious about responsibility he truly is. Brian does all he can to find Derek and the raft, but the reader has to wonder what Brian will find when he finds the raft.



Chapters 23-24 and Epilogue

Chapters 23-24 and Epilogue Summary

In chapter twenty-three, Brian swims for what seems like hours, going around curve after curve and never seeing the raft. Finally, Brian finds the raft stuck against some low hanging willows. Once again, Brian is afraid to check on Derek, afraid he is dead. However, Derek is still alive and breathing.

In chapter twenty-four, overwhelmed from exhaustion, Brian awakes on the raft, a new paddle in his hands. Brian does not remember making the paddle, but is grateful to be moving. Brian hears a dog barking on shore and suddenly spots the roof of a house. Brian paddles close to shore and finds himself rescued by a little boy and two adults.

Epilogue. Brian and Derek are rescued. Derek's coma proves to be minor and he is fully recovered in a few months. Brian suffers infections in his palms, but he too recovers. One day, months later, Brian receives the gift of a canoe from Derek with a note that tells him it will be easier to paddle next time.

Chapters 23-24 and Epilogue Analysis

Brian finally finds Derek alive, but Brian is so exhausted from the ordeal that he does not even remember beginning to move the raft again. Brian is beyond thought, beyond action, and surely would have died if the trading post had not been where the map said it was. However, the trading post is exactly where it should be and everyone is saved. The reader suspects there is also a friendship here that will last for many years.



Characters

Brian Robeson

Brian Robeson is the main character of the novel. Brian previously appeared in a novel titled *Hatchet*, in which he was flying to Canada to see his father when the pilot died of a heart attack. Brian crashed the plane into a lake and survived for fifty-four days in the woods. Now three employees of a government-run survivalist program want Brian to do it again so that they can learn better techniques to teach their students. At first Brian is put off by the idea, but then he decides to go.

Brian insists that his return to the wilderness be like his previous experience, with no tents, guns, or other survival gear. Despite the lack of gear, Brian and his partner, Derek Holtzer, settle right down in the woods as though they are on an enjoyable camping trip. Brian feels ill at ease because he feels as though this is not an authentic experience. However, it will become an authentic experience when Derek is hit by lightning and goes into a coma. Brian must make a decision whether or not to wait for help or go for help. Brian decides action is the best course.

Brian builds a raft and takes Derek to a trading post down the river, more than a hundred miles. This trip is difficult and Brian nearly drowns in his attempt. However, both he and Derek are quickly rescued and returned to civilization once more.

Katie Robeson

Katie Robeson is Derek's mother. Katie is unhappy with her son's desire to go back into the wilderness. The first time Brian was forced to survive in the wilderness, Katie and her ex-husband were convinced that Brian was dead. To send him back is like making all that fear and grief amount to nothing. However, Brian is strong-willed, and he convinces his mother that it is alright to allow him to go back into the wilderness. In fact, Derek agrees to allow them to name the operation after Katie.

Derek Holtzer

Derek Holtzer is a psychologist who works for a government school that teaches survival. Derek has never had to survive in the wilderness and failed his one attempt to take the course at his own school. However, Derek is the one selected to go with Brian when he returns to the wilderness because it is the psychological aspects of the experience that the school is most interested in.

Derek brings along a lot of survival gear on their return to the wilderness, but Brian forces him to leave all but an emergency radio and his briefcase behind. Derek is ill prepared for the experience, but he follows Brian's every action. Soon they find themselves almost on a pleasant camping trip. However, when a freak thunderstorm



comes, Derek is struck by lightning and left in a coma. Brian must save Derek's life. When it is all over, both Brian and Derek recover quickly.

Bush Plane Pilot

When Brian boards the plane that will take him back to the wilderness, he is instantly reminded of his last plane ride when the pilot had a heart attack and died midair. However, Brian finds himself put at ease by the youth of this new pilot and his penchant for rock music. Brian figures this pilot is much too young to have a heart attack. Brian is also fascinated by this pilot's expertise and he learns a great deal just watching him land the plane.

Trading Post Owners

Brian sees on a map that there is a trading post nearly a hundred miles from the lake where he and Derek are set up. Brian knows that if there is a trading post there must be people. Brian decides to go to the trading post over the river. When he arrives, Brian is so exhausted he can no longer fight. The trading post owners save Brian and Derek's lives.

Bill Mannerly

Bill Mannerly is one of the instructors from the survival school. Bill Mannerly comes with Derek the first time they approach Brian at his house. Bill Mannerly pushes the idea that they want to learn from Brian, not the other way around. It is this idea that spurs Brian to consider going back into the wilderness.

Erik Ballard

Erik Ballard is one of the teachers at the survival school. Erik does not speak upon meeting Brian when he first meets him at his house. However, Erik is one of the men who wants Brian to return to the wilderness to teach them how to teach survival skills.

Brian's Dad

Brian's dad continues to live apart from his son and ex-wife and has fallen in love with another woman in the year since Brian's experiences in the wild. Brian has to convince his father to allow him to return to the wilderness, but he has success and is allowed to go. Brian's dad later says that Brian should never return again, but eventually relents because he now understands that no one is as well prepared for the wilderness as Brian.



Deborah McKenzie

Deborah McKenzie is a girl Brian has begun to date since his return to the real world. At first it was difficult for Brian to date because of the media interest in him. Brian and Deborah would have to sneak around to avoid the reporters. However, as things settled down, Brian was better able to settle into a relationship with Deborah. In fact, Brian now shares everything with Deborah.

The Counselor

After his return to the real world, Brian was sent to a counselor out of fear that he had been mentally changed by the experience. However, Brian was never able to express to the counselor how beneficial he felt the experience was and how amazing it was to discover fire like his ancestors before him had done.



Objects/Places

Rescuers' Note

Brian leaves a note for would-be rescuers at the shelter where he and Derek were living.

Notebooks

Derek makes notes in his notebooks about Brian's skills in surviving in the wilderness.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes attack Brian and Derek mercilessly their first night at Necktie Lake and again while they are traveling down river on the raft.

Pocket Knives

Brian and Derek each have a pocket knife that they use to survive in the wilderness.

Briefcase

Derek keeps a waterproof briefcase with him on the wilderness trek in order to keep notes on Brian's actions.

Emergency Radio

Derek insists on keeping with them an emergency radio that is designed for use outdoors. However, the radio is struck by lightning and no longer works, leaving Brian alone with an injured Derek.

Hazelnuts

Brian and Derek find some hazelnuts their second day on Necktie Lake.

Berries

Brian and Derek eat berries as their sole source of nutrition the first day at Necktie Lake.



The Raft

Brian builds a raft out of poplar trees that some beavers have chopped down. Brian uses this raft to get Derek help after he falls into a coma following a lightning strike.

Brannock Trading Post

Brian takes Derek to Brannock Trading Post, a hundred miles downriver, to get him help after he falls into a coma.

Necktie Lake

Derek choose Necktie Lake, a lake a hundred miles from the L-shaped lake where Brian's plane crashed, for their return to the wilderness.

Necktie River

Brian navigates a raft down Necktie River to get help for Derek who has fallen into a coma.



Themes

True Survival versus Role Playing

Brian is asked to return to the wilderness and reenact his survival after the plane crash that left him alone in the woods for fifty-four days. Brian agrees, but he soon gets the impression that Derek, the psychologist traveling with him, does not get the true spirit of the experiment. Brian insists that Derek leave behind all the equipment he brought, leaving them with only an emergency radio, a briefcase, and the items in their pockets. At first this seems to make the experiment more real to Brian, but soon it seems too comfortable.

Brian tells Derek the only way to really teach survival is to put a person in a real life or death situation. However, Derek insists this is impossible, but finds Brian's opinion fascinating. Brian will live to regret what he has said because that very night Derek will be struck by lightning, leaving Brian in a position to decide what to do in order to save Derek's life.

Brian feels that what he is doing with Derek is role playing. However, it quickly becomes a real fight for survival. As Brian takes Derek up the river to find help for his medical condition, Brian finds himself back in the same mental situation he was in when his plane crashed. For this reason, true survival is a major theme of the novel.

Responsibility

Brian has never been responsible for anyone but himself. When the pilot died, it happened so quickly there was nothing Brian could do about it. When he was alone in the wilderness, Brian had only himself to think about. Back home, Brian is a child and he has a mother to take responsibility for him. Brian has never had to think about another individual other than himself.

When Brian agrees to return to the wilderness with Derek, he takes on the role of teacher over an adult. Brian finds this exciting, but it is not really a responsible role. Brian does not have to make decisions for Derek that he would not be making for himself. It is not until Derek is injured that this begins to change.

Derek is hit by lightning and falls into a coma. Suddenly, Brian finds himself having to make decisions that affect both himself and Derek. Brian must figure out how best to care for Derek. Brian finds himself doing some of the most fundamental things for Derek, and this is a situation that frightens Brian. Brian is responsible for another human being and any decision he makes could be the wrong one. It is this that makes responsibility a theme of the novel.



Mind Over Matter

Brian is exhausted when he begins his trip downriver with Derek. Brian was up the whole night before watching over Derek and he is hit with such a wave of exhaustion when he paddles the raft in the darkness that he cannot keep his eyes open. Soon Brian is having odd dreams that tell him to just let go, to let the raft go where it wants to go. Brian even has the thought that he could reach safety faster if he dumps Derek overboard.

Brian's exhaustion is making him have thoughts that he would not otherwise have. This exhaustion also makes it impossible for Brian to concentrate on the pressing issues. In the end, Brian is so exhausted he does not even remember making a new paddle and moving himself and Derek closer to their destination. However, Brian manages to reach his goal, proving that he is able to force his mind to concentrate on what really matters, making mind over matter a theme of the novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The main character, Brian Robeson, is the main focus of the narration. However, due to some comments made throughout the book, the reader becomes aware that there is also something of an authorial voice, suggesting that the point of view is not just third person omniscient, but more of a third person with the authorial voice.

The point of view of this novel is similar to the previous novel starring the main character, Brian Robeson. The point of view allows the reader to hear Brian's thoughts and emotions, but it also offers hints as to what might happen as the novel continues to progress. At key points in the novel, the author offers his own insights that add tension to the novel and assure the reader that something big is about to happen. This point of view is a useful tool in the right hands and it is clearly in the right hands here.

Setting

The novel begins in Brian Robeson's house, a nice middle-class home in New York State. This is a safe place filled with modern conveniences. The novel then moves to the wilderness of northern Canada, where Brian has gone to reenact his experiences of being lost in this area. There is a lake and a river as well as a forest where Brian is able to get all he needs to survive.

The setting of this novel is very similar to the setting of the previous novel. Brian is at home at first, then moves into the wilderness, showing the contrast between the two worlds in which Brian has lived. The wilderness is frightening, but to Brian, it is almost like home until Derek falls into a coma. Brian moves onto the river to find help, and this is a new setting that adds tension and fear to the novel. The setting is almost like a character in the story, a nemesis brought about to make Brian's life more dangerous. For this reason, the setting of the novel works well with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written for a young audience; therefore, the language tends to be simple. However, the language does not speak down to the readers, but seems to speak their language without the slang and other words specific to young readers. For this reason, there are no foreign words, no phrases that the reader will not easily understand, nothing that could cause a reader to have trouble comprehending the overall plot of the novel.

The language fits the audience and the main character perfectly. Although there are older characters in this novel, the language continues to reflect the thoughts and



knowledge of Brian Robeson; therefore, it is a polite language that is fairly simple, reflecting his education level. The author does a good job of speaking on the level of his readers and keeping authentic to his characters. The language of this novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-four chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is fairly short. The novel is told with both dialogue and exposition, up to the point where Derek is injured. At this point, the majority of the novel is internal dialogue as Brian works out his course of action and acts it out.

The novel has only one plot. This plot follows Brian as he attempts to reenact the fifty-four days he spent in the wilderness after a plane crash. Brian finds his return trip to the wilderness lacking in excitement until his partner is struck by lightning and falls into a coma. Brian decides he must go for help. He builds a raft that he then navigates down an unfamiliar river. The trip is difficult, but in the end Brian achieves his goal.



Quotes

"Well, to make it short, we want you to do it again."
Chap. 1, p. 3

"A year had passed, and in the world around him not much had changed."
Chap. 2, p. 7

"To want to go back was insane."
Chap. 3, p. 13

"He remembered the rough parts."
Chap. 4, p. 19

"That first night Brian decided he was insane to have come back, insane to have agreed to do it, and insane for sending the plane away with all that wonderful equipment."
Chap. 6, p. 31

"That's what nature is, really—getting food."
Chap. 7, p. 41

"Nothing was the same, really."
Chap. 9, p. 51

"He wasn't that other thing. Not that other word."
Chap. 11, p. 60

"Derek was in a coma."
Chap. 12, p. 69

"If he made the run, took Derek down the river, at least there was a chance."
Chap. 14, p. 80

"All that mattered now was to keep moving."
Chap. 17, p. 101

"He became something other than himself that afternoon."
Chap. 23, p. 123



Topics for Discussion

What is Hatchet? How is this book related to Hatchet? What would you tell a reader who has not read Hatchet first? Is it difficult to follow the events in *The River* without first reading Hatchet? Would you recommend reading a set of books out of sequence? Do you think this book stands well on its own, or do you feel it relies on Hatchet too much?

Who is Brian Robeson? Why have the survivalist teachers come to Brian? What could Brian possibly teach these men? Why does Brian's mother not want him to go? Does she have a good argument? Why does Brian insist on going? Does he have a good argument? Who wins out in the end? For what reason?

How did crashing a plane and surviving in the wilderness affect Brian's life? In what ways does he feel he is different? In what ways is he the same? How does Brian feel about his experience? Why can Brian not convince the counselor that his experience was beneficial? Why would the counselor think the experience was bad for Brian? Was it? Explain.

Why does Derek decide to go to a different lake rather than return to the lake where Brian had his experience? How do you think Brian would have felt about returning to the site of his own experience? Why does Derek bring a bunch of survival gear? How many people would crash a plane with that type of survival gear? Why does Brian refuse to allow him to keep it? Why does Brian later wonder if this was a mistake? Was it a mistake? Would the gear have made a difference later?

What items do Derek and Brian have when the plane leaves? How will each of these items help them in their attempts to survive? Where do Brian and Derek spend their first night? What attacks them? For what reason? What do they do to stave off these attacks? Why does Brian come to think that they are not doing enough to learn to survive in a dangerous situation?

What causes Derek to become injured? What is Brian's biggest fear for Derek? Why does Brian have to clean Derek up after his injury? What caused this to happen? Why is Brian afraid to care for Derek? Why does Brian decide that he must move Derek downriver to get help? Where will they find help? What would happen if they had stayed at their camp? Did Brian make the right decision?

What causes Brian to hallucinate on the river trip? Why does Brian think he should kick Derek off the raft? What would happen to Derek if Brian had done this? Why does the river narrow when they come between two mountains? What dangerous situation do they run into? What happens to Brian? Why does Brian fear that Derek has drowned? Did he? How does Brian finally find help?