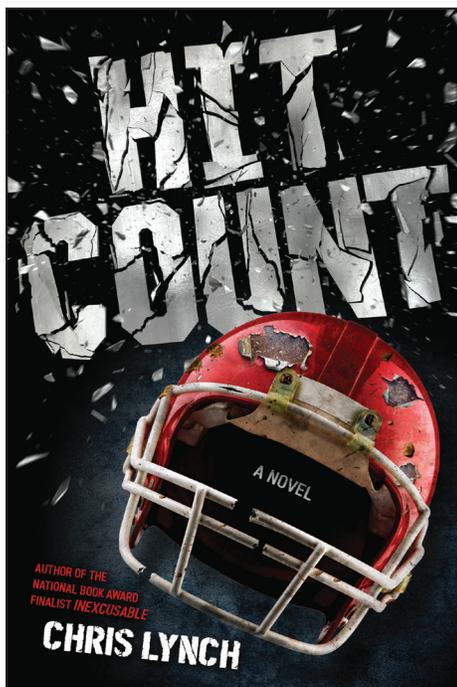


HIT COUNT

by Chris Lynch



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YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Ages 14 and up, Grades 9 and up
336 pages, 5½" x 8¼"

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BOOK TALK

Arlo Brodie loves being on the football field, getting hit hard and hitting back harder. That's where he belongs, leading his team to championships, becoming "Starlo" on his way to the top. Arlo's dad cheers him on, but his mother quotes head injury statistics and refuses to watch. Arlo's girlfriend tries to make him see the danger; when that doesn't work, she calls time-out on their relationship. Even Arlo's coaches begin to track his hit count, almost ready to pull him off the field. But Arlo's not worried about collisions. The cheering crowds and the adrenaline rush convince Arlo that everything is OK—in spite of the pain, pounding, dizziness, and confusion.

In *Hit Count*, Chris Lynch explores the American love affair with contact sports and our attempts to come to terms with clear evidence of their real danger for young athletes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Lynch is the author of many acclaimed young adult novels, including *Little Blue Lies*, *Pieces*, *Angry Young Man*, the National Book Award Finalist *Inexcusable*, and the Printz Honor Book *Freewill*. Chris is on the faculty of the creative writing MFA program at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When he's not teaching or visiting with family in Boston, he lives in Scotland.



Jules Chester

Praise for HIT COUNT

"Lynch offers a powerful, provocative look at the dark side of popular sports and their potential cost, using Arlo as a cautionary, even tragic tale. Arlo's rise and fall is handled skillfully, allowing readers into the self-destructive, self-deceiving mindset of an addict without condemning him."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"The strength of this hard-hitting novel is how well award-winning author Chris Lynch portrays the drive and hunger of young football players . . . This intense timely story provides incredible insight as to why knowledge of football's potential danger is not enough to keep young players from taking the field."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"An important work that raises troubling questions about the culture of violence in American high school sports."

—*School Library Journal*

"This unflinching examination of the price of athletic power, with plenty of bone-crunching play-by-play action, is both thought-provoking and formidable."

—*The Horn Book Magazine*

HIT COUNT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On page 16 while looking through *The File*, Arlo says, "You had to be a certain type of athlete to wind up in that state, a certain type of person." How do Arlo's assumptions about "types of athletes" and "playing smart" affect his growth as a player? Do you think they affect how he sees himself by the end of *Hit Count*?
2. At several points in the story, Arlo is reminded by his teammates and coach that "football is a team sport." Why do you think Arlo has such a hard time with that fact?
3. On page 44, in reference to Sandy's joking comparison of Arlo's boyfriend skills to Dinos's, Arlo thinks to himself, "Everything is a competition. How else do you know how you're doing?" How does Arlo internalize this belief and apply it to the rest of his life as the book continues? What are some examples of Arlo turning innocent situations into competitions? What kind of response does he get from the other people in his life?
4. Arlo watches his brother, Lloyd, go through several stages of addiction and recovery throughout the book. What is the connection between how Lloyd feels about drugs and alcohol and how Arlo feels about exercise? Once Arlo begins exercising to the point of injury and illness, why is his excessive behavior not criticized as Lloyd's is?
5. When Arlo's headaches and vertigo begin, the author uses visceral physical imagery to describe the episodes. (For example, on page 273: "My head felt like someone was actually turning a big screw, driving it into the bone and brain with a turn, then a turn, then a turn.") How does this writing style affect your reading of the story?
6. As Arlo begins to lose respect for Lloyd, he finds a new mentor in Dinos—but before long, his achievements have outpaced Dinos's as well. How does this affect Arlo's relationship with Dinos? How does Dinos respond to this change?
7. On page 17, Arlo sees Sandy protesting the cheerleading tryouts. Is there a connection between Sandy's rejection of "typical" high school gender roles for girls and the image of masculinity that Arlo buys into on the football team? Do you think that it's easier for Sandy to break away from the cheerleader image than it is for Arlo to navigate the jock image?
8. Arlo's mother is outspoken about her dislike of football, while Arlo's father seems at first glance to play a smaller role in the family discussion. Are there instances in the book, however, where Arlo's dad influences Arlo's feelings? What kind of impact does his form of quiet encouragement have, versus Arlo's mother's outright objections? Why might one have been more effective than the other?
9. When Lloyd is forced to abandon his football plans, he decides to join the army. What do you think might connect the world of high school sports with the military? How does this new plan affect Lloyd's family's perception of him? Did you expect Lloyd to be accepted into the army?
10. When Arlo visits Sandy on Nantucket, he panics while out on her friend Gordon's boat and decides to go home. As he's leaving, on page 201, he says, "I was thinking I never wanted to feel that powerless again. We needed to be home, to be us." What is the connection between Arlo's sense of power and his sense of home? Why does he associate strength with routine, and how does this negatively affect him?
11. On page 341, as Arlo steps into his first real boxing lesson, he says, "I'm not afraid to get hit. I was never afraid to get hit." What is Arlo afraid of, if not the hits themselves? Does fear have a presence in this book? Discuss Arlo's nervous avoidance of Sandy and his mother when he thinks they are going to ask him to give up football.
12. Sandy quickly realizes that she cannot bear to watch Arlo's violent games, preferring to keep their relationship separate from his football career. But on page 244, Arlo acts out of character and grabs Sandy harshly by the arm. Is the author suggesting that the aggression required of top football players on the field can carry over to other aspects of their lives? Does Arlo ever truly "turn off" his game day persona, even around Sandy?
13. What do you think Arlo will do after the end of the book? Will Lloyd's example help him avoid a difficult transition into a football-less life, or will he follow in Lloyd's footsteps?

Reader's Guide by Elizabeth Lynch