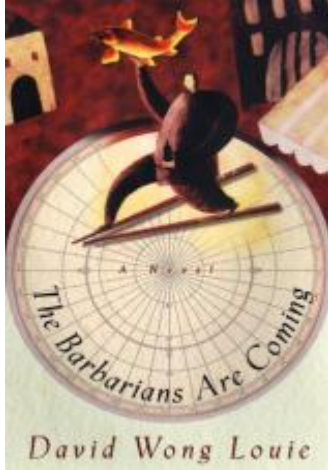


# The Barbarians are Coming

by David Wong Louie



## About the Book

In a tale that alternates between black comedy and out-and-out slapstick, between the pain of a son alienated from his father and a father an alien in his son's native land, **The Barbarians Are Coming** reveals the deep psychic wounds each man has suffered even as it ultimately leads to a reconciliation that is as moving as it is necessary. Here is a tale of the immigrant experience—indeed, of the American experience: of the deracination of the second generation and the wrenching losses of the first.

## Discussion Guide

1. The names of characters have a special significance in **The Barbarians Are Coming** especially in relation to nationality. Genius and Zsa Zsa are given their American names by Lucy with a sense of ridicule and these names become permanent. Are Genius and Zsa Zsa aware of the mockery implied by these names? If so, why do they choose to accept them as opposed to selecting their own?
2. Food, eating and cooking are intimately tied to the personalities of the members of the Lung family. What do you learn about Sterling, Genius and Zsa Zsa from their relationships with food?
3. What qualities does Yuk possess that endear her to Genius and Zsa Zsa and spur their desire to have Sterling marry her? Are these qualities absent in Sterling and, if so, is their absence a result of a conscious effort by Sterling to abandon them? Is there a sense of resentment on Sterling's part caused by the relationship that Yuk has with Sterling's parents?
4. Sterling's communication with other characters is often marred by difficulties. He and Bliss interact better in writing than in person, there is constant conflict with his parents regarding speaking English, he and Yuk experience confusion concerning the phrase "move the bed". What elements of Sterling's character contribute to these difficulties?

5. In addition to being the patriarch of his own family, Morton Sass takes on the role of father figure to Sterling after his marriage to Bliss. However Morton also serves as Sterling's boss for "The Peeking Duck." How does each relationship influence the other? Does either of these relationships emerge as the dominant one?

6. Sterling feels a stronger connection to Ira than he does to Moses even though there is a lack of physical resemblance between the father and his younger son. What factors bind Sterling and Ira together? Is the fact that Ira appears "American" a component of Sterling's affection toward him?

7. Both Sterling and Genius exhibit tendencies toward unfaithfulness in terms of their significant relationships with women. Is this a sign of their overall attitude toward the gender or an indication of a lack of stability in their lives? To what extent do you imagine the lives of these two men would have been different if they had been married to other women (Genius to Lucy, Sterling to Yuk)?

8. In Part III of the novel the author changes the concentration of the narrative, focusing on Genius' past as opposed to the present. What effect is achieved by doing so? Does the reader gain a greater sympathy for the character from knowing his personal

## Author Bio

**David Wong Louie** was born and raised in New York. He received a Bachelor's Degree in English from Vassar College and an MFA from the university of Iowa. His first book, the story collection *Pangs of Love*, won **The Los Angeles Times Book Review** First Fiction Award, the **Ploughshares** First Fiction Book Award, was a **New York Times Book Review** Notable of 1991 and a Voice Literary Supplement Favorite of 1991. Louie currently teaches in the Department of English and the Asian-American Studies Center at UCLA. He lives in Venice, California with his wife and son.

## Critical Praise

" An ambitious and appealing first novel, brilliant in its scathing insights? Louie's coruscating novel is full of astonishing writing, but the real delight is his wit and humor as he keeps plucking away the prickly petals of his characters' desires until he finds their hearts. "--**Publishers Weekly**" Louie is elegant, funny, a touch spooky, and he has as fine a hair-trigger control of alienation and absurdity as any of the best of his generation "--**Richard "Louie's work transcends the restrictions of ethnic labels and markets: He's not just a talented young Asian-American writer; he's a talented young write, period.** "--**Charles Review**

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