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Life: A User's Manual written by Georges Perec is a story about an apartment building, and its various inhabitants and their stories. Perec, by moving from room to room, and character to character, allows the reader to glimpse into the lives of these people. Much of the story takes place in the past (or the history of these people), and the apartment building is a simply to tool to enter into that past. Throughout the stories, connections are made amongst the various characters.

The structure of this narrative is nonlinear, as each chapter unfolds with a different room or character in the apartment. The first chapter of the books begins as an introduction to the apartment at 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier and its inhabitants. But almost immediately, the story abandons a linear structure. Amongst the various chapters, there is no structure to the order of chapters. Neither the characters nor the rooms are narrated in any set order. Perec jumps from talking about fourth floor right to fifth floor right to seventh floor. In addition, Perec sometimes begins chapters with descriptions of rooms, and other times begin chapters with descriptions of characters.

The story engages the reader by offering strange, sometimes shocking stories about various characters. For instance, Perec describes the trapeze artist who becomes so engaged with staying on the trapeze that one day he refuses to come down. When the police tries to save him by climbing onto a fire ladder, the trapeze artist lets go, and falls to his death. Many of these stories seem tangential, only relevant because they relate to one of the dwellers in the apartment or to a painting hanging in one of the rooms, but they

add an additional dimension to the narrative.

Perec also employs various textual mechanisms to engage the reader. When discussing a character who had written books, Perec would list a bibliography of those books at the end of the chapter. This adds an odd legitimacy to Perec's story as if these books have really been published, and the reader can't help but pay attention to this detail. In addition, Perec inserts portions of catalogues or recipes into the narratives. They interrupt the flow of narration, it engages the reader. Instead of just reading about a catalog, the reader actually gets to see it. At the same time, the reader begins to realize that Perec spent a great deal of effort in trying to construct every single detail of his stories.

I got drawn into the narrative by the characters that Perec was describing. I enjoyed the tangents that Perec stories took. Oftentimes in talking about a particular character, Perec gave stories about generations of that person's family, and how things eventually evolved to their current state. Most of these stories aren't told in whole, which can be somewhat frustrating, but keeps the reader engaged.

Although there is no linear structure to the way the novel is constructed and no central character, I believe that the story is held together by a theme. Bartlebooth, one of the characters in the novel, with his paintings and puzzle pieces brings the story together. In the *Preamble* of the novel, Perec makes a special point talking about jigsaw puzzles. It is as if by reading the story, the reader is putting pieces of jigsaw puzzles together. There is no direction or order in which the pieces fit, but the reader is able to do it at the end of

the novel. The story would probably make just as much sense if the reader read the chapters in a different order. The reader can probably pick one character and read only the chapters about that character, and then pick another character and do the same thing.