

# **Taltos: Lives of the Mayfair Witches Study Guide**

**Taltos: Lives of the Mayfair Witches by Anne Rice**

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## Plot Summary

Ash is a tall man, more than seven feet, and is soon identified as a Taltos which is a near-extinct, immortal, superhuman race. Ash is a wealthy owner of a doll manufacturing company and feels very lonely, believing himself to be among the last of his kind and believing that there are no females remaining that are of mating age.

A young woman who is almost comatose, Rowan, is at the Mayfair family home where she is being cared for by her husband Michael and a thirteen-year-old cousin, Mona Mayfair. Mona soon reveals that she and Michael have had an affair. When Rowan is snapped out of her state, she isn't angry at the affair because she believes it might provide a child for Michael. Rowan has given birth to two Taltos children and both died at Rowan's hands. When Rowan and Michael learn of the murder of a friend, they leave the country in search of clues. There they meet Ash who recognizes them immediately as witches and they recognize him as a Taltos. Together they join forces to discover the plot behind the murder and discover a Taltos woman who has been held with the hope of finding a mate for breeding purposes. But Ash immediately realizes that the woman is past child-bearing age. The three avenge the murder and set matters right in an ancient cult. They then go to New York.

There, Ash reveals the history of the Taltos to Rowan and Michael and the three seem to make a friendship connection. Though Ash and Rowan are attracted to each other, they deny the attraction because Rowan is committed to Michael. Rowan and Michael depart Ash's New York home for their own in New Orleans where they discover that Mona has already given birth. The child, Morrigan, is a Taltos and Mona immediately confronts Michael and Rowan, insisting on the child's safety. Mona says that she'll leave the family home rather than allow them to kill Morrigan as Rowan did two children of her own who were Taltos. Rowan killed her son, Lasher, because he was evil. She killed her daughter because she realized that having male and female Taltos puts the human race in jeopardy because a female Taltos gives birth to a child who grows to mature size in a matter of minutes. When Rowan and Michael first arrive home, Michael's clothes have Ash's scent and the girl goes crazy, pleading with them to take her to the male Taltos. They refuse. Ash becomes concerned when time passes and he doesn't hear from Rowan and Michael, who he had come to consider his friends. As soon as he comes near the house he catches the scent of a female and is angry that Rowan and Michael know that he's horribly lonely but kept the existence of this female from him. Morrigan also catches his scent and breaks through a window to get to him. They leave together with plans to mate near the ancient home of the Taltos.



# Chapters 1 through 4

## Chapters 1 through 4 Summary

As the story opens, Ashland - called Mr. Ash by those who serve him - is in his home in New York. He's very wealthy and makes a deal with a young woman for her services designing dolls. Ash notes that some people are repelled by him because of his height and that some people realize that he isn't human. He works from his apartment overlooking Central Park and has dreams of projects he might undertake. Ash is told that he has a telephone call from a man named Samuel. He returns the call and is told that there's been an incident involving a gypsy named Yuri. Ash arranges for money to be sent to Samuel for a hotel and makes plans to leave immediately for London.

In Chapter Two, Rowan is at her home in New Orleans. Almost comatose, she is being cared for by her husband Michael Curry and her thirteen-year-old cousin, Mona. Mona talks almost incessantly to Rowan and confides that she and Michael have had an affair. She goes on to say that she realizes that Michael's love belongs to Rowan. There's a project within the family to examine the genes of the family members. The family is very wealthy and Mona is named to inherit the estate. Another cousin, nineteen-year-old Mary Jane, stops in to visit and says that she's certain Rowan can hear them and will return to full consciousness someday. Mary Jane doesn't live in the family estate but lives in a house in the swamp that has been flooded, leaving only the upper floors dry and making it impossible to reach the house except by boat. After Mary Jane leaves, Mona realizes that she's very taken by Mary Jane's charms and determines to do whatever she can to help Mary Jane realize her dreams.

Mona and Rowan are together when another family member, a woman named Bea, arrives with the news that Aaron has been killed. Rowan, who is a doctor, abruptly snaps back to reality and asks Mona to accompany her to the morgue to examine Aaron's body.

In Chapter Three, Samuel arrives at the hotel room in London that Ash had arranged for him. He has the gypsy named Yuri with him. Yuri is a member of the Talmasca, a sect that holds a great deal of information including the history of the Taltos. Ash arrives and begins questioning Yuri. Yuri reveals that he'd seen another Taltos, Lasher, and Ash asks if that Taltos had a mate but Yuri says his mate was Rowan, a member of the Mayfair witches clan. He also reveals that Rowan and Michael were Lasher's parents. Yuri calls New Orleans and talks to a member of the Mayfair clan. He learns of Aaron's death and sends word to Mona, Michael and Rowan that he's in England and that he's fine. Yuri immediately comes to the conclusion that a member of the Talmasca killed Aaron and that they'll be trying to kill him now. Yuri reveals that members of the Talmasca have become obsessed with finding a Taltos though Ash says that wasn't the case in years past. Ash says that he, Yuri and Samuel should join forces to discover the truth behind Aaron's death. Samuel says that he killed the man sent to kill Yuri at Donnelaith. Ash says that humans want to get their hands on Taltos with the hope that



they can breed a super-race. Yuri says Rowan is now barren but that there are others of the Mayfair clan who could bear a Taltos child. Ash says that puts them in danger.

In Chapter Four, Mona and Rowan go to the morgue where Rowan examines Aaron's body. Back at home, Rowan briefly remembers the nightmares she suffered at Lasher's hands and her attempts to get away. She notes that the people who love her can't possibly understand the ordeal. Mona knows that Michael will be angry with her but begins making plans to go after the men who killed Aaron.

## Chapters 1 through 4 Analysis

It will eventually be revealed that Ash is a Taltos - an ancient breed of large beings that are immortal and outwardly resemble humans. As a Taltos, he is tall - more than seven feet. He is very old as one of the first of his kind. He is also the last of his kind, as far as he knows. A Taltos child is born of a Taltos mother and father or of two witches with specific genes. The beings are more fully described later in the book.

Ash notes that he has devoted servants in his employ, including a man named Remmick, but that Remmick will soon have to be sent away. The reader later learns that Ash doesn't perceptively age and that his reason for sending Remmick away is that Remmick will eventually realize that.

In Chapter Two, a series of characters are introduced. The majority of them had been introduced in the previous books of the trilogy and the reader who is not familiar with those books may have trouble keeping track of the characters. Basically, Rowan and Michael are married and Rowan is comatose because of a trauma. She had given birth to two Taltos children, a male named Lasher who had held Rowan hostage and tortured her and a female whom Rowan killed in order to keep the species from repopulating the earth. Mona is heir to the family estate and is taken with Mary Jane, whom she knew only vaguely prior to this book. Mary Jane will become a major character and will be with Mona when she gives birth to a Taltos child. Mona and Michael have had an affair. Though they don't really seem to regret it, the deed is past and they are not romantically involved. There are two additional characters introduced - Yuri and Aaron. Yuri had made a profession of love to Mona at one point but both will come to realize that the romance is doomed to failure. Both Yuri and Aaron are members of a sect known as Talmasca, an ancient secret society that holds - among other things - written documentation of the existence of the Taltos. Aaron has been killed on order of the Talmasca. It's the news of his death that shocks Rowan out of her comatose state.

In the previous books, Rowan gave birth to a Taltos named Lasher who was a reincarnation of an evil spirit. Rowan based her fear of the Taltos on that encounter. There are references to the graves that hold the body of the two Taltos and some other minor details, but the reader who hasn't read the previous book will not have a complete understanding of the situation.



The project to examine the genes of family members is never fully explained but one of the effects of that study is that the combinations of witches that would parent a Taltos child will be revealed. The reader soon learns that Michael and Rowan and Michael and Mona each provide that combination.

Ash points out that any witch who can give birth to a Taltos would be very much in demand. Yuri has, by that point, already shown him a picture of Mona Mayfair before realizing that Ash, as a Taltos, might want her for his mate. Yuri doesn't voice that fear but Ash senses it and assures Yuri that he won't go after Mona.



# Chapters 5 through 11

## Chapters 5 through 11 Summary

In Chapter Five, Ash arrives in Edinburgh and makes the drive to Donnelaith. A short distance before the town he gets out of the car to walk, instructing his assistant and other employees to go on to the inn. In the woods, he hears the beating of drums and remains well clear of the sound. He knows the Little People are near but that they don't know he is near. He remembers another time and can imagine that he hears a woman's screams. He encounters the Little People - Samuel's people - and can smell the odor of human fat burning on their fires. He discovers that there are few women remaining in the tribe. He rushes to the inn and orders an immediate return to London. There he asks Samuel why he hadn't mentioned that the women were all gone. Samuel asks what Ash plans to do next and he says that he will try to discover what secret the Talmasca are keeping and will seek out Mona.

In Chapter Six, Rowan tells Michael that she wants to know what was found in the room where Lasher had kept her. Rowan says that she believes there would have been papers there, including genealogies written by Lasher "before his mind deteriorated." Mona knows that all those things are in boxes and recalls a horrible scent from the boxes. Rowan alerts Mona to the fact that she can read her mind though the power isn't consistent. The conversation turns to Mona's future and she says that she'll steer clear of anyone in the family with the extra genetic marker that would indicate their child would be a Taltos. Rowan reveals to Mona that she plans to leave for England in search of Aaron's killer. Mona wants to go but Rowan points out that Yuri's phone call makes it clear that she's in danger and should remain at home where she'll be safe. Rowan tells Michael her plans to leave and urges that he stay at home with Mona but he refuses.

In Chapter Seven, young men named Marklin and Tommy climb Wearall Hill near Glastonbury. There he encounters Stuart Gordon. Stuart is furious that Marklin had a hand in killing Aaron. Marklin says that Aaron "had to be silenced." Stuart urges that they not anger the Mayfairs but Tommy says that Aaron was married to Beatrice Mayfair and was very close to other members of the family. Stuart refers several times to Tessa who is a female Taltos. Marklin and Tommy have seen her but don't know where she is. They say that they also hired someone to kill Yuri and though they haven't seen his body, they believe him to be dead.

In Chapter Eight, Michael learns that Mona is pregnant. He and Rowan prepare to leave for England.

In Chapter Nine, Ash arrives at the Talmasca's Motherhouse. He slips into the house by a side door and makes his way upstairs where he finds a woman reading. He begins to question her though she is startled. He tells her that Aaron is dead and watches her reaction to gauge whether she might have been involved. Ash says that he believes it's a member of the Talmasca that killed Aaron. The woman takes him to the Superior



General who immediately recognizes Ash as a Taltos. Ash realizes that this man knows about Aaron's death. He kills the man and demands that the woman give him a phone number to reach "the elders." She refuses at first but complies. Ash simply walks out of the house. Ash tells Samuel that he has to help rid the Talmasca of corruption. Ash says that it's not wide-spread corruption because the other people he encountered in the house didn't recognize him as Taltos.

In Chapter Ten, Mona goes to the doctor and is told that she's about three months pregnant though Mona knows she can't possibly be that far along. She wants to ask Rowan what it might mean but decides to wait. Michael calls to say that they'd arrived safely and Mona doesn't mention it to him either.

In Chapter Eleven, Michael and Rowan meet with Yuri who tells them about his encounter with Ash, who he knows to be Taltos though Rowan and Michael are skeptical. He says that Samuel had told him that the Taltos are a doomed race unless a female is found in some remote part of the world or as the child of a witch. Yuri says that Ash is in the country because Samuel had given him details about the sighting of a Taltos - Lasher. Yuri says that the Little People are also facing extinction and that both races are in search of someone - like Mona - who could give their races new life. Rowan says their first step should be to try to reach Samuel and Ash.

## Chapters 5 through 11 Analysis

Rowan points out that there was some "intervention" in the conception that resulted in Lasher's birth and that seems to be why both Rowan and Mona think that the odds of Mona giving birth to a Taltos child are not high. Rowan says that she had no real indication that there was anything wrong with her pregnancy until the last minute. She and Mona discuss the possibility that there might be something wrong with Mona's baby but Mona says even with that chance, she can't possibly consider aborting the pregnancy. Mona talks about having Rowan as godmother to the child and of a lovely baptism service. It seems a pipe dream and that in normal circumstances Rowan would be angry and feel betrayed. However, she recognizes that she can't give Michael any children and that this might be his only opportunity to father a normal child. As a parting shot, Rowan calls Mona "Jezebel," obviously referring to the Biblical story of an adulterous union. She acknowledges that Mona has a baby on the way and is heir to the estate but says that "Michael is mine."

The details about Yuri's adventure prior to meeting Samuel are described in bits and pieces. Yuri was attacked in the woods and Samuel intervened, killing the man who attacked him though not before Yuri was injured. Marklin, Tommy and Stuart are seeking a male Taltos in an effort to breed Tessa.





# Chapters 12 through 19

## Chapters 12 through 19 Summary

In Chapter Twelve, Marklin, Tommy and Stuart arrive back at the Motherhouse to discover that the Superior General has been murdered. Stuart is chosen to fill that position and Marklin is ecstatic though he is careful to hide his feelings. However, Stuart turns the position down and another is chosen. Marklin and Tommy learn that Stuart has been contacted by Yuri and that the two men are planning to meet. Marklin leaves the house with the hope that he'll be able to meet up with Tommy.

In Chapter Thirteen, Ash is established in an apartment in Belgravia when Rowan calls. Ash immediately tells her that Yuri's life is in danger, knowing that she's with Yuri. They make plans to meet. Ash sees Rowan and Michael from a distance and recognizes them immediately as witches. Rowan recognizes Ash as Taltos. Yuri had called Stuart with the hope that whatever was wrong within the membership of the Talmasca did not reach Stuart. When Ash sees Stuart, he begins to question him and Stuart admits knowing about Aaron's death but denies that he ordered it. Ash summons his car and they all get in. He demands information from Stuart and says that he plans to kill Stuart. Stuart says that unless Ash releases him immediately, he'll never take them to Tessa. He gives directions to where she's being kept.

In Chapter Fourteen, the housekeeper, Eugenia, wakes Mona from a dream for a phone call. Mona tries to recapture the dream but can't, though she is suddenly certain that her baby will be a girl and that she must name her Morrigan. Mary Jane visits and notes that Mona is pregnant. She also discerns that Michael is the father. Mona and Mary Jane eat a meal together and Mona discovers that she's craving milk, bread and apples. Mona confides her fear for the baby but says she's convinced it's not going to be "some giant." Mary Jane says that it's normal to be concerned. Mona's curiosity about the Taltos is strong and she considers that she might dig up Rowan's children who are buried in the yard.

In Chapter Fifteen, Marklin and Tommy return to the Motherhouse. They are discussing the fact that they need to know where Stuart is holding Tessa but Marklin has a premonition and hesitates. He says that he doesn't want to go inside but Tommy convinces him. They casually question the first person they encounter inside and learn that Stuart hasn't been seen since he turned down the role as superior general of the Talmasca that morning.

In Chapter Sixteen, the group continues their drive to Stuart's property where he says Tessa is being held. They find themselves eventually on a gravel road and then the driver of the limousine stops in a clearing. The building they see is a dilapidated Norman tower. Ash senses where Tessa is being held and climbs the stairs to her room. As he mounts the steps, Stuart cries out that Ash is not to hurt Tessa. Gordon, though no longer being restrained by Ash, follows and rushes past Ash to Tessa's side. Ash talks to



her, first asking if she can understand him. Stuart immediately realizes that there's something wrong with the situation and Ash says that the woman is Taltos but is very old and unable to have children. Stuart is furious and accuses Ash of lying but seems to realize it's true. At Tessa's request, she and Ash dance to the music from a record player.

In Chapter Seventeen, Mona wakes with a sense of well-being and a craving for more milk. Another member of the family, Ryan, puts in an appearance while Mona and Mary Jane are sharing a meal. He says that the papers Rowan requested are in her bedroom but tells Mona that she must stay away from the boxes. Ryan seems to have something more to say and Mary Jane catches onto the information first, saying that Michael is a direct relation to the Mayfairs, not just by marriage to Rowan as had been assumed. Ryan confirms this and tells the girls that there are guards around the house, hired after Yuri indicated a threat was likely. After Ryan leaves, the two girls go up to the bedroom and immediately note an odor that they've all come to associate with Lasher. About this time, Morrigan begins communicating with Mona, talking to her and calling her "Mama."

In Chapter Eighteen, Marklin again tells Tommy that he has a bad feeling about their presence at the Motherhouse and believes they should leave. Tommy says that they aren't in danger, that leaving would create suspicion which would eliminate another opportunity to question anyone in the Talmasca, and that they should remain a little longer in the hope of finding where Stuart is holding Tessa. They compromise and agree to remain until the beginning of an upcoming ceremony when they'll leave together.

In Chapter Nineteen, Yuri battles to come to terms with the realization that Stuart has betrayed him and that Stuart was involved in Aaron's death. Stuart refuses to reveal his accomplices but describes his discovery of the ancient writing about the Taltos and his fascination with it. He says that he only shared the information with specific novices and Yuri immediately locks onto Tommy and Marklin as likely candidates for that. Stuart refuses to confirm the theory but his look is confirmation enough. Stuart says that soon after he found Tessa he realized that she talked about two "different lives" and that she was an embodiment of a reincarnated being. Stuart reveals pieces of information he gathered from Tessa, including the sacrifice of some Taltos males, the use of women by humans in an effort to create a race of superhuman soldiers, and a time of dancing among circles of stones. Stuart's goal was not to create super humans, but to breed Tessa so that her child would be able to reveal more information about the race's past. Stuart says that he came to realize that Tessa is "addled" but says that Ash could provide the information he sought.

Stuart says that he read from the Talmasca's tomes and that he discovered the story of Ashlar who had converted to Christianity. He produces the book of St. Ashlar and Ash's face turns cold. Ash says that he wrote the book, that it had been turned over to the Talmasca and is furious that Stuart has it in his possession. Stuart and Ash argue and Stuart produces a gun, threatening to shoot Ash. Rowan uses her magic to cause Stuart's heart to stop. Yuri realizes that he can now return to the Motherhouse and Ash asks that Yuri take Tessa in. Yuri agrees. Ash takes Yuri aside and tells him that he must ask that Yuri never try to contact him. He says that Yuri must also relay that to other



members of the Talmasca. Yuri plans to remain with Tessa and to call members of the Talmasca to come get them both.

## Chapters 12 through 19 Analysis

Marklin reveals that he and Tommy have been interrupting communications with the Motherhouse. Through their endeavors, the majority of the Talmasca members have been misled about specific events. These events or the purpose of their efforts are not detailed in this book but the reader does learn that Aaron and Yuri had been excommunicated from the Talmasca because of it.

The significance of white food for the Taltos is never explained but Ash loves everything that's white. He says that he doesn't particularly like the taste of lobster but eats it because it's white meat. Mona has developed a craving for milk and white bread and the white meat of an apple.

Tommy Monohan and Marklin George have to identify themselves at the door of the Motherhouse and that's the first time the reader learns their last names. The author had introduced both much earlier but it's only now that the reader discovers their full names and that both men are "novices" of the Order of the Talmasca. This presentation of information is typical of this author and may make the book more difficult to understand for some readers.

Mary Jane asks Mona who she trusts implicitly and Mona says it's Mary Jane. Mary Jane asks why it's not Michael or Rowan and Mona says that they must be considered "enemies." It's evident at this point that Mona has come to fully realize that Morrigan is Taltos and that Michael and Rowan might demand that she be killed. Mona's worries are transmitted to Morrigan who says on several occasions that she's frightened.



# Chapters 20 through 24

## Chapters 20 through 24 Summary

In Chapter Twenty, Mona finds some ice cream and she asks Morrigan if they should share with Mary Jane or "gobble it" all by themselves. Morrigan says they should just eat it. Mona tells Mary Jane that they're going to have to leave the house. She points out the guards and asks Mary Jane if she can drive. Mona says that the child is Taltos, that the birth is imminent, and that she's going to protect the child from Rowan and Michael. Mary Jane agrees to help and says that they'll go to her granny at Fontevrault. Fontevrault is an old plantation house that is partially flooded. They have to reach the house by boat and Mona agrees that's where they'll go. Mona continues to talk to Morrigan, reassuring her that it's alright and that they'll be safe. Morrigan says that she's afraid because Mona is afraid and pleads with Mona to protect her from those who might harm her.

In Chapter Twenty-one, Marklin wakes to the tolling of a bell indicating the beginning of a Talmasca ceremony. He wakes Tommy and the two go to the room where the ceremony is to be held. They become separated as they talk to various people and Marklin realizes that he and Tommy are the only two novices in the room. Marklin asks one member if the two of them are supposed to be there and is assured that they are. Marklin then discovers that there's a casket and that they are at a wake of sorts. He gets closer and is shocked to find Stuart's body in the casket. Then the two are accused of playing a role in the attempted murder of Yuri. This is the first time they've heard that Yuri isn't dead. They're also told that Stuart's notes and his diary indicate the role played by Marklin and Tommy in the entire scheme. The boys had met Tessa prior to Stuart's housing her in his tower and she has confirmed their involvement. Tommy and Marklin are forcibly taken to a place where a door opens into darkness and they are thrown in. Marklin sees Tommy fighting just before he falls and then Marklin falls as well. Marklin is unable to walk and discovers that Tommy had been killed by the fall. Marklin finds a lighter in Tommy's pocket and discovers pieces of human bones littering the floor. He begins to scream.

In Chapter Twenty-two, Rowan and Michael fly with Ash in his plane back to the United States. Samuel is also with them as is Ash's staff. Michael has already revealed the information he had gotten from Lasher, a history of Lasher's life from the 1500s. Later, Ash and Rowan are talking and Ash shares his need for companionship. Rowan tells him that she killed a Taltos female. She says that the female was her daughter, the result of her union with Lasher, and that she'd feared the possibility of that daughter creating more Taltos children so that the human race would be in jeopardy. Rowan says that she'd feared the daughter for her very existence. Though this might have been the last possible opportunity for Ash to have a female for companionship or with whom to mate, he isn't angry. Rowan says that Michael has been concerned that Ash would learn about the female's death at Rowan's hand and would hate them. By this point, Michael has come to like Ash very much and dreads jeopardizing the friendship.



In Chapter Twenty-three, Mona and Mary Jane arrive at the dock going to Fontevrault. Mona's pregnancy is very pronounced and she is having trouble walking. Mona is afraid and she gives Mary Jane instructions of what to do if she dies. Granny says that she's heard of "a walking baby." She recounts the story of a woman who gave birth to a walking baby and says that "Grandpere Tobias went down there and chopped it up with an ax." She says that when those children were born in Santa Domingo, they were burned. Mona says that her child will be protected at all costs.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Rowan and Ash talk again and he proposes an affair but she declines. Ash tells Rowan and Michael that he will share with them the history of the Taltos. In Chapter Twenty-five, Ash begins the story, saying that members of the Taltos race have "residual memories" of the entire race.

## Chapters 20 through 24 Analysis

Ash talks at length about the need for companionship. He says that he is generally alright in the life he has built for himself but that sometimes the need for companionship becomes almost overwhelming. It's obvious that Ash and Rowan are attracted to each other and they discuss the possibility of an affair but put the idea aside at Rowan's insistence.

Rowan explains her decision to kill the Taltos female by saying that she'd known the humans and Taltos could not possibly live on the earth together. The reader may expect Ash to disagree but he doesn't. In fact, when Rowan says that she'd feared that a Taltos female would endanger the human race, Ash says that she's probably right. Ash soon describes the history of the Taltos, including the clash between the humans and Taltos. Considering this history, it's likely that Ash is right.



# Chapters 25 and 26

## Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-five, Ash begins the story, saying that members of the Taltos race have "residual memories" of the entire race. He lists off traits of the Taltos, including that they hate loud noises and recognize witches by sight and other Taltos by scent. The Taltos "developed" in a secluded area that was a paradise for the race. There were few deaths and those only by accident. There were occasions of "pestilence" that also created problems. He says that even when two Taltos argued and one was killed in the quarrel, it was considered an "accident." Some old ones died in their sleep but it was assumed that they'd received an injury that had taken their lives. Women who gave birth too often also died though it wasn't talked about among the Taltos. Whenever a member of the race died, a "coupling" occurred to replace that life. The food was plentiful and life pleasant so there was seldom need to argue and no need for envy.

Ash describes the "coupling," saying that it usually lasted at least a half hour and the culmination of the intercourse was held for another hour or more with the couple only breaking apart because the child was about to be born. Monogamy was unheard of and children loved and cared for as a sign of the continuation of the race. He says that there was little pain and that childbirth was serious because it involved pain. Then their paradise became chaotic and many of them left, including Ash, two of his daughters, two men and a woman. The island eventually sank into the sea. The new land was nothing like paradise and they hated the cold of winters. Ash became the leader of the group and admits that he didn't trust anyone else. He constantly worries about his people, fearing that they will become lost or be killed by animals in the woods. He also worries about quarrels erupting between them.

Sometimes humans wandered into the settlement and they were cared for by the Taltos though they were intrigued by the fact that the children were born in such helpless states. They eventually settled in Britain and their lives took on some of the idyllic qualities of their lives on the island. They created circles of stones for the birthing ritual and Ash notes that those born during this time were less kind than their ancestors. They heard rumors of other Taltos villages being raided and the inhabitants massacred but didn't really believe it, citing the fact that they had little that others would want. Then humans raided Ash's settlement and all the youngsters were killed. Many of the women were taken prisoner and permanent settlements established nearby. Ash and his people gathered all the Taltos they could find or rescue and moved north. It's about this time that Ash and his followers realized that they couldn't live in harmony with humans and that they'd have to kill off the humans if they expected to survive. But the Taltos were unable to kill indiscriminately and knew the humans would ultimately win out. Some villages held captured Taltos hoping to breed them to humans. Almost invariably, human women who mated with Taltos males died. Some pregnant women managed to escape in an effort to protect their unborn babies from a life of cruelty and were taken in by the Taltos. Ash says it's only then that they discovered that it takes longer for a human



mother to give birth to a Taltos but that a human mother who sang to her child and reassured the child would give birth much sooner.

Some Taltos during this time went "wild," preferring to live away from all human and Taltos contact. They developed their own belief systems. It's also about this time that the Taltos learned of the "Little People." They were dwarfs, malformed, the result of an attempt to conceive a Taltos from a Taltos/human union. Ash says it's unclear why these hybrids occurred but they created an entirely new race.

Some young Taltos born to Ash's clan had a desire to see the world outside their protected village and their travels invariably provoked rumors of the giants who lived in the country. Ash says that all of them wanted to learn about the world outside their village and so they created a "subterfuge" that they hoped would allow them to live in peace with their human neighbors.

## Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Ash talks at length about the need for companionship. He says that he is generally alright in the life he has built for himself but that sometimes the need for companionship becomes almost overwhelming. It's obvious that Ash and Rowan are attracted to each other and they discuss the possibility of an affair but put the idea aside at Rowan's insistence.

Rowan explains her decision to kill the Taltos female by saying that she'd known the humans and Taltos could not possibly live on the earth together. The reader may expect Ash to disagree but he doesn't. In fact, when Rowan says that she'd feared that a Taltos female would endanger the human race, Ash says that she's probably right. Ash soon describes the history of the Taltos, including the clash between the humans and Taltos. Considering this history, it's likely that Ash is right.



# Chapters 27 and 28

## Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

In chapter twenty-five, Ash begins the story, saying that members of the Taltos race have "residual memories" of the entire race. He lists off traits of the Taltos, including that they hate loud noises and recognize witches by sight and other Taltos by scent. The Taltos "developed" in a secluded area that was a paradise for the race. There were few deaths and those only by accident. There were occasions of "pestilence" that also created problems. He says that even when two Taltos argued and one was killed in the quarrel, it was considered an "accident." Some old ones died in their sleep but it was assumed that they'd received an injury that had taken their lives. Women who gave birth too often also died though it wasn't talked about among the Taltos. Whenever a member of the race died, a "coupling" occurred to replace that life. The food was plentiful and life pleasant so there was seldom need to argue and no need for envy.

Ash describes the "coupling," saying that it usually lasted at least a half hour and the culmination of the intercourse was held for another hour or more with the couple only breaking apart because the child was about to be born. Monogamy was unheard of and children loved and cared for as a sign of the continuation of the race. He says that there was little pain and that childbirth was serious because it involved pain. Then their paradise becomes chaotic and many of them leave, including Ash, two of his daughters, two men and a woman. The island eventually sinks into the sea. The new land is nothing like paradise and they hate the cold of winters. Ash becomes the leader of the group and admits that he doesn't trust anyone else. He constantly worries about his people, fearing that they will become lost or be killed by animals in the woods. He also worries about quarrels erupting between them.

Sometimes humans wonder into the settlement and they are cared for by the Taltos though they are intrigued by the fact that the children are born in such helpless states. They eventually settled in Britain and their lives take on some of the idyllic qualities of their lives on the island. They created circles of stones for the birthing ritual and Ash notes that those born during this time were less kind than their ancestors. They hear rumors of other Taltos villages being raided and the inhabitants massacred but don't really believe it, citing the fact that they have little that others would want. Then humans raid Ash's settlement and all the youngsters are killed. Many of the women are taken prisoner and permanent settlements established nearby. Ash and his people gather all the Taltos they can find or rescue and move north. It's about this time that Ash and his followers realize that they can't live in harmony with humans and that they'll have to kill off the humans if they expect to survive. But the Taltos are unable to kill indiscriminately and know the humans will ultimately win out. Some villages hold captured Taltos hoping to breed them to humans. Almost invariably, human women who mated with Taltos males died. Some pregnant women managed to escape in an effort to protect their unborn babies from a life of cruelty and were taken in by the Taltos. Ash says it's only then that they discover that it takes longer for a human mother to give birth to a Taltos





but that a human mother who sang to her child and reassured the child would give birth much sooner.

Some Taltos during this time go "wild," preferring to live away from all human and Taltos contact. They develop their own belief systems. It's also about this time that the Taltos learn of the "Little People." They are dwarves, malformed, the result of an attempt to conceive a Taltos from a Taltos/human union. Ash says it's unclear why these hybrids occur but they create an entirely new race.

Some young Taltos born to Ash's clan have a desire to see the world outside their protected village and their travels invariably provoke rumors of the giants who live in the country. Ash says that all of them wanted to learn about the world outside their village and so they created a "subterfuge" that they hope will allow them to live in peace with their human neighbors.

In chapter twenty-six, Yuri and Michael talk on the phone. Yuri had pledged his love to Mona and now tells Michael that he has a message for her. Before he can reveal that message, Michael says that Mona has many things to accomplish and that she'll understand. In chapter twenty-seven, Mary Jane is headed to the boat with "Dr. Jack," a physician. She has a baby in a basket and tells him that Mona has given birth to the child. She tells Dr. Jack that Mona and the baby are fine but that they need a birth certificate. Dr. Jack insists on examining Mona and declares that she's bruised but alright. He questions her to some degree and finally fills out the birth certificate as requested. Mona and Mary Jane provide the basic information, including that the baby was delivered by Mary Jane and Dolly Jean, otherwise known as "Granny," and that the child's name is Morrigan. As the doctor and Mary Jane are preparing to leave, the doctor hears a clacking noise and discovers it's a young woman typing on a computer. There's a storm raging and the electricity goes off, prompting the young woman to begin screaming. Mary Jane rushes to the girl, calling her Morrigan and urging that she calm down. The doctor asks about the girls' identity and Mary Jane says that she's the aunt of the newborn. Just then Granny yells at Mary Jane, telling her that she has to get going because the baby is supposed to be home by five. Mary Jane and the doctor leave with the baby and Mary Jane gives him an envelope filled with crisp twenties.

In chapter twenty-eight, Ash picks up his story. He says that the group of Taltos he lives with "invented a human identity." They called themselves "Picts" and explain their height as genetic. They remain private but interact with humans to some degree. Because they pretend to be just another human race, the humans basically treat them well and they find a way to live peacefully. Ash says the most important part of the subterfuge is that no one could ever see the birth ritual or learn that the babies were grown to full size in a matter of hours. There is a problem in that witches recognize the Taltos on sight but the Taltos can also recognize the witches on sight and they generally pretend to ignore each other. There is a rumor that a witch who drinks the blood of a Taltos will become immortal and some witches are able to lure a Taltos to her. Sometimes Taltos intermarried and any children that survived that union were accepted into the Taltos, a fact that introduced human blood into the race.



Then Ash encounters a monk who needs his help. Together, he and Ash travels to a monastery and Ash hears more about the Christian religion. He compares the miracle of the birth of Christ to a virgin mother to the miracle of a Taltos birth and wants to satisfy his curiosity about this new religion. He learns that Christians preach peace and love and he is immediately convinced that this is the correct path for the Taltos. Ash tells a priest all about the Taltos, including their immortality. The priest refuses to believe the story and Ash discovers that the carefully laid stories of the Picts have been fully accepted. He returns to his village with plans to share his newfound faith with the others. One aspect of the faith that appeals to him is the vow of chastity but others say that monogamy or living a chaste life is contrary to the very nature of the Taltos. The members of the village are impossibly divided and Ash says that the only real option is for those who choose to convert to leave, but he doesn't want to leave his home. The human neighbors involved in the conversation begin to ask questions. They ask why there are never any babies or children seen in the Pict's village. In the heat of the argument, some of the Taltos tell the truth and a battle begins. The majority of the Taltos and many of the humans are slaughtered in the fighting. The battle dies down but is revived when some humans yell that all the "monsters" have to be killed. When the battle is finished, only five Taltos are alive. With the exception of one female, Janet, all five had accepted Christianity. The priests stand with Ash and those who accepted but Janet is held by the humans and burned at the stake. Janet screams a curse at Ash, telling him that he's betrayed his people and praying that he will be "loveless and childless" until "the world around you crumbles."

Ash and several other Taltos who make professions of faith take Holy Orders from the church and Ash is assigned a church that becomes very popular. Ash is concerned, fearing that the people are putting too much faith in him because of his extraordinary height but the priests ignore his fears. Ash creates a book of the history of the Taltos - the book Stuart had in his possession at the tower. Ash says the book was declared "blasphemy" by the priests. The same people who honored the Taltos as priests blamed them for diseases or disasters and Ash knows that they'll never really live in harmony together.

## Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Ash refers several times to Lasher, though it's not clear how he knows about Lasher. He says that Lasher had lived before and that he'd refused to "accept death." According to Ash, Lasher's reincarnation was "a tragic blundering reentry into life."

While Atlantis isn't mentioned, it seems possible that Ash is describing Atlantis when he talks about his island home sinking "into the sea." He talks about the circles of stones they created for the ritual of birthing and admits that one of those is known today as Stonehenge.

The doctor's arrival at the plantation to provide a birth certificate is an apparent attempt to ensure that there's a valid birth certificate for Morrigan, though no one would believe the certificate's validity until she's older. As predicted, she is already walking, talking and

is typing on the computer when the doctor arrives. Mary Jane apparently "borrowed" a baby to pose as Mona's child. The money is designed to ensure the doctor's cooperation and silence and apparently has the desired effect.



# Chapters 29 through 34

## Chapters 29 through 34 Summary

In Chapter Twenty-nine, Mona, Mary Jane, Granny and Morrigan return to the Mayfair estate. In Chapter Thirty, Ash continues his story, saying he experienced a vision of sex with Janet in a cave and then traveled the country, returning to Donnelaith in 1228, fearing that the Taltos had completely died out. He completes his tale by saying that his interests now lie in building his empire, in making toys and accumulating wealth. He assures them both that he won't bother Mona or any of the other powerful witches of the Mayfair clan.

In Chapter Thirty-one, Rowan dreams about killing the Taltos daughter and she and Michael prepare to return home to New Orleans. In Chapter Thirty-two, Samuel also leaves but warns Ash not to become too friendly with Rowan and Michael because it could put him in danger. Samuel says that all humans eventually fear what they don't understand. Ash prepares to send gifts to Rowan and Michael. He chooses a very rare doll that Rowan had admired as her gift and the book of St. Ashlar as Michael's.

In Chapter Thirty-three, Michael and Rowan arrive at home and discover Morrigan. Mona immediately makes them pledge not to harm Morrigan, saying that she'll leave unless she exacts that promise. Morrigan catches the scent of Ash, a male Taltos, and goes crazy, pleading with them to take her to him or to at least tell her of his whereabouts. They refuse though Mona says that she'll tell Morrigan when she's older. Michael has a conversation with Morrigan and she says that someday she will "take over." She says that she was so strong and knowledgeable when she was born that her children will be even more so. Rowan points out that if adults saw a baby and knew without a shadow of a doubt that the child would grow up to kill many people, the death of that child would be the right thing. Michael says that they've pledged to live together but Morrigan seems to know instinctively that Taltos and humans can't live together.

In Chapter Thirty-four, five days have passed since Michael and Rowan left and Ash is feeling sad that they haven't made contact. He decides that he'll go to New Orleans and check in on them, planning to just look at the house without making contact. But when he arrives, he smells the female Taltos and is immediately angry, feeling that Michael and Rowan have kept her existence from him. Morrigan catches Ash's scent and crashes through a window to get to him. They leave together with her assuring Mona that she's alright. She is frantic to have sex with him but he tells her that they will go to the land of their ancestry.

## Chapters 29 through 34 Analysis

Rowan dreams about killing the female Taltos again. The child, who was Rowan's daughter, was very young when Rowan killed her. But after the dream, Rowan says



there was no need to have killed her even though she's reasoned it out and Ash says she did what was necessary for the survival of the human race.

Rowan is skeptical of Mona's insistence that Morrigan not be harmed. Rowan points out Lasher's existence and says that Morrigan might be some manner of Lasher's ultimate plan. Michael doesn't really seem to believe that but is watchful. Mona insists that Morrigan isn't evil and says that the Taltos is "just another form of natural." Morrigan, though technically fully grown, is obviously not in full control of herself. Ash is the epitome of control but Morrigan can't seem to fight urges. She wants to have music and to dance, and insists on satisfying that craving, just as a toddler would insist on getting what she wanted. Morrigan's reaction to the scent of Ash on Michael's clothing is similarly dramatic and she goes crazy, throwing the equivalent of a fit in an attempt to get her way.

The story is open-ended with Rowan's prediction of the Taltos and humans combining with the imminent coupling of Ash and Morrigan. It's left to the reader to decide the outcome.



# Characters

## Ashlar

A Taltos, he is immortal and has memories of times before the dawn of humans. His history includes a profession of Christian faith and chastity in the 1700s. He became known then as "St. Ashlar." Ash is virtually the last of his kind and feels lonely because of that. He is, like all Taltos, very tall and that fact makes him stand out in earlier centuries when most men were much shorter. In the modern day, Ash has become very wealthy through the manufacture of dolls. He has surrounded himself with people who accept his ways and protect his privacy though he knows that he will eventually have to leave them to make a new life for himself because they will realize that he doesn't age. Ash is a kind person and says that's a part of his natural makeup, but protects himself from intrusion above all else. For example, he arranges to feed and shelter homeless people from the streets when the weather is bad but has them removed when fights erupt among them. When Ash is faced with the need to kill, he does so ruthlessly and effectively. In those cases, he seems without remorse. The fact that Ash is lonely prompts his decision to go to New Orleans to check in on Rowan and Michael and it's there that he discovers that a new Taltos has been born.

## Mona Mayfair

Mona Mayfair is thirteen when she becomes pregnant with Michael's baby. She feels guilty over her affair with Michael but is very excited at the idea of becoming a mother. Mona is wealthy, having been named heir to the considerably large Mayfair estate. Mona is among the Mayfair witches and has dropped out of school as the story opens. She is devoted to her family and spends much of her time trying to coax a reaction from Rowan. Mona knows that Rowan killed Lasher who was a Taltos and fears that she will also try to kill Morrigan. She initially wants to talk to Rowan who had also given birth to a Taltos. But when she becomes certain that the child is a Taltos, she doesn't alert Rowan to the fact because she fears that Rowan will force an end to the pregnancy. When Rowan and Michael arrive home, Mona immediately confronts them, saying that she wants their assurance that Morrigan will not be harmed or she'll leave with her. Mona's connection as Morrigan's mother may be more solid because the two communicated prior to Morrigan's birth. Mona becomes very attached to Mary Jane and depends on her to help with Morrigan's delivery. Mona is a keen judge of character but is somewhat less mature than she wants others to believe.

## Michael Curry

Initially thought to be married into the Mayfair family, it's discovered that he is actually a Mayfair by birth and that he has the specific gene necessary to produce a Taltos.



## Mary Jane Mayfair

A cousin of Mona, Mary Jane is very much the country girl. She is not an integral part of the family until after Mona becomes pregnant. Mary Jane seems to realize that there's something wrong with Mona's pregnancy from an early stage. When Mona asks whether Mary Jane thinks there's something wrong, she declines to put her hands on Mona's belly, saying that it wouldn't be good for two young witches to practice witchcraft in this way, but it seems that she really senses a problem and doesn't want to say so. Mary Jane is present when Mona gives birth and arranges for a birth certificate from a local doctor by borrowing a baby and bringing the doctor to the house where Mona delivered the child.

## Morrigan

Mona's baby, Morrigan is a Taltos. Her father is Michael who has fathered two other Taltos children. Morrigan is hungry for knowledge from the beginning and is demanding as any toddler might be. However, she is fully grown from within hours of her birth and craves the attention of another Taltos. When Michael returns home with the scent of Ash still on his clothing, Morrigan becomes frantic. When Ash arrives in person, she crashes through a window and rushes to him.

## Rowan Curry

Michael's wife, she is all but comatose as the story opens, the result of the trauma suffered when she was held captive by her son, Lasher. Rowan, fearing the possibility that the Taltos would take over the world, killed her daughter Taltos. Rowan is a strong woman and snaps out of the state when she learns of the death of a friend. Rowan is a cousin to Mona and knows that Michael fathered a child with Mona but isn't angry about it.

## Samuel

A member of the "Little People," Samuel and Ash are friends. He is somewhat grotesque in appearance. He drinks a great deal and is very demanding, though Ash tends to arrange for anything Samuel requests. Samuel seems to take advantage of Ash's friendship but also seems to be lonely. However, Samuel is the first to decide that he will leave and does so despite Ash's request that he stay.

## Stuart Gordon

The leader of the Talmasca, Stuart Gordon discovers a Taltos female named Tessa and hides her away with the hope of finding a male to mate with her. Stuart is inadvertently behind the death of Aaron, a friend of the Mayfairs, though he chastises the two men



who were ultimately responsible for the murder. Stuart is devastated when he learns that Tessa is barren. He attacks Ash and is killed by Rowan.

## **Dolly Jean Mayfair**

Otherwise known as Granny, Dolly Jean Mayfair is Mary Jane's grandmother. She and Mary Jane live together in a former plantation mansion that is partially flooded. Granny helps with the delivery of Morrigan and returns to Mona's house after the birth.

## **Marklin George**

Posing as a novice with the Order of the Talmasca, Marklin George is actually searching for a way to bring two Taltos together. Marklin knows that Stuart has a female Taltos but doesn't know where she's being held. With the help of his friend, Tommy, Marklin hopes to gain that information from members of the Talmasca and then plans to leave. However, it's discovered that he's a traitor and is behind the death of Aaron, another member of the order. Marklin and Tommy are thrown into a dungeon where Tommy dies instantly and Marklin is left to die.

## **Yuri**

A member of the Order of the Talmasca, Yuri encounters Samuel after being attacked by a hired assassin. Yuri is injured and Samuel takes care of him, bringing Yuri and Ash together. Yuri can't believe that others of the Talmasca are involved in the attempt on his life and arranges to meet Stuart Gordon, a man he believes to be incorruptible. Yuri realizes Stuart's role in the plot after learning that Stuart is holding a Taltos female captive.





# Objects/Places

## Taltos

Taltos is the name of a specific breed of human-like beings that are immortal. In the case of Ash, he has been alive for all time but Morrigan and Lasher were the result of a union between specific witches.

## New York

Ash lives in New York and his doll manufacturing company is based there as the story opens.

## New Orleans

The Mayfair family lives in New Orleans.

## London

Samuel and Yuri meet Ash in London.

## Claridge's

Claridge's is the hotel where Samuel, Ash and Yuri stay in London.

## The Motherhouse

The headquarters of the Talmasca is called the Motherhouse.

## The Little People

The name given to Samuel's race is The Little People. They were begun when humans and Taltos bred together and some of the offspring were small and deformed.

## Donnelaith

Donnelaith is where the Little People live.



## **Stuart Gordon's Tower**

Tessa is being held in Stuart Gordon's Tower.

## **Fontevrault**

The plantation house where Mary Jane and Granny live and where Mona gives birth to Morrigan is called Fontevrault.



# Themes

## The Make-up of the Taltos

The overall make-up of the Taltos, from the genetics to the personality, is a driving force behind this book and becomes one of the major themes. The Taltos are an ancient breed and initially focused only on happiness within themselves and others of their kind. This innate gentleness makes them unprepared to cope with the warring nature of humans. Deaths occur among the Taltos prior to the arrival of the human race, but are rare. The Taltos are highly sexual beings and the birth of a Taltos when the parents are both Taltos occurs within a short time of mating. The females sometimes die in the birthing process and the mating process is very controlled because of that. When the Taltos are born of witch parents, the birth happens after a matter of weeks, the child is able to walk immediately and grows to full size and knowledge in a matter of hours. Because of the almost-instantaneous growth to adulthood, it would be possible for a Taltos male and female to recreate an entire tribe of their kind in a relatively short period. This thought prompted Rowan to kill her daughter who was Taltos for fear that the Taltos would take over the world. The fact that Ash and Morrigan leave together with a focus on an immediate mating means that there would likely be a new child quickly and that the two parents could theoretically repopulate their species, putting the human race in danger. The book ends with that possibility on the reader's mind after providing all the information the reader needs to come to that conclusion.

## The Need for Companionship

Ash believes himself to be the last of the Taltos and that makes him very lonely. He surrounds himself with employees who are willing to bend to his demands and work. He says that he no longer thinks about it but it's evident that he does. Ash talks about the life of his people while they lived in their island paradise. He says that when they left that place, they broke into groups. The youngsters of the groups sometimes left to see more of the world. But they tended to return to their groups in order to be with others of their own kind. Morrigan believes herself to be alone as well but when Michael returns from New York, she catches Ash's scent on Michael's clothes. She becomes frantic to find the male Taltos, one of her own, even though she feels a strong bond to her mother. Morrigan is so desperate to be with Ash that she breaks through a window. Ash, who had become very attached to Michael and Rowan, is angry when he discovers that they have a female Taltos and have not told him. He takes it as a sign of betrayal because he is, in fact, desperate for the companionship of another of his kind.

## The Relationship Between Peoples

The relationship between Taltos and humans becomes a major theme in the book because the two races find themselves unable to live together at all. Ash says that he'd



initially not realized that there would be a clash between the races but that humans came to mistrust the Taltos just because the Taltos are different. The Taltos carefully create an identity for themselves as a different race of people, the Picts. With that identity, the race relations are better for awhile but there are soon problems. Someone questions the lack of babies among the clan and that prompts fear. That fear prompts a new level of hatred. The humans who know about the Taltos are also afraid. Rowan is a prime example of this. She knows that her daughter could produce an entire clan in a matter of days and fears that the human race would soon be in danger of extinction. She enjoys Ash's company but is afraid of what would happen to her race if the Taltos male and female come together.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is presented in third person from an omniscient perspective. This is vital because there are characters in various parts of the country that come together only periodically. The use of the omniscient perspective allows the readers to catch up with various aspects of the plot as necessary. The perspective is vital because some characters never learn about specific points of the story. For example, Mona is never privy to aspects of Ash's life. The perspective also serves the purpose of presenting clues about the various characters. For example, the reader is given information about Ash's visit to Scotland where he hears the dwarfs but remains some distance from them. It's not until much later that the reader learns the significance. The reader learns some aspects of the story through the perspective of a specific character. For example, Ash tells Rowan and Michael the history of the Taltos well into the book. This means the reader has already gained some of the information but Ash's story makes it all clear. This story, presented at this point, is effective because it helps the reader make sense of many of the events that had occurred up to this point. This use of perspective from the aspect of various characters is effective and appropriate to the story. The perspectives are acceptable but the reader should keep in mind that some perspectives may be biased in favor of - or against - a particular character or group of characters. For example, Ash tells the history of the Taltos but he is the only person who knows if it's all the truth. He talks about the Taltos being forced into actions by circumstances and people, and that could be correct, but it could also be an effort on his part to present his race in the best possible light.

## Setting

The story is set in recent days and there are several distinct physical settings. The time setting is obvious because Ash owns a jet and the characters fly from one place in the world to another freely. There are computers and fax machines at the safe house of the Talmasca, another sign that the story is set in modern times. There are a number of specific settings described in the book. The majority of these overview settings are real though the specific settings in which the action takes place are probably not. For example, Ash is in New York City and he describes the view of Central Park. The city and park are real but his particular office probably isn't. The same is true of the Mayfair home in New Orleans. The city is real but their home and that of Mary Jane Mayfair are probably fictional. Settings are adequately described. For example, Ash, Rowan and Michael make their way to Stuart Gordon's "tower" where he is holding the female Taltos named Tessa. The roads leading to that tower are described, including the fact that the final road is unpaved. Gordon dies in the upper room of the tower. Other aspects of the settings are completely imaginary. For example, Ash tells the history of the Taltos and describes an island that sank into the sea.



## Language and Meaning

The plot of the story is convoluted, mainly because the book is the third story of the trilogy. The action is slow and sometimes difficult to follow because the action during the early part of the book is caught up in the previous books. The author eventually explains the basics of the earlier books in order for the reader to understand what's happening. The author uses few words that will be unfamiliar to a general audience but the plot makes some of the story line difficult to follow. The overall tone is dark and foreboding, a tone accented by the ending of the book. Though Ash and Morrigan have found each other, the impact on the human race has yet to be determined. Rowan, for one, believes their meeting could put the human race in danger. The story is divided into dialogue and narrative. There are long passages of each. For example, Chapter twenty-five is almost completely dialogue. In this chapter, Ash tells Rowan and Michael the history of the Taltos race. This is the exception rather than the rule and other sections of dialogue are not as lengthy. The dialogue is believable and adequate for the story. The narrative is sometimes plodding and the reader may lose interest in some aspects of the story.

## Structure

The book is divided into thirty-four chapters. The chapters are numbered and there are no titles to give a clue as to what the reader is to expect in that chapter. The chapters vary in length. For example, Chapter Twenty-six is only three pages in length while Chapter Twenty-five is forty. Because there are characters in various parts of the world with action going on simultaneously, the story jumps from one scene to another. For example, Chapter One introduces Ash and his current business endeavors. The reader learns that he is not human but has no real clues as to his origin during that chapter. Then the reader is taken to New Orleans for Chapter Two and the introduction of the Mayfairs. This may be a problem for some readers because the author frequently leaves the reader hanging at some point of conflict in one scene while taking the reader to a completely different scene before returning for a resolution. While the goal is to provide anticipation and to create suspense, some readers may find it disorienting. To further complicate the storyline, this book is part three of a trilogy. The author provides some information about previous events but this information is often provided after the reader is confused about a particular character or event. For example, the reader is introduced to Rowan but it's some time before the author explains how Rowan came to be virtually comatose.



## Quotes

"Michael, for chrissakes, if there is a crime of statutory rape in this state, you'd have to get a lawyer to look it up to be sure. The age of consent between cousins is probably ten, and there may even be a special law on the books lowering the age to eight for Mayfairs." - Mona, Chapter 2, Page 57

"It was either knock him off the cliff or let him fire another shot at the gypsy. I must confess I did it rather for the hell of it, as Yuri and I hadn't yet exchanged a single word." - Samuel, Chapter 4, Page 87

"He could smell burning flesh, but this was not real; it was only a memory." Chapter 5, Page 116

"You play with your toys and your money and all your fine things, and you forget. You forget and that's why you're happy." - Samuel, Chapter 5, Page 120

"God, what secrets does this world harbor, what monsters are camouflaged amid its forests, its big cities, its wilderness, its seas?" Chapter 11, Page 194

"She had seen plenty of scenes in horror movies over the years in which people did that sort of thing, traipsed off to the graveyard to dig up a vampire, or went at midnight to discover just who was in what grave. She had never believed those scenes, especially if the person did it by herself or himself. It was just too frightening." Chapter 14, Page 248

"You could tell us things which no human can ever discover in any other way. You can tell them with clarity and power, for you're strong, not addled, like my poor Tessa!" - Stuart, Chapter 19, page 302

"When a walking baby was born out there in the swamps to Ida Bell Mayfair, when I was a child, they said it stood taller than its mother as soon as it came walking out, and Grandpere Tobias went down there and chopped it up with an ax while the mother was laying there in bed screaming!" - Granny, Chapter 23, Page 371

"Never did people quarrel over fruit or eggs or milk animals. There was too much of everything." - Ash talking about the island home of the Taltos, Chapter 25, Page 388

"These creatures didn't live long. What, thirty-five years, perhaps, but during that time they changed dramatically; they went from little wriggling pink things to tall, strong beings, only to become wizened, withered old things." - Ash describing their first encounters with humans, Chapter 25, Page 400

"May you wander - loveless, childless - your people gone, until our miraculous birth is your only dream in your isolation. I curse you, Ashlar." - Janet being burned at the stake, Chapter 28, Page 466



"I tell myself we all run the risk of the horror; any child can be a monster, a bringer of death. What would you do if it were a baby, a tiny pink thing like they ought to be, and a witch came and laid her hands on it and said, 'It will grow up to wage war, it will grow up to make bombs, it will grown up to sacrifice the lives of thousands, millions.'" - Rowan, Chapter 33, Page 537





## Topics for Discussion

What is Taltos? What are Little People? How are the two produced? There are four Taltos listed in the story. Who are they and how was each conceived?

Describe the history of the Taltos as presented by Ash. To whom does he tell the story? Why does he tell it?

Who is Tessa? What is Stuart's hope for her? What does Ash reveal about her? What is Stuart's response? What is Stuart's fate? What are the fates of Tommy and Marklin?

Who is Rowan? Michael? Mary Jane? Dolly Jean? Morrigan? Yuri? Ash? Samuel? How is each related to Mona?

Describe Mona's pregnancy. What is her initial reaction to the fact that the pregnancy might produce a Taltos? What is her fear once she is certain that the child is a Taltos? What does Granny say happened to another Taltos child born in the swamp years earlier?

How does Ash discover Tessa's existence? What is his reaction to the discovery? How does he discover Morrigan's existence? What is his reaction to that discovery?

Describe at least two of the settings in the book. Compare the events that occur at the two.