

# **The Tale of the Body Thief Study Guide**

## **The Tale of the Body Thief by Anne Rice**

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# Plot Summary

"The Tale of the Body Thief" is book four of the Vampire Chronicles by Anne Rice. In this book, the Vampire Lestat tells how he meets Raglan James, a self-described body thief. Raglan James approaches Lestat with an offer that would allow Lestat to enter a mortal body, to become mortal again for the first time in hundreds of years. Lestat jumps at the chance even though he suspects that James is not an honest man. As a mortal, Lestat discovers how vulnerable the human body truly is when he becomes deathly ill. When James fails to return at the appointed time to reverse the body exchange, Lestat turns to his vampire friends for help. However, Louis and the others refuse to help Lestat. Lestat turns to mortal man, David Talbot, for help. With David's help, Lestat gets his own body back along with a new appreciation of what it means to be a vampire. "The Tale of the Body Thief" is a story of self-discovery and friendship that continues Anne Rice's unique vision of a magical world filled with unique characters.

Lestat has been a vampire for more than two hundred years. Lestat is very powerful, possessing abilities that other, newer vampires, do not possess. However, Lestat has become overwhelmed with the guilt of killing humans for his own sustenance. For this reason, Lestat decides to kill himself. Lestat goes to the Gobi Desert to lie in the sun. This would normally kill a vampire, but Lestat's powers are so strong that two days in the sun does not kill him, but leaves him terribly burned. Lestat makes his way to the home of his friend, David Talbot, where he rests until his burns become more tolerable.

A human man has somehow discovered who Lestat is and has begun to follow him, leaving packages for him at random places. Lestat soon realizes that each package, from short stories to movies, has the same theme. Lestat becomes curious about this human and agrees to meet him. The man, Raglan James, tells Lestat that he has the ability to exchange bodies with other people. James explains that the soul actually leaves the body and his soul can take its place. James then tells Lestat that he wants to exchange bodies with him, to have the experience of living inside a powerful vampire's body. Lestat forces James into giving him time to think about the exchange, but in reality Lestat only wants time to arrange the financial exchange James has insisted on.

James and Lestat exchange bodies. Lestat is now a mortal human with a strong, young body. Lestat immediately finds himself in trouble, however, as James has stolen all the money Lestat has hidden for his own use during the exchange. Then, as Lestat becomes aware that his new mortal body is becoming ill, he discovers that James has decided not to return at the appointed time to return Lestat to his true body. Lestat falls deathly ill and is hospitalized. While in the hospital, Lestat meets a nun who is a volunteer nurse at the facility. Lestat tells this woman the truth about his situation. The nun takes him into her own home to care for him and to protect him from the consequences of his rantings.

Lestat falls for the nun, coming as close to love as he has ever been with a human woman. However, the urge to return to his former existence begins to overtake him and he finds himself rushing back to New Orleans to seek the assistance of his vampire



friends. Louis, one of his closest friends, refuses to help him. Lestat finds himself alone and in desperate need of help. Finally he turns to David Talbot, a human friend and Superior General of the Talamasca.

David and Lestat track James to a cruise ship. On the ship, they confront James and Lestat manages to get his body back. However, when Lestat leaves the ship and reconnects with David, he discovers that James has taken over his body. Lestat, in a fit of anger, kills David's body. Then Lestat finds David in Raglan James' and turns him into a vampire against his will. David is angry at first, but later forgives Lestat as he embraces his powerful new body.



# Introduction and Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 1-4

## Introduction and Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 1-4 Summary

"The Tale of the Body Thief" is the fourth in the Vampire Chronicles by Anne Rice. In this novel, the Vampire Lestat is the narrator, telling a more modern tale than the previous books in the series.

Introduction. The Vampire Lestat introduces the book by talking about the three previous books, how they took place in the past, and how this book will focus more on the present and Lestat's friend, David Talbot.

Chapter 1. The Vampire Lestat is in Miami, one of his favorite towns, where he is stalking a serial killer. Lestat has begun killing murderers in order to assuage his guilt over killing to sustain his unnatural life. However, as he stalks this particular killer, he finds himself fascinated with a woman who would have been the killer's next victim. After draining all the blood from the serial killer, Lestat attacks the woman, taking her life as well. Wracked with guilt, Lestat goes out to the water's edge to clear his mind and is surprised to find himself confronted by a human who leaves a package for him that contains a short story by H.P. Lovecraft.

Chapter 2. Lestat goes to London to visit the home of his mortal friend, David Talbot. David is the Superior General of the Talamasca, an organization that monitors unnatural creatures, such as vampires and witches. David has recently begun to avoid his duties at the Talamasca, keeping to himself. Lestat thinks that perhaps David has begun to question his mortality or his faith because of his friendship with Lestat. When Lestat goes to visit David, he recalls the tension of their last meeting. Lestat tells David that he is unhappy with his existence and wants to die. David tries to convince him not to go, but Lestat refuses to listen.

Chapter 3. Lestat goes to the Gobi Desert to expose himself to the sunlight. Lestat purposely chooses a very remote area where he will not be able to escape the sun. Lestat is surprised to discover he has survived the first day in the sunlight, but remains in the sun for a second day. Somehow Lestat survives the second day as well, after managing to bury himself in the sand. Lestat finally decides that his body is too powerful for the sun to kill him and he flies back to David's home where he takes refuge from the horrible pain of his burns in David's study.

Chapter 4. Lestat wakes in David's study. The pain is lessening, but Lestat is amused to discover that the burns have caused a darkening of his pale, vampire skin that makes him appear almost human. Lestat leaves the house to feed in the streets of London.



## Introduction and Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Fans of the Anne Rice Vampire Chronicles will recognize the Vampire Lestat as one of the main characters in the previous three books. In this novel, Lestat has become disillusioned with his long life as a vampire. Lestat is haunted by memories of his mortal life back in eighteenth century France, and his guilt over the murders he must commit in order to sustain his life as a vampire. Lestat tries to kill only the worse of humanity, but occasionally finds himself so overwhelmed with darkness that he kills an innocent in order to enjoy the less dark experiences of those humans.

In previous books, Lestat has befriended David Talbot, a human who lives in England and runs an organization whose job it is to observe and keep secret the world of vampires and witches. Lestat is aware that David Talbot is perhaps the only true friend he has ever had, but David is growing older and will die soon. Lestat already grieves David's impending death and the impact that his friendship with David has had on the mortal's life. Lestat is an immortal creature who is completely unnatural and very powerful, yet he continues to have the same human emotions as he once had before his transformation. This leaves Lestat struggling with guilt and the idea of what might happen to him and his soul when he eventually dies.

Lestat is tired of his unnatural life and his impact on others and has decided it is time to die. However, Lestat discovers that his unnatural state has grown so powerful that he cannot die. This depresses Lestat and leaves him with the same guilt and desire to die he felt before. Now the reader must wonder how Lestat will deal with his desire to end his existence now that he knows he cannot kill himself.



# Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 5-9

## Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 5-9 Summary

Chapter 5. When Lestat returns from feeding, he sits with David and listens to him talk. David tells Lestat about his youth in Brazil, of how he met a young man whom he had a passionate affair until the young man's mother placed a curse on him. David returned to Brazil to learn the woman's religion, to become a Candomble priest. It was this experience with the supernatural that led to David's involvement with the Talamasca. Now, recently, David has been studying Faust and the Bible, and this leads to a deep discussion about religion with David admitting to Lestat that he once saw a vision of God and the devil discussing the devil's role in humanity. Shortly after this discussion, Lestat leaves David's home and returns to London. Although no one knows where Lestat is, a package is delivered to him at his hotel containing another short story.

Chapter 6. Lestat goes to Paris, a town he has not visited in many decades despite his great love of the city, to test the abilities of the strange human who has been sending him packages. While in the city, Lestat thinks a lot about the past, especially about his relationship with David as well as his friend, Louis, and the young girl they once cared for, Claudia, who died an untimely death. The strange human finds Lestat again, sending to him a package containing a movie, followed quickly by another. Lestat speaks to David and finally identifies the theme that all the short stories and movies given to Lestat have in common. They are all about people who switch bodies somehow. David warns Lestat to be careful around this human, who has identified himself in a note to Lestat as Raglan James. Lestat, however, decides to meet with James.

Chapter 7. Lestat returns to his home city, New Orleans. After touring briefly some of the familiar places in the city, Lestat makes his way to the abandoned house where his friend, Louis, makes his home. Lestat tells Louis that he thinks he has met someone who can give him the opportunity to experience a mortal body again. Louis warns Lestat against doing this, but Lestat becomes angry. Lestat claims that all vampires desire to be mortal again. Lestat leaves in anger, but later runs into Louis again while visiting a favorite cathedral.

Chapter 8. The following night, Lestat meets with James. Over coffee, James tells Lestat that he has figured out a way to exchange bodies with people. James admits that he often does this by force, forcing people out of their own bodies so that he might steal them. However, James cannot do this with Lestat's body and has decided to ask him to do it willingly. James tells Lestat that he can have his human body, one that James has taken from a young mechanic who is now dead, for a week if Lestat will allow him the use of his own body and pay him ten million dollars. After James explains the whole



process, Lestat suggests he might be willing to try it, but only for twenty-four hours. However, Lestat refuses to commit. Lestat tells him he will go to Georgetown in two day's time if he decides to do it.

Chapter 9. Lestat arranges for the transfer of twenty million dollars for James to pick up the day they are to return to their own bodies, making it so that James cannot get the money if he does not return Lestat's body. At the same time, Lestat takes precautions so that James cannot use his body to touch any of his massive amount of funds. David calls and tells Lestat basically what James has already told him, that James once worked for Talamasca and learned of Lestat that way. David warns Lestat that James is a con man who often takes advantage of people and has been convicted of many thefts of opportunity. Lestat, however, refuses to listen to David's words of warning. The day before the scheduled switch, Lestat goes to Georgetown and hides some money in James' house for his use when he is inside the mortal body. Lestat also meets a dog who once belonged to the house where James lives and decides to make it his own.

## **Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 5-9 Analysis**

Lestat and David have a long discussion about David's past, his involvement in a type of voodoo religion, and religion. David has become obsessed with Faust and God over the past few months, trying to decipher his own feelings toward religion and what will happen to his soul when he dies. This is the same kind of struggle Lestat has been having over his guilt associated with the murders he must commit in order to survive as a vampire. Both men are unclear about whether God really exists and if their souls are destined to eternal damnation upon their deaths. This is something that makes both men frightened.

Lestat wanted to die, but found that his unnatural body is too powerful to kill. For this reason, Lestat jumps at the chance to become human again, to experience what it means to be mortal once more. For this reason, Lestat jumps at the chance to switch bodies with the body thief even though he realizes that this man is not the most honest in the world and will more than likely attempt to leave Lestat trapped in his mortal body. Lestat seems less than concerned about this possibility, believing that he is too smart to allow someone like James to get the better of him. Lestat is warned by both David and his friend and fellow vampire, Louis, but he refuses to listen.





# Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 10-13

## Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 10-13 Summary

Chapter 10. Lestat arrives at James' home the morning of the body exchange. Lestat insists on learning more about the man whose body James now has. This man, a mechanic, was accused of killing his family after becoming high on a drug he was selling on the streets. The man, depressed and in shock after his experiences, was lured out of his body by James. When the man's soul moved into James' dying body, James killed him. James assures Lestat that the original soul for his mortal body will never come back. Lestat finally agrees to the exchange. They exchange passports and id. James gives Lestat keys to a car. Then Lestat floats out of his body and settles into the body of the mortal. In the aftermath of the exchange, the dog, Mojo, begins to attack Lestat's vampire body, so Lestat orders James out of the house.

Chapter 11. Lestat realizes that James broke the kitchen door in his escape, allowing the cold into the house. Lestat knows that he must fix this problem before his new mortal body freezes, but does not know how. Eventually he simply seals off the kitchen from the rest of the house. Lestat feels strange in the new body, unsure how to move this bigger, heavier body. Lestat trips once and injures his head. Then Lestat discovers he must use the bathroom and is disgusted by the natural elimination processes of his new mortal body. Lestat then realizes he is hungry, but the money he hid in the house is gone and the keys to the car James left him are gone.

Lestat walks to a nearby restaurant in the snow, unprepared for the experience of the cold, and begs a meal. A young hostess has pity on him and feeds him. Lestat finds food tasteless and unsatisfying. After he eats, the young woman invites Lestat back to her home. The young woman sets out to seduce Lestat, but wants him to stop when it comes time to apply contraceptive. Lestat, unfamiliar with such procedures, refuses to stop and rapes the young girl. Overcome with guilt afterward, Lestat apologizes and promises to return with a gift. Lestat returns to James' home, bathes, and takes a bath before falling asleep. When he wakes, the sun is shining on his face for the first time in several hundred years.

Chapter 12. Lestat takes Mojo and walks out in the sunlight. Lestat feels a part of a new community as he tours the monuments of Washington, D.C. Lestat is surprised at the kindness and camaraderie of people in daylight. As he tours the sights, Lestat is stopped several times by people who are worried about his condition because he is clearly becoming ill. Lestat finds this extraordinary. Lestat then goes and picks up some money he has arranged to be delivered to a local bank and checks into a hotel after buying some clothes. Lestat is confronted by a hotel maid who is worried about his condition. The woman brings Lestat some over the counter medications. Lestat sleeps



and then wakes in the middle of the night and realizes it is time to meet James at the house for the exchange. James never shows up. Lestat tries to make his way back to the hotel, but collapses in the street.

Chapter 13. Delirious with fever, Lestat begs a nurse not to allow him to die. As he moves in and out of the delirium, Lestat remembers when he took Claudia from the hospital and turned her into a vampire. As Lestat slowly comes out of his confusion, he becomes aware that the same nurse has stayed by his side through it all. Not only that, but he has told the nurse, Gretchen, everything about him, including the body switch and his life as a vampire. When the hospital becomes overwhelmed with the flu epidemic, Gretchen takes Lestat out of the hospital to care for him herself.

## **Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 10-13 Analysis**

Lestat becomes a human by switching bodies with the body thief. Lestat is excited at the chance to be human again, but from the very beginning he becomes overwhelmed by the weaknesses of the human condition. Lestat is offended by his new body's elimination processes as well as the smells generated by the body. Lestat also dislikes the taste and texture of food, but learns to enjoy the taste and intoxication of wine. Lestat discovers sex, but does not know how to control his passions or make allowances for the needs of his partner. It is a complicated situation that leaves Lestat filled with similar guilts to those he suffered as a vampire.

When the sun comes up, Lestat experiences sunlight in a way he has not been able to experience since he was human two hundred years before. Lestat is overwhelmed not only with the sensation of sunlight, but with the kindness and behavior of people in daylight as compared to those in the dark. Lestat discovers that this experience is worth everything he has given up to be mortal.

When Lestat returns to the house to get his own body back, James does not show up. The reader is not surprised as Lestat was warned of this possibility several times before he made the exchange. Then Lestat becomes ill. Lestat has become hyperaware of all the things that can kill him while in this mortal body, but he has somehow overlooked the possibility of illness until he collapse from pneumonia. Lestat finds himself in the hospital fighting for his life and telling his unusual story to a nun. The reader, aware of the religious discussions that have been taking place throughout the book, must wonder about the irony of Lestat befriending a nun.



# Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 14-19

## Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 14-19 Summary

Chapter 14. Lestat is taken to Gretchen's home, a quiet cottage far from the hospital. Gretchen bathes him and puts him to bed. As Lestat continues to recuperate, he thinks frequently of Claudia, believing that he is really seeing and speaking to her. Lestat is reminded of Claudia's attempts to end his life and his guilt over her death. As Lestat gets better, his conversations with Claudia begin to end. Lestat talks with Gretchen and learns that she worked in a clinic in French Guiana, but came back to America because her vow of chastity had begun to consume her and she hoped to meet a man with whom she could give up her virginity.

Chapter 15. Lestat finally feels well enough to bathe himself. After a quick bath, Lestat returns to the bed and makes love with Gretchen, an experience that is much better than his previous sexual experience.

Chapter 16. Lestat and Gretchen have a picnic on the living room floor and she tells him about her childhood as a piano prodigy. They discuss her decision to give up music in order to become a nun after she made a promise to God when her mother was ill. Then they discuss the existence of God. Gretchen admits that she does not believe God exists. Lestat then makes a promise to Gretchen that when he returns to his own body, he will come to her to prove the truth of his stories.

Chapter 17. Well now, Lestat flies home to New Orleans in order to enlist the help of his friend Louis to recapture his own body. When Louis comes into his own home where Lestat waits, he mistakes him for a normal mortal and attacks him. Lestat finally convinces Louis of his true identity.

Chapter 18. Lestat tells Louis his story and asks him to turn this new mortal body into a vampire. Louis refuses. They argue and Louis leaves, telling Lestat that he can never see him again. Angry, Lestat burns down Louis's home. As the flames catch and Lestat becomes aware of the fire engines approaching, he sees another vampire friend, Marius, watching him. Marius turns his back on Lestat.

Chapter 19. Lestat goes to a café while he tries to figure out what to do next. Finally he decides to return to his apartment even though he is unsure how he might be able to enter the apartment since he has taken every precaution to keep humans out. When he arrives, Lestat discovers that the door to his apartment is open. It turns out David has broken into the apartment in hopes of finding Lestat. David lets Lestat in and listens to his story. David agrees to help Lestat find his body and tries to assure him that the other vampires have not killed his former body. David takes Lestat to breakfast as they wait



for information from the Talamasca about a string of murders that they believe have been committed by James. When the information comes, they are able to use it to conclude that James is on board the Queen Elizabeth 2 cruise ship. David uses his connections to get himself and Lestat on the cruise ship under assumed names.

## **Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 14-19 Analysis**

Lestat remains with the nun, Gretchen, for several days. Lestat learns that Gretchen has begun to question the existence of God even though she continues to believe in her own role as a nurse to young, underprivileged children. Lestat falls in love with Gretchen as much as a man of his experiences can. Gretchen loves Lestat too for his unusual story and her belief that he is mentally deranged to a certain degree. It is an experience that is of great importance to Lestat and helps him learn more about what it means to be mortal than he has been able to learn in two hundred years of being immortal.

Lestat returns to New Orleans with a renewed desire to get his body back. This includes Lestat turning to his longtime friend Louis for help. However, Louis refuses to help in an attempt to force Lestat to remain human. This causes a breach in their friendship and Lestat reacts violently, burning down Louis's home.

Lestat's friend David comes to the rescue and agrees to help him. This again reinforces Lestat's feelings toward mortals even though he has now come to the conclusion that it is better to be immortal. This could foreshadow some changes between David and Lestat that the reader might not see at this point in the novel.



# Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 20-28

## Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 20-28 Summary

Chapter 20. David and Lestat fly to Grenada where they plan to meet the Queen Elizabeth 2. A man from the Talamasca catches them up on the man they believe to be Raglan James. The man also tells them that he has taken a cabin in the middle of the ship where he has hidden several guns and placed a trunk for Lestat's use after he regains his body. David and Lestat then spend a quiet evening in their room practicing the skills they will need to recover Lestat's body. Later, Lestat wants to make use of his mortal body by having sexual relations with David, but David refuses.

Chapter 21. David and Lestat board the ship and are taken to their exclusive cabins. David talks the porter into giving him a key to James' cabin. David and Lestat break in and find James asleep in a trunk.

Chapter 22. David and Lestat leave James be and explore the ship. Lestat finds a quick path from James' cabin to the one the Talamasca has set up for him, for his use after the body switch. That night, Lestat observes James, in Lestat's former body, in the lounge. Later, Lestat watches James leave the ship for an unknown destination. Lestat and David spend the evening together, later observing James when he returns and spends the rest of the night gambling and dancing with older passengers. Shortly before dawn, Lestat and David go to James' cabin where they await his return. When James enters the room, a fight ensues. Lestat manages to push James from his body when the sun comes into the room and causes pain in James' vampire eyes. Lestat quickly rushes to his cabin in his vampire body to the sound of gunshots.

Chapter 23. When Lestat wakes at dusk, he senses that neither David nor James are on the ship. Lestat goes to James' cabin and finds ship security waiting for him. Lestat is informed that there was an incident in the cabin and that David was discovered to be a fraud and escorted from the ship. Lestat is told that David left a message that he wanted to meet in Miami. Lestat quickly leaves the ship to avoid further confrontation with ship security.

Chapter 24. Lestat goes to South America to see Gretchen as he promised her. When Lestat finds the hospital where Gretchen works, he is shocked by eerie similarities to the hospital where he found Claudia over a hundred years before. When Gretchen sees him, she refuses to believe he is her lover. Gretchen goes into a chapel where she begins to show signs of stigmata.

Chapter 25. Rather than go straight to Miami to see David, Lestat remains in South America and spends the day in a lost temple.



Chapter 26. Lestat arrives in Miami and quickly contacts David. Lestat and David meet in a café. Lestat tells David what happened with Gretchen. David tries to be sympathetic, but something seems off about him. Then David asks Lestat to make him a vampire. Lestat is surprised because David has resisted the idea throughout their friendship. However, Lestat is also happy at the idea of being on equal footing with his dear friend and to not have to anticipate inevitability of David's mortal death. However, as Lestat begins to drain David of blood, he absorbs his memories and experiences. It is then that Lestat realizes this is not David, but Raglan James. In anger, Lestat throws David's body against the wall, causing a brain injury. Lestat calls for help and quickly leaves the room. Lestat finds a payphone where he calls the Talamasca. However, as he speaks, Lestat sees his former mortal body and realizes it contains David's soul.

Chapter 27. David tells Lestat how James shoved him out of his own body and into the body Lestat had recently vacated. David then explains what happened on the ship with security and how he escaped unnoticed. Finally David explains that he knew he should return to his own body and die within it, but he cannot make himself desire to leave this youthful body.

Chapter 28. David and Lestat go to the hospital where David's body lie dying, but when they arrive they discover it is too late. David feels at once free and frightened. Lestat promises to arrange for David, in his new body, to inherit most of what his previous body leaves behind in death.

## **Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapters 20-28 Analysis**

Lestat has learned many lessons by becoming mortal again. Lestat has discovered just how fragile a human body can be and how unpleasant many of the natural processes of a mortal body are. However, Lestat has also learned how wonderful it can be to be out in sunlight and to be intimate with another person. Lestat has fallen in love, both with Gretchen and in a different way with his good friend, David. Lestat wants to be close to David, but David is uncertain because of the frailties of his old body. This confuses Lestat to an extent, but he continues to love his good friend in a deep, profound sort of way.

Lestat, despite his new understanding of what it means to be mortal, wants to return to his powerful vampire body. Lestat is no longer unhappy with his vampire existence even though he still struggles with guilt. Lestat continues to be haunted by memories of the murders he has committed in the name of being a vampire and the innocence he stole when he made his adopted daughter, Claudia, a vampire against her wishes. Lestat has always sworn he would never force a person to become a vampire against their will again, but he continues to carry this guilt with him.

After finally regaining his vampire body, Lestat goes to Gretchen to prove to her that his story was truthful. Gretchen, a nun, becomes hysterical when she sees the truth and turns to a God she told Lestat she did not believe existed. This causes Gretchen to



show signs of stigmata, a religious occurrence that is thought to only happen to the truly devoted. This is a confusing and hurtful experience for Lestat that leaves him sad and filled again with guilt. Lestat does not quite know what to make of this experience except to feel the pain of yet another person he loved who does not understand him.

When Lestat finally meets up with David again, he discovers that after years of refusing the gift of immortal life, David finally wants to become a vampire. Lestat does not stop to think this through, similar to how he jumped into the idea of body switching, and begins the procedure. However, Lestat quickly discovers that it is not David's soul in David's body, but Raglan James. Lestat damages the body and is quickly filled with horrible guilt. However, David is perfectly happy to have a new start, a new life, in the much younger body both Lestat and James abandoned.



## Part 2, Once Out of Nature: Chapters 29-33

### Part 2, Once Out of Nature: Chapters 29-33 Summary

Chapter 29. Lestat returns to New Orleans where he arranges to restore the rooms he once shared with Claudia and Louis to their former glory. Then Lestat tours his beloved city, wondering if all the other vampires have truly abandoned him now.

Chapter 30. Lestat travels the entire world, letting all the vampires know he has returned.

Chapter 31. While Lestat sits in his beloved cathedral, Louis comes to him. Lestat and Louis speak for some time. Lestat demands to know why Louis loves him and if Louis would have eventually relented and made Lestat's new mortal body a vampire. Louis claims he cannot honestly answer, and then demands to know if Lestat could condemn another soul to their existence.

Chapter 32. Lestat claims the story should have ended there, but does not.

Chapter 33. Lestat tracks David to the Barbados resort where he took refuge after initially leaving the QE2. David is clearly happy in his new mortal body. Lestat, however, has decided to make David a vampire despite his refusals over the years. David is angry and fights Lestat, but Lestat persists anyway. When David becomes a vampire, he is angry. Lestat lets him go feed and is upset when David does not return. Lestat waits for him several days before returning to New Orleans. Once there, Lestat finds David and Louis in the newly restored rooms of Lestat, Louis, and Claudia's former home. David tells Lestat that he was angry at first and disappeared to punish Lestat. However, he is now happy in his new form and wants to go with Lestat and Louis to carnival in Brazil.

### Part 2, Once Out of Nature: Chapters 29-33 Analysis

When it is all over, Lestat finds himself feeling abandoned by the only family he has left, the other vampires. Lestat refuses to disappear, to be ignored. When Louis attempts to reconnect with him, Lestat is still angry and hurt that Louis refused to help him when he was desperate even though he can understand Louis' point of view. Louis did what he did because he thought he was protecting Lestat from a second damnation, but Lestat no longer views his immortality in the same way.

All through the novel, Lestat has been haunted by Claudia, by her telling him that he was destined to make another soul take the Dark Trick against their will. Lestat has resisted this idea throughout the novel, but suddenly decides that he wants David to take the Dark Trick. David is Lestat's only true friend and Lestat can no longer face the



idea that David will once again grow old and die. To prevent this, Lestat selfishly forces David to accept immortality and changes him into a vampire while his new body is still young and healthy. David fights him and is angry, but in the end is pleased with his new life. This should please Lestat, but instead it leaves him in the same darkness, the same guilt he felt at the beginning of the novel, suggesting a difficult time in Lestat's future.



# Characters

## Lestat de Lioncourt or The Vampire Lestat

Lestat de Lioncourt is the name the Vampire Lestat was given in his mortal life. Lestat, the narrator of this novel, has been a vampire for more than two hundred years when this novel begins. Lestat has grown unhappy with his existence as a vampire, filled with guilt over the murders of innocence he must commit in order to receive the blood he needs to survive. Lestat tries to only kill those who deserve it. Recently Lestat has been targeting serial killers. However, Lestat has grown depressed due to the memories taking these people blood infuses him with and he craves the memories of more innocent people. For this reason, he slips at the beginning of the novel and kills an innocent old woman he was attempting to save from a serial killer. Lestat is so overcome with this guilt that he decides to kill himself, but someone survives the attempt.

Lestat is given an opportunity to take over a mortal body and be mortal again for the first time in hundreds of years. It is Lestat's thought that all immortals only want to be mortal again, therefore he jumps at the chance despite the many warnings from his friends. When Lestat becomes mortal, he enjoys being out in the sun, but quickly discovers that the man who took his body does not plan on coming back. It is then that Lestat truly learns who his friends are. Lestat experiences love in his new human body, but also realizes that he would prefer his powerful vampire body. Lestat regains his old body only to find himself abandoned by all he thought loved him. Lestat resorts to his old ways with disregard to morals or guilt, even forcefully changing his good friend, David Talbot, into a vampire. Lestat feels abandoned and sees no harm in creating more havoc since he is already forever damned.

## David Talbot

David Talbot is the Superior General of the Talamasca, a group that collects evidence of the supernatural such as vampires and witches. David Talbot and the Vampire Lestat have been friends for several years. This experience, and his advancing age, have caused David to begin to question the choices he has made in his life and where he might be going when death finally comes for him. Lestat has offered on many occasions to give David immortal life, but David refuses, preferring to live out his life as it was originally intended.

When Lestat becomes depressed and decides to end his life, he turns to David. When his attempted suicide fails, Lestat again turns to David. Finally, when Lestat finds himself without a friend in the world, it is David who comes to his rescue. With David's help, Lestat is able to retrieve his former body. At the same time, David finds himself pushed out of his own body and forced into the body of a much younger man. Although filled with guilt that his old body is dying and his soul should be in it, David is happy with



his younger existence. David looks forward to a second chance at life. However, Lestat decides that now that David is young again that it is a good time to make him immortal. David is angry at first, but later pleased with his new existence as a young, immortal man.

## Raglan James

Raglan James is an older gentleman who has spent his life making unwise decisions. James is a small time thief who often steals things in such a way that he is sure to be caught. Mildly psychic, James was once a member of the Talamasca, but was thrown out because of his thieving ways. James learned of Lestat while a member of the Talamasca and when he learned how to force others out of their bodies so that he could take them over, James decided he would like to live inside Lestat's very powerful body. Unable to force Lestat from his own body, James contacts him and asks for the privilege of trading bodies. Lestat, who has been unhappy with his own immortality, quickly agrees. However, true to his past, James quickly disappears with Lestat's body and does not give it back. In the end, Lestat takes his own body back, but James takes over David's body in the hope of convincing Lestat to turn him into a vampire. Lestat figures out the change at the last minute and kills James in David's body.

## Claudia

Claudia was a young girl who lived over a hundred years ago. During a plague outbreak, Claudia's mother was dying of the disease when Louis, a new vampire desperate to feed, took her life. Lestat later tracked Claudia down to a children's hospital for plague victims, claimed her, and made her a vampire. For a very long time, Claudia, Louis, and Lestat lived happily together. However, Claudia became unhappy with being an immortal stuck in a child's body and began to blame Lestat. Claudia convinced Louis to help her kill Lestat and run away. Although Lestat did not die, Claudia and Louis were held accountable for his death. Claudia was exposed to sunlight and killed.

In this novel, as Lestat suffers a near fatal illness in his new mortal body, Claudia begins to haunt him. Claudia taunts Lestat, telling him that he will again force a person to become a vampire against their will. Lestat tries to deny this accusation, but in the end his own guilt and sense of abandonment causes Lestat to turn David into a vampire against his will. Although David comes to accept this new life, Lestat continues to be overcome with guilt about it.

## Louis de Pointe du Lac

Louis de Pointe du Lac is a young French American that Lestat turned into a vampire in order to be a companion to him. Louis and Lestat have long had a difficult, love-hate relationship. However, despite their difficulties and the loss of Claudia, Louis and Lestat continue to be friends. For this reason, Lestat turns to Louis when he first realizes who



Raglan James is and what he offers. Louis tells Lestat to kill James and to refuse his offer. Lestat does not listen to Louis. However, when Lestat finds himself trapped in the mortal body after James fails to return at the appointed, time, he turns to Louis. Lestat asks Louis to turn Lestat's new mortal body into a vampire so that he will have the power to find his former body. However, Louis, after learning that Lestat has fallen in love with Gretchen, refuses to give him the Dark Gift. Louis thinks that Lestat has finally gotten what he wants and is simply having buyer's remorse. Louis was turned into a vampire against his will and cannot make himself to do that to another. However, Lestat does not see things this way and he burns down Louis's home in revenge.

## The Mechanic

The Mechanic is a young man in England who worked as a mechanic, but transported and sold drugs to make extra money. One day, apparently under the influence of the same drugs he transported, this young man killed his entire family. The young man then was placed in a mental institution where Raglan James worked. For a month, Raglan James worked on the young man, finally coaxing his spirit out of his own body and into James'. James then killed his old body and escaped the mental hospital. It is this body that James offers to Lestat when he proposes as body exchange. It is also this body that David finds himself in after Lestat manages to recover his own body.

## Gretchen

Gretchen is a middle aged nun who has recently had a crisis of faith in which her own chastity has begun to obsess her. Gretchen has devoted her life to helping the less fortunate, not so much because of her deep belief in God but because she believes it is her purpose in life to help others. Gretchen admits to Lestat that she does not really believe there is a God, but that she has devoted her life in this way in order to fulfill a promise to a God she is not sure she believes in and because she feels deeply it is the right thing to do. Lestat and Gretchen become lovers when she takes him from the hospital in order to nurse him back to health in his mortal body. Later, when Lestat returns to Gretchen in his true body to show her his stories were true, she does not believe him and then begins to show signs of stigmata.

## Marius

Marius is a vampire. Marius is Lestat's old mentor and teacher, the one who has kept the historical secrets of the vampires. Lestat thinks of Marius often in this novel as his friend, as someone he does not want to disappoint or offend even though he seems to feel it is inevitable. When Lestat burns down Louis' home after finding himself stuck in a mortal body and frustrated by Louis' refusal to help him, Lestat sees Marius. Lestat becomes afraid that Marius might have appeared in that way to tell Lestat he has or is going to kill Lestat's former body because of what he has done.



## Restaurant Hostess

After becoming mortal for the first time in hundreds of years, Lestat finds his body starving, but himself without the means to buy food. Lestat goes to a restaurant and asks the hostess to give him food in exchange for work. The girl takes pity on Lestat and gives him a meal. Later, the girl takes Lestat home with her where she stages a seduction. However, Lestat has never had sexual relations in this century and did not understand when the girl wanted to stop long enough for him to use a prophylactic. Lestat raped the girl and later returned to give her a gift in way of apology.

## Mojo

Mojo is a very large dog that Lestat finds behind the Georgetown home where Raglan James lives. Lestat realizes the dog used to belong to the former owner of the house and that he dislikes James. Lestat adopts this dog, eventually taking him back to New Orleans with him. Mojo becomes a loyal friend, more of a friend than Lestat finds in Louis or most of the other vampires during his crisis.



# Objects/Places

## H.P. Lovecraft Short Story

In Miami, while dealing with the guilt over killing an innocent old woman, Lestat runs into a human who gives him an H.P. Lovecraft short story he has already read. Later, after receiving several similar packages, Lestat realizes that the strange human is trying to tell him something about body switching.

## Faust

David Talbot has recently become obsessed with the themes of Faust, studying it along with the Bible.

## Louis' House

Louis occupies a small cottage behind a larger plantation home outside of New Orleans. It is here that Lestat often comes to see him. It is also this home that Lestat burns down after Louis refuses to turn Lestat's human body into a vampire.

## New Orleans Rooms

Lestat continues to own the rooms where he once lived with Claudia and Louis, but has allowed them to fall into ruins. At the end of the novel, Lestat has the rooms restored to their former glory and it is there that he finds David and Louis at the end of the novel.

## Queen Elizabeth 2

The Queen Elizabeth 2 is a cruise ship on which Raglan James' father once worked. James take passage on the QE2 after stealing Lestat's vampire body. It is on the QE2 that David and Lestat confront James, and Lestat takes his body back.

## Georgetown

Georgetown is where Raglan James is living in his current mortal body. This is where Lestat and James make their body exchange and where Lestat finds himself stranded when James fails to return to make the second exchange as planned.



## **New Orleans**

New Orleans is where Lestat and his friend, Louis, live. This is also where Lestat once lived with the child, Claudia.

## **London**

London is where David Talbot spends a great deal of his time as the Superior General of the Talamasca. London is also where James stole the body of a young mechanic for the purpose of exchanging bodies with Lestat.

## **Miami**

Miami, one of Lestat's favorite cities, is where the novel begins. Lestat is in Miami to take the blood of a serial killer who targets old people. Later in the novel, Lestat meets David Talbot in Miami, only to discover that Raglan James has taken over David's body.

## **Paris**

Paris is also a favorite city to Lestat, even though he has not visited it often since Claudia met her death there. Lestat has memories of Paris from his mortal life when he visited there shortly before becoming immortal.

## **Gobi Desert**

Lestat attempts suicide by exposing himself to the sunlight in the Gobi Desert.

## **French Guiana**

Gretchen volunteers at a children's hospital in French Guiana. It is here that Lestat goes to see her after regaining his vampire body in order to prove to her that he did not lie about his transformation into a mortal. Unfortunately, Gretchen does not believe him and then begins to show signs of stigmata.



# Themes

## Guilt

Guilt is a major theme of "The Tale of the Body Thief" because of Lestat's obsession with his own guilt. At the beginning of the novel, Lestat is overcome with guilt because of the deaths he causes in order to take the blood he needs to survive as a vampire. Lestat once attempted to take blood but leave the victims alive, but found that to be unsatisfying. Lestat then began taking only the lives of those who deserve it. Lestat has begun tracking serial killers and killing them. However, when Lestat takes a life through blood, he also takes that person's memories and experiences. Taking the memories and the experiences of killers is filled with darkness that often leaves Lestat depressed and unsatisfied. For this reason, he slips and takes the life of an old woman had meant to be saving by taking the life of her would-be killer.

So overwhelmed with guilt, Lestat tries to take his own life, but he has grown so powerful in his vampire form that he finds it impossible. The next best thing is to switch bodies with a body thief and become mortal. Unfortunately, when stuck in the mortal body Lestat finds himself fighting for his life and he realizes he really does not want to die. This fight for life, however, causes Lestat to confront a person from his past, a young vampire girl he made who later died for attempting to kill him. This girl, Claudia, accuses Lestat of making vampires against their wills and claims he will do it again. Again Lestat finds himself overwhelmed with guilt. Unfortunately, when all is said and done, Lestat also finds himself abandoned. This causes him to no longer care about the guilt and he fulfills exactly what Claudia has claimed he will do: Lestat forces David Talbot to become a vampire.

Guilt is a theme of this novel because it is a motivating factor. It is guilt that makes Lestat suicidal at the beginning of the novel and guilt that later pushes him to indulge in the body thief's plan. Later, it is this guilt that changes Lestat's perception of life and the world around him, causing him to force David to become a vampire.

## Relationships

Relationships are important to people, especially a man who will live for all time. Lestat has been known to force people to become vampires so that he might have a companion in his long, lonely life. However, Lestat has learned a few lessons from his past and has come to a point where he respects a mortal's wish to not become immortal.

Lestat is something of a self-centered person and he becomes obsessed with his own guilt and his fears of what might happen to his soul when he finally dies. For this reason, Lestat attempts suicide. Later, Lestat uses this same excuse to switch bodies with a body thief so that he might become mortal once again. However, when Lestat decides





he does not like being mortal but needs help in finding the body thief, he learns who his friends truly are.

Lestat goes to Louis and asks for help, but Louis believes that Lestat got what he wanted and by turning him into a vampire, he will be denying Lestat the experience he really wanted. Lestat feels abandoned. This feeling is deepened when Lestat catches sight of his old friend and mentor, Marius, after he burns down Louis's house. Lestat is convinced that the entire vampire community has abandoned him because they do not agree with his decision to become mortal.

Although David helps Lestat get his body back and proves to be a true friend, Lestat forces him to become a vampire. Lestat has done this for selfish reasons, but David later comes around and accepts the situation. However, their relationship has forever been altered to a certain degree. It seems to the reader that Lestat has simply lost the ability to be true to a good friend because he has been hurt so many times, in the past by things such as Claudia's murder, and more recently by Gretchen's denial of his true form.

## **Immortality versus Mortality**

This entire novel is about a supernatural world in which vampires are real. The narrator of this novel is Lestat, a man who was turned into a vampire in the 1700s and who has lived his immortal life both in great joy and happiness as well as great despite and physical desperation. Lestat has become unhappy with his immortal existence mostly because he dislikes the murders and other terrible acts he must perform in order to continue to exist. For this reason, he jumps at the chance to become mortal once again.

Lestat has recently been infused with memories of his mortal life and this makes him nostalgic for that time. However, when he becomes mortal again, he discovers that it is not as pleasant as he remembers it. In fact, the only thing Lestat truly enjoys as a mortal this time around is the ability to be out in the sun and to know the kindness of other humans. Lestat realizes that he truly prefers being immortal and all the supernatural powers that come with it. For this reason, Lestat fights to return to his immortal form and then gives the gift to his friend David despite David's unhappiness with it.

# Style

## Point of View

This novel is written in the first person point of view. The narrator is the Vampire Lestat, the narrator of several of the other novels in this series. In this novel, Lestat tells a modern story of how he came into contact with a body thief who gives him the opportunity to be mortal again, an experience that teaches Lestat how much he truly does enjoy the power that comes with his immortal body.

The point of view of this novel is a narrow view that only allows the reader to know what the main character knows and experiences. However, in this novel this point of view is not restrictive because the story is best seen only through Lestat's eyes. This novel is a very personal story about one man's struggle with his ideas of religion as well as his feelings toward his own unnatural existence. In the end, not only does Lestat come to appreciate his immortal existence, but he breaks his own rule and forces his good friend to take the Dark Gift despite his long term resistance. For these reasons, this story was best told in the first person point of view and the point of view works well with the overall plot of the novel.

## Setting

"The Tale of the Body Thief" takes place all over the world in the mid-1980s. The novel begins in Miami, one of Lestat's favorite cities, but quickly moves to England and then the Gobi desert. Later, Lestat returns home to New Orleans, only to travel again to Georgetown and then the South Pacific. The global setting of this novel is realistic and exciting, showing the reader a world that is unaware and unprepared for such a character as this novel's narrator, Lestat.

The setting of this novel works well with the overall plot of the novel because the author is clearly knowledgeable about her settings and she uses them in such a way that they provide an exciting background while also interacting with the characters in such a way that they add conflict to the plot. When Lestat goes to the Gobi Desert, the reader knows the dangers to his life there and is not surprised when those dangers take place, even though they do not take his life as possibly suspected. Later, when Lestat goes to Georgetown and the snow causes him to become deathly ill, again it is an expected outcome that adds tension to the overall plot of the novel. The author uses her settings well, enhancing the plot rather than taking from it.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in English. The language is not a simplistic English that might speak down to the reader, but not so sophisticated that the average reader will not follow



along. The language is filled with intelligence, but commonality, clearly written by someone with a clear understanding of the language and its many nuances.

The language of this novel reflects the language of a man who has lived a long life and has experienced many cultures. While there are some foreign words in the novel, they are used sparingly and are easily explained in the text, not posing any difficulty for the reader. The author uses her language in such a way to make her narrator seem more authentic, but also in a way that allows the intended audience to understand the plot without too much difficulty. For these reasons, the language works well with the plot.

## Structure

The novel is divided into two parts. The first part of the novel, the longest part, tells the story of Lestat's meeting with the body thief, his experiences as a mortal, and his actions in recovering his original vampire body. The second part of the novel shows Lestat dealing with the fallout of his experience and his decision to change his dear friend, David Talbot, into a vampire. The novel is told from Lestat's point of view and is done in both narration and dialogue, providing the reader with many very vivid scenes as well as deep, philosophical discussions.

There is one main plot in this novel along with many subplots. The main plot follows Lestat as he turns his suicidal tendencies into his desire to be mortal once more. A subplot follows the relationship between Lestat and his good friend, David Talbot, that leads both men down an unusual path. Another subplot follows Lestat as he discovers the gentler side of humanity and he falls in love with a nun. Finally, a subplot deals with Lestat's feelings of abandonment by those in the vampire community. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.

## Quotes

"Now we are truly ready to begin. Let's turn the page, shall we?" Introduction, pg. 6

"I wanted to be human, and feel human, and his blood was threaded all through me, and it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 1, pg. 21

"The Gobi Desert is therefore an immense graveyard and a fitting place for me to look the sun in the face." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 3, pg. 46

"Our coven had endured for over fifty years in that lovely upstairs apartment. And surely this factor ought to be considered when I'm being condemned, either by myself or by someone else, for my errors. Louis and Claudia had both been made by me, and for me, I admit that. Nevertheless, ours had been a curiously incandescent and satisfying existence before Claudia decided I should pay for my creations with my life."  
Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 7, pg. 101

"Mojo loved my strength; I loved his beauty. And nothing else ever really mattered at all." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 9, pg. 155

"I struggled to open my eyes before I even realized what I was doing, that I was flexing the lids of this mortal body, that indeed, I was blinking, staring through mortal eyes into the dimly lighted room, staring at my old body exactly opposite, at my old blue eyes peering back at me through the violet-colored glasses, staring at my old tanned skin."  
Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: chapter 10, pg. 165

"When I asked her if she knew all the arguments against this, and how illogical it was, how illogical all of Christianity was, she said calmly that it didn't matter. What mattered was doing good. That was all. It was simple." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 14, pgs. 221-222

"How weary I was; how seared from my own anger; how close to despair." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 18, pg. 267

"There had been something absolutely penitential about my undergoing the transformation in the mean cold of Georgetown, no doubt of it at all." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 20, pg. 301

"I think my lips formed the word 'David' one more time as if it were a prayer." Part 1, The Tale of the Body Thief: Chapter 22, pg. 341

"Well, the book should be ended. It really should have ended when I lit that small candle, but it didn't. I realized that the following night when I first opened my eyes." Part 2, Once Out of Nature: Chapter 32, pg. 411

"What more is there to say, really? The tale is told." Part 2, Once Out of Nature: Chapter 33, pg. 435



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Lestat? In what way does he suggest in the introduction to this novel that the reader should already be familiar with him and his story? Why does he say that this novel will be a modern tale? How does that differ from his other stories? Who does Lestat tell the reader will feature prominently in this novel? Why does he offer this warning?

Why is Lestat in Miami at the beginning of the novel? What does he plan to do? For what reason? How does Lestat follow a strange man in the beginning of the novel? Why does Lestat tell the reader he should have behaved differently but could not make himself do it? What does Lestat do to the strange man in the first part of this novel? For what reason? Why does Lestat go back to the old woman he was hoping to save in the first chapter of this novel? What does he do to her? How does he feel about it?

Who is David Talbot? How does Lestat know him? Why does Lestat seek out David in the second chapter of this novel? Why does Lestat reflect on their previous meeting when he goes to David? What does Lestat tell David he plans to do in this chapter of the novel? Does he? What happens to Lestat? Why does Lestat return to David? What discussion do David and Lestat have at this point in the novel? How does Lestat respond to David's revelations and his clear religious struggle?

Who is Raglan James? How does Lestat come to know him? For what reason? What does James offer to Lestat? Why does Lestat ignore both David and Louis' warnings against James? What does Lestat want from James? Why does Lestat think he can outsmart James? Does he? What happens to Lestat? Whose fault is it?

Why does Louis refuse to help Lestat when he goes to him for help? Why? How does Lestat respond to this? What does this say about Lestat? Who else appears to be refusing to help Lestat? For what reason? Why does Lestat fear that his vampire body will be destroyed before he can retrieve it? Is this a reasonable fear? Who finally agrees to help Lestat? For what reason?

How does Lestat get his vampire body back? How does Lestat feel about this? Why does Lestat kill David Talbot? Why does Lestat later turn his formerly mortal body into a vampire? What is Lestat trying to prove with these actions? Why is Lestat struggling with guilt at the beginning of the novel? How has this guilt changed by the end of the novel?

Who is Gretchen? How does Gretchen come to know Lestat? Why does Gretchen take Lestat into her home? What happens between Gretchen and Lestat? How does Lestat feel about Gretchen? How is this encounter different than Lestat's encounter with the restaurant hostess? Why does Lestat promise to go to Gretchen after he regains his true form? How does Gretchen react when he goes to her? How does this make Lestat feel? How does this impact Lestat's future actions?