

White Cat Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Cassel is a seventeen year old boy from a family of curse workers, people with special powers. When he sleepwalks onto his school roof and is sent home, he becomes caught up in his brothers' plot to assassinate Mr. Zacharov, the head of a major crime family. Meanwhile, Cassel finds out that Zacharov's daughter Lila, the girl he thought he had killed, is actually still alive. She has been transformed into a cat, the same one Cassel has been dreaming about, and only Cassel can turn her back. Cassel learns the truth about himself, that he is a transformation worker but that his brother has been blocking his memories. He changes Lila back into a girl, and together they succeed in foiling the assassination of Mr. Zacharov.

While dreaming of a white cat, Cassel sleepwalks onto the roof of his boarding school and is sent home by the dean, who now considers him a liability. Cassel feels like he deserves this in some way, because when he was fourteen he killed the girl he loved, Lila Zacharov. He cannot remember murdering her, but he does remember standing over the body feeling gleeful.

Cassel is picked up from school by his older brother Philip and sent to stay with his grandfather at his mother's old house. She is currently in prison. There are stray cats in the barn, and Cassel brings the white cat inside. He dreams of the white cat again, this time telling him that only he can lift the curse on it.

The next day Cassel, who comes from a family of conmen, forges a medical note from a doctor in the hopes he will be allowed to go back to school.

All Cassel's family are curse-workers except for him, which makes him feel left out. One night he hears Philip, his other brother Barron, and Granddad, discussing him downstairs. He wants answers, so he tries to contact Barron. He goes to Barron's house and breaks in, where he finds footage of himself on the roof, with a white cat clearly present. He sees a note in Barron's diary saying that L is clearly there. There is also an animal cage in Barron's room that smells of cat. Suddenly Cassel thinks that Lila must be alive after all, and has been turned into the white cat. He thinks both brothers have something to do with this and that it was probably all ordered by Anton, who is Lila's cousin and wants her out of the way so he can inherit the family business.

However, when Cassel gets home, Philip has sent all the stray cats to an animal shelter. Cassel tries to get the Lila cat out but is told he has to be eighteen to adopt a cat. He asks his roommate Sam for help, and along with a girl called Daneca, they scam the animal shelter into giving Cassel the cat.

That night Granddad is drugged and Cassel is taken by his brothers and Anton to a restaurant. They want him to rehearse an assassination plan to kill Mr. Zacharov. Cassel realizes that his brother Barron is a memory worker who has been blocking Cassel's memories all this time, so that he will not remember he is being used to help them kill. Cassel is even more surprised to find out he is really a transformation worker and that



Barron has been blocking this memory all his life. The only reason he is unaffected by Barron's powers now is that he has sewn memory charms into his leg. Cassel plays along with his brothers and Anton for now.

The next day Cassel turns Lila back into a person. They travel to Atlantic City where she is reunited with her father, Mr. Zacharov. She tells Cassel to go ahead with the assassination attempt but only pretend to turn her father's heart to stone. Cassel agrees. He confides in Sam and Daneca and tells them everything, then asks for their help. He is planning another con.

On Wednesday night he is picked up by Barron and Anton for the assassination. They go to the restaurant, where Daneca gives Cassel a fake blood pack Sam has made. Granddad spots Cassel and suspects something is going on. He tries to get Cassel to leave, but Cassel pretends he needs the bathroom. In the bathroom he pretends to kill Mr. Zacharov. Lila then comes in and pretends to shoot Cassel. Their plan works until Anton gets hold of the gun and realizes it is all faked. However, Barron is now on their side. He has experienced memory loss from the memory curses he has been using on Cassel, and keeps diaries to help him remember his plans. All Cassel had to do was change Barron's diary entries to make him think he is on Cassel's side. Barron holds the knife to Anton's throat, but Anton gets away and tries to kill Cassel. Granddad is forced to use a death curse on Anton. Mr. Zacharov thanks Cassel and promises not to harm his brothers if Cassel agrees to work for him now.

At the end of the story Lila tells Cassel that she has always loved him. Cassel is overjoyed until he finds out that his mother used her emotion work to manipulate Lila's feelings. Now Cassel can never be with her when he knows her feelings for him are fake.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

Cassel is a teenage boy in a family of curse-workers, magic users in an alternate version of modern USA. When he sleepwalks onto a roof, Cassel is sent home from the private boarding school he attends. He quickly becomes wrapped up in the plot his two older brothers have put together to murder the head of the Zacharov crime family and put their friend Anton in his place. Cassel figures out that his brother Barron has been memory-working him, using him to help in their plan and then forcing him to forget. Cassel was made to think he murdered Zacharov's daughter Lila, the girl he loved, but he soon realizes that she was actually transformed by him into a cat. He rescues her and manages to foil his brothers' assassination attempt, re-writing Barron's memories in the process.

Cassel wakes up on the roof of his boarding school and he realizes that he has been sleepwalking. He dreamed of a white cat that bit off his tongue. Cassel calls for help, and soon a crowd of teachers and pupils gathers below. The fire department helps him down. He is taken to the headmistress's office where Dean Wharton tells him he is an insurance liability and so will have to be sent home until he can get a doctor's note proving that it will not happen again. They are not sure whether he was really sleepwalking or whether he was attempting suicide.

Cassel returns to his room, where he tells his roommate Sam that he will have to leave the school for awhile, and asks if Sam can take over the betting business he is running. Sam is happy to. Cassel's whole family are con-men, which is why Cassel is so good at running these secret bets and fixing them in his favor. Cassel's mother is currently in prison after being caught in a con. The other members of Cassel's family are all curse-workers, meaning they have specialized magic powers. Cassel is the only one who does not, though he often wishes that he does.

Cassel is wracked with guilt about the death of a girl he loved, called Lila. He remembers standing over her dead body and feeling gleeful about getting away with her murder. He cannot remember or understand why he did it, but he feels terrible about it. Cassel's family helped to cover up the murder, buried the body and sent Cassel to boarding school to pretend to be normal.

In the dining room a girl called Daneca comes up to him and asks if he will join HEX, an advocacy group promoting workers' rights. Her whole family are workers, like Cassel's. He tells her he is not a worker and not interested in joining, which disappoints her. The next day Cassel's oldest brother Philip comes to pick him up from school.



Chapters 1-2 Analysis

This story is set in an alternate version of our own world in which curse-working, a kind of magic, has always been a part of human life and history. It is not secret; non-curse-workers are very aware of it and its effects. Curse-work is now illegal. It was banned at the same time as the prohibition on alcohol, but although that particular ban was lifted, curse-work has remained illegal. This has caused the growth of major crime families who carry out illegal curse-work, and it has pushed many curse-workers into vulnerable positions with these crime families. Even good curse-working has been banned, such as the kind that brings good luck. Due to some negative effects, the good uses to which it can be put have been ignored, and the whole range of curse-working is tarnished with a bad name. All curse-workers are penalized, whether they would have used their powers benevolently or not. This has a lot of similarities with the ban on alcohol in the United States from 1920 to 1933, which was a real event in the history of our world. By including this event and other real episodes of history among the fictional events in this novel, the author weaves together her alternate history with real history. This helps to give it a greater sense of realism and makes the stranger events and people easier to relate to. The world of this novel feels like a realistic place that could easily have existed if curse-work had been a part of our own history.

Prohibition in the States was enforced in an attempt to improve morals, safety and health. Alcohol can be abused. People can drink too much and seriously harm themselves, or hurt or even kill others while under its effect. However, alcohol can also be an enjoyable thing when consumed sensibly and in moderation. It can be used at weddings and other social occasions to celebrate with or to mark a special event. By banning all alcohol, the state was telling people that they were not allowed to decide for themselves whether they could be responsible or not. This is similar to the situation in this story with curse-working, in which people are not allowed to commission good forms of curse-work, and the curse-workers who would have been responsible are punished because of a few dangerous individuals. Prohibition of alcohol in the States also led to the establishment of large crime families that sold illegal alcohol. Even after the ban was lifted, many of these gangsters and criminal organizations continued to operate, now getting involved in drugs and other criminal activities. Here, banning curse-work has had a very similar affect in encouraging organized crime. By comparing the ban on curse-work with the prohibition on alcohol, which failed, the author is showing that the ban on curse-work is also failing to achieve its intended goals. The author is perhaps commenting that this kind of government interference in people's lives and freedom will never be successful or fair.

The first two chapters give the reader their first impression of Cassel, the main character of the book. He is a seventeen year old boy attending Wallingford Preparatory boarding school. Although he is privileged enough to be attending an expensive boarding school, he is not as rich as the other students, nor does he have such influential parents. Cassel also has more than his fair share of troubles. His father is dead and his mother is in prison. His two older brothers have sent him to a rich boarding school, but appear to have done so more to get him off their hands than because they



really care about his education. He has very little family support, and does not have any real friends at the school either. He finds it difficult to fit in, even though he is desperate to be normal. All his family, except himself, are curse-workers, meaning they have magical powers and so are in some way special. He is not a curse-worker and so feels like the only one who is not special. He is the odd one out. However, because his family members are curse-workers, he is also not accepted at school. He cannot be 'normal' either. This makes him a very isolated character at the beginning of the novel.

This is all made worse by the terrible secret that Cassel is holding on to. He murdered a girl called Lila when he was fourteen. He was in love with her, and he is constantly shocked and appalled at what he has done. He cannot remember or understand why he would kill her. All he does remember is standing over her body and feeling gleeful about getting away with it. His family found him there and quickly covered up the death, burying the body and sending Cassel away to boarding school. Shortly after, Cassel's mother was caught out conning rich men out of their money, and was sent to prison. Cassel has no-one to talk to about his guilt. He knows he has disgusted his family, who are now wary of him, and he has disgusted himself too. He now no longer trusts himself, meaning that his relationship with a girl called Audrey fell apart. He tries to talk to Sam about his guilt, but he cannot bring himself to confide the whole story. This makes it clear that Cassel is desperate for someone to talk to and to be his friend, even though he tells himself that he is better off alone. Cassel's extreme guilt and loneliness, as well as his desperation to remain at the boarding school so that he can at least pretend to be normal, make him a sad and sympathetic character. Because he is the viewpoint character and the story is told in first person, the reader is given a deep insight into all Cassel's thoughts and feelings. This allows the reader to feel like they know him better. He does not seem like a vicious murderer, and his confusion and guilt over the death is enough to help the reader feel sorry for him rather than automatically hate him.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Philip takes Cassel back to his house. He tells Cassel that he will be going to stay with Granddad at their mother's old house, to help clean it up and be ready for her release from prison. Cassel is annoyed about this. He calls his brother Barron, the middle brother, to ask if he can stay with him instead. Barron is dismissive and avoids giving Cassel a definite answer. Maura, Philip's wife, comes upstairs and asks what's going on between Philip and Cassel, as they do not seem to like each other much. Cassel does not tell her that Philip probably wants to keep him away from his wife and son, knowing that Cassel is a murderer.

That night he wakes up and hears voices downstairs. He goes to the top of the stairs and listens. Barron, Philip and Granddad are all in the house discussing Cassel and the best thing to do with him. Granddad is worried, but Barron argues that Cassel wasn't trying to kill himself. He points out that someone could be cursing Cassel, such as Zacharov, who is still looking for his daughter Lila. Granddad thinks Cassel will be better off living with him, especially as Philip has enough to worry about when he is clearly curse-working his own wife. Cassel is shocked to hear this.

Maura comes out of her room and says she also heard voices. She joins Cassel in the hallway. She tells him that she can hear strange music that no-one else can hear. She says that she intends to leave Philip but that this is a secret. She then asks Cassel whether his name is a traditional family name. Cassel says his mother just likes weird names, but that his Granddad insists his own father was a Maharajah in India. Maura says Granddad told her his family were descended from runaway slaves. Cassel laughs and says he likes the Maharajah story better. They go back to bed.

Next day Cassel, Philip and Granddad start clearing out the old house. They see some stray cats, and Cassel puts food out for them. Cassel's ex-girlfriend Audrey comes round. She is concerned about him, and suggests lying to the school that his sleepwalking was caused by insomnia medication. He explains that he cannot do this because he already told the school he used to sleepwalk a lot when he was younger. She wonders if the sleepwalking could be stress related, caused by his dad's death and his mother's imprisonment. She also suggests he could be being cursed. He tries to reassure her that this is not the case, though he is secretly worried that it might be true.

That night Cassel dreams of a room full of cats, and a tiny figure in a doll's dress and veil coming towards him. The veil slips and he sees it is actually a white cat, walking upright. The cat tells him he put a curse on it that only he can remove. The cat's voice sounds like Lila. He feels claws on his back and wakes up in a puddle of rainwater. He realizes he must have been sleepwalking again.



Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Cassel seems to be in a potentially dangerous situation. In these chapters, it is revealed that the girl he killed was none other than Lila Zacharov, the daughter of Mr. Zacharov, head of one of the major crime families. This means that if Mr. Zacharov ever finds out about Cassel's involvement in his daughter's disappearance, or even suspects him, Cassel will be in great danger. This has potentially already happened, as Cassel's sleepwalking could be caused by curse-work. However, it seems unlikely that Mr. Zacharov would do anything so subtle, or fail to complete the job if he did decide to kill Cassel. It is more likely that there is a different explanation. These chapters help to set up this mystery a little more, as Cassel once again dreams of a white cat. This time the cat accuses Cassel of cursing her, and says that only he can lift the curse. This is confusing, as Cassel is not a curse-worker. Could the dream simply represent Cassel's guilt, especially considering that the cat speaks with Lila's voice? There is obviously something strange going on, something that Cassel's family knows about but that he is being deliberately left out of. Could this have something to do with the dreams Cassel has been having? As the mystery deepens, the sense of intrigue and suspense is heightened.

These chapters begin to reveal a little more about Cassel's broken family situation, and why he feels so alone. Cassel's oldest brother Philip does not appear to like Cassel very much, and certainly does not want him around. He is not very friendly towards him, and does not appear to care about Cassel's feelings or safety regarding the sleepwalking incident. Instead, he blames him, as if Cassel was deliberately trying to cause trouble. At the house Cassel feels very unwelcome. He calls his other brother, Barron, and asks if he can stay with him instead. Although Barron is outwardly nicer than Philip, he brushes Cassel off and is dismissive, not giving him a definite answer. Cassel knows that this is his way of saying 'no.' Barron at least shows some concern for Cassel, but he is not there for him when it counts. Cassel also reveals that Barron is a compulsive liar and unreliable, making him a difficult person to lean on when Cassel needs help or support. The most normal member of Cassel's family appears to be his Granddad, who also happens to be a retired death-worker for Mr. Zacharov himself. No wonder Cassel is a little strange and paranoid. The reader can understand why he feels as though he cannot fit in anywhere.

When Cassel wakes up in the middle of the night and hears Barron talking downstairs, he is hurt that Barron would come here and not tell Cassel he is visiting. He is also hurt that his whole family would leave him out of discussions. It seems that this is nothing new, and that Cassel has always felt left out. He feels as though he is technically part of the family, but may as well not be because of the way he is treated by the other family members. This situation is made so much worse by the fact that his father is dead and his mother is in prison. There is literally no support network for Cassel to lean on, and no-one who he can turn to when he needs help or comfort. It is no wonder that Cassel feels so alone, and that he feels as though he cannot trust anyone. This bad situation helps to explain why Cassel is so desperate to go back to school and to feel that he fits in somewhere. The reader can feel very sorry for him at this point.



Cassel's family situation seems to lead to a strange sense of non-identity for Cassel. Cassel is not sure of who he really is or where he fits in in the world. He is not a curse-worker like the rest of his family, but their power and his unusual life mean that he is not like other 'normal' teenagers either. He is both a part of his family and separate from it, feeling neither fully included nor fully rejected. He is not sure who to trust, or who really cares for him. This confused identity is emphasized by the stories he tells Maura. She asks where his name comes from and whether it is traditional in his family. He does not really know, but suspects that his mother just likes odd names. She was forced by his father to give Philip a normal name, but after that she was free to choose names like Barron and Cassel. Cassel tells Maura that his Granddad insists they are descended from a Maharajah of India. She says that Granddad told her the family is descended from runaway slaves. He laughs and tells her that there is even a story in which they are descendents of Caesar himself. Cassel comes from a family of compulsive liars, con-men and eccentrics. He can therefore never know the real truth about his past, his ethnicity or his ancestors. He has no idea what his identity or his family's identity really is. He complains that people often come up to him on trains thinking he can speak their language. This suggests that Cassel's features and skin color are universal enough to suggest many different ethnicities. The fact that Cassel's identity is a mystery even to him emphasizes his disconnected, isolated and confused situation. Cassel has never been allowed to know who he really is. This theme will become very important later in the story when Cassel learns that other aspects of his true identity have been deliberately hidden from him.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

The next day Cassel thinks about Lila. They were nine when they met. Her parents' marriage was falling apart, so she went to live with her mother in the Pine Barrens, and later met Cassel and his family. She was spoiled and a bit of a tomboy. They played rough and she was a bit of a bully, but he worshiped her. Then her parents divorced and she was dragged around Europe for some time, and then spent a few summers in New York with her father. Cassel did not see her again until they were thirteen, when he found her in the house talking to Barron. Barron told Cassel to go away as they were discussing private worker things. Barron and Lila then went somewhere together, and she came back with disheveled hair and her lipstick gone. Cassel was jealous.

Granddad comes home from the shops with humane traps for the raccoons in the barn. Cassel goes to set them up and sees cats in the barn. He gives food to the white cat, which follows him back to the house. Granddad disapproves, but does not make Cassel put the cat out.

As Cassel continues to clean, he remembers his first criminal activity at seven years old, when his mother asked him to climb through the window of a house to steal a manila envelope from a desk. He did so, stealing a little glass figurine of a cat for himself while he was there. He gave his mother the envelope but never told anyone about the cat.

As he is clearing up the house, Cassel finds a memory charm in an envelope in one of his mother's old diaries. There is a note saying 'Give this to Remember!' He slips the charm into his pocket.

Cassel lies to Granddad that he has an appointment with a sleep specialist, and Granddad lets him borrow the car. Cassel drives to Princeton. He tells the receptionist at the sleep clinic that he has an appointment, then steals another patient's file and some office stationary while she looks on the computer. She tells him there is no appointment listed and he walks away, but the doctor comes out and calls him back, saying he will see him anyway. This is not part of Cassel's plan but he has no choice but to go along with it. The doctor assumes Cassel has come for 'the test' and Cassel does not know what he is talking about so he just plays along. The doctor attaches electrodes and says that he will test to see if Cassel is hyperbathygammic, the technical term for a worker. Cassel is shocked. This test is not mandatory but some non-workers want it to be. The workers oppose this, so the proponents are trying to push all non-workers to get themselves tested. Then it will be obvious who the workers are as they will be the ones who refuse to get tested. Cassel knows this will only make discrimination against workers worse, and he does not want to contribute to this. He pulls off the electrodes and hurries out.



He continues with his original plan. He goes to a copy shop and uses the logo from the stationary and a signature from the file to create a fake letter to his school. The letter informs them that his sleepwalking is due to not taking his medication and that he should be fine to come back to school now. He calls Maura and asks her to answer a pre-paid phone that he will give her, if it rings. She should pretend to be the receptionist at a sleep clinic and confirm that the doctor sent a letter to the school. She agrees. Cassel mentions her intention to leave Philip and she is confused, asking why she would leave him when she is so happy. Cassel then mentions the music and Maura says that she just started hearing it this morning. She does not appear to remember their previous discussion. Cassel tries to give her the memory charm, but she says that Philip does not approve of her wearing charms.

Cassel drives to school to get some money out of his private stash, so that Sam can pay out on some bets after two very unlikely teachers hooked up.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

These chapters provide an idea of what Lila, the girl Cassel murdered, was like. Cassel describes her as a bit of a tomboy, slightly spoiled by her rich parents and used to getting her own way. She was a bit of a bully towards Cassel, but in a strong, forceful way rather than a cruel way. She was very good friends with Cassel and he worshiped her. It is clear even from these brief memories that Cassel was a little in love with Lila, but that she did not return these feelings. She saw Cassel as a friend, perhaps even a brotherly figure and does not seem to have ever considered him any other way. Instead, she began dating Barron, which made Cassel extremely jealous. Cassel was also hurt by their secrecy when talking about 'worker things,' which seems to have been the general excuse used to keep Cassel out of anything. This is a potential murder motive, and might explain how Cassel managed to go from worshipping Lila to killing her in the heat of the moment. If this is the case, he may have blocked out the memory because of his rage in the moment and his extreme guilt afterward.

However, there is another potential motive for Lila's murder, given in these chapters, which could point the finger at someone other than Cassel. Cassel remembers an incident in which Anton, Lila's cousin and the only male heir to Zacharov's empire, came into the house to see Cassel and Lila wrestling. Anton knocked Cassel down and demanded that he show the Zacharov children the respect they were due. Lila shouted back at him and told him that when she is head of the family business he will be sorry. Anton enjoyed making Cassel grovel, insisting he lower himself in the presence of Lila and kiss her feet. It is clear from this story that Anton is an arrogant and power-hungry person who loves his position of importance and likes to be in command of others. Anton also obviously resents Lila as he would like to be head of the Zacharov family but she is next in line. Lila threatens him, telling him she will make him sorry when she is in charge. Anton therefore has a very obvious reason for wanting her dead and out of the way. With Lila gone, he will be Zacharov's next choice as heir. He will also have removed an annoying girl who wishes him harm. Anton has also proved that he can be cruel and vicious, and that he does not care about other people as much as himself. It is



therefore possible that Anton either killed Lila or arranged her death, and that Cassel has been cursed into thinking he is the culprit, perhaps by a memory worker. This would explain why Cassel cannot remember anything about the event except standing over the body, which in itself is not firm evidence of his guilt. It would also explain why Cassel does not seem like the type who could murder his best friend, because he actually did not.

Cassel finds it very hard to trust people and to make friends. He is wary around Sam and will not let him get too close, and he has never even attempted to make proper friends at the boarding school. These chapters reveal a little more about why Cassel deliberately isolates himself in this way. First, it is clear that Cassel still feels a lot of guilt about Lila. He does not trust himself around friends because he killed the only real friend he ever had. If Cassel is capable of killing Lila, then he figures that he would be just as capable of killing new friends. He does not want to do that or to become that person again, so he keeps himself and others safe by keeping them at a distance, not allowing himself to get that close to someone again. As well as considering potential new friends' safety, Cassel is also afraid to lose someone again and to go through that pain all over again. Additionally, the story of Lila and Barron shows that Cassel has been betrayed by friends in the past. His own brother and the girl he loved started dating, and held secret conversations that he was not allowed to be part of. He put all his trust in these two people and was let down. Cassel has also been let down by most of his family. It is no wonder that he finds it difficult to trust others, and that this stands in the way of him making friends.

When Cassel remembers his first foray into crime at the age of seven, he remembers stealing a tiny glass figurine of a cat from a house. Now, Cassel sees cats in the barn and feeds the white cat, which follows him into the house. Previously he has dreamt about white cats on two occasions. This recurring cat imagery is important. It foreshadows the importance of the white cat and the revelations that will come, and it also symbolizes how much Lila has always been part of his life, as Lila and the image of the cat are so strongly linked. The recurring cat theme also adds a sense of mystery, reminding the reader that there is something strange going on in Cassel's life right now and that he will have to figure out what it is before he can be safe.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Cassel returns to the old house and has dinner with Granddad, lying to him that the doctor did some tests but doesn't have the results yet. He takes sleeping pills and that night he experiences no dreams or sleepwalking. Granddad wakes him up the following morning, and Cassel is dismayed to see that his mother's memory charm is no longer in his pockets.

Cassel calls Barron's dormitory at college, but a girl answers and tells him that Barron dropped out earlier in the year. She says she mailed his stuff to him, and Cassel asks what address she sent it to.

As Cassel drives to Barron's new address, he remembers Lila's fourteenth birthday party at a fancy hotel. Cassel saw her in her room beforehand and they pierced each other's ears. They each drank a shot of vodka, then Lila licked the blood from Cassel's ear. Mrs. Zacharov came in and saw the alcohol, and yelled at Cassel to get out. At the party Cassel tried too hard to be funny and ended up being obnoxious, leading to one of Lila's friends throwing a punch at him in the bathroom. Cassel shoved him back, and was escorted out of the hotel. Meanwhile, at the party, Barron asked Lila out and they officially started dating.

At Barron's house, Cassel picks the lock and goes inside. He sees sticky notes everywhere reminding Barron of everything, even his own name. He finds a notebook with Barron's diary inside, containing a very detailed record of everything Barron does, as well as notes of things to remember. Today's entry mentions doing something big with Philip and Anton.

Cassel looks on Barron's computer, which is open at a YouTube video of Cassel on the roof of the school, taken from a cell phone. Someone yells 'jump' and the phone moves to look at the crowd, where Cassel clearly sees a white cat in the bushes. He looks at Barron's diary entry for the day this footage was uploaded and sees a note saying that L is clearly visible, that it is P's fault and that he will need to drive P and A apart to control the situation. C is at the old house with G. Cassel thinks C refers to him, G to Granddad, P to Philip and A to Anton. L could stand for Lila, but he is not sure what this means. Then he sees an animal cage in Barron's room, the door open and the unchanged newspapers smelling strongly of cat urine. Suddenly Cassel suspects that the white cat might actually be Lila. He also thinks Barron's, Maura's, and possibly his own memories are being stolen. He wonders if Anton is a memory worker and if he is behind the whole thing.

Cassel drives to a mall and buys memory charms from a fortune teller called Crooked Annie. He asks her about memory curses and she explains that a block can be put in place so that the victim cannot access certain memories. This can be reversed.



Memories can also be permanently stolen, which cannot be reversed. A memory worker can also plant new, fake memories. Cassel also asks about transformation work. Crooked Annie tells him a living thing can be turned into another living thing and that this can be reversed safely, but if a person is transformed into a non-living object it will not survive the change.

Cassel buys a razor and cuts his leg, then places three small memory charms under the skin, before stitching up the wound. He then returns home, planning to take the Lila cat and run away. However, when he gets back, the cats are gone. Granddad tells Cassel that Philip sent them to an animal shelter.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Cassel is suddenly granted the hope that he did not kill Lila after all. He puts the various clues together and realizes that the white cat must be Lila. The cat has been present every time Cassel has dreamed of it, meaning that it could have touched him and dream worked him. This was Lila's special power. At first Cassel thought his nightmares and sleepwalking were poetic justice for killing a dream worker, but now he thinks they mean something else entirely. If Lila has been trying to get through to him, this is exactly what she would do. At Barron's house he sees a note saying that L is clearly in the You Tube video of him sleepwalking on the roof. Cassel thinks L means Lila. Lila is not in the video but the white cat is. There is also an animal cage in Barron's room that smells strongly of cat. Cassel's memories of the murder are hazy and some of his other memories appear to have blurred or vanished as well. Barron is clearly having memory problems as his house is littered with reminder notes and he is keeping a detailed diary. Maura has also been exhibiting memory problems. This leads Cassel to the conclusion that they are all being memory worked and that this has something to do with Lila being turned into a cat. Given the note in Barron's diary referring to Anton, and Philip's close friendship with Anton, Cassel wonders if Anton could be the memory worker who is attacking them. As the reader has already seen, Anton has a good motive for wanting Lila dead, and he never liked her anyway. Anton also strongly disliked Cassel, and so might find it amusing to alter Cassel's memory to make him think he killed his best friend. Cassel comes to the conclusion that Philip must be involved too. When he gets home and finds that Philip has sent the cats to an animal shelter, he views this as proof of Philip's treachery.

Cassel finds it easy to hate Philip and blame Anton, but he prefers to think that Barron is innocent and being played, like Cassel is. Cassel has a strong dislike for Philip, perhaps caused by the fact that when they were children, Cassel worshiped him but Philip ignored and dismissed him. Cassel grew closer to Barron instead and pinned all his brotherly hopes and affection on him. In Cassel's mind, Barron is a kinder and more caring brother. However, the reader gets a very different view of Barron. In Cassel's memories, we see Barron as a thoughtless and even slightly cruel older brother who likes to mess with Cassel, manipulate his feelings, and deliberately date the girl that he knows Cassel likes. He seems to be doing this purely to make Cassel jealous, as if he is demonstrating which one of them is more powerful and in control. Although Cassel



wants to think the best of Barron, the reader is more cynical. In his diary, Barron talks about doing something big with Philip and Anton, and about having to control the situation. It sounds as though he knows perfectly well what is going on and is in control of what he is doing. He also has a cage in his bedroom, meaning that he is the one who has been keeping the Lila cat prisoner. Judging by the smell and the old newspapers, he has not been treating her very well at all. If Philip and Anton are behind Lila's disappearance, then it seems likely that Barron is just as much to blame. Cassel will have to face this at some point and deal with yet another family member letting him down.

Now that Cassel thinks Lila might not be dead after all, he can suddenly lift a huge weight that has been on his shoulders. Before, he was a murderer and a horrible person, wracked with guilt. Now he has the chance and the hope of being a good person after all, as the murder seems to have been faked. Now Cassel can play the hero and rescue Lila instead of thinking that her death is his fault. Now he can cling to the hope that he will get his best friend back and has not lost her after all. These are powerful emotions for Cassel, whose whole life has been affected by the murder. He has felt the need to punish himself and isolate himself, and has never allowed himself to be happy. Now he might be able to actually like himself again.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Cassel visits three animal shelters before he finds the Lila cat. When he greets her with her name, she seems to respond. He tries to adopt her, but the woman on the counter tells him he has to be eighteen. He tries to argue that the cat is his, but she will not listen. He calls Sam and asks for his help breaking the cat out of the shelter. Sam is amused and agrees to help, but he wants to bring Daneca along too. Cassel is not too happy about involving another person, but he reluctantly agrees.

That night Sam calls and invites him to a party. Cassel decides to go. He sees Audrey, who is clearly drunk. She says she misses him and is not over him, and then she kisses him. Cassel kisses her back. A boy called Greg, who is now dating Audrey, pulls Cassel away from her and accuses him of using curse work to make Audrey like him. He tells Cassel he is a criminal like his mother. Cassel punches him, and a boy called Rahul drags him out of the party. He dumps Cassel on the grass outside and tells him to chill out, then goes back inside. Cassel feels very alone, until Sam comes out and sees him. He says he is glad to see him, before throwing up and asking Cassel to drive him home.

The next day, they pull off the heist to get Lila out of the animal Shelter. Daneca pretends to have lost her grandmother's cat Coconut, a white Persian which she was supposed to be taking care of. She pretends to be panicked about this, and offers a \$500 reward. She mentions that the cat was wearing a diamond collar. She gives the guy behind the counter her number to call in case the cat is brought in. Half an hour later Cassel and Sam walk in. Cassel asks the guy behind the counter if he can put some flyers up about a cat they have found. The picture on the flyer is of a white Persian cat. Cassel shows him the collar he found with the cat, which is actually a cheap, fake diamond collar they just bought. The guy behind the counter says he might know the owner and will take the cat to her for them. Cassel pretends to be a little upset and explains that he told his sister about the cat and now she wants to keep it. He says all he told her is that the cat is white, so any white cat will do. He asks if the shelter has a white cat he can take. The guy asks for ID but Cassel pretends to have forgotten it. The guy does not want to pass up an opportunity to make \$500 and call a pretty girl, however, so he lets Cassel take the Lila cat anyway. Cassel promises to bring the Persian cat to him later, and they leave with the Lila cat.

Cassel, Sam and Daneca go to a coffee shop to celebrate. Granddad calls and tells Cassel to come for dinner at Philip's house. Cassel drives Daneca home first, where Daneca's mother talks to him about the history of workers and their problems. She explains the problem of runaway workers becoming trapped in a life of crime with the big families. She is currently sheltering one runaway boy right now, and wants to help more. She tells Cassel that if he ever feels ready, they would like him to join their cause.



Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Cassel is finally beginning to see why having friends might be a good thing after all. Right now, when he desperately needs help, Sam proves that he is willing to be there for him. Daneca also agrees to help, and plays her part beautifully. They help him to carry out the complicated con, and he would not have been able to get the Lila cat out of the shelter without them. At the party, Cassel feels extremely alone and is reminded that the people at school who were friendly to him because he was their bookie are not his true friends. He is reminded of how much he does not fit in. However, as he lies on the grass feeling lonely and depressed, Sam comes out and says how glad he is to see Cassel. Sam is a very friendly and earnest boy who does not try to manipulate others to gain things, but is honest about his feelings. He likes Cassel for who he is and genuinely wants to help him. He makes Cassel feel like he might be wanted as a friend after all. Sam seems to admire him and is excited by his lifestyle, finding him a fun person to hang out with. More importantly, however, Sam is also very sympathetic about Cassel's problems and shows he would be willing to listen if Cassel ever wanted to talk to him. Cassel needs to learn to trust others a little more, and to see that friends do not have to be a liability. At the moment he is afraid of how much they have seen about the real him, and he considers friendship to be a system of exchanging one thing for another. He thinks he now owes Sam and Daneca, rather than seeing that sometimes friends just do things for each other because they are friends, not because they want to gain something later. Cassel is just beginning to open up to the idea of a proper friendship again, but it will take a while before he is able to embrace it completely.

This chapter explains more about the workers and how the major crime families were formed. Daneca's mother explains that putting workers in labor camps to await trial led to the formation of the powerful families who offered protection or other benefits in exchange for loyalty. By trying to combat a few criminal workers, the government actually made the problem worse by encouraging organized crime based around curse working. As already seen, this is an analogy for Prohibition in the States between 1920 and 1933, when the ban on alcohol led to the formation of organized crime based around illegal alcohol and drugs. Daneca's mother also explains that this puts the innocent workers in a very difficult position as they are sought out and manipulated by the crime families. Once inside the life of crime, it is very hard to get out. Again, the government has made things worse by trying to make them better. Daneca and her mother clearly feel that this situation is not working and that workers should be granted more rights and more protection. This discussion provides important foreshadowing, as Cassel will also find himself inextricably involved with one of the major crime families by the end of the novel. Cassel also becomes trapped, coveted for his power and blackmailed into a life serving Mr. Zacharov. Will Cassel need help to escape one day, just as Daneca's mother is doing for other boys trapped in the criminal world?



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

Cassel goes to Philip's for dinner, where Philip, Barron and Granddad are celebrating mom's hopeful release from prison. Cassel talks to Maura and gives her a memory charm. He makes her promise to sew it into her bra. Mom calls and Cassel asks her what kind of worker Anton is. She warns him to stay away from Anton, and then demands to speak to Philip.

Cassel asks Barron if he remembers events from their childhood. Barron says that he does, and Cassel then tells him that none of those events actually happened to them. He made them up to prove that Barron is losing his memories and trying to cover it up. Barron looks annoyed and immediately reminds Cassel that he murdered Lila. He insinuates that Cassel killed her because he was jealous of Barron dating her. When he describes the murder, Cassel thinks it sounds odd, as if Barron is remembering lines he has been given to say.

Philip finishes speaking to mom and tells Cassel that he needs him to trust him and Barron. Cassel lies that he does. He notices that there is sediment in the bottom of Granddad's glass and realizes that Granddad is drugged, not drunk. He insists on taking Granddad home despite his brothers' protests that he should just stay the night here. At home he gives Granddad water mixed with hydrogen peroxide to make him throw up the drug.

Later that night Barron and Philip wake Cassel up. They say they are taking him out for 'rehearsal' with Anton. Cassel realizes that Barron must be the memory worker, not Anton, and that he has already touched him to restore his previously blocked memories. This did not work because of the memory charms in Cassel's leg. Now Cassel has to play along and pretend he remembers. They tell him they are rehearsing for Wednesday when they plan to assassinate Mr. Zacharov at a party he is throwing. They want Cassel to approach Mr. Zacharov in the restaurant bathroom and shake his hand. He will have a small hole pre-cut in his glove so that he can do transformation work to turn Mr. Zacharov's heart to stone.

Cassel is amazed and shocked to find out that he is actually a transformation worker, and that Barron has been blocking his memories of this all this time. He realizes that he must be the one who turned Lila into a cat.

At the restaurant, the others suggest that Cassel pretend to be drunk when he enters the bathroom, so that Mr. Zacharov will not think he is a threat. They want Cassel to make this more realistic by being sick. They insist that he should make himself throw up now, so that they can put a bottle of pre-prepared sick in the toilet stall for Cassel to pour into the toilet on the night. Cassel goes into the restaurant kitchen to try to make himself throw up, but two of Mr. Zacharov's men come in and point a gun at him. Philip



enters and they point the gun at him instead. Cassel reaches out and touches the gun, and without meaning to, he changes it into a snake. He then suffers the blowback of the curse work as his own body goes through multiple transformations. Anton kills the two men and Philip puts Cassel in the trunk of the car. When they reach home, Cassel has recovered. Outside the house Cassel is rude to Anton, who beats him up and orders his brothers to kick him. They do, and he is knocked unconscious.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

Now the mystery is beginning to unravel. Cassel learns that both his brothers have been using him, and that he was right in thinking Anton is behind the whole thing. Anton wants to take over the Zacharov family business. He is presumably the next in line now that Lila is gone, but he is too impatient to wait and wants to get rid of Mr. Zacharov now. He and Philip have planned an assassination using Cassel's talents as a transformation worker. They would never be able to get away with murdering Mr. Zacharov any other way, but if Cassel turns his heart to stone it will look like a heart attack and no one will suspect murder. Cassel is also generally believed to be a non-worker, so he will not be seen as a threat. Barron has been manipulating Cassel, forcing him to participate in their scheme and then blocking the memories so Cassel cannot do anything about it or back out, only un-blocking the memories again when Cassel is needed. This explains what they have been up to, and why Cassel's memories have been a little off lately. It also explains why Barron's own memories are disappearing; it is blowback from all the memory work he has been performing. Finally, it explains why Lila was attacked. Anton will have wanted her dead to ensure that he is next in line to the powerful Zacharov empire. However, it does not explain why Lila has been turned into a cat, and why Barron has been keeping her prisoner. Cassel will still have to unravel this part of the mystery to fully understand what is going on.

Everything that Cassel thought he knew about himself and his family begins to shatter now. He thought he was a non-worker, and for years he has wished that he could have powers and be special too. He even used to pretend that he was a transformation worker, as this would mean he was rarer and even more special than his brothers. He hated being left out and always felt like he was never a real part of the family. Now he finds out that he has been a transformation worker all along. His fantasies have literally come true, but unfortunately they have done so in a very unexpected and negative way. Cassel might be a transformation worker, but all this means is that he has been manipulated into an assassination plot, and has turned the girl he loved into a cat. He has had his memories robbed from him because of his powers. He finally fits in with the rest of his family, but now he finds out that his family are not really worth fitting in with. Being a transformation worker has only brought Cassel more trouble than he could have imagined.

Cassel also finds out that none of his memories can be trusted anymore. Barron, who he had thought was a luck worker, is actually a memory worker, and has been messing around with Cassel's memories for years. Cassel could have done or been anything and if Barron touched him he would not remember. This leaves Cassel in the very disturbing



position of having to question everything he knows about himself and his past. He is already convinced that Lila's murder is a lie; now what other memories will prove to be false? Cassel also finds out that he has been part of an assassination plot, and has worked on it before with his brothers. The previous times his memories were unblocked, did he go along with the plan happily? Is this the first time he has objected and felt sickened by what his brothers want him to do? Is he a good person after all? Cassel can never really know the answer to these questions. Barron has literally robbed him of his identity, which has always been a little confused and shaky anyway. Now Cassel must question who he is, and who he would like to be. He cannot know for sure what he did in the past, but he can take a stand now and decide how he will act in the future. The memory charms in his leg have given him the opportunity to take back control of his own life and actions.

Cassel also has to face some very unpleasant truths about his brothers. Not only was he severely mistaken about Barron, it seems his brothers have done more than simply lie to and ignore him. They have abused his trust, turned him into an assassin, drugged their grandfather and taken away Cassel's memories. This is a long way from the family love and trust that their mother has always desperately tried to promote. Cassel was quick to believe that Philip is a criminal, but he wanted to think Barron was innocent. Now he sees that Barron has done much worse things to him than Philip ever did. At the restaurant, it is Philip who seems more concerned about Cassel than Barron, though both brothers are almost painfully uncaring. They insist that he make himself throw up, and later they kick him into unconsciousness under Anton's orders. Cassel's brothers have gone too far and gotten into this scheme too deep. Now they answer to Anton and they are not willing to give up the power and money he offers them in order to save their little brother. Cassel knew his family was not very supportive, but he never imagined they were this bad. Now he really is all alone, and he can never trust his brothers again.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary

Cassel wakes up in his bed and feels his leg. 2 of the stones under the skin are broken, backing up his assumption that Barron tried to use memory curses on him twice the previous night. The cat is sitting by his bed. He says he does not know how to change her back into Lila. She touches him and he dreams. He dreams of Anton and Philip telling him that they have a secret business killing people for money. Now they plan to take over from Mr. Zacharov, which will mean more money and security for Philip's family. He mentions that Maura is pregnant, meaning that this is a vision from the past, showing Philip and Anton first beginning to work together. Cassel then dreams that the Lila cat tells him to cut off her head.

Cassel goes downstairs and eats breakfast with Granddad. Philip rings to say that Maura has left with the baby. He asks Cassel what he said to her, and Cassel says he doesn't remember, putting emphasis on those two words. He puts the phone down, then realizes he has been stupid and might have just given away that he knows he was memory worked.

When Granddad goes to the store, Cassel tries to turn Lila back but has trouble. He decides he needs to put her in danger to bring on his abilities, so he swings a sword at her. This works, and he is able to change her before the sword hits. He suffers bad blowback for a while, then Lila wakes him up and tells him there are two people outside.

They hide in the closet while Philip and Barron come in and start searching for Cassel. Lila kisses Cassel to keep him quiet. When Philip and Barron go upstairs, Cassel asks Lila what has really been going on. She says Philip and Barron have been sending her out to make their assassination targets sleepwalk straight to them. She has also made Cassel sleepwalk to them several times. That night at school, when he sleepwalked onto the roof, she was trying to kill him but could not go through with it. She thought he did not care she was being locked up and used. He tells her this is not true; he thought she was dead and that he had killed her. She says Barron and Philip were going to kill her, but Cassel turned her into a cat instead and told her to run. She was caught by Philip and Barron, however, and caged. At this point, Barron must have changed Cassel's memory.

Philip and Barron come back downstairs. Barron says they have nothing to worry about and that Cassel was probably just testing Philip, because Maura told him something about being memory worked. He does not think Cassel actually remembers anything. When Philip and Barron appear to have left the house, Cassel and Lila come out of the closet. However, Philip is still in the house. He sees Cassel but Lila manages to hide again. Philip knows that Cassel remembers, but he tells Cassel that he will have to trust his older brothers a little longer and that everything will turn out alright in the end.



After Philip has left, Cassel takes Lila to Wallingford where they get some sleep in his dorm room. He introduces her to Sam. He then manipulates Audrey into letting Lila have a shower in the girl's dorms. Lila comes out looking cleaner and prettier. They then go to the train station where Lila calls her father. He does not believe it is really her. Cassel speaks to him and arranges a meeting in Atlantic City. He hangs up and they buy tickets.

On the train to Atlantic City, Lila tells Cassel that Anton, Philip and Barron have been using him to help them kill people. Cassel changed the bodies into ordinary objects, making them easy to dispose of without being suspicious. Cassel is horrified by this revelation, realizing that he is a murderer after all.

Chapters 13-14 Analysis

Just when Cassel was relieved at not being a killer after all, he finds out that he is still a murderer. This time, he is told that he helped his brothers kill many people. He may not have killed his best friend, but he has committed terrible acts, helping his brothers to hide the bodies of the people they were hired to murder. Now Cassel is overcome with guilt all over again. However, this time he cannot even remember the terrible acts. He has no idea if he went along with his brothers' plans willingly or if he was coerced. He does not know if he struggled, or if he felt guilty afterwards, or even who the people he helped to kill were. Cassel must come to terms with the fact that he is a killer even though everything he knows and feels about himself tells him that this cannot be true. He is sickened by the whole idea.

Cassel is having a very hard time regaining a sense of who he really is. First he found out that none of his memories can be trusted, then that he has been a curse worker all this time. Now he finds out that he is a killer. He has no idea who he really is or what he is capable of. By not being able to remember the crimes, has Cassel been wiped clean of them? Is he a different person now from the one who helped his brothers to kill? Can changing his memories change who he is? This is a very interesting question that is echoed later in the story when Barron's own life and personality completely change through re-writing his memories. This seems to suggest that a person's identity is made up entirely of their memories, but is this true? If Cassel has killed in the past, can simply wiping those memories away absolve him of the guilt? Cassel does not seem to think so, and he is furious with his brothers for using him in this way.

Connected to Cassel's confused issues of identity is the question of his ethnicity. In a previous chapter Cassel listed off different potential backgrounds and histories of his family. His ignorance about his family's past emphasized a feeling of lost identity, of not really belonging. This feeling is strengthened by the fact that Cassel's ethnicity is deliberately left ambiguous. He says that people come up to him on trains thinking he can speak their language, suggesting that he has a very generic look that could belong to a number of different ethnicities. In chapter fourteen the issue of Cassel's race is briefly revisited. Cassel explains that the Wallingford position on race is to ignore it, and that ethnicity is never mentioned. This is why Audrey seems so awkward when Lila



compares her paleness to Cassel's tanned skin. The author mimics this 'color-blindness' when writing her novel, never specifying Cassel's ethnicity and so ignoring this issue in the same way the school chooses to do so. This is another example of Cassel's identity being pushed aside and confused, denying him the ability to know who he really is. Cassel's ethnicity is a blank just as his life and his personality are now also blanks. Who is Cassel really? He can never fully know what the past Cassel was like, or which of his memories are true or false. He can only go on what he is now, what he feels now, and how he intends to react to the world in the future. Now Cassel has to set about re-forging his identity and coming to a new understanding of who he is.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary

They reach Atlantic City and Lila goes into the hotel while Cassel wanders out onto the boardwalk. Mr. Zacharov is waiting for him. He thinks Cassel got someone to pretend to be Lila on the phone and is trying to con him out of money. He tells his bodyguards to beat Cassel up. One twists back Cassel's arm, but then Lila walks up and tells them to stop. Mr. Zacharov is astonished and emotional.

They all go up to the hotel room where Mr. Zacharov questions Lila. She will not tell him where she has been and he thinks she is protecting someone. He asks Cassel if he hurt her and then threatens him. Lila tells him this is not true. He invites Cassel to come to Koschey's restaurant for his party on Wednesday, but he warns Cassel that he is a dangerous man to cross. He wants to speak to his daughter in private, so one of his bodyguards drives Cassel home.

That night Cassel gets a call from Dean Wharton saying he can come back to school the next morning. He gets a ride with Sam and all the teachers seem pleased to see him back at school. The other students are mostly wary of him, but he hangs around with Sam and Daneca. He decides he will trust them completely and tells them about Lila being the cat, though he does not mention that he is the transformation worker who did it.

The phone rings and Lila is on the other end. She tells Cassel to go ahead with the assassination plan for Wednesday but to only pretend to kill her father. Mr. Zacharov will play along. Then Lila will come in and shoot Anton. She has already locked up Philip to ensure he is kept out of it, but she cannot promise to help Barron. She needs Cassel to find a gun and figure out a way to get it into the party past the metal detector. Cassel decides he will need Sam and Daneca's help, so he tells Lila to get him two extra tickets.

After class, Cassel talks to Sam and Daneca and explains everything that has happened. He tells them his plan, which will require a fake gun and blood bags, which Sam has been working on for drama club and is excited to supply. Cassel spends the next few days preparing, which involves breaking into Barron's house and stealing something, leaving something else in its place.

On Wednesday Barron and Anton come for him. They think Philip has been sent on an errand by Mr. Zacharov. Cassel has a quick shower, but as he comes out Barron sees the cut on his leg. He tells Anton to grab Cassel while he cuts the memory charms out of Cassel's leg.



Chapters 15-16 Analysis

Cassel is finally able to place his trust in his new friends. He sees that Sam and Daneca are there for him and like him for who he is, not what they can get out of him. He sees that they are more reliable than his own family, and that he needs people he can trust and lean on. He cannot face everything alone, and he is tired of always having to be so secretive and paranoid. He decides to tell them everything that happened, though he still keeps his identity as a transformation worker a secret. He trusts them with Lila's secret as well as the knowledge that he has killed, and that his brothers want to make him kill again. They are shocked but sympathetic, and they are completely on Cassel's side. They want to help, and Cassel immediately feels better about what he has to do. He comes up with a plan that involves all of them. As he places this much trust in them, he describes it as feeling as though he is ripping off his skin. It is painful and difficult for him, but at the same time it feels good, as it is such a huge relief. The imagery of him ripping off his own skin effectively captures Cassel's sense of vulnerability in this moment, as well as a feeling that he is stripping away the things that used to be him in order to begin afresh and start a new, better version of Cassel. His lost memories allow him to start again in this way, and this time he is determined to get it right and not to isolate himself.

Lila and Mr. Zacharov's meeting is very awkward. He is amazed and emotional at seeing her again, but she is trying to keep her feelings in check as much as possible. She has been hurt and terrified, but she does not want to show this. She is his heir as well as his daughter, so she is anxious not to show any vulnerability or weakness. She is determined that she will be the head of the Zacharov family one day, and to do so she needs to convince her father that she is strong enough for the role. This is why she refuses to tell him that she was turned into a cat, as she thinks this will make him feel too sorry for her, undermining any admiration he might have for her bravery. Lila is also very conscious of having to prove herself extra strong because she is a girl, as women in the great crime families are still considered to be weaker than men. This explains how Lila has become such a hard, dominant and confident character. From an early age she has known that she needs to live up to and prove herself to her father. However, this highlights a potential problem. In helping Lila and Mr. Zacharov, Cassel will foil his brothers' despicable plan, but he will also be helping Mr. Zacharov to stay in power. It is true that Anton would be much worse, but perhaps the greater problem is the crime families in general. Even after beating Anton, Cassel will still be stuck in thrall to the Zacharov family. Lila, in proving how much she is like her father, is demonstrating that the Zacharov empire under her control may not be any different. In the end, Cassel's plan can only lead to temporary happiness, and it is the crime families themselves that he will have to go against if he is ever to be truly free. This is what Daneca's mom has realized, but Cassel has not quite seen this yet.

Cassel's plans are deliberately kept mysterious to heighten suspense and anticipation for the final three chapters of the book. By not letting the reader in on every detail of the con, the author has set the reader up to be surprised, putting them in a position to really appreciate Cassel's planning and cleverness. However, it seems that things are already

going wrong. Barron has found the memory charms in Cassel's leg and will now know that Cassel knows more than he is letting on. The reader wonders if Cassel will be able to bluff his way through this and continue with the plan, or if everything is now lost.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

Cassel confronts Barron and Anton, asking why they took his memories. Barron says that he and Philip were short of money and that assassinations are very lucrative if the bodies can be disposed of permanently. Cassel could do this, so they used him, but blocked his memories to make sure he would not be traumatized by it all. They got this idea from their mom, who asked Barron to block Cassel's memories of being a transformation worker when he was still a child, to protect him until he was ready for the knowledge. She does not know about the assassinations, however.

Cassel agrees to co-operate if they will give him a cut of the money earned. They quickly agree, and Cassel pretends to be friendly with them now. Meanwhile, he palms the last memory charm and swallows it when Barron is not looking.

At the party, Cassel sees Daneca and she surreptitiously gives him the blood pack and wires. Then Granddad spots Cassel and tries to make him leave the party. As they walk past Anton, Anton calls Cassel over and insists on him having a few drinks. Cassel pretends to be drunk and to need the bathroom. Granddad comes with him. Inside the toilet stall he finds the bottle of old vomit his brothers have put there for him. He pours it down the toilet and pretends to be sick. While in the stall he attaches the blood pack to his chest and re-buttons his shirt.

Anton comes into the bathroom and clears everyone out. Cassel comes out of the stall. Mr. Zacharov comments that no-one is supposed to be in here with him, and Anton introduces Cassel. Cassel shakes Mr. Zacharov's hand and whispers to him to pretend his heart has just been turned to stone. Mr. Zacharov fakes his death and Granddad is appalled. Cassel quickly transforms his hand so that he will suffer blowback for the transformation, so that it will look like he really did change Mr. Zacharov's heart to stone.

Anton now takes out a knife and tries to kill Granddad and Cassel but is interrupted by a knock on the door. A voice calls out that it is Barron. Anton lets him in, and Lila enters with a gun to Barron's back. Lila pretends to shoot Cassel and he pulls the trigger on his blood pack to make it burst. He pretends to die. Lila tells Anton and Barron to get against the sinks, but Anton manages to knock the gun from her hand. He tries to shoot her and realizes the gun is fake, and then realizes that he has been played. Mr. Zacharov and Cassel stand up and Anton advances on them, asking Barron for his knife. Barron points the knife at Anton's throat instead. Cassel tells Anton that he and Barron have planned to double cross him all along, and have been secretly meeting with Mr. Zacharov. Barron confirms this, and Mr. Zacharov plays along too. Just as Anton seems defeated, Cassel insults him and Anton lunges for him, knocking him to the ground. Granddad uses death work to kill Anton.



Cassel explains to Granddad that he broke into Barron's house and replaced his diaries with fake ones written by Cassel. Since Barron cannot remember anything, these convinced him that he has actually been secretly working against Anton all along. Mr. Zacharov agrees to let Barron and Philip live if Cassel will work for him from now on. Cassel agrees.

Outside the bathroom Sam and Daneca run up to Cassel. They all go to the kitchen where he introduces his friends to Lila, and Lila tends his wounds. Philip is also there, who shouts at Cassel, and blames him for ruining everything.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Cassel literally re-writes his brother in order to get him on his side. Barron has lost most of his memories due to the blowback from his memory work, meaning that he believes everything he has written in his diaries. Barron uses this to his advantage. He forges Barron's handwriting and writes some fake diaries, which he leaves in Barron's house in place of the old ones. These convince Barron that he has been meeting with Zacharov and plotting against Anton all along. The diaries also convince Barron that he has a better relationship with Cassel and acts as a better brother to him. By forging the diaries, Cassel wipes away the old Barron and replaces him with a new, better one. This is ironic considering Barron's particular power, and it seems like poetic justice after everything Barron put Cassel through. Barron messed with Cassel's memories, taking away parts of his identity and changing who he was. Now Cassel has to somehow cope with the things he has done but cannot remember, while creating a new identity for himself at the same time. Now Cassel has done almost exactly the same thing to Barron. He has taken away Barron's identity and given him a new one, and now Barron must start a new life and figure out what kind of person he is all over again.

Apart from being a beautiful example of poetic justice, this also raises interesting questions. Can a person be changed completely just by changing their memories? If you can convince a bad person that they are a good person, will they then act like a good person, or does 'badness' run deeper than that? Cassel is not sure if this will change his brother in the long run, or if the old Cassel will start to show through. Perhaps his personality will corrupt him again and he will go back to a path of crime, manipulation and abuse. Perhaps Barron was never bad in the first place, but was manipulated in a similar manner by Philip and Anton, who convinced him that he was a killer plotting with them to assassinate Mr. Zacharov. It seems that they have managed to do something similar with Cassel in the past. Cassel was also a killer, but now that his memories are altered he is disgusted by this idea, and has become a different, more moral and stronger person. Could this happen to Barron too? Has Cassel done him a favor by saving his life in a manner that allows him to start again, guilt-free and happy? Barron is now in a much better position than Philip, or even Cassel, who still has to live with his guilt. How much of a person's identity is formed by their memories, and how can anyone ever really know who they are if who they are can so easily be changed?



As the reader might have predicted, Cassel has succeeded in foiling Anton's plot and keeping Mr. Zacharov alive. However, he is not out of trouble yet. Mr. Zacharov is still a hard, strong and formidable man. He is the head of a criminal organization and he will not tolerate any kind of insubordination. The only reason Philip and Barron are still alive is not out of gratitude to Cassel, but because Cassel is useful. Cassel has escaped the manipulation of his brothers and the cruelty of Anton only to walk right under the thumb of another despot who will probably force him into a life of crime. Cassel is still not free, and never will be until he can somehow get away from the crime families and their hold over him. For now, he has swapped one evil for a lesser evil, but the reader senses that Cassel will not be happy with this situation for long.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Cassel spends the next days catching up on schoolwork with Sam and Daneca. One day Barron comes over and tells him that it is Pizza Tuesday. Cassel realizes that this is something he wrote in the diaries to fill in some of Barron's activities. Now Barron thinks that Pizza Tuesday is actually something he does every week with his little brother, and he wants to continue. They go for pizza, and Barron talks about how their mom will hopefully be getting out of prison soon. He also tells Cassel that he intends to return to law school.

Meanwhile, Philip is still working for Mr. Zacharov, who is keeping his enemy as close as possible to ensure he does not plot against him again. Cassel calls Maura to see how she is doing. She says that she is fine, and she sounds very happy. Lila calls Cassel and asks if he would like to get hot chocolate. Everything Cassel wants seems to be finally coming true, and he is very happy.

Cassel decides to go to a meeting of the HEX advocacy group to learn more about workers and their rights. Audrey comes too. At the meeting, a girl talks about the negative connotations of the word 'cursing' and that it is all just magic really.

Cassel goes home to find Lila in his bedroom. She tells him that she always wanted him, and kisses him. As they are about to take things further, Granddad knocks and says Cassel's mom is on the phone. She tells Cassel that she is proud of him for saving his brothers so she got him a gift. She worked Lila to make her completely in love with Cassel. Cassel's mother thinks she did something nice for Cassel by doing this, but Cassel is upset. His mother tells him she cannot reverse it. Cassel is devastated. He can never be with Lila now, knowing that her feelings for him are fake.

Chapter 19 Analysis

In the HEX advocacy group meeting, a girl speaks about how workers are perceived. If something is portrayed and treated as though it is bad, then it will become bad. By taking away workers' freedoms, the government forces them into criminal activities, perpetuating the idea that curse work is a bad thing. She argues that workers want to be allowed to choose what kind of people they are and how they will use their powers, and that they should have this right. Judging people guilty before they have done anything is not fair, and it is this that causes prejudice and hatred from non-workers. Non-workers think that all workers are criminals and so treat them that way. A large part of this, she claims, is that the word 'curse' is so negative. Curse work is really just magic. It can be good or bad, and it can be used for wonderful things as well as frightening things. Thinking of their powers as magic rather than cursing takes an inbuilt stigma away from



the concept, giving it a sense of being something special and wonderful instead. It should be celebrated, not condemned.

This argument is compelling, and the reader can see how the illegality of curse work has led to a lot of problems among workers. As the main characters in the novel are curse workers, this means the reader can be more easily sympathetic towards them. However, the reader has also seen some truly terrible, sickening and horrific things done by curse workers. Barron has willfully messed with people's memories, destroying their identities and forcing them into situations they hate but cannot get out of. He manipulated Cassel into being an assassin, and forced Maura to stay with a husband she does not love. With one touch Granddad can kill a person, and Cassel can change a person into any other thing, forcing them to live as an animal or killing them by changing them into an inanimate object, then throwing them away like garbage. Lila can influence a person's dreams, even leading them to sleepwalk off a roof. Other curse work might not be so devastating, but it is still extremely disturbing. Cassel's mother manipulates emotions to get her own way, fooling people into thinking they are in love when they are not, which could easily be considered a form of rape. Many of the curse workers in the story show absolutely no remorse for what they do or how they affect other people's lives. It is no wonder that non-workers are so afraid of curse workers. It is also clear that there does need to be some kind of regulation. Deciding what kind of regulation and how it will be applied is much harder. At the moment the system penalizes all curse workers, good or bad, and drives them to lives of crime. Without any regulation, innocent people would be even more vulnerable than they are now. This is a difficult issue with no easy answer. It is ultimately up to the reader to decide how they feel about it.

By the end of the story all Cassel's fantasies are coming true. He is a curse worker after all, and not just any kind but the rarest and most special kind of worker, a transformation worker. This was his particular dream as a child, and in games he used to pretend that he was a transformation worker. He has also always longed for a better relationship with his brother Barron, who he used to look up to and feel was a friend. Now he has this, with Barron even initiating Pizza Tuesday and dedicating time to chatting with his little brother about life. Finally, he has always been in love with Lila, who never seemed to feel the same way. Now she says that she has always wanted him, and she seems eager to begin a relationship with him. However, all of these things turn out to be not quite what he expected. Being a worker means trouble and death, and being a transformation worker means that he has been manipulated into being a murderer. He will now have to work for Mr. Zacharov forever because his skills are too precious to let go. His relationship with Barron is soured by the fact that Cassel can still remember everything bad that Barron did to him. Deep down, Cassel will always know that Barron did not choose to be his friend willingly, but had to be manipulated with fake memories. Cassel also cannot enjoy a relationship with Lila, as he now knows that his mother created the whole thing, giving Lila fake feelings. After being manipulated and used himself, Cassel cannot stand doing this to Lila. All Cassel's dreams have come crashing down around him. He has technically won, but he feels more like he has lost. This is an extreme example of being careful what you wish for.



Characters

Cassel Sharpe

Cassel is the main character of the novel, and the story is told from his point of view. Cassel is a seventeen year old boy who attends Wallingford Preparatory, a boarding school for the rich elite children of New Jersey. Cassel's father died in a car crash, and his mother is in prison. He has two brothers named Philip and Barron, who can barely afford the fees to send him to boarding school, but do not particularly want to look after him themselves. Cassel therefore has a lot less spending money than his schoolmates, which has led him to set up an illicit betting business.

At the beginning of the story, Cassel is a very isolated and lonely figure. He has no real friends at school and is tolerated as the pupils' bookie but not actually liked. Many of the kids there are wary or even scared of him, thinking he is a curse worker like his family and so either dangerous or a criminal. It does not help that Cassel's mother is a proved criminal who is currently in jail, and his grandfather was a death worker for the powerful criminal Zacharov family. Cassel is very aware of his isolation at school, but he thinks that friends will only get in his way. He has trouble trusting other people, as well as himself, and would rather not have friends than risk getting hurt. Cassel experiences a similar sense of loneliness at home, where his two older brothers make it clear that they do not really care about him and that he is a bit of a nuisance to them. Cassel does not fit in at home or at school, as he is not a curse worker like his family, but he is associated with curse workers because of his family. At home he is left out of worker discussions. At school he is avoided because he might be or know workers. He can never be a worker, but it seems he can never be normal either. Cassel has been let down by all the people who should have been there for him. When he is in trouble or upset he has no one to turn to, and he has to take care of his problems by himself.

This changes halfway through the story, as Cassel begins to let others get closer to him. He sees how much his family really have let him down, and he realizes he can never trust them or rely on them. However, he also realizes that he does need people to be on his side. He is desperate to talk to someone, and he can admit that he needs help. He begins to make friends with a boy from his school called Sam, and a girl called Daneca. Both Sam and Daneca prove to Cassel that friends are worth having after all, and that friends do not have to slow or tie a person down. He includes them in his con, and later he trusts them enough to tell them what is happening to him. He decides to trust them completely and opens up to them, which he describes as feeling like ripping off his own skin. This is because it is so difficult for him to show his vulnerability and feelings to others when he has always seen this as a sign of weakness. His family has taught him to trust no one but himself and that showing weakness opens a person up to being conned. Now Cassel manages to go against this and sees that his family's view of the world is very cynical and not always correct. When he finally does relent and makes friends, he is much happier for it.



Cassel carries around a lot of guilt about his past. He believes that when he was fourteen he killed Lila, the girl he loved. He does not remember the actual murder, but he does remember standing over her body and feeling gleeful. This memory now disgusts him and he can never forgive himself for what he has done. He carries this guilt with him everywhere, and it has stopped him from being able to trust himself completely around other people. This is what led to his relationship with Audrey breaking down, and why he finds it so hard to make friends. He is worried that he will hurt them, and he does not want to feel the agony of losing someone so important to him again. When Cassel realizes that he did not kill Lila after all but instead transformed her into a cat in an attempt to save her life, he is relieved. Suddenly he is like a new person, able to trust himself and others again. The great weight of guilt has been lifted, which makes Cassel feel suddenly strong and capable of anything. However, this does not last long as Cassel finds out that he is a killer after all. He helped his brothers to murder people for money. Those memories were erased, but when Cassel finds out the truth he cannot put aside the guilt just because he cannot remember the crime. He is horrified that all the bad feelings he was carrying around are now coming back, that he is a killer and a bad person after all. Cassel's extreme guilt helps the reader to feel sympathetic towards him even though he is a murderer after all.

Cassel's memories have been blocked and altered by his older brother Barron, ever since Cassel was young. As a result, Cassel, and the reader, can never be sure what the true Cassel is really like. It seems that he has helped to kill people in the past, but he cannot remember this now and it is not part of his life. In fact, he is horrified and disgusted by the idea. Not remembering the crime has allowed Cassel to become the kind of person who would disapprove of it and would now never commit a similar act of murder. By losing his memories, has Cassel changed into a different person? Cassel has to wrestle with many similar issues of identity in the story. He can never know who he really is or what he is capable of, as he can never be sure if a memory is real or not, or whether other memories have been blocked or stolen from him. He had thought he was a non-worker who did not fit in anywhere, and now he learns that he is the rarest kind of worker there is. Cassel has already felt confused and alone, as he does not feel like he fits in anywhere, at school or at home. He has never been sure whether his identity is wrapped up in being part of a family of curse workers, or whether his identity is about being a normal person. He has thought himself a killer but not understood why, then found out he is not, only to realize that he is a murderer after all. On top of this, Cassel's family identity and ethnicity are ambiguous and confusing. Cassel's race and color appear to be ignored by everyone around him, and the author follows suit by only hinting at it. According to family, Cassel is descended from an Indian Maharajah, escaped slaves, or even Julius Caesar. His past and his family history are a mystery. He has no identity beyond 'Cassel' and thanks to Barron he is not even sure what this means anymore.

Cassel finds out that he is actually a transformation worker and has been all along. His memories of it were blocked by Barron on the instructions of his mother, in an attempt to keep him safe and innocent. Cassel has always dreamed of being a worker and having special powers, and now that fantasy has come true. However, the reality is not quite like the dream. Being a transformation worker means that Cassel is used and



manipulated by the people who should be taking care of him. It means that he has been forced into becoming an assassin, and that the head of the Zacharov family will keep him tied to crime for life. Being a transformation worker means that everyone wants a piece of Cassel and that he has very little hope of ever being free.

Cassel comes across as a very brave and loyal boy in this story. He does not make friends easily, but when he does he is determined to help them no matter what. He risks everything for Lila and is willing to sacrifice his own freedom for her. Despite hating his brothers for what they did to him, he also remains loyal to them, ensuring that they are not punished by Mr. Zacharov. Again, Cassel pays for this with his own freedom. Cassel is wary, suspicious and cynical about people, but he changes throughout the story. He sees that friends are worth having after all. He is generally more honest and caring than the rest of his family, and he tries to be a good person. However, this does not stop him from lying when necessary and being very good at planning and carrying out complicated cons. He is skilled at reading other people, and he knows how to get what he wants. He is a very capable teenager who has the confidence to do things for himself.

Since childhood Cassel has been in love with Lila, the daughter of Mr. Zacharov. He likes her forceful personality and her strong spirit. She bullies and dominates him a little, but he likes this about her too. He admires her greatly, and when they were younger he used to hero-worship her as he did his brothers. Now he is the position of having to save her, but she still refuses to be a damsel in distress. She relies on Cassel for his help, but she immediately starts calling the shots, telling him what they should do and planning how to deal with the assassination attempt. Cassel soon realizes that he still loves Lila. At the end of the story he is overjoyed that she appears to love him back, but then he finds out that his mother worked Lila to make her have feelings for Cassel. Cassel is disgusted by this. He has been manipulated enough himself and will not do the same to others. He values free-will and knows it would be wrong to be with Lila now. Despite his criminal activities, Cassel comes across as a good person, and it is easy for the reader to like him.

Philip Sharpe

Philip is Cassel's older brother and the oldest of the three Sharpe boys. He is married to a woman called Maura and has a baby son with her. Maura is not particularly happy and wants to leave Philip, but Philip has been getting Barron to block her memories to make her stay. When Cassel realizes this, he give Maura a memory charm so that Barron's next curse will not work. She leaves Philip the next day. He is angry and blames Cassel, saying Cassel has ruined his life and that he will get revenge.

Philip is friends with Anton, the only male heir to the Zacharov family. Anton is Lila's cousin and is very jealous of her, so Philip and Anton come up with a plan to help Anton gain control. First they get rid of Lila, then they plan to assassinate Mr. Zacharov. Although Philip is Anton's friend he is still treated like an employee who works for Anton, and he must show him proper respect and obey him at all times. Philip seems to be



happy enough with this relationship and does appear to actually like Anton. When Cassel foils their plans, Philip is furious that Cassel took Anton as well as Maura away from him.

Philip is a body worker, so his main role with the Zacharovs is as their hired thug. He accepts this and does not seem to have any qualms about hurting or killing other people, whether they are innocent or not. All he cares about is the money and security he gets from his job. He wants to take care of his family and make sure that he is always in a position where he is indispensable to Anton and the Zacharovs. As the older brother Philip seems to feel the need to be responsible for the others. He sees himself as a provider, and so he feels justified in doing whatever he needs to in order to bring in money. Despite the fact that Cassel hates him more than Barron, Philip actually comes across as the more caring of the two brothers. Philip does honestly care about Maura and his son, and he seems to care about Cassel to a certain extent too. He takes his mother's instructions to look out for each other to heart. He thinks he is providing a job and security for Cassel by manipulating him into being an assassin, and he thinks he is helping Cassel by taking his memory away in order to stop him from being traumatized by it all. He sees this as giving Cassel the benefits of the killing with none of the guilt. Philip is also more likely to be the one who suggests going easier on Cassel. When he thinks Cassel knows more than he should, he does not attack him or interrogate him but simply tells him to trust his older brothers for a little longer. Philip seems to like to fool himself that they are a happy, supportive family and is shocked when everything falls apart. However, despite his focus on family, he can be just as cruel and brutal as Anton, and he seems to feel no remorse about the lives he has destroyed.

Barron Sharpe

Barron is Cassel's older brother and the middle of the three Sharpe boys. He is a memory worker, though Cassel has always believed that he is a luck worker. Cassel used to hero-worship Philip when he was younger and disliked Barron. As he got older, he saw Barron as the better of the two and grew to hate Philip. It is unclear whether this was a natural change of opinion or whether this was the result of Barron messing with his memories. In Cassel's flashbacks of the past, Barron always comes across as a selfish and cruel older brother who seems to take pleasure in hurting Cassel. He likes leaving Cassel out of things and making him feel unwanted. He deliberately pursued Lila, knowing that Cassel loved her, and began dating her. In present day, Barron does not seem to be much better. When Cassel calls him after being told to leave Wallingford, Barron is not as abrupt and mean as Philip, but he proves that he still has no time for Cassel or his problems. For the reader, there is little to choose from between Cassel's unfriendly older brothers, and it is easy to see why Cassel feels so isolated and let down.

Later, Barron's true personality comes out. He is actually even crueller than Philip, and he clearly does not care about anyone except himself. Unlike Philip, who is driven to crime by the desire to support his family, Barron seems to be doing it for the fun of it. He enjoys conning people and manipulating people, and he feels no remorse for anything



as long as he is not getting hurt himself. He is a very selfish person. At one point Cassel describes him as a sociopath, summing up his complete disregard for other people. Barron does not even seem to care much about his own family, as he thinks nothing of hurting Cassel and robbing him of his memories. Philip wants Cassel to forget so that he does not have to live with the guilt, but Barron makes Cassel forget so that he can manipulate and use him.

Cassel finds out that Barron is a memory worker and that he has been interfering with Cassel's memories for a long time. He made Cassel think that he killed Lila, which has ruined Cassel's life, burdened him with false guilt, and made it impossible for him to trust himself or others again. He has made Cassel forget about being a transformation worker, and although this was their mother's idea, it is clear that the jealous Barron took pleasure in doing it. He has also forced Cassel to help him and Philip kill people for Anton, and then blocked Cassel's memories of this. Now, through blocking and unblocking his memories at the right times, Barron has turned Cassel into an assassin. By doing these things, Barron has completely wiped away Cassel's sense of identity, forcing Cassel to question who he really is. Barron has remorselessly pulled apart his younger brother's life.

Cassel manages to turn Barron to his side by playing a clever trick on him. In a beautiful case of poetic justice, Barron's own memories are messed with and altered. Barron experiences blowback from his memory cursing in the form of his own memories disappearing. He can now remember very little about himself and what he has done for the past few years. Because of this, he keeps diaries detailing everything he does and all his plans. All Cassel has to do to change Barron's loyalties is to forge new diaries, convincing Barron that he has been on Cassel's side all along. He does this, and Barron is fooled, believing everything he reads in the diaries. Cassel literally re-writes his brother, making him into a better person. Now, not only does Barron believe he is on the right side, working to prevent the assassination of Mr. Zacharov, he also believes that he loves his little brother and wants to protect him. He thinks they go out for pizza every Tuesday, and so now he starts taking Cassel out for pizza every Tuesday. Cassel is amazed how well this manipulation of his older brother worked. Barron has become a completely new, and much nicer, person.

Barron's personality change makes the reader question how much of a person's identity is wrapped up in their memories. Now that Barron is different and is behaving differently, and cannot remember being any other way, can Cassel really continue to bear a grudge against him? Can he blame Barron for past actions that Barron cannot remember? Has Barron become enough of a new man for Cassel to treat him as one? These are the questions left to the reader at the end of the story.

Granddad

Cassel's grandfather, referred to as Granddad in the story, was once a death worker for Mr. Zacharov, meaning that anyone he cursed would instantly die. Granddad suffers blowback from this in the form of blackened fingers on his left hand. Despite having



such a sinister and morally objectionable job, Granddad comes across as a very kind, patient and caring man. He is concerned about his family, and about Cassel in particular, who he sees is not yet as corrupted by the criminal life as his brothers are. Granddad appears to disapprove of the criminal life, despite having been involved in organized crime himself. He does not seem to like his daughter being a con-woman and he certainly does not want the same for his grandchildren. He tries to encourage the brothers to stick together and help each other out, as well as encouraging Cassel to be as 'normal' as possible.

Granddad obviously suspects that Barron and Philip are up to something shifty, and when he overhears them talking about the assassination plan he is determined to stop Cassel being used in this way. At the party he tries to get Cassel to leave, and then tries to protect him when the plan goes ahead anyway. When he sees that Cassel has played them all he shows admiration for Cassel's cleverness, but he is worried that Cassel has risked too much. Now Cassel is stuck in a similar position to his grandfather, having to work for Mr. Zacharov. Although Granddad did what was necessary at the time, he seems to feel sad that Cassel now has to go through the same. Of all Cassel's family, Granddad is the most supportive and loving, and the only one who is really there for Cassel in the end. He is also the only one who comes close to understanding Cassel.

Cassel's Mom

Cassel's mother is an emotion worker, meaning she can manipulate and alter people's feelings however she likes. She uses this to make her marks particularly receptive to the cons she pulls on them. She seems to be especially fond of making millionaire men fall in love with her, then scamming them out of money. When she thought Cassel had killed Lila, she was horrified and she grew careless in her cons. She was caught and sent to prison, where she is throughout most of this story. She laments that she cannot be there for Cassel in his time of need, and seems to think that she is more important in holding together the family than she actually is. In reality, all the brothers seem to agree that she just brings in unnecessary drama and likes to cause trouble. She can often be a bit over emotional, which is caused by the blowback from her emotion cursing.

Cassel's mom is insistent that all her sons should stick together as a family, love and support each other, and always look out for each other. She tells them that family is more important than anything else. This is ironic considering what happens, and how the older brothers manipulate and abuse Cassel. Despite their actions, their mom still loves them and is proud of Cassel for managing to get them out of trouble with Zacharov. She behaved similarly when she thought Cassel had murdered Lila, covering up the death and insisting that they all stick together as a family and support Cassel. She is very loving and cares deeply about all her boys, but she does not always act in their best interests. She is also not very willing to take sides even when one of them badly hurts another.



Cassel's mom thinks that she is helping Cassel when she manipulates Lila's emotions to make her love him. Cassel is disgusted by this and his mother cannot understand why. She seems to think that everything in life can be solved by making others do what she wants, and that if a person can get what they want then they should be happy. She does not seem to care much about free-will or choices. This is why she makes Barron block Cassel's memory of being a transformation worker. She thinks she is helping him and protecting him, but she does not see that she is actually taking away a part of himself and preventing him from being who he really is. Similarly, she does not see that making Lila love Cassel is wrong, or that this will upset Cassel. She does not understand Cassel very well at all. She is much more like Barron in her selfish attitude towards the world and other people. However, unlike Barron, she does mean well.

Lila

Lila is the daughter of Mr. Zacharov and so is the heir to the family empire. Cassel describes her as having woolly blond hair and one green eye and one brown one. She likes to cut her hair short and is a bit of a tomboy. Cassel thinks she is very pretty, and later Cassel's mother says that Lila is much prettier than Audrey.

As Zacharov's heir, Lila is very conscious of the need to always appear to be in control. She must look strong, powerful and confident at all times, and never show weakness, especially to her father. She needs to prove to him that she will be a good head of the family and that he can trust her in this important role. She is determined to take over the family empire when he dies, but unlike Anton she is not so desperate for this that she would kill him. Because Lila has always had to be tough and has been encouraged not to show vulnerability, she can come across as a little arrogant, forceful and pushy. Cassel says that she is a bit of a bully, but he secretly likes this about her. He admires her strength and he likes her telling him what to do. He does not resent her bossing him about, as she does so with friendship rather than condescension like Anton. It is clear that she would make a much better leader than Anton. However, it also seems clear that she has no intention of changing the business or moving away from crime. She will probably rule the family in the same way her father does, with a firm focus on power and loyalty, which can turn dangerous when pushed. In other words, she is better than Anton, but she may prove no better than her father.

Anton saw Lila as a threat to his power, so he ordered Philip, Barron and Cassel to kill her. Cassel had been in love with Lila for a long time, so he refused to do it. To prevent his brothers from murdering her, he turned her into a cat. She tried to run away but Philip and Barron caught her. Barron put her in a cage and has been keeping her in his house. Occasionally they use her to make people sleepwalk to them to be killed. She thinks they are cruel and evil, and she assumes that Cassel is in on this. When she escapes, she makes Cassel sleepwalk onto the roof and intends to kill him. She cannot go through with this, however, as she still remembers being good friends with Cassel. Later, Cassel rescues her and turns her back into a girl. She explains everything to him and he tells her that Barron made him forget it all. He never purposefully abandoned her. Lila understands this, but for a while she finds it hard to forgive Cassel for forcing



her to be a cat for so long. It has been very difficult and traumatic for her, and though she puts a brave face on, it has obviously strongly affected her.

Lila is good friends with Cassel, and soon forgives him for turning her into a cat. She shows that she trusts him and leans on him, and she tries to be loyal to him in the end by removing Philip from the assassination attempt to keep him safe from her father's anger. In the past she has been a good friend to Cassel too, though she always seemed to be completely oblivious to the fact that Cassel was in love with her. Instead, she started dating Barron. However, when Barron ignored her or brushed her aside, she did not seem too bothered, happily talking to Cassel instead. She enjoyed visiting Cassel and it is Cassel she chose to spend time with before her birthday party, piercing his ear and licking the blood from it in a very flirtatious gesture. Later, in the present, she kisses Cassel in the closet. She tells him it is to keep him quiet while his brothers search the house for them, but she could have kept him quiet simply by shushing him. At other times she seems to be deliberately flirting with him. At the end of the story she tells him she forgives him, and later she asks him out. Then one day she comes round and confesses that she has always loved him. He is ecstatic until he finds out his mother emotion worked Lila to fall for him. Now he does not know how Lila really feels. This is also a mystery for the reader. Might Lila have liked Cassel and wanted to date him without his mother's influence? Or has she only ever liked Cassel as a friend? Lila deliberately keeps her private and more vulnerable feelings bottled inside where others cannot see, so she is a very difficult character to read.

Sam

Sam is one of the boys at Wallingford Preparatory, where Cassel goes to school. He is Cassel's roommate in the boy's dormitory. Cassel has always found him easy to get along with, but has never considered him a friend. Throughout this story he begins to open up to him more and finds that Sam is actually a very loyal, kind and supportive friend after all. Sam seems to find Cassel's life exciting and is eager to help him in his cons. Sam finds the whole thing thrilling and exhilarating, and he appreciates Cassel's cleverness. He shows that he is brave and willing to risk his own safety to help out a friend. He is a very likeable character.

Sam loves to fiddle with things, converting machines or coming up with inventive new things. He has converted his hearse to run on grease, making it more environmentally friendly, and he is eager to do the same to Cassel's car. He has created a fake gun and blood bags with triggers to make them explode for drama club, and is disappointed that they will not use them. When Cassel wants to use them as part of his own plan, Sam is overjoyed that he can be useful and that his inventions are actually coming in handy. Cassel also describes Sam as a bit of a geek because he loves science fiction and fantasy. Sam clearly loves adventure, mystery and magic, which is why he is so interested in Cassel. His parents want him to get a respectable job after college, but this would clearly not suit Sam's personality. When Cassel leaves Wallingford he asks Sam to take over the betting business, which Sam does efficiently, enjoying learning about Cassel's methods for making money.



Sam begins dating Daneca in this story, who also becomes one of Cassel's new and firm friends.

Daneca Wasserman

Daneca is a girl who attends Wallingford Preparatory, the boarding school Cassel goes to. She has spoken to Cassel before and is constantly trying to get him to join HEX, an advocacy group for workers' rights. Daneca's mother and whole family are workers, like Cassel, and so she thinks he will be interested. When he shows no concern and tells her that he does not care, she is very disappointed, considering him selfish for only thinking about himself. She is a very earnest, caring and passionate girl who genuinely believes in making a difference and changing the world. She is pro-active; if she sees problems she wants to fix them, and she believes that it is everybody's duty to do the same.

When Cassel begins to hang around more with Sam, Daneca comes too. She has begun dating Sam, but she soon becomes good friends with Cassel too. When Cassel needs them they are both there for him, and Daneca even agrees to take part in his con to get the cat out of the animal shelter. She is exhilarated by this, like Sam, enjoying their ability to fight an unfair system and get something done. When Cassel tells her and Sam about his problem and the assassination attempt, both she and Sam immediately want to help, even though it will be dangerous for them. Both are very caring and loyal friends.

Daneca does not give up on trying to recruit Cassel for HEX, and by the end of the story she has convinced him that workers' rights might be worth fighting for. He comes along to the next meeting.

Mr. Zacharov

Mr. Zacharov is the head of one of the major crime families in the USA, the Zacharov family. These are criminal organizations that have grown up out of the ban on curse working. Mr. Zacharov is a very powerful and dangerous man. He can easily order someone to be killed or kidnapped, and once someone begins working for him they will be trapped in this way of life until they die. Mr. Zacharov is capable of being very firm, hard and even cruel, but he also has a human side. When his daughter goes missing he is distraught, and when she returns he is very emotional. Like her, however, he has to be careful about showing his vulnerable side, and he warns Cassel that he is not a man to be betrayed or crossed. He is quick to judge and jump to conclusions, and not afraid of hurting people. He does not appear to have much concern for others, whether they are innocent or not, but he does show respect and perhaps even loyalty to those who help him. When Cassel foils the assassination attempt on his life, Zacharov agrees not to hurt his brothers if Cassel will work for him from now on. Zacharov is calmer and perhaps more fair than someone like Anton, but he still always gets what he wants.



Mr. Zacharov owns a stone called the Resurrection Diamond, which is famous for having the power to prevent a person's death, whether by curse magic or more conventional weapons like guns. Crooked Annie tells Cassel that there have been many attempts to kill Zacharov but that they have all failed, so perhaps there is some truth to the stories about the diamond. At the end of the story, after Cassel pretends to kill Zacharov, Anton takes the diamond. When Anton has been killed, Cassel picks it up and gives it back to Zacharov. As he does so, he notices that the stone is chipped and therefore useless. It will not protect him anymore. What is not clear is whether this has only just happened, during the assassination attempt, or whether the stone has been like this for some time. Perhaps it is not even really the Resurrection Diamond at all, but a fake that Zacharov used to discourage assassination attempts and to make him seem more powerful.

Anton

Anton is Lila's cousin and the only male heir to the Zacharov family empire. He was jealous of Lila because she was next in line, and so he ordered Philip, Barron and Cassel to kill her. He then plotted with Philip to assassinate Zacharov. In this story he pushes Cassel to help in their assassination attempt and makes it clear that he will be harmed if he refuses. When Cassel does not show him proper respect he beats him up, then orders his brothers to finish kicking him. This mirrors one of Cassel's memories in which Anton, as a child, ordered Cassel to show proper respect to Lila and to kiss her feet. Anton is clearly power-mad and loves dominating others. He wants to feel in control and he is far too greedy to be sensible. He is a very cruel and sadistic character. At the end of the story, his assassination attempt is foiled and he attacks Cassel. Granddad kills him with death work.

Audrey

Audrey is a red-haired girl who attends Wallingford Preparatory boarding school. She was Cassel's girlfriend for a time, but she broke up with him before the beginning of this story. She could not stand his moodiness any longer, not realizing that he was afraid he might kill her like he killed Lila. She appears to slightly regret breaking up with him, as she still has feelings for him and tells him so. She also seems slightly jealous and suspicious of Lila. At first, Cassel also wants Audrey back, as he is lonely and misses human closeness and comfort, but when Lila returns he knows that Lila is the one he really loves. By the end of the story Audrey appears to have accepted Cassel as a friend again, as she accompanies him to the HEX meeting.

Maura

Maura is Philip's wife. She lives with Philip and they have a baby boy together. She is not a curse-worker. Cassel becomes aware that Maura is being worked when she mentions strange music that only she can hear, and appears to forget whole



conversations. Cassel also overhears his grandfather accuse Philip of working his wife. Later, Cassel realizes that it is actually Barron who is taking Maura's memories away. He gives her a memory charm and insists that she sew it into her bra. This stops Barron's memory curses from working on her, and allows her to remember that she wants to leave Philip. She runs away with the baby. Philip is furious with Cassel for causing this, but Cassel is happy that he has managed to help Maura reclaim her life.

Maura comes across as a friendly, gentle woman who cares deeply about her son. She likes Cassel, finding him more honest than his brothers and sympathetic because he is a non-curse-worker like her. She agrees to help him get back to school by answering a pre-paid phone if the school calls it, pretending to be the receptionist at the doctor's office.

Valerio

Valerio is the hall-master at Wallingford school. It is his job to ensure that the pupils are safe and not getting up to anything against the rules. He is generally suspicious of Cassel and reacts to Cassel's sleepwalking as if he thinks Cassel is deliberately trying to cause trouble.

Dean Wharton

Dean Wharton is the dean of Wallingford. When Cassel sleepwalks onto the roof, Dean Wharton tells him he will have to take a medical absence from school until he can prove he is not a liability. When Cassel sends a fake doctor's letter to the school, Dean Wharton calls to let him know he can come back. Dean Wharton seems more worried about the legal and financial ramifications of Cassel's sleepwalking than about his actual safety.

Crooked Annie

'Crooked Annie' is a fortune and charm seller in the mall that Cassel visits when he suspects he may have been memory worked. He buys memory charms off Crooked Annie, who sells fakes as well as real ones. She is nervous, as she believes that the government might be listening to their conversation. Cassel thinks she is being paranoid. Crooked Annie appears to be an old friend of the family as she seems to know Cassel. She gives him more information about memory and transformation work.

Rahul

Rahul is a boy at Cassel's boarding school who has been friendly to Cassel in the past. However, at the party at Zoe's house, Rahul acts as though he does not really want to be around Cassel. Cassel is reminded that many of the students at Wallingford are only

friendly to him because of the betting business he runs. They want something from him, but are not interested in being actual friends.

Greg

Greg is a boy at Cassel's boarding school. He is dating Audrey now that she and Cassel have broken up. At Zoe's party Greg is angry when he sees Cassel kissing Audrey. He accuses Cassel of being a worker and making Audrey like him with magic, and tells Cassel that he is a criminal like the rest of his family. Cassel hits him and is then dragged out of the party.



Objects/Places

Wallingford Preparatory

Wallingford Preparatory is an expensive private boarding school for rich kids in New Jersey. Cassel was sent here by his two elder brothers after he seemingly murdered Lila, and after their mother was sent to prison. They can only just afford the school fees, and so Cassel has a lot less money than the other pupils at the school. This is why he runs a secret betting business. Both boys and girls attend Wallingford, with separate dormitories for each.

Curses

Curses are a kind of magic that only specific people (curse workers) can perform. In order to place a curse (do magic) a worker must have skin contact with their victim, which usually requires touching them with their hands. This is why everybody wears gloves at all times while in public. However, it does seem possible to perform curse work without touching hand to skin, as some curse workers who were punished by having their hands cut off learned to use their feet instead. Not all curses are evil, despite the negative connotations of the word. Some curses can actually be beneficial, such as curses that give a person good luck. This is why the girl at the HEX meeting at the end of the story argues for curse work to be thought of as 'magic' instead.

Curses come in seven different kinds, and curse workers can each only use one of these areas of magic. The seven kinds of curses are Luck, Dreams, Emotion, Body, Memory, Death, and Transformation. The most common type of curse worker is a luck worker. The rarest kind is a transformation worker. Cassel thinks there may possibly be one somewhere in China, but he has not heard of one in the USA in his lifetime. Later, Cassel learns that he is actually a transformation worker. Cassel's mother is an emotion worker, meaning that she can manipulate people's emotions, such as making rich men fall in love with her so that they are easier to con. Philip is a body worker, meaning he can severely harm people with one touch. He works as the Zacharov family's hired thug. Lila is a dream worker, which is how she makes Cassel dream about her and sleepwalk. Barron is a memory worker, though Cassel thinks he is a luck worker at first. Granddad is a death worker, meaning he can kill with one touch.

Blowback

Whenever a curse worker performs a curse, they will receive 'blowback' in a lessened form of the original curse. For example, a luck worker giving someone good luck would receive a little good luck in return. When Cassel's mother performs emotion curses she is emotional for several hours afterwards. Granddad has blackened stumps on his left hand where his fingers used to be, which is the blowback caused by death work. When Cassel uses transformation curses he suffers erratic transformation of his own body for



a short while afterwards before returning to his normal shape. Barron's blowback for memory work is the loss of his own memories. By the end of the story he has performed so many memory curses that he can barely remember anything about himself or the past few years. This is why he writes diaries and notes to himself. Cassel takes advantage of this to rewrite his diaries, convincing Barron that he is a good person and a better brother, and so making him that way.

Curse Worker

A curse worker is a person who can perform various specialized curses on people, such as giving them good or bad luck, changing memories, influencing emotion, or transforming objects and living things. Throughout history there have always been some people able to do this, but the 'gift' is quite rare. Children of curse workers are more likely to be curse workers than children of ordinary people, as it is passed down genetically. However, the type of curse worker that a parent is does not influence what the child will be. For example, two luck worker parents may produce a memory worker child.

Transformation Curses

Transformation curses works by changing something into something else. An object can be turned into a living thing, such as a gun to a snake, and a living thing can be turned into any object. However, the change from living to non-living is permanent, so even if transformed back into a human, the victim will be dead. A living thing can be safely turned into another living thing and back. While in their changed form, transformed humans appear to retain human intelligence and memories. This is why Lila can make plans and influence Cassel while in her cat form. In this story, Cassel is a transformation worker, though he does not realize this at first because the memories of it have been blocked by Barron. Transformation workers are extremely rare, and so are coveted by the crime families as well as the government, making their lives rather dangerous.

Memory Curses

Memory cursing can work in a few different ways. The memory worker can block memories, which prevents the victim from accessing them. This block can be removed later to allow the memories to be accessed again. Alternatively, the memories can be stolen, in which case the victim will never remember them again. This cannot be reversed. The memory worker can also plant false memories, making the victim believe events of the past happened differently from how they really did. Barron uses memory blocks as well as fake memories on Cassel to make him more compliant in their plan, to save him from any trauma, to make him forget he is a transformation worker, and to convince him that he murdered Lila.



Gloves

Everyone in this story wears gloves at all times when in public, and many continue to wear them in private, even in bed. As curse workers need skin to skin contact, with their hands, in order to perform curses, wearing gloves is a precaution against being secretly influenced or attacked. Wearing gloves at all times has become so common that it is now a social convention. When Cassel sees people with ungloved hands it feels somehow inappropriate, like looking at them naked. Maura does not wear gloves around her house as she says Philip thinks it is a sign of mistrust.

The Crime Families

When the ban was put on curse working, curse workers accused of breaking the law were held in labor camps to await trial. It took so long to establish how the trials would proceed that many of these people lived for a long time in the camps. This is how the term 'worker' became used for the curse workers. In the camps, certain individuals began to assert dominance and build up alliances. These became the great curse working crime families that are now the head of organized crime in the USA. The six big crime families are Nonomura, Goldbloom, Volpe, Rice, Brennan, and Zacharov. Many curse workers in the States find themselves either recruited by or in the sway of these families, forced into vulnerable positions performing curse work for them. It is the Zacharov family that Cassel and his family are involved with.

The Zacharov Family

The Zacharov family is one of the six major curse working crime families in the USA. Mr. Zacharov is currently the head of the family, and his daughter Lila should have become his heir. This made her cousin Anton jealous, so he decided to get rid of Lila. Unknown to him, she was changed into a cat instead of being murdered. Cassel's grandfather was Zacharov's death worker but is now retired, though he is still loyal to the family. Philip works as a body worker (a hired thug) for Mr. Zacharov, but is good friends with Anton. This is why Philip and Anton came up with the idea to assassinate Mr. Zacharov so Anton could take over the family business.

The White Cat

A white cat makes several appearances in this story. First it visits Cassel in a dream where it seems to bite off his tongue. He sleepwalks onto the roof while this is happening. Then it appears to him in another dream and tells him that he has cursed it, and that only he can remove the curse. Later an actual white cat visits him at his mom's old house and he brings it inside to look after it. After breaking into Barron's house he sees footage of his sleepwalking on the roof of the school and notices a cat in the background. In Barron's diary he sees a note saying that 'L is clearly there.'



Cassel begins to suspect that the white cat is really Lila and that he did not kill her after all. However, Philip has sent the white cat to an animal shelter. Cassel pulls a complicated con to get her out, and then tries to transform her back into Lila. He succeeds. The white cat has indeed been Lila all along. Even in cat form she can still manipulate dreams, so Barron and Philip have been using her to make people sleepwalk to them. Lila was turned into a cat when Cassel refused to kill her and transformed her instead. Barron has been keeping her locked in a cage in his house until she managed to get away. That was when she visited Cassel and gave him his first dream of the white cat.

Keloid Necklace

A keloid necklace is a puckered scar around the neck, created by cutting the skin and packing ash into it. This is a sign of belonging to one of the big crime families, and marks a person out as someone to be feared. Both Anton and Philip have keloid necklaces.

Charms

Charms are rocks that have been specially cursed to protect against other curses. They work because rock absorbs the curse, and then breaks when a similar curse is sent at the person, protecting them from its effects. Once the charm has broken it is useless and another one will need to be used. A separate charm is needed for each of the different kinds of curse magic, as each charm will only repel a curse similar to the one it has absorbed. So, for example, if a person wanted to be protected against all curses, they would need charms against Luck, Dreams, Emotion, Body, Memory, Death, and Transformation curses. Only rock works for this, not silver, gold, or wood. Although many legitimate charms can be purchased, the sale of fake charms is common. Because curse work is illegal, these charms are also technically illegal, meaning that there can be no official regulation of charms to ensure that only genuine ones are sold.

HGB

HGB stands for 'hyperbathygammic,' which is the technical term for a curse worker. Because this is usually shortened to the initials HGB, curse working has become known as the 'heebeegeebies.' Illegal curse work on a person without their permission is known as HGB assault. This is what Cassel's mother has been imprisoned for.

The Resurrection Diamond

The Resurrection Diamond is a famous stone owned by Mr. Zacharov which will supposedly keep a person alive, protecting them from multiple curses as well as more mundane attacks such as gunshots. Crooked Annie tells Cassel about this. She is not sure if the story is true, but she does know that Mr. Zacharov is still alive despite several



attempts on his life, so perhaps the Resurrection Diamond really does protect him. When Cassel fakes Mr. Zacharov's death, Anton takes the diamond. After Anton has been killed, Cassel picks the diamond up off the floor and gives it back to Mr. Zacharov. He notices that it is chipped, meaning that it will no longer provide any protection. It is unclear whether this happened during the assassination attempt, or whether the diamond has been useless for a long time now.

Proposition Two

Proposition Two is a proposition to enforce mandatory testing for HGB, by law. Under this law all children would have to be tested to see if they are workers. This information would then be kept on file, but private. Opponents of Proposition Two think that this information will not remain private for long and that it will cause discrimination against workers, as well as limiting their choices in life.

Koschey's Restaurant

Koschey's is a fancy restaurant where Mr. Zacharov is throwing a party in honor of opposing Proposition Two. This is where Anton, Philip and Barron have planned to assassinate Mr. Zacharov, while he is alone and vulnerable in the bathroom.

Mark

A 'mark' is an intended or potential victim of a con. They are usually people who can be easily influenced and who are looking to gain something. Cassel claims that a grifter cannot con an innocent person.

Grifter

'Grifter' is another way of saying conman.

Con

'Con' is short for 'confidence trick.' This is a scam in which a person believes they will be getting something if they help out the conman, usually by giving them money, but they are then left without the desired reward. For example, in Cassel's cat scam, the victim thinks that he will be getting a \$500 reward, so he happily gives Cassel the white cat. He is then left without the white cat or the \$500, because he has been tricked.



Themes

Identity

Identity is an important theme in this story, as Barron's memory manipulation forces the reader to question whether a person's sense of self is almost entirely built on their memories. Barron is a memory worker, meaning he can alter people's memories, either making them permanently forget things, putting a block in place so that memories cannot be accessed, or even creating false new memories. Barron uses these powers on his little brother Cassel in order to manipulate him into doing what he wants. First he made Cassel forget about being a transformation worker, then he planted a false memory in Cassel's head to convince Cassel that he killed Lila. Cassel has spent years believing that he is a murderer, and has felt shocked and disgusted with himself. This has majorly affected his life, as he has not been able to make friends properly or stay in a relationship because of his trust issues and extreme guilt. He has been carrying around the weight of his remorse on his shoulders for a long time. Cassel has also spent years wishing he was a curse worker like the rest of his family so that he could fit in with them better. He feels isolated and alone, like he does not belong in his family or with normal people. He has longed to feel special, but instead has felt inadequate when compared to everyone else in his family.

These things have informed a large part of Cassel's perception of himself, of his identity. He thinks of himself as a non-worker who does not fit in, who wishes he really was a worker. He thinks of himself as a murderer who killed the girl he loved, and so considers himself a bad person who cannot be trusted, who is not worthy of sympathy or real friends. However, all of this is a lie. This is not really Cassel's identity at all, but merely one created for him by Barron. This is why Cassel is so disconcerted when he finds out that his memory has been messed with. He is a worker after all, and now must think of himself in completely different terms. Although Cassel is happy to think that he is no longer a killer, he is still confused and angry, feeling violated that his own brother would do this to him. Barron has literally stolen his identity, leaving Cassel unsure of who he really is.

Unfortunately things only get worse for Cassel, as he finds out that Barron and Philip have also manipulated Cassel into being their assassin. They used his powers as a transformation worker to help them kill people and dispose of the bodies, then Barron blocked Cassel's memories of these crimes. This means that Cassel has been living a normal life unaware that he is an assassin and has done terrible things. Barron and Philip are also using Cassel in their plot to assassinate Mr. Zacharov, and are once again blocking his memories after their rehearsals so that Cassel does not know about the plan as he goes about his normal life. When Cassel finds out about this he is furious and devastated. Just when he began to be able to think of himself as a good person again, and not a killer, he finds out that he is a murderer after all. Once again he has to alter his perception of himself, realizing that his identity is still confused. Is Cassel a killer and a terrible person because he has committed these horrible crimes? He cannot



remember any of them, and since his memories have been blocked he has acted morally and heroically. Does this mean that he is now a good person? Does Cassel's identity include events that he does not remember, or can it only be built on the person that he is now? The reader has never seen Cassel kill anyone, so their view of Cassel is only what is presented in this story. To the reader, Cassel seems like a warm, friendly and brave person who helps his friends and tries to do the right thing. It is hard for the reader to think of Cassel as a killer or a bad person. Perhaps a person's identity is actually subjective, or perhaps it can be changed as memories are changed. If this is the case, then is a person's identity built entirely on their memories? If someone's memories of being a bad person are erased, can this turn them into a good person, or will their character always shine through in the end?

These questions are relevant to the character of Barron, too. As Barron has manipulated Cassel's memories, he has suffered blowback and lost most of his own memories. He has to leave sticky notes around the house to remind him of things, even his own name, and he keeps a diary to remind himself of everything he does and is planning. Barron was a very bad person who never cared much about his little brother and thought nothing of hurting other people. He only cared about himself, and seemed to be assassinating people for the fun of it as much as for the money. He manipulated his own brother's memories without a second thought about what it would mean for Cassel. However, Cassel manages to change all this simply by changing Barron's memories. Just as Barron did to Cassel, Cassel literally steals Barron's identity and replaces it with a new one. Cassel forges a new diary and replaces Barron's real one with it. This new diary tells Barron that he is a good person who does care about his little brother. It convinces Barron that he has been working to foil the assassination attempt all along. After reading this diary Barron suddenly shifts to Cassel's side and helps him out. Afterwards he begins a new, friendlier relationship with Cassel, believing that things have always been this way. He picks Cassel up for Pizza Tuesday, believing this is a regular activity they do together, and happily talks about his feelings with Cassel. Barron's identity has been completely changed into what Cassel always wanted it to be.

Cassel is amazed how much Barron changed simply by altering his memories. Cassel wonders whether Barron has any deeper feelings of dislike for his brother, which he pushes aside now that he thinks they are friends, or if the mean old Barron will ever come back. Cassel is not sure whether this identity change is permanent or not. In other words, he is not sure how much of Barron's identity is really built on his memories. It seems that changing a person's memories can change them completely. If this is true, then is Barron really a different person? Will Cassel have to allow Barron the new start that he himself hopes to achieve? Cassel finds it hard to forgive Barron for his past crimes, but is it fair to blame Barron for what he now cannot remember and does not even know was ever a part of himself?

There are other identity issues in the story, unrelated to memory. Cassel's ethnicity and background are only hinted at and not explored. At Wallingford, Cassel explains that school policy is to ignore race and color and just not talk about it, as if it is something mildly embarrassing. The author mimics this policy by deliberately leaving this aspect of



Cassel's identity is ambiguous. Cassel is clearly not white, as Audrey is suspicious of their story that Lila, who is white, is related to him. Lila mentions the extreme difference in their skin tones. Cassel mentions that people often come up to him on trains thinking he can speak their various languages, but he cannot. This suggests that he has quite a generic look that could belong to a number of different ethnicities. Cassel's family history is also very mysterious as he mentions that there are various stories about it, such as being descended from an Indian Maharajah, from ex-slaves, or even from Julius Caesar. Cassel is not sure which, if any, of these is true. These are all just more examples of how Cassel's identity is confused, and he does not have a sense of who he really is. He feels like he does not fit in anywhere, and even his family's past is closed off to him.

Lila's own identity is also a little confused. Lila is the daughter of Mr. Zacharov, and so she is the heir to a huge criminal empire. She is therefore expected to be tough, strong and confident. Because of this she is very reluctant to show any weakness or vulnerabilities, is often bossy and determined, and likes to be in charge of a situation. This contrasts with her warmer, softer side. She has been good friends with Cassel and wanted to like him on an equal level, which is why she reacted badly when Anton tried to put Cassel back in his place, suggesting that Lila was more important than him. She wants to assert her position in the family, but she also does not want to be Cassel's boss rather than his friend. She shows vulnerability with Cassel, indicating that she does need to lean on others sometimes. Despite being a bit of a bully she is kind and caring, and this seems to contrast strongly with the hard, threatening role that she will have to fill as Zacharov's heir, and later as head of the family. Being turned into a cat was hard for Lila, preventing her from having control and putting her in a constant state of misery and fear. She has not forgotten this, and now she has to learn to deal with it. She has also been a cat for so long that certain mannerisms she displays are quite feline. Now, after being a victim and a cat for so long, she is forced to quickly re-forge her identity as a human, and as the powerful daughter of Zacharov.

Prohibition vs Freedom

In this story curse work has been banned, and so its practice is illegal. This was banned back in the 20s, along with alcohol, but whereas alcohol prohibition was lifted, the ban on curse work was not. The Prohibition (of alcohol) was a real event in American history, taking place between 1920 and 1933. Alcohol was banned for health and moral reasons, but the ban did not really succeed in achieving its aims. One of the consequences was that alcohol was sold on the black market, and illegal establishments were created to sell it. Organized crime, in the form of big crime families and gangsters, also grew up around the selling of alcohol, and then branched into other criminal activities. In this story, similar things have happened. Curse working has been banned but this has not stopped charms and curses from being sold on the black market. It has also not stopped criminals from using curse work. Similar to the real ban on alcohol, the ban on curse work has also led to organized crime in the form of powerful crime families. These were formed during the years in which accused workers were held in labor camps while the courts worked out exactly how to proceed with



prosecuting curse workers. In these ways, the ban has only made things worse. By drawing comparisons between the real Prohibition of alcohol and the fictional Prohibition of curse working, the author is showing that government interference on this scale rarely solves anything, and seems to be doomed to fail. It also makes the fictional world seem more grounded in reality, giving the story a grittier and more realistic feel.

The ban on curse working was intended to keep non-workers safe and to stop crime through cursing. One of the potential issues with the ban, however, is that it drives curse workers towards a life of crime rather than encouraging them to use their powers for good. Curse workers who may have been able to live good lives, using their powers responsibly to help people, now find themselves drawn in by the big crime families and forced to work for them. Others find their powers manipulated by the government. Curse workers actually now have less choice and less freedom. Once they are caught up in the criminal life, too, it is very hard to get out of, and the law provides absolutely no support for them. This is why Daneca and her mother are fighting for worker rights. They believe that it is not fair for a law that was meant to protect people to ignore the needs of the workers themselves, making life far more dangerous for them. They try to help workers, particularly children, who are in trouble, but they cannot help everyone. They want things to be changed, and the laws to be re-assessed. As the reader gets to see the ways in which the curse working characters in this story are drawn into a life of crime, and how Cassel becomes trapped by the Zacharov crime family at the end of the book, it seems clear that Daneca and her mother have a very good point. The Prohibition laws are not protecting workers, and perhaps they do need to be changed.

While Daneca and her mother are fighting for greater freedom and protection for workers, Proposition Two is being proposed in New Jersey. Proposition Two would make it mandatory for all children to be tested for HGB, to see if they are curse workers or not. This information would be kept in a secret file and not passed on to the government or to other organizations. However, opponents of Proposition Two believe that this information would eventually be passed on, or would find its way into the hands of the crime families. This would make workers even bigger targets, and make their lives even more dangerous. Opponents are also worried that Proposition Two would encourage greater discrimination against workers among the ordinary public. Proponents of the proposition are trying to convince all non-workers to get tested voluntarily, which will then easily mark out the ones who are workers anyway, as they will be the ones who refuse to get tested. Cassel thinks this is terrible and he does not want to be a part of it, even when he thinks that he is not a worker himself. Through seeing some of the prejudice Cassel receives while at school, the reader can see that Proposition Two might indeed increase discrimination, and that this would be a bad thing. Cassel's secret about being a transformation worker would also be out in the open, putting him in grave danger as he would be fought over by criminal organizations and the government. By reading about curse workers, it is easy to see why they feel these kinds of laws would disadvantage and endanger them.

When Cassel attends a HEX meeting, which is an advocacy group for workers' rights, he encounters another good argument why the current laws are unfair. The girl at the meeting explains that by banning curse working, the government seems to be pointing



the finger at all curse workers and making them all seem like criminals. This is why they encounter fear, hate and discrimination among the ordinary public. They are feared because the government tells people there is something to fear. This is patronizing and very authoritarian; the government is not allowing curse workers the free choice of whether to be responsible or not. The ones who would have chosen to be good are not even given the chance to use their powers for the benefit of others. Instead, all curse workers are tarnished by the actions of a few bad ones, and so curse work in general is considered an illegal and dangerous activity. The girl in the meeting argues that the word 'curse' is part of the problem, as it has negative associations. If they thought of curse work as magic instead, which it really is, then that negative association would no longer be there. Instead it would sound special and extraordinary. People might understand that it can help them too. Until now, curse workers have been made to feel somehow dirty, unwanted and immoral. They wish to change this. They want the right to be able to show people how wonderful their magic can be.

The reader can be very sympathetic to the curse workers' arguments because they do have some very good points, and because the reader has seen how dangerous a curse worker's life can be, as well as all the negative effects of the ban. The reader has also seen events from the point of view of Cassel, a curse worker in a family of curse workers. At first he thought he was not a worker, and so the reader could see how a normal person could sympathize with curse workers and want to be one. Later, when he finds out he is actually the rarest kind of curse worker there is, the reader can see how all the advocacy groups' arguments make sense. Cassel is in constant danger, and he is pulled into a life of crime from which he cannot now get out. He does always try to do the right thing, and if given the chance he probably would use his powers for good and for the benefit of others. By seeing things through Cassel's eyes, the reader can see how unfair the current system is.

However, the reader has also seen the dark side of curse work, and can understand why normal people are so afraid of it. In this story curse work has been used to kill people, to dispose of dead bodies without ever being found out, to steal memories and create new ones, to steal a person's identity or make them think they have done things they have not, to force people to act in ways that benefit the curse worker, to manipulate emotions and con people out of their money, to influence dreams and make victims sleepwalk right into the hands of their murderers, and to physically harm and torture people. It is no wonder that curse work has a bad name. Even if this is merely the small criminal underbelly of curse work, it is still terrifying, and it is clear that normal people need even greater protection against it, not less. This protection should not, however, come at the expense of worker safety, and it should not encourage discrimination. It is clear that the current system is not working. Things need to change, but what is not clear is how much, or in what ways, things should change. This is a difficult problem with no easy solution.



Friendship

Cassel begins the story with no friends, but through the events of the book he comes to learn the importance of friendship. At first, Cassel does not trust others or even want friends. He believes that other people will only let him down, as his brothers and his mother have let him down. In his family he has no one he can talk to or confide in, and no one to help him with problems. He does not even have a real home. He is used to having to deal with things himself, and used to feeling alone. He thinks that things are more efficient that way. Because his family has taught him about tricks and scams, and he has grown up with con men, he has been taught that having friends is a vulnerability that will be exploited. He now believes that friends are just a liability.

This is made worse because Cassel does not even trust himself. He had a very good friend once called Lila, but he believes that he murdered her when they were fourteen. He is guilt-stricken that he did such an awful thing, and he worries that he is just a bad person who might hurt others again. He does not trust himself around other people and does not want to make friends again in case he loses them again. He is trying to prevent himself and others from being hurt. When Cassel realizes that he did not kill Lila after all, he changes noticeably. He immediately begins to loosen up and open up. If he is not a killer after all, he reasons, then perhaps he can make friends with people again. He begins to talk more to Sam and to include him in things. He asks for Sam's help, and both Sam and Daneca help him carry out his con at the animal shelter. He enjoys working with others for a change, and sees the value in having other people to help him with difficult situations.

Cassel's process of making friends again is not easy, however. At first he sees friends as something that he has out of necessity, to help him with tasks and problems that need more than just himself to solve. When he gets Lila back, however, he seems to remember what it was really like to have a friend, and he becomes a warmer, more open person. He is also facing some pretty major betrayal from his brothers, and he now realizes that he needs someone he can trust and confide in who has nothing to do with his family. Eventually, everything gets too much for Cassel to handle on his own. He decides to tell Sam and Daneca everything, explaining what has been happening to him, who Lila really is, and that his brothers are trying to turn him into an assassin. He describes this process as like ripping off his skin. This is an effective simile, as it conveys Cassel's pain at having to open himself up like he has never done before. It also conveys a sense of Cassel's extreme vulnerability at this point as he peels off the protective layers he has built up to keep others out, now letting Sam and Daneca see the real person underneath. If his family is correct about other people, then Cassel is putting himself in a dangerous position by doing this. However, he no longer wants to be the kind of person who has to face life on his own, and he is willing to take the risk.

As Cassel begins to see that friends are a wonderful thing after all, he loosens up even more and decides to involve them in everything. He also has fun simply hanging out with them. Sam and Daneca are there for him in ways that his family has never been, and he finally feels that he can trust them. He also stops seeing friendship as a mere



exchange of favors. He had viewed friendship as a practical necessity. Now he sees that it is a pleasurable thing too. He likes doing things for his friends simply because they are his friends, and he sees that he is not putting himself in a position of debt by accepting their help too. He gives back to them, not because he has to, but because he wants to. This is why he decides to attend the HEX meeting with Daneca. By the end of the story, Cassel has made two firm friends, and has regained his old friend Lila. He is now in a much stronger position than at the beginning of the story, and is far happier for it too.



Style

Point of View

"White Cat" is told in first person from the point of view of Cassel Sharpe, the main character of the story. Cassel is a teenage boy who, despite the fantastical elements of his life, is easily relatable to by the reader. Cassel wrestles with some extraordinary things, like the guilt of having killed someone, and the magical powers of his family and his enemies, and eventually his own magical powers as well. However, Cassel also faces issues that many readers can understand. He comes from a broken home in which his father has died and his mother is absent. He feels abandoned and ignored. He feels like he has no one to talk to or to turn to when he has problems. He also finds it hard to make friends at school and has severe trust issues. He worries about being 'normal' without realizing how normal many of his concerns are, such as worrying how to act around an ex-girlfriend, coping with another girl who he loves but she does not seem to love him back, and trying to keep up with schoolwork. When he does get involved in magical events and criminal activities, he tries to do what is right and is horrified by cruel behavior. All these things make it easier for the reader to sympathize with Cassel.

By telling the story in first person, the author allows the reader to see Cassel's deep thoughts, feelings, fears and hopes. This helps the reader to understand Cassel better, particularly in circumstances that would be unfamiliar to them. For instance, the reader might not understand how a boy who hates manipulating people would enjoy conning people, but by seeing Cassel's thoughts and reactions, they can understand that conning gives Cassel the power to pursue what he wants, which means he does not have to rely on his untrustworthy brothers. The reader also understands from Cassel's thoughts that he considers it impossible to con an innocent person, so in some way every mark deserves what they get. Cassel disapproves of magically altering people's emotions and memories in order to con them, something that his mother and brother practice, as he considers this to be a step too far. That is manipulating people, which Cassel has experienced and will not do to another person. This is clear when the reader sees Cassel's disgusted reaction to his mother emotion working Lila to make her love Cassel. By telling the story from first person perspective, then, the author succeeds in making the reader like and understand Cassel even when he is doing something morally questionable.

First person also puts the reader into Cassel's place. Everything that he knows, the reader knows, but anything that is hidden from him is also hidden from the reader. This means that the reader experiences the events of the novel as Cassel experiences them, which makes the twists, surprises and revelations more effective. This also allows the reader to see just how damaging Barron's behavior has been. The reader has been given an insight into everything Cassel feels as well as the person he considers himself to be. The reader then shares his shock when he finds out that he is a transformation worker, that he did not kill Lila after all, that his brothers have been manipulating him,



and that he has helped them assassinate people. The reader is then forced to question everything they know about Cassel, just as he has to do. Like Cassel, the reader does not know what really happened in his life before the events of this book. His memories could be false or could be missing. All Cassel can go on is the person he is right now, which is the character that the reader has seen. This makes the question of how much a person's identity is tied to their memories a particularly interesting and important one for the reader as well as for Cassel.

Setting

"White Cat" is set in New Jersey. It begins at Wallingford Preparatory, which is a boarding school for children of the rich elite. Cassel is the poorest student there, which sometimes makes him feel a little left out. This is why he has started his own betting business. The children at Wallingford can be cruel; many of them are wary of Cassel or avoid him because he is associated with curse workers and criminals. It is clear early on in the story that Cassel has no real friends there. The dean tells him to go on medical leave, more worried about the school's potential legal issues concerning Cassel's sleepwalking than he actually is about Cassel's health or well-being. Wallingford is therefore initially presented as quite an unfriendly and cold place, introducing readers to the idea that Cassel is a very isolated and unwanted character.

Most of the story takes place at Cassel's mom's old house, where he is staying with Granddad and helping to clear the place out ready for his mom's release from prison. The house is a clutter of old memories and bit and pieces from their past. Most of it was stolen or conned out of people. This represents Cassel's family's main identity. They are a family of grifters and criminals, but they do not necessarily have a sense of who they are beyond this. There do not seem to be any heirlooms or furniture passed down through the generations. Instead, they have accumulated other people's clutter, stealing other people's lives. This clutter of old memories also represents one of the main themes of the novel. Cassel finds out that Barron has been blocking, stealing and changing memories. He has made Cassel think things happened that really did not, as well as blocking other memories so that Cassel is never aware they happened. Memories are not sacred to Barron. They are a big jumble of clutter like the memories in the old house, which he can reach in and move around, throw away or lock up in an inaccessible room. He can even put new ones in. This leads to confusion and to Cassel losing a sense of who he really is. For Barron, it leads to almost complete amnesia. This is why Barron's own house is so full of notes and diaries to himself, trying to help him rebuild a sense of who he is each time his memories are lost.

Some of the story takes place in Philip's house, which he shares with Maura. This is a normal family home, concealing the terrible acts that take place or are planned inside, as well as the family breakdown that Philip is trying so hard to hide away. After the confusion and hypocrisy of Philip's house and the old house, Wallingford suddenly starts to seem a lot friendlier. When Cassel decides to trust Sam and Daneca and actually starts making friends he can rely on, his dorm room at the boarding school



becomes a place of refuge rather than loneliness. Finally Cassel has found somewhere where he can belong.

Language and Meaning

The language of the story is simple and mimics the way a normal seventeen year old boy of today might speak. This is because the story is being told by Cassel in first person, so all descriptions and observations are coming from him. A lot of Cassel's language is sarcastic, which can often come across as bitter or defensive. This reflects the fact that Cassel has been isolated for a long time, feeling like he cannot trust himself or others properly, and that his whole family has let him down. Cassel is well-educated and speaks quite eloquently to the reader while telling his story, but his speech is still full of modern slang and colloquialisms, reflecting the fact that the story is set in an alternate version of modern day.

Cassel also uses terms that he has picked up from his family that refer specifically to conning, such as 'grifter' and 'mark.' Most of the time Cassel relates events as if he is telling a story, but when he talks about his scams, or about conning in general, he suddenly takes on a more conversational tone with the reader. He speaks directly to the reader, explaining exactly what is going on or how certain tricks are used. This creates the feeling that Cassel is taking the reader into his confidence and involving them in the scam. This conversational tone also makes it easier for the reader to relate to Cassel and feel invested in what is happening despite the fact that Cassel might be doing something morally reprehensible.

Structure

The story has a very simple structure and is told in chronological order, with flashbacks coming in the form of memories. Occasionally the narrative is broken up by Cassel's dream sequences, which are usually immediately identifiable as dreams. As the story is told in first person by Cassel, nothing happens when Cassel is not there, and events are always seen through his eyes. The story never swaps to a different character or a different location. The story only follows the events that Cassel can remember, ignoring anything he might have done while his memories were unblocked by Barron, such as the first rehearsals of the assassination plan. The reader knows that these have occurred, but as the story is being told by Cassel in past tense, this means that it is being narrated after Cassel's memories have been blocked again. This means Cassel cannot tell the reader about these missing moments because he simply cannot remember them himself.

There are only two sections of the novel where Cassel's planning is carried out 'off the page' and the reader does not get to be involved. Both times this is before Cassel pulls off a con. The first time is when he plans the con to get the Lila cat out of the animal shelter, and the second time is when he is planning how to foil the assassination attempt at the end of the story. Both times this technique of keeping the reader a little



more distant than usual is designed to increase suspense and to allow the reader to experience the clever planning of the con from the mark's perspective. This is a common tactic used in stories with cons or heists, as it more effectively demonstrates how the con works, as well as increasing excitement as the reader gets to experience the clever twist without having it spoiled beforehand.



Quotes

"Things don't happen to people because they deserve them." Chapter 1, p7

"Luckily, if there's one thing I'm good at, it's faking and lying." Chapter 1, p9

"I might be a member of the family, but I am always going to be an outsider." Chapter 3, p40

"When I was Audrey's boyfriend, I thought that by making her like me, by making her think I was like everyone else, I'd become like everyone else." Chapter 4, p52

"Mom said those sudden, sickening flashes of the murder would get better over time, but they just got less frequent. Maybe some small decent part of me didn't want to forget." Chapter 5, p62

"But actually trusting someone when they have nothing to gain from me just doesn't make sense. All friendships are negotiations of power." Chapter 6, p91

"I can't trust the people I care about not to hurt me. And I'm not sure I can trust myself not to hurt them, either. Friendships suck." Chapter 6, p93

"Family is the most important thing. There is no one who will love you like your family." - Cassel's mom, in his memory of her talking to her three sons. Chapter 7, p104.

"I forgot that I don't belong, that I would never belong. That I had charmed my way into being their bookie but that I was never their friend." Chapter 9, p142

"Looking at the mirror in the hall, it's like I'm watching us all in a fun house glass, a parody of a family gathering. Look at us celebrating our criminal enterprises. Look at us laugh. Look at us lie." Chapter 11, p166

"Maybe the point of real friendship isn't that you have to repay kindness, but whatever. At least I should try." Chapter 19, p301

"...if all a luck worker ever does is make people have good luck, then all he has is good luck too. It doesn't have to be bad." - Girl at the HEX meeting. Chapter 19, p303

""Magic," the girl says. "It's just all magic."" - Girl at the HEX meeting. Chapter 19, p303



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of identity in this story. What does identity mean to Cassel? Which characters have an identity crisis in the story, and which characters are forced to reconsider their idea of who they really are?

Why is the ban on curse working compared to the real-life Prohibition of alcohol during the 1920s in the United States? What similarities are there? What does this say about curse working and the success of its ban?

Do you believe the workers should have increased rights or not? Do you think the current system is working, and why? If the laws need to be changed, how should they be altered?

Discuss the character of Cassel. What do you think of him? Is he a hero? Do you like him? Give reasons for your answers.

Why is Cassel shocked and disgusted by his mother's actions at the end of the book? How does this relate to the things that have been done to him, and the horrible things he has seen? What does it say about Cassel's character?

Discuss the theme of friendship in this story. Why is Cassel so alone at the beginning of the story and why does he deliberately try to keep others distant? What changes and why? Is Cassel better off at the end of the story, and why?

Discuss free will in this story. Whose free will is limited and how? Who exercises free will and how do they do so? Is free will shown as something that is worth fighting for?

Do you think Barron can be forgiven at the end of the story, now that he cannot remember being a bad person or the bad things he has done? Give reasons for your answer.

Who is the bigger villain of the story: Philip, Anton or Barron? In your answer you should consider the bad traits and redeeming features of each character, as well as the severity of their actions. Give reasons why you think your chosen villain is the worst.

Discuss the character of Lila. How does she act towards Cassel? How does she deal with the weight of being Zacharov's daughter, and what does this mean for her? Is she heroic? Do you like her, and why?