

Thirst No. 4: The Shadow of Death


By Christopher Pike


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The conclusion to the phenomenally successful Thirst series follows five-thousand-year-old vampire Alisa Perne as she battles a new race of immortals: the Telar. The Telar are a challenging threat. But Alisa is hungry for blood—and thirsty for revenge.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Christopher Pike is a bestselling author of young adult novels. The Thirst series, *The Secret of Ka*, and the Remember Me and Alosha trilogies are some of his favorite titles. He is also the author of several adult novels, including *Sati* and *The Season of Passage*. *Thirst* and *Alosha* are slated to be released as feature films. Pike currently lives in Santa Barbara, where it is rumored he never leaves his house. But he can be found online at [Facebook.com/ChristopherPikeBooks](https://www.facebook.com/ChristopherPikeBooks).

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ONE

I hug Seymour and whisper in his ear.

“It’s me, Sita. I’m still here. I’m in Teri’s body.”

Seymour Dorsten does not know how to respond. I can’t blame the guy since I’m basically telling him that I have just reenacted the resurrection and risen on the third day, if it has in fact been three days since Matt shot me in the chest. I’m not too sure of the date. The last few days have been a blur. Sometimes I felt like Teri, other times I thought I was Sita. But most of the time I felt as if I was wandering lost in a twilight realm without any clear sense of self. One thing is for sure: Even though I did technically die, I never went to heaven. I never saw Krishna, which weighs heavily on my heart.

I’m not sure I’m happy to be alive again. When I threw myself in front of the laser beam that was about to slice Seymour in half, and shouted out to Krishna, I believed deep in my soul that I would soon see my Lord. That didn’t happen. Indeed, I don’t know what happened. I have no memory whatsoever of what occurred immediately after I got shot.

Nevertheless, I’m grateful to John, Paula’s son. It was only after the funeral ceremony, when John took my hands and gazed into my eyes, that my confusion lifted and my personality crystallized. With his help, I’m myself again, except for the rather important fact that I’m no longer in the body I was born with.

Where is Teri, I wonder? How did I displace her soul? When Matt shot me, she was deep in the unconscious phase of the conversion cycle from a human being to a vampire. In order to save her life, I had already replaced a large portion of her blood with my own. Matt had been furious at my decision to change her, but he had not fired his weapon at me out of malice.

No, he had shot me in the chest because the Array had overshadowed his will and forced him to kill me. I can only assume Cynthia Brutran had grown weary of me and activated her mind-warping tool in order to rid the world of my presence. I can’t imagine she’ll be happy to see me again, although I suspect she won’t recognize me. But see me she will for I swear I’m going to kill her the first chance I get.

“It can’t be you,” Seymour says.

“It is.”

“But that’s impossible.”

“I know,” I agree.

“You’re confused. Changing into a vampire—I’ve never been through it myself. But it must be a disorientating experience.”

“I’m telling you the truth.”

“It was Sita who changed you. It’s her blood that now flows through your veins. I’m not surprised you’ve inherited some of her memories. That’s what must be throwing you off. You just think you’re Sita.”

“I am Sita.”

Seymour shakes his head firmly. “No. Sita’s dead. She died in my arms, in Matt’s arms. That’s screwed you up as well. She should have been here to teach you what it means to be a vampire. But she’s gone and you don’t have anyone to talk to. I mean, you can talk to me but I just write about vampires, I don’t know shit about them. Not when it comes to the real thing.”

I reach out and hug him. “You know me.”

“Teri . . .”

“Shut up. You know it’s me. We’re too close, you can *feel* that I’m here. Quit trying to convince yourself otherwise.”

Seymour doesn’t hug me back. Yet his face is suddenly stricken with grief and he is close to tears. “No. I can’t go there. I can’t let myself hope. It hurts too much. Get out of here. Go back to Matt. He’s half vampire, maybe he can tell you what to do.”

I continue to hold on to him. “Matt’s the last person I can talk to. He knows there’s something wrong with me but he’s nowhere close to guessing the truth. Plus he was furious that I gave Teri my blood. Now if he finds out I’ve stolen her body, he’ll want to kill me all over again.”

Seymour does not reply. I feel him trembling in my arms. His breathing is suddenly erratic, his heart pounds. But as I stroke his head and press my lips against his neck, I feel him slowly begin to calm down. It is only then his tears start to flow, their damp saltiness washing over me like an elixir of pain. I know intuitively he has not been able to cry during the last few days. When we’re close like this, we’re practically one mind. I know his grief has been too intense to allow it to come to the surface. For that reason I keep touching him, soothing him, until finally his tears stop. Only then do I release him and take a step back, the heel of my right foot accidentally bumping into my coffin. It’s weird to look at it, from the outside, and imagine what’s on the inside.

My dead body.

“Why did you decide to bury me?” I ask. “Why didn’t you have me cremated?”

He shrugs as he slowly collects himself. “I guess there was a part of me that kept hoping you would rise from the dead. Like a normal vampire.”

“Cute. Was that the real reason?”

“I couldn’t stand the thought of putting you in the fire.”

“Well, if it’s any consolation, I’m glad you left me intact.”

“Do you think you can get back inside your body?”

“Seymour. I’m a goddamn vampire. I’m not a divine avatar. I can’t work miracles.”

“Maybe John can help. You need to talk to him.”

“John’s the one who just locked me tight in this body. Before he got ahold of me, I was drifting around the ozone.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know exactly. I remember being up in the mountains with you and Matt, outside that cave where Teri was resting. Then I felt the Array coming and saw Matt’s face change, like he was possessed, and I knew Brutran had caught him in her web. I’m sure you saw the same thing.”

“I did. But what happened when you jumped in front of the laser and got shot in the chest?”

“I died. I felt myself dying.”

“What was it like?”

“It was quick. I felt my heart explode. I saw my blood pour out. But it was weird. My blood suddenly turned to gold dust, and floated up to the sky. At least that was how I saw it.”

“I saw the same thing. So did Matt. What happened next?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing?”

“That’s exactly what I mean. There was a long gap where I didn’t experience anything. Not that I can remember.”

“What is the first thing you do remember?”

“Waking up in bed beside Matt.”

Seymour frowns. “Were you naked?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Just curious.”

I snort. “Here we’re trying to solve one of the greatest mysteries of all time and all you can worry about is whether I’ve been having sex with Matt the last few days.”

“Have you?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“I know you’re attracted to him.”

“Seymour, please, you’ve got to help me. I don’t know what’s going on. I’m in someone else’s body. It’s freaking me out. I don’t even know if that means Teri’s dead or not.”

Seymour considers. “Do you have access to all her memories?”

His question shocks me. Because suddenly I feel as if a computer file has opened deep in my brain—separate from the Sita file—and I can recall the details of Teri’s life. The sudden flood of her nineteen years on earth staggers me and I almost fall over. Seymour reaches out and steadies me.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“I remember!” I cry out, recalling a dozen Christmas mornings and birthdays in the Raines’ happy household. I see Teri’s parents so clearly, they could be standing right in front of me.

“What’s that like?”

“Confusing. I feel like two people. But it’s sort of nice, too. I feel closer to her than ever.”

“That could be the answer. It’s possible Teri’s gone nowhere. Maybe you’re overshadowing her personality. I don’t mean this as an insult but you always were an egomaniac.”

“You’re saying the two of us are in this same body?”

“Yes.”

I shake my head. “No, that’s not right. Even though I have her memories, I feel like they happened to someone else—to her, not to me. Trust me, I would love to feel her soul inside. But she’s gone, Seymour. She’s just gone.”

He sighs. “Then chances are she is dead.”

I nod weakly. “That’s what I fear.” The words sound so simple and plain. But a mountain of grief stands behind them. Even though I was with Teri when she was dying, I still can’t accept her death.

“You have to talk to John,” Seymour says.

“John doesn’t talk to people. He just hangs out and plays computer games. You remember on Santorini, he wouldn’t even see me.”

“True. But he came to your funeral today.”

“He came because his mother brought him.”

“Then talk to Paula. She’s a seer. Tell her what’s happened.”

“What good would that do?”

“What harm would it do?”

“Paula warned me to stay away from Teri. She said nothing good would come from the relationship and she was right. She’s always right.”

“I hear ya. Hey, how come you keep putting your hands over your eyes?”

“I didn’t know I was.” I realize he’s right and lower my hands, but I raise them a few seconds later. The glare is bothering me. It appears Teri’s body is more sensitive to the sunlight than my own. Yet she—or it—is not nearly as susceptible as a newborn vampire generally is.

I wonder how much my mind is affecting the new body I’m in, and vice versa. Specifically, I wonder if I’m as strong as I used to be. Going by the way I walk and talk, and the acuity of my senses, I don’t feel nearly as powerful as I normally do.

That worries me. I’ll have to be at full strength to deal with Brutran and the IIC, never mind the Telar. However, there might be some advantage in their thinking I’m dead. I tell Seymour as much but he is doubtful.

“The only way we can deal with those two groups is to hide from them,” he says. “That battle we had with the Telar three days ago proved that. You and Matt hit them with everything you had in your arsenal and they kept coming. Their organization is too big, too deeply entrenched in too many countries. The same with Brutran and the IIC. There’s no way we can fight them. At least not directly.”

I point to the blisters he has on the back of his right hand.

“Are you forgetting about the X6X6 virus the Telar are planning to release? If we sit back and do nothing, seven billion people will die.”

“I didn’t mean we should find a cave in the Rockies and hibernate. We still have a vial of the T-11 vaccine and we have Charlie on our side. We need to put him in touch with other scientists who can help him reproduce the vaccine on a massive scale.”

“Is that vaccine even working?” I study his blisters more closely. They’re dark and look plump with dead blood. “Have you given yourself another shot?”

“Yesterday. It slowed down the spread of the blisters but it didn’t get rid of them. Shanti has blisters as well, on her face, especially on the skin that she had grafted on. I was planning to give her another dose today.”

“Have you talked to Charlie about what’s going on?”

“I haven’t had a chance. It took all my time to plan your funeral.”

“I suppose I should be grateful.”

“Don’t mention it. But I’m serious when I say we have to keep a low profile when it comes to the Telar and IIC. We can’t fight ten thousand immortals and we can’t fight Brutran’s Array.”

“I wonder how Brutran was able to lock the Array on Matt.”

“Why should he be immune?”

“First off he’s a Telar/vampire hybrid, and his father, Yaksha, was not just any vampire. Matt’s stronger and faster than I am. Also, we assumed Brutran was able to attack because she collected blood from me at her Malibu office. But I can’t see how she could have gotten ahold of a sample of Matt’s blood.”

“The relationship between your blood and the Array is just a theory of yours. It might be wrong. We’re still not sure what the Array is or how it works. Brutran might be able to target whoever she wants.”

“Brutran went to a lot of trouble to get a sample of my blood. Then she went out of her way to avoid me until my blood had been disbursed to her people. That I’m sure of.”

“Matt could have run into her people in the past, without knowing it. Ask him when you’re in bed tonight. He might remember something.”

“I can’t ask him that. It’s not a question Teri would ask.”

“So you’re going to keep Matt in the dark? How long do you think that will last? You have to tell him the truth.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I’m afraid. He has a temper. I told you, he was furious at me for trying to change Teri into a vampire, even if it was to save her life. Right now, he’s probably just learning to accept her as a vampire. Now, if I tell him that not only did the change not work, but I just happened to steal Teri’s body in the process, he’ll explode. I wouldn’t be surprised if he tried to kill me.”

“He’s not going to kill his old girlfriend’s body.”

“He might if he’s convinced she’s not coming back.”

“But you didn’t choose for this to happen.”

“He won’t care! He’s not going to react logically. He’s emotionally on fire.”

“I understand all that. But he needs you and you need him. You two are the only ones who can save the world from these maniacs. It doesn’t have to be now, but at some point you’re going to have to risk telling him the truth.”

“Agreed. Later. A lot later. Let’s give it a few days. Or weeks.” I stare down at my coffin. “I need to be alone for a few minutes.”

He hesitates. “All right.” He turns and walks toward his car. “Don’t do anything disgusting,” he calls over his shoulder.

When he’s gone, I kneel beside the coffin and put my hands on the top. I’m sitting in the same position John was when he did whatever it was he did to my body. Or should I say my old body? Chances are this change is permanent.

The coffin has been nailed shut. Even though I lack my old strength, I’m still a vampire with Sita’s blood flowing through my veins. That makes me stronger than a dozen men combined. I snap the top off without effort and set it aside. For the first time in my long life, I stare at myself from the outside. The effect is overwhelming. I shake, feel a wave of dizziness, and for a moment I fear I will faint.

I look so much like me, and yet I’m a stranger to myself. It frightens me to gaze at my face. I could be staring at a mirror that lies under a foot of water. I look like a ghost.

I have a hole in my chest, in my heart. The long white dress the morgue has dressed me in does not hide the fact. There is a dark red and gold stain where the material brushes the skin near my left breast. I know I should not touch the wound but feel I must. My shaking hand reaches out and pops two buttons off the dress as my fingers probe the rim of the wound that ended five thousand years of life.

The hole feels narrow, too narrow. Of course I have no clear idea how wide it should be, yet it doesn’t seem right. Plus my dress is stained because the wound is still damp, when it should be dry.

I smell not a hint of formaldehyde. I know Seymour would not have allowed me to be embalmed, on the off chance someone might have tried to steal my blood.

There’s just something about the wound that’s unnatural.

I get the impression it’s slowly healing.

Yet the dead do not heal.

Not even dead vampires.

On impulse, I let go of the bloody hole and reach up with my other hand and open my eyes. Leaning forward on my knees, I stare down into them, and here I note a definite change. They are darker than before. The blue is closer to black, and they gaze back at me with a reflectivity that no mirror could match. However, I don’t see myself in them.

I see Krishna. I see his face, his eyes, his divine dark-blue light. The weight on my heart partially lifts and I shed my first tears for dead Sita. I finally realize I’m alive only because he wills it, and that this respite won’t last forever, or even a great many days. He has sent me back for a purpose and I have a limited amount of time to accomplish it.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sheila Rocha:

Spent a free time to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could be reading a book is usually option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing that you ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to try look for book, may be the reserve untitled Thirst No. 4: The Shadow of Death can be fine book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

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