



Vampires rock. Especially Lestat, who has risen from a decades-long slumber and reinvented himself as a contemporary American rock star in the movie *Queen of the Damned*, a sequel of sorts to 1994's *Interview With the Vampire*. Instead of Tom Cruise, Stuart Townsend bares fangs this time as Lestat, whose music awakens the queen mother of vampires, Akasha, from her supposedly eternal slumber. Played by beloved R&B singer Aaliyah, Akasha uses all her malevolent power to make Lestat her main man, and the world's vampires are biting mad. So is a young London woman named Jesse who is drawn to the dark side and wouldn't mind a little neck biting with everyone's favorite immortal player. She must stand with the vampires against Akasha before the queen manages to unleash hell on earth and wipe them all out.

—ROBERT B. DESALVO

The Vampires Bite Back



THE QUEEN OF THE DAMNED Insider

1. *The Queen of the Damned* is the third book in the *Vampire Chronicles*. The movie incorporates elements from that book and the second novel, *The Vampire Lestat*.

2. Warner Bros. got production moving on *Queen of the Damned* before October 2000, when the rights for the book would have reverted back to Anne Rice.

3. Producer Jorge Sarlegui said he knew he'd found the new Lestat after seeing Stuart Townsend in *Resurrection Man*, in which Sarlegui described Townsend as "pale, sexy, androgynous, cocksure and dangerous as hell."

4. *The Queen of the Damned* is directed by Michael Rymer and has two credited screenwriters. Anne Rice volunteered to pen the screenplay for union scale, but her offer was politely declined.

5. Aaliyah's older brother, Rashad Haughton, rerecorded several of his sister's lines in *Queen of the Damned* after her death to smooth over her Egyptian accent.

6. Jonathan Davis of Korn co-wrote and recorded five songs for *Queen of the Damned* and scored the film along with composer Richard Gibbs. Because of legal reasons, the soundtrack CD will feature the voice of Jeff Scott Soto, whom Davis coached.

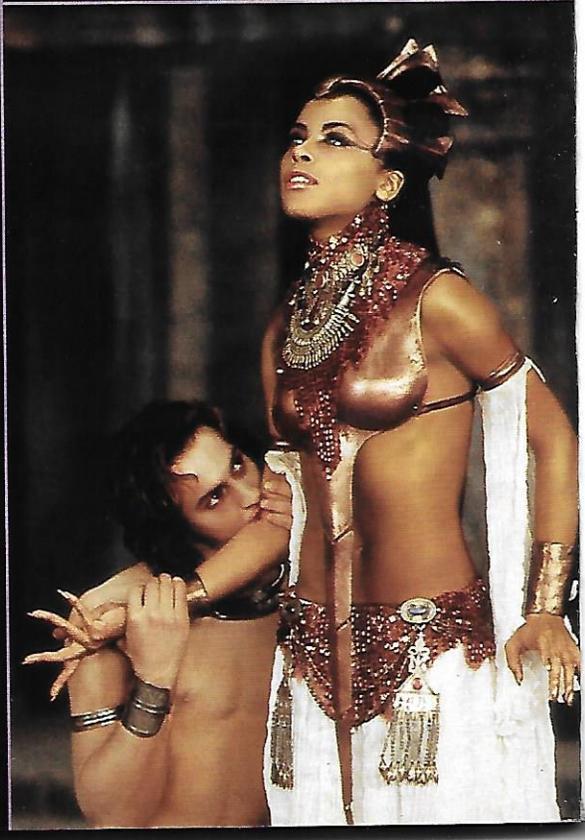
7. Warner Bros. decried an erroneous *New York Post* report that the movie was heading straight to video until Aaliyah's death raised its profile.

HAIL TO THE QUEEN

In Arabic Aaliyah means "the highest, most-exalted one," so it's fitting she play the Queen of the Damned. The R&B sensation released three platinum albums, the first when she was 15, as well as the hit *Are You That Somebody* from the *Dr. Dolittle* soundtrack and the Oscar-nominated *Journey to the Past* from the film *Anastasia*. She recorded the hit *Try Again* for the movie *Romeo Must Die* and made her acting debut in that film opposite Jet Li. Aaliyah had begun working on the *Matrix* sequels before the small plane she was on crashed in the Bahamas last August, killing everyone on board. The death of this talented 22-year-old was a tragedy, and because her unfinished work in the *Matrix* sequels had to be scrapped, *The Queen of the Damned* will stand as her final film.

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE WRITER Anne Rice

Best-selling author Anne Rice is best known for her *Vampire Chronicles*, which unfurled in 1976 with *Interview With the Vampire*, followed by *The Vampire Lestat*, *The Queen of the Damned*, *The Tale of the Body Thief*, *Memnoch the Devil*, *Pandora*, *Armand*, *Merrick* and last year's *Blood and Gold*. The epic stories follow the sensual and supernatural exploits of various vampires, though Lestat is the star. "I completely identify with him," says Rice on her official website. "He is my male self and does the things I wish I could. When I'm writing, he's right there telling me the story, leaning over my shoulder, telling me to get it right, pointing out things I should change, breathing down my neck and doing everything but biting me. He wouldn't dare!" (text continued on page 150)



"Writing my novels, I was deeply into S&M. But I was constructing a fantasy, not a road map."

Before Anne Rice first drew blood on the literary scene with *Interview With the Vampire*, vampires were mostly relegated to late-night B movies. No one had ever tried to bring humanity to the monsters, to view vampires as tormented outsiders who struggle with morality, the meaning of life and the transience of love and erotic desire. *The Vampire Chronicles*—nine books and counting—amassed a huge following that broke barriers based on gender, sexual orientation and age. Although the 60-year-old author is modest about how much her *Vampire Chronicles* have expanded the mythology of the undead, she says dismissal of her work stings. "Some people don't take *The Vampire Chronicles* seriously at all, because the books are about vampires," she says. "They don't understand how much I've put into the novels. In some dark and tangled way, Louis was me in *Interview With the Vampire*. That was my melancholy, my guilt for leaving the Catholic Church, my grief for the death of my daughter."

Initially, Rice wasn't thrilled with the casting of 1994's blockbuster *Interview With the Vampire*, which features Cruise as Lestat, but now she sings his praises. "I

was wrong about Tom Cruise's not being able to overcome type," she says. "He's a wonderful actor who became the character Lestat and understood Lestat's personality. I just saw Richard E. Grant, an actor I had lobbied for in *Interview With the Vampire*, play a vampire in the comedy *The Little Vampire*. He was this dramatic, cultured character tricked out in Elizabethan drag. I'd like to think I had a little influence there. It's flattering to think people have read my work and want to build on it." Now *The Queen of the Damned* is out in theaters with a new cast and minimal involvement from Rice. "When the movie was in development, I offered to write the screenplay for union scale with a deferred payment if the movie was ever made," she says. "I wanted to do *Lestat* and the studio wanted to do the third novel, *The Queen of the Damned*. They really didn't want me. They told me politely that I was just too big for them." Rice maintained contact with the filmmakers during the production of *Queen*, but at the time of this interview, she had not seen the movie. "I'm optimistic," she says. "Even an adaptation of the book can be good if the personalities of the characters remain

true to the story. That's what I'm hoping for with *Queen*." What does she think of the new Lestat? "I met Stuart Townsend after the picture wrapped," she says. "He came to New Orleans and I showed him around the house and property. He was charming. He had a good experience making *Queen* and he told me about some of the things that fascinated him, like playing a rock star onstage in front of a real audience."

Although Rice's work has been translated to the screen with varying success, the author still gets excited at the prospect of her stories on film. Her book *Ramses the Damned*, about an immortal mummy, is being developed by James Cameron, and she'd love to see Joaquin Phoenix play the ghost who haunts a woman in the supernatural love story *Violin*. "When I watched *Interview With the Vampire*, I was thrilled to see scenes I had written being acted out pretty faithfully to what I had done," she says. "It gave me chills. The same thing happened with Showtime's *Feast of All Saints*, which was such a faithful adaptation by the screenwriter, John Wilder. He really understood the book. Now I'm reluctant to work on any project without John." Rice probably regrets not having Wilder around when her erotic novel *Exit to Eden* was turned into a slapstick comedy starring Rosie O'Donnell and Dan Aykroyd. "The movie *Exit to Eden* was so disconnected from my work that it didn't even bring in my audience," she says. "The producers interpreted the novel to be comic, and they ridiculed the characters. *Exit to Eden* is actually a kinky love story."

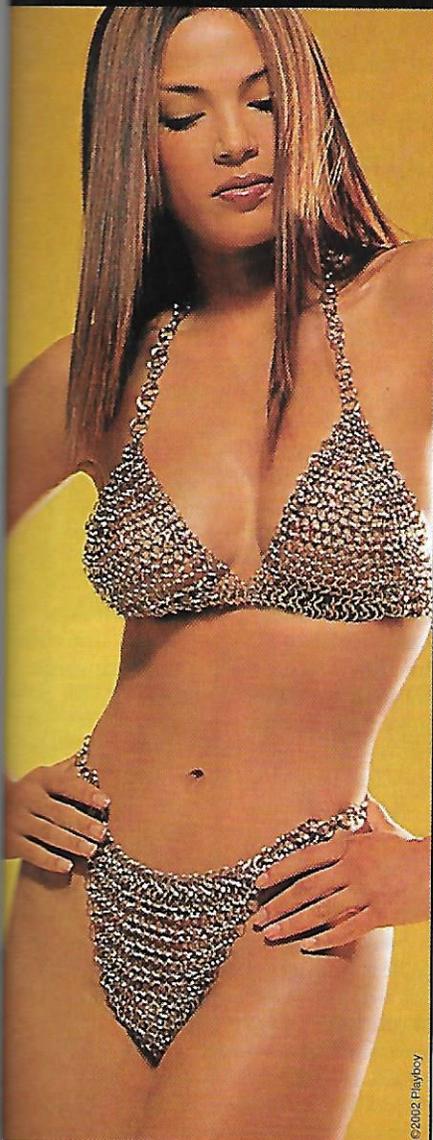
Rice is a kink connoisseur. Her pornographic *Beauty* trilogy (*The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty's Punishment* and *Beauty's Release*) is a sadomasochistic retelling of the classic fairy tale. "I used the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure because my father was still living at the time and I didn't want him to know about it," she says. "Roquelaure means cloak in French, so A.N. Roquelaure really means Anne with a cloak. I wanted to put these elaborate sexual fantasies in print, and I believed pornography could be written without the grimness of *The Story of O* or *9½ Weeks*. I wanted something that was playful and highly erotic on every page yet didn't contain four-letter words, something that could be elegant and fun for both men and women. I think I accomplished my goal." It was a dark fantasy for Rice, but what about her fans? "I've met people who are into S&M who come to my signings and talk about the *Beauty* books and how they act out the scenes," she says. "It frightens me a little, and I tend to be shy, so I don't ask a lot of questions. I appreciate their lifestyle, but I have not personally been involved with S&M. When I was writing my



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novels, I was deeply into it. But I was constructing a fantasy, not a road map or a blueprint."

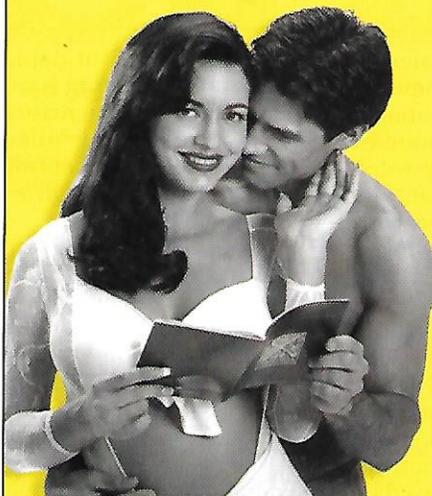
Although Rice says her days of writing pornography are over, there is no lack of erotic tension in *The Vampire Chronicles*, in which the characters explore limitless erotic pairings. "When I write, I see the world through bisexual eyes," she says. "I'm not sure that everyone is inherently bisexual, but I know a lot of people who are capable of being bisexual if they could remove the prejudice or if it were more swanky to be that way. I think maybe I'm bisexual—I don't really know. When I'm Louis or Lestat or any of those characters, I see everyone as essentially attractive and compelling. I don't see the world with the grimy eyes of a detective novelist. I don't use negative vocabulary. I believe everyone is attractive to some extent, and the bisexual romanticism in those novels is a part of my psyche. Lestat is the man I wish I was. For many years I felt like a gay man in a woman's body, and Lestat is kind of a gay man in a gay man's body."

Lestat, who has taken a backseat in the last few *Chronicles*, will return next in the book *Blackwood Farm* and be the focus of the upcoming *Angel Time*. "I was working on *Angel Time* in 1998 when I got diabetes and went into a coma," Rice says. "I almost died with a blood sugar level of 800, and when I got to the hospital I was on the verge of cardiac arrest. When you're in a diabetic coma, your brain actually shrinks, so it was frightening to come out of that with no ability to fantasize, imagine or plan. I was in a state of the present tense and agitated all the time. It took months to get back my vocabulary and my capacity to write a narrative."

Now that she has made a notable impression on pop culture and changed the mythology of the vampire, will she abandon the *Chronicles*? Is there a final chapter? "I have a young audience coming up that wasn't even born when I wrote *Interview With the Vampire*," she says. "*The Vampire Chronicles* are being used in philosophy classes in college and high school literature classes. Teachers come through the book-signing line and tell me that they assign the *Chronicles* to kids because it gets them to read. All of that is wonderful. I'm writing a novel called *The Talamasca*, about the order of psychic detectives that I first introduced in *The Queen of the Damned*. I'm trying to keep vampires out of it, but I don't seem to be able to control myself and I keep weaving all my books together. I want new characters, new voices and new ideas, so it's going to be clean if it kills me. But I don't see any end to *The Vampire Chronicles*. I still have a lot to say."



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