

## Children of the Shadows: Unearthing the Ritual

**C. C. Uzoh**

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*Children of the Shadows is a unique, emotionally stirring fantasy novel focused on faith and family.*

C. C. Uzoh's *Children of the Shadows* is a suspenseful and dramatic fantasy novel that questions what people will sacrifice for survival and power.

In the African village of Akagheli, Nkemjika Odimegwu stumbles upon her husband doing the unthinkable—sacrificing their first born son, Dike, during an occult ritual called Mkpataku. Fleeing with her daughter, Nkemjika appeals to the supposedly Christian king for safety but learns that not everyone practices what they preach.

Nkemjika is far from the only woman who has found her first born son missing followed by their husbands rising to power; even the queen's son died mysteriously. Realizing that there are few people she can trust, Nkemjika uses her faith, resourcefulness, and otherworldly connection to her dead son to try to escape the evil that has taken over her village.

Nkemjika is courageous, bold, vulnerable, and honest, making her a heroic lead. She narrates, and her inner monologue is psychologically sympathetic. Her daily life in the village is presented with detail, and the text is believable even as supernatural elements are introduced.

Nkemjika's son, Dike, finds himself stuck in a kind of purgatory for victims of the sacrifice ritual; his subplot is thoughtful as it explores the grief of death. Dike and his fellow spirits, the Pneumas, follow a strict set of rules around interacting with mortals; Dike's story and relationships with other Pneumas enhances the novel's themes of family and loyalty.

Papa Dike, village neighbors, and various village chiefs and king's men round out the supporting cast. Papa Dike is hard to understand; his motivations are not developed before the Mkpataku ritual, and his temperament and beliefs shift during the story. It is difficult to keep track of the many chiefs and henchmen involved, few of whom have specific personalities. Conversations often sound contrived. Odera, the king's commander, is one notable exception; he goes rogue to help Nkemjika and becomes a sensitive and brave character who adds tension and suspense to the plot. Odera's combat skills make for intricate fight scenes.

A religious overtone places Christianity in the right and occultism in the wrong but does not feel judgmental or overemphasized in the context of the story. The novel is the first in its series, and the end leaves some characters and questions pending, but the main story arcs are clearly and satisfactorily resolved.

The writing is beautiful and poetic, with ornate language and drawn-out sentences that increase the novel's drama. Italics differentiate Nkemjika's personal thoughts from the narration. Descriptions bring locations to life through sensory language and abundant imagery. The mix of village life under a monarchy and occasional mentions of somewhat modern technology make it difficult to pin down a timeline, though.

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DELIA STANLEY (January 10, 2019)

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