



Shadow of the Sun

Merrie P. Wycoff

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The tightly packed story and precocious protagonist will hook readers on this ancient Egypt fantasy series.

Political intrigue, religious animosity, and mysticism all collide in Merrie P. Wycoff's *Shadow of the Sun*, the first book in The Shadow Saga. In this historical fantasy, Merit-Aten struggles with the knowledge that she is her family's savior, despite being merely a child.

Merit-Aten, the first granddaughter of the pharaoh, is only four years old at the start of the book, but she is wise beyond her years. Her wisdom and curiosity serve as the springboard for the plot. Thanks to her inquisitiveness, she uncovers a scheme against her grandmother's life and a political plan to usurp power from her family by the worshippers of Amun. Led by Merit-Aten's Aunt Sit-Amun, the worshippers of Amun fear that the growing love for Aten, the god worshipped by Merit-Aten's family, will lead to the end of Amun's centuries-long sway over pharaohs and commoners alike. While seeking a way to expose those responsible, Merit-Aten learns much about herself, including the fact that she has supernaturally heightened senses. These powers help Merit-Aten tap into her own mystical importance as she tries to save her family and preserve their reign over Egypt.

Shadow of the Sun is a tightly packed novel with multiple story lines weaving together. Some of these lay untouched at the conclusion, smartly setting up sequels. The plot threads also allow for a briskly paced story and a dense, stimulating plot. Merit-Aten feels like a three-dimensional, flesh-and-blood friend by the end of the story. Connections with other characters are also quickly made, although the antagonists could use more development. At times, personalities are painted in blacks and whites instead of the always-more-intriguing grays, leaving some characters too static.

Wycoff deftly displays a true passion for Egyptian mythology. The foreword clearly lays out her love of and interest in ancient Egypt, its culture, and its spirituality. However, some details are left unexplained, which can be a little confusing. Conveniently, a glossary is included, helping to clarify the references a bit.

The book attempts to tackle some heavier themes, such as cause and effect, war and peace, and the treatment of the lower class by those who hold power. The narrative shines best when these themes are subtly hinted at rather than touched on directly through dialogue, which can become stiff and unnatural.

The writing and language of *Shadow of the Sun* will appeal to younger fans of historical fiction and fantasy, although it should be noted there are some sexually graphic scenes that steer the book toward a more mature audience. The heavy political and religious themes also might appeal to a more mature reader. Wycoff uses these elements, along with fantasy and intrigue, to weave a tale that quickly set its hooks in readers and spurs the mind on a wild guessing game.

RON WATSON (July 24, 2015)

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