Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Shadows and Fire
Jennifer Fales
Outskirts Press
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Shadows and Fire is set in a future in which mankind shares the world with genetically engineered beast-people. Both human and so-called "supernatural" society are in dire straights: Humans are under the repressive yoke of the Church, a government-cum-religious-body, and the supernaturals are beginning to have difficulty reproducing amongst themselves. Into this dystopia, a pair of twins have been born: Lilith (the protagonist) and Laydon. Their parents were a mix of human and hybrid, and the twins have unprecedented abilities as a result. Now they find themselves at the center of a political maelstrom, as Lilith attempts to find her way back to her beloved brother.

Along the way, Lilith teams up with a dragon-woman named Maltha and a wolf-man named Geoff'tan. Laydon, meanwhile, tries to guide his sister back to him while he works with Aamon, Maltha's ruthless cousin.

Soon, Lilith finds herself dealing with shady information brokers, hulking guards, and conniving rat-people. She is of great interest to everyone, given her bizarre heritage and unprecedented abilities. When threatened, she is able to generate bursts of fire with her mind. Yet her only interest is in finding her way back to her brother. Jennifer Fales offers several interesting political themes—supernatural society, for instance, is on the cusp of revolution because the "prey" class is tired of being secondary to the "predator" class—but they remain subplots to Lilith's search for Laydon.

The novel ends with a few surprising revelations, but leaves many questions unresolved. It's apparent that the book is meant to be part of a series, but it is not clear if there will be another installment.

Fales's disinterest in scientific plausibility makes her book more fantasy than science fiction. Although this is her first novel, the author's prose is eminently readable and never

distracts from her fast-moving plot. The focus on Lilith and Laydon lends the story an air of intimacy that helps to counterbalance the big ideas of the novel's setting. *Shadows and Fire* also benefits from Fales's vivid and amusing turns of phrase. For example, when a guard approaches Lilith, terrified of her strange powers,"he looked like he'd rather be feeding his fingers to a meat grinder than touching Lilith."

Overall, the story is a bit shallow. There are a lot of interesting themes, but few of them are explored in any depth. Fales's characters are engaging, but they're rarely more than types. Even Lilith and Laydon don't feel like more much than ciphers.

Yet these shortcomings only manifest themselves after the fact. Fales's book is an undeniably fun read, and one hopes that a sequel will deliver on the promise of this novel. *Shadows and Fire* is recommended reading for fantasy fans and science-fiction aficionados.

Kenrick Vezina