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Clarion Review ★★★★★ FANTASY

## Stealing the Shadow of Death

**Merrie P. Wycoff**
**Marty Petersen, Illustrator**
Rosa Mystica Publishing (Jul 8, 2014)
Softcover $19.95 (352pp)
978-0-692-02120-0

*Wycoff's vivid setting and intriguing plot create a fascinating ancient-Egyptian story from start to finish.*

Enlightenment, danger, and love await the young protagonist of Merrie P. Wycoff's *Stealing the Shadow of Death*, the second book of The Shadow Saga. Ancient Egyptian culture comes alive and almost outshines the story of Merit-Aten, the book's heroine, as she navigates the path to spiritual truth while protecting her family against a threat from the past.

Merit-Aten—the eldest daughter of Pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti—is on the cusp of her teenage years and training to become the High Priestess of Osiris at her father's request. As she navigates through various trials to follow this path of initiation, she and her family also face a growing threat from the followers of Amun, corrupt officials deposed by Akhenaten when he came into power. Dealing with this danger forces the young girl to confront her fears and learn about the hidden, wicked truths behind the practice of mummification. As if this weren't challenging enough, Merit-Aten must deal with the ups and downs of adolescent love as well, while her mother continually pressures her to choose a worthy consort and produce an heir.

Even though the book hits numerous plot points, it does so at a solid pace. Wycoff explains each trial Merit-Aten faces with enough detail to paint a full picture of its circumstances and ramifications, but the packed plot prevents any single event from stagnating. Overall, the plot drives the story more than the characters do; Merit-Aten develops somewhat, but the supporting characters do not receive much attention. Since the book has a captivating plot and a rich setting, though, the matter is clearly one of writing style rather than a lack of writing skill.

In addition to maintaining a page-turning pace, Wycoff neutralizes nearly any source of possible confusion within the text. The story can stand alone even though this is the second book of a series. Characters occasionally reference past events, but they summarize those events in a manner that provides adequate understanding to the current storyline. Moreover, the author follows unfamiliar cultural terms with brief explanations that inform without distracting, and the inclusion of a glossary at the end of the book adds further clarity.

The author's extensive knowledge of this period in Egyptian history shows in her writing, and at times, her passion for it can seem overwhelmingly strong. In her foreword, Wycoff describes her search for mystical knowledge, and in her acknowledgments, she references someone who encouraged her to write this book and "reveal the truth" of Akhenaten's story by doing so.

*Stealing the Shadow of Death* will likely appeal to most people with an interest in ancient Egypt, regardless of whether that interest is vague or passionate. Wycoff's vivid setting and intriguing plot create a fascinating read from start to finish.

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CAITLYNN LOWE (July 15, 2015)

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