

The Shadow Watchers

Bert Nelson

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“On June 20 1934 John Webster disappeared without a trace. He simply vanished. His young friend Adam Maclean discovered clothing and personal effects but no body” Bert Nelson writes in the beginning of *The Shadow Watchers*.

John’s disappearance leads to unanswered questions that plague the lives of Adam MacLean and John’s son Joel for nearly fifty years. Adam attempts to solve the mystery by researching esoteric tomes from different world cultures that lead him to India. There he learns the tale of the “Shadow Watchers” a group of wizened men with the ability to stop time.

The Shadow Watchers is at first written like a fable. The characters and situations become more complex as the book progresses. Nelson loses the innocent tone that would make *Shadow Watchers* appealing to children and young adults. He adds a weight to his voice; a jaded edge of despair that annihilates any sense of the child-like wonder that he took painstaking efforts to nurture in the beginning of the novel.

The backstory of the character John Webster provides an example of the heaviness Nelson infuses in his prose. Trapped in a loveless marriage and in the oppressive orbit of his wife and his father-in-law’s religious fanaticism John Webster appears to be a “simple” and gentle shoe repairman. This simplicity is misleading because his curiosity about the mechanics of time space and the universe seem to go beyond the borders of obsession into the realm of insanity. Nelson writes “John had doubts about the conventional ideas of Time and Death...Somewhere on the fringe of his mind was a formless thought—a shapeless but persistent impression which resisted the intrusion of other ideas...Constantly aware of his uneducated ignorance...he lived most of his life in a kind of no-mans land somewhere between the flickering shadows of his own thoughts and the inflow of ideas from other people.”

John is so tormented by his obsession and the estranged relationship with his wife and father-in-law is so hellish that one cannot help but think of the final line from Jean Paul Sartre’s play *Huis Clos (No Exit)*: “Hell is other people.”

The Shadow Watchers will appeal to readers who enjoy fiction with soft sci-fi story lines that emphasize the human condition like the works of Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison.

Unfortunately the novel is replete with typographical errors and has an inconsistent template found in some print-on-demand books. This is hard to overlook and detracts from an otherwise entertaining novel.

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