

The Tale of the Shadow Dwellers

Carol Johnson

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Murder and mayhem, singing and songwriting create a colorful world amid the shadows and darkness.

An exciting new journey into the world of the paranormal, Carol Johnson's *The Tale of the Shadow Dwellers* is a fast-paced, action-driven blend of romance, science fiction, and fantasy, featuring an alluring but secretive race of virtually immortal creatures of the night.

Feisty and impetuous, Laura's burning need for justice brings her to the attention of theater owner and Shadow Dweller Stephan Renard and his seductive partner, Nicolette. As Stephan's interest in Laura grows, so too does Nicolette's ire, and a scorned vampiress is a deadly individual. Luckily, Laura has a growing posse of mentors, protectors, and fellow danger junkies, all willing to risk their lives to defend the innocent and end the destruction caused by otherworldly miscreants.

Although following some of the mainstays of "vampire fiction" and its mythology, including blood as sustenance and an aversion to sunlight, *Shadow Dwellers* branches off into some unexpected but inspired directions. Science and performing arts are center stage along with gadgetry, pharmaceutical crime-fighting strategies, and tricked-out cars that could give the Batmobile a run for its money. Murder and mayhem alongside singing, songwriting, and Stephan's specialty, set design, create a colorful world amid the shadows and darkness.

From the opening sequence onward, *Shadow Dwellers* is a nonstop series of actions and reactions, with relationship teasers and the occasional philosophical musing filtered in. The result is a somewhat unstructured plot line that could easily be divided into two complete and distinct stories or parts, the first centering around Stephan's theater, "The Colony," and the second on "The Institute," a hidden laboratory in which Laura finds herself a person of extreme interest. Secondary characters tend to appear and disappear as needed, and some holes in the overall mythology are revealed the further Laura tumbles into the realm of Shadow Dwellers. Later, the "Ancients" and "archangels" are puzzling—their origins, powers, and purpose are never fully divulged.

Luckily, heart-pumping battles with strange golems, caverns full of magma, and out-of-body experiences make for fast page turning, and a sequel could easily pick up where *Shadow Dwellers* leaves off, hopefully reintroducing some of the vibrant characters forgotten along the way and filling in the gaps. Fans of Kim Harrison and R. L. Mathewson who are looking for something fresh will appreciate Laura's irrepressible drive and spirit in Carol Johnson's *The Tale of the Shadow Dwellers*.

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