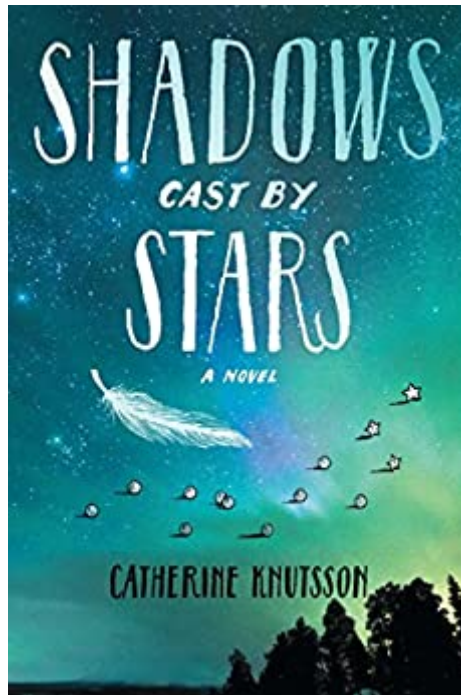




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# Shadows Cast By Stars



## Synopsis

Old ways are pitted against new horrors in this compellingly crafted, “atmospherically beautiful” (>) dystopian tale about a girl who is both healer and seer. Two hundred years from now, blood has become the most valuable commodity on the planet—especially the blood of aboriginal peoples, for it contains antibodies that protect them from the Plague ravaging the rest of the world. Sixteen-year-old Cassandra Mercredi might be immune to the Plague, but that doesn’t mean she’s safe—government forces are searching for those of aboriginal heritage to harvest their blood. When a search threatens Cassandra and her family, they flee to the Island: a mysterious and idyllic territory protected by the Band, a group of guerilla warriors—and by an enigmatic energy barrier that keeps outsiders out and the spirit world in. And though the village healer has taken her under her wing, and the tribal leader’s son into his heart, the creatures of the spirit world are angry, and they have chosen Cassandra to be their voice and instrument... Incorporating the traditions of the First Peoples as well as the more familiar stories of Greek mythology and Arthurian legend, *Shadows Cast by Stars* is a haunting, beautifully written story that breathes new life into ancient customs.

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## Customer Reviews

Shadows Cast By Stars is one of the most uniquely original novels I've had the pleasure of reading within the past year. I regret that it has taken me this long to review it, but things happen for a reason and I'm always happy to bring attention to a novel whether it has just been released or published 10 years ago. Shadows is a very hard book to categorize and is sort of a genre bender. It is dystopian yet the author manages to weave in Greek mythology, Arthurian legend, and culture of the First Peoples. I think this is one of the reasons why it has been having trouble finding the right audience. Despite this, Shadows is one of the most fascinating dystopian books out there, with beautiful, lyrical writing, and characters that you come to care about. Let's talk about characters for a moment. I thought Cassandra was a great heroine and I found myself quite sympathetic to her plight. She sort of reminds me of myself at times, an old soul that carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. She loves her father and her brother but I got the sense that she is the glue to this family dynamic. I couldn't help but fall a little in love with her brother Paul, and I think that is a huge feat and proves how amazing of an author Catherine Knutsson is. I usually get bored with brother/sister tales because one character always seems to be more interesting than the other. But Paul is such a well written character, a tortured soul that seems to be always hanging over a precipice, one step in the light, one step in the dark. Once Cassandra, Paul, and their father are forced to leave and move to the Island, other interesting characters are introduced. I loved Madda, the village healer who takes Cass under her wing and teaches her about healing and controlling her powers. We also get to meet the village leader's son, Bran, who becomes Cassandra's love interest. Some reviewers thought Cass and Bran's relationship was rushed. I don't believe so. Was there an immediate attraction between the two? Yes, but they didn't fall into each other's arms right away. It was more like a slow burn. But then again, when it does happen and they allow their feelings to take over, it's a beautiful thing since they live in a world where at any moment they could be discovered by those from the Corridor. What makes this novel truly unique and thought provoking is the many themes and lessons to be learned. Catherine Knutsson does this by giving us characters that can walk in the spirit world, a world where technology has poisoned us and the Old Ways are embraced by few but perhaps is the key to saving the world from self destruction. Cassandra and her brother Paul are called "Others", those who are immune to Plague because they carry antibodies to fight it

due to their aboriginal blood. The term "Others" is interesting because it reminds me of a Multicultural class I took back in college. "Others" was a term used by whites when referring to Asian people. I remember thinking how horrible it must have been to be called an "Other", as if these people were not human beings but something entirely different, in a far less superior category. That's how Cass and her people are treated, so discrimination and prejudice are huge themes that run throughout the novel. Spirituality is also prevalent in *Shadows Cast By Stars*. While Cassandra can see spirit and see a person's Shade (like a person's totem or animal spirit), Paul has terrifying visions that come true and is often visited by the dead. Cass knows this takes a huge toll on Paul who starts to become more and more withdrawn. I also love how everything has a spirit which reminds me of Native American culture. While at school, Cass finds and sneaks out "contraband", a term used in the Corridor for old, forgotten items such as pencils, clips, elastic bands, rusty old keys, ribbons, etc. She then takes these items home and waits until they tell her what they want to be used for; sometimes she weaves them into dreamcatchers, other times it may be a basket. These items come to life in her hands and shows us how even the smallest object, such as a rock, has a spirit inside it. Another important and interesting theme throughout the novel is that of Technology vs. The Old Ways. Novels that explore the advancement of technology and give us different views on what the world may look like in the future always disturb and intrigue me. It's scary because I see some of the negative effects already. We live in a world where teenagers don't even know how to tell time by looking at a clock because they are so used to looking at their cell phones. We live in a technological society where 10 years ago I could remember phone numbers without even checking my personal phone book but now if I lost my cell phone, I wouldn't even be able to call my boyfriend because I don't know his number by heart! In *Shadows Cast By Stars*, we are 200 years in the future where technology has basically turned against us. Everything is poison, the air we breathe, the people infected with prejudice, etc. But maybe there is another way to live. Maybe it's not too late. Cassandra's father has taught his children how to live without electricity, how to live off the land. With Cass' healing nature and her father's instructions, they were able to salvage part of the soil in order to grow vegetables. Her father believes that by embracing and remembering the Old Ways, it keeps you honest and helps to remember who you are. Once Cassandra and her family reach the Island, the Old Ways become more clear, the spirit world calls to her more often, and creatures you only hear about in nighttime stories or in legends come to life. It's rare for a novel to spook me or give me goosebumps, but this is Catherine Knutsson we are talking about! I know I mentioned how beautifully written the novel is, but some of her descriptions are so very vivid, especially when she introduces us to some of the ancient creatures that Cass has to contend with, such as the *sisiutal*

and the dzoönokwas. I'm not even going to attempt to explain them, but let me just say the dzoönokwa that stalked Cassandra in the woods was truly frightening. But even these fierce creatures I came to respect because even they know how threatened their own world and existence has become due to the sickness that technology has spread. There were a few issues I had with the book that held me back from giving this novel a perfect 5 star rating and I am afraid they may mirror what others have complained about already. I would have to agree that we need to know more about the Corridor. After all, this is a dystopian novel. Everything we learn about the Corridor is at the very beginning of story, perhaps the first 2 or 3 chapters at most. We know that the Corridor is a city, polluted, contaminated, and people are dying from some sort of Plague. We know that government officials of the Corridor want "Others" tagged so that they can be used for their blood, almost like sacrifices. While this demented city and government sound scary, we never get any examples, flashbacks, or first person accounts as to how dangerous this society is. I'm also not so sure I am sold on the concept that people of the Corridor have to kill "Others" for their blood. If they keep killing those who are immune to the Plague, what happens when they become extinct? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to maybe breed "Others" so that they can keep up with the demand for their blood? Sounds horrible, I know, but the breeding concept sounds more believable than killing them all. I also had a problem with how the government keeps tabs on those who have aboriginal blood. In the beginning of the story, everyone knows that Cass and Paul are "Others". Yet somehow the government doesn't know that their father is as well. How can they know Cass and Paul are immune to Plague but not their father? It really makes no sense and should have been thought through more. *Shadows Cast By Stars* is an ambitious, deeply moving story. I still sometimes have a hard time wrapping my brain around the fact that this is Catherine Knutsson's debut novel. Her writing and storytelling are just that good. If you like stories that are not only entertaining but also make you think, then look no further. *Shadows* is the type of novel that I can see being used in high school classrooms and in colleges because it can prompt so many interesting discussions about discrimination and prejudice, spiritualism, and the pros and cons of technological advancement and what our world might look like in another 200 years. The book may test you morally and ethically in regards to the government killing one group of people to sustain the lives of others. Who has the right to make such a judgement? What makes one group of people more important than the other? If you are tired of searching for something unique in the overly saturated dystopian genre, give *Shadows Cast By Stars* a try. It's totally worth it. Reviewed by: Mia @themusescircle.blogspot.com

Okay wow, gorgeous, gorgeous book. Like waking up in the dark. Have you ever watched Princess Mononoke? There's that one scene where the forest god is walking through the lake, with the half-submerged trees, and there's light everywhere and yeah.... This book felt like that scene - dreamlike, dangerous, wild, spiritual. It's definitely not going to be for every YA reader; the pace is languid, the prose elegant. But the imagery - I could see Cass's world as clearly as if I were there; smell the cold on the wind, see the shades rippling behind people. Also, while the setting is post-apocalyptic, because of the weaving of myths and legends through the narrative, I'd place this firmly in fantasy and recommend it to adult fantasy readers. I think this book has strong crossover potential. I'm hoping there's a sequel written because while one part of Cass's journey is done (her acceptance of her powers and becoming the medicine woman) there is still so much more that has to happen, especially if Knutsson holds with her Arthurian motif.

I loved the story very much. It spoke to my heart and how I feel about the earth and the horrible things we are doing to it. The prose is beautiful and haunting. The characters are original and easy to relate to, with strong influence by Native American legend and tradition, as well as much of early European Arthurian fable, and a touch of science fiction, that is not so far removed from a future painted by the influences of GMOs, pesticides, and the greed of Agricorporations. This book is up for the Monica Hughes Award for Science Fiction and Fantasy.

A strong yet subtle mixture of fantasy, science fiction, and slice of life. Really takes off in the second half. Needs a sequel.

What... A let down. I was really excited for it, since it would be my first with a minority character, you know? Especially Native American. It's not that that kind of thing is really important to me, either. I read whatever sounds interesting, preferably with fantasy, and I'm even more prone to reading romance. So this book had all three elements, interesting setting, fantasy theme, and romance. So how did it manage to ruin it itself? What made it interesting also made it boring... if that makes any sense. What was supposed to enthrall me, like the barrier, the spirits, the totems, the mystery, the traditions... made it harder for me to take it seriously. And don't get me wrong, it's not the setting in which the author chose to create this story. It's the way she wrote it, her descriptions, her prose, etc. It was messy. So messy. All over the place. I'm not saying I could do any better, and I won't be presumptuous and say anyone else could have, either. But I was really disappointed to learn the plot of a book I paid money for and invested time in wasn't even very clear. Not even a little. And,

let's not forget the romance of the story. A young boy born to lead a band of warriors, or so his mother believes because she read it somewhere or feels it to be that way, who's also mentally unstable. A young girl suffering from seizures and constant pestering spirits, who has a brother whose gift is different, even more terrible, but not really, just as terrible. Actually, no, they can see the same things...okay, now I confused myself. Point is...two people with different destinies INSTANTLY are drawn to each other and not long afterwards do the deed in a lake where she almost died. Honestly their relationship was so flimsy and inconsistent (kinda like the book, really...entirely so actually), and didn't make me feel anything for them, which is really saying something considering almost every fantasy book I buy has romance in it. And it wasn't the instant connection that bothered me, again it was the way that it was described. Almost lazily, with no real regard as to what they felt about each other, how it spoke about them as people, what they meant to each other, etc. I don't know if I described my problems with this book well, but the gist of it is: I don't recommend it. Not to say the author's works in entirety can't be recommended (assuming she has more, it did say this was her debut). Just this book. This, I definitely will not recommend. I hope this helps.

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