



by Michael Stavarič
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Fiction

Shadowcatcher

Die Schattenfängerin

review

In this poignant coming-of-age story centred on a single father and his daughter, Stavarič straddles older YA and adult literary fiction and showcases his talent as an award-winning author and children's book writer.

Stella is a fifteen-year-old girl whose close relationship with her father is partly born of their mutual love of the natural sciences and the wonders of the universe, and partly from their outsider status in a small town. Stella's mother, Greta, is in a local psychiatric institution, and Stella barely remembers her. This unusual family set-up has made Stella stubborn and highly independent. More than anything else, she longs to join her father on his regular trips to watch solar eclipses around the world. However, she wakes up one morning to find that her father has died in his sleep. Despite her terrible loss, she manages to convince the authorities she can live alone until she turns sixteen. Soon afterwards, she starts work as an assistant to the local undertaker, while planning a trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she hopes to witness one of the solar eclipses her father told her so much about.

When she discovers an envelope addressed to her in one of her father's travel files, she resolves not to open it until her return from Africa. During the trip, she is profoundly affected by the mystical power of the eclipse, which is so strong that it even turns her eyes a different, brighter shade. Back at home, she discovers she can affix

shadows to people who mean her harm; soon afterwards, she merges with the shadow of her late father. In an epilogue, the letter from her father's file reveals that he was not in fact her biological father: he found her in what was then known as Zaire, moments after a solar eclipse, leading him to believe that she herself had been created by this natural phenomenon.

In pared-back, vivid prose, flashbacks to Stella's childhood are intertwined with the years following her father's death. Stavari? captures the grief of losing a parent while adding fascinating scientific and anthropological details, such as Stella's father's account of the Aymara people, who visualise the past as lying before them, and the future behind; the mirror image of the Western perspective. With more than a dash of the supernatural, this powerful and moving tale has a wide appeal.

Find out more:

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about the author



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Michael Stavari?, born in Brno, Czechoslovakia in 1972, is a freelance writer, translator and lecturer. He studied Czech Studies and Communication in Vienna, and spent 10 years teaching inline skating at the Austrian capital's Sports University. He has won numerous fellowships and awards, including Science Book of the Year, the Adelbert Chamisso Prize, and the Austrian State Prize for Children's and YA Literature.

Previous work: *Gotland*, Luchterhand (2017); *Fremdes Licht*, Luchterhand (2020); *Das Phantom*, Luchterhand (2023) (Auswahl)

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