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Shadow Kiss



Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller -- Rose knows her love for Dimitri Belikov is forbidden. Her best friend, Lissa -- the last Dragomir princess -- must always come first. But a strange darkness begins to grow in Rose's mind. The immortal undead are closing in, and they want vengeance for the lives Rose has stolen. In a heart-stopping battle, Rose will have to choose between life, love, and the two people who matter most...but will her choice mean that only one can survive? --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Praise for the Vampire Academy series "Mead...weave[s] a unique and mesmerizing mystery with a whodunit ending that even the most skilled detectives will not predict...this little gem is sure to be a hit." --VOYA "Teens able to handle to edgy elements will speed through this vamp story and anticipate the next installment." --Booklist "In a world that seems saturated with vampire books, Richelle Mead has created characters and a world that is both unique and believable." --TeensReadToo.com

Richelle Mead is the author of Vampire Academy and Frostbite. She lives in Seattle.

With the events of *Frostbite* having wrapped up so cleanly, I went into *Shadow Kissed* not really knowing what to expect. With the *Vampire Academy* series being six books long and this book marking the midpoint, surely Richelle Mead was going to have to throw some massive twist in to turn this series in a new, more urgent direction. And damn if she didn't deliver just that. Spoilers follow. Rose and the other senior dhampirs of St. Vladimir are starting the biggest test of their skills to date: six weeks of field experience guarding a fellow Moroi student and fending off faux Strigoi attacks by their instructors. Already, Rose has a little problem in the form of seeing her dead friend Mason in ghost form and she soon thrown another curveball when she isn't assigned to guard Lissa, but rather Lissa's moody boyfriend Christian. And since the universe seems to enjoy slinging all sorts of challenges at them at once, Victor Dashkov's trial and the Queen's controlling behavior towards the girls further throws them into turmoil but even all of that starts to seem like nothing as Rose begins to learn more about what it means to be Shadow Kissed and the dangerous effects of the bond she shares with Lissa. With the tense political atmosphere of the Moroi world, the ongoing Strigoi threat, concern for her future sanity, and her feelings for Dimitri growing stronger, Rose is in for a trying time. As you can probably see from my summary, there's a lot going on in *Shadow Kissed* and it's a pretty exciting read from start to stop. It paced well and doesn't suffer from the same issue of the middle slowing to a crawl like its predecessor did. I often found it difficult to want to stop reading simply because it seemed like every chapter revealed something new and intriguing and I just had to know more. In my opinion, one of the hallmarks of a good novel is having every scene contribute something to the story, but it could be character development, worldbuilding, or progression of the plot, but every scene accomplishes something so there's no "wasted space" and it definitely felt that *Shadow Kissed* was always moving forward in some way. It was an immensely satisfying read that never forced me to slog through a boring moment and kept me engaged from start to finish, which is something that I feel I don't get to say often enough. We also get to see more of the vampire world in this novel with Rose and friends travelling to the royal court for Victor Dashkov's trial and it's a nice change of pace to see what

lies beyond the world of St. Vladimir's and what may await our main characters when they finally graduate. Of course, the little visit adds some complexity in the form of Queen Tatiana's scheming for Lissa's future and her rather disapproving opinion toward Rose. Much of what happened in this series so far has been confined to the academy and the people within it or to the general Strigoi/Moroi threat, so it was nice to get a conflict that'll have a greater impact in the scope of these characters' lives. It also served to start setting up some subplots and conflicts for characters outside of Rose, which I hadn't been expecting from a first-person point of view novel. Granted, a lot of it is only made possible through Rose's convenient link with Lissa, but it's used appropriately and serves to help rather than split the story, so I'm not going to complain about it, though I do worry that it might eventually become a plot crutch. "Shadow Kissed" is a real gamechanger of a novel. As I said above, I started this book not really knowing what to expect. I knew that Mead couldn't really end with the characters maintaining the status quo that they've enjoyed thus far, not if she wanted to encourage interest in future books. It's been fun hanging out with Rose, Lissa, and the rest of the academy, but I figured that this was going to be the book that shook things up to kick off the second half of the series. I just didn't know how exactly the author was going to do it. Much to my surprise, there were quite a few big events to provide some new conflict, starting almost on the first page with Rose seeing the ghost of Mason, her friend who died at the hands of Strigoi in the previous novel. I was quite impressed that Mead chose to tackle Rose's struggle with dealing with the trauma she experienced and coming to terms with the events of the last few months; it's something that I feel doesn't get addressed enough in these sorts of books given the trials that authors put their characters through. It also launches Rose into discovering what it truly means to be Shadow Kissed, the term given to one brought back from death. In addition to being plagued by spirits, she also learns that her bond with Lissa has some troubling implications for both Rose's future sanity and Lissa's continued use of spirit. And speaking of Lissa's unique powers, they're growing and that doesn't come without its share of side effects. So we learn a lot, and much of it is very significant to Rose and Lissa. I've enjoyed Mead's worldbuilding so far, and the information uncovered here just adds more depth to her vampire world. It seemed like the characters were discovering new things every other chapter and

it's all very intriguing. And then there's the ending. So, some of it is actually pretty cool. Strigoi manage to get through the wards around the academy to launch an attack on St. Vladimir's. Unwilling to hide and wait for the guardians to take care of the problems, Rose and Christian team up with Christian using his fire magic to weaken the Strigoi while Rose finishes them off with her stake to take out as many Strigoi as they can. Given the tense political climate surrounding the Moroi using their magic offensively, this is a pretty big development and I loved seeing them work together not just as characters, but as a sample of what a Moroi and dhampir can accomplish when combining their abilities. Lissa also brings her powers into the open to heal the wounded, though the ramifications of that aren't really addressed in this book. And of course, the mere fact that the Strigoi have decided to work together in a large group continues to provide a very real threat for the entire vampire world. But none of those things, however significant they are, are what people are referring to when they talk about THE ending. They're talking about Dimitri. He becomes a Strigoi – pardon my bluntness, but I feel like there's no other way to say it. If the other developments don't serve to push the story in a different direction, that certainly will. I was shocked when I read it, thoroughly surprised that Mead had taken that route but I didn't experience the same overwhelming grief that other reviewers seem to have experienced. Perhaps it's just because I've read too many Young Adult novels, but I simply don't think this is going to be as permanent as Mead has made it out to be. I'll be quite impressed if Dimitri ends up being well and truly "dead" and Rose has to cope with that and work on moving on, but I don't really have any hope that that's where this is going. This genre just isn't known for killing off the main character's romantic interest. I'm sure there'll be a cure or Dimitri hasn't actually been turned or something else to either return him to his old self or otherwise make it possible for his relationship with Rose to continue. Still, all of that aside, it was a big risk for Mead to take and I'm glad that she chose to pull no punches to finish off the third installment. The final big event would be Rose leaving the academy to hunt down Dimitri and, as a corollary to that, abandoning her future role as Lissa's guardian. I'm very mixed on how I felt about this. The split between the girls is very thematically appropriate. Throughout the novel, Rose is constantly reminded that "they come first," referring to the Moroi, and I can appreciate her

decision to finally put her needs at the forefront instead of holding them back to serve as a guardian. However, I always find myself cringing when a girl throws away her future for a guy that she's only known for a few months. I'll get to my issues with Rose and Dimitri's relationship in a moment, but I was extremely disheartened that Rose would put her short-lived romance above her lifelong friendship with Lissa. Lissa may have come off as a little selfish in pointing out that Rose had a bigger obligation to her than to Dimitri but she was right. If Rose and Dimitri had been together for a couple of years, I'd get it and would even root for her in making this choice. As it stands, however, she's throwing everything away for a guy that she's known for about six months, and their actual romance was far shorter than that. It all just seemed irresponsible, and not in that "love makes you do crazy things" sort of way. I will commend Mead, though, for making me feel as gutted as both Rose and Lissa felt in that scene, so there's that! Romance-wise, this is the book that really turns things up, so to speak. In the last book, Rose was stuck figuring out who she had feelings for: Mason or Dimitri. In "Shadow Kissed," she's solely focused on Dimitri and this isn't necessarily a good thing. See, if I'm going to be honest, I have some problems with this relationship getting as serious as it did. I'll also happily admit that Dimitri sends my heart all aflutter unlike any other YA romance interest (it's the combination of Russian, long hair, and bad-ass skills mostly the Russian, though I'm nothing if not a Russophile), so I fully understand why Rose is so smitten with him. What I don't grasp is why he's so taken with her. She's seven years younger than him and very much a teenager. He seems so mature and collected that I don't understand why he's so attracted to someone like Rose. In the last book, he said something about her really "getting him" but I'm just not buying that since I haven't seen any evidence of her empathizing with him anymore than any other guardian might be able to. Additionally, I'm just not into the student/mentor becomes more relationship. Call it a personal preference. So, while I sympathize with Rose's feelings toward Dimitri and feel like they do actually bring out the best in one another, I just can't buy this "deep" relationship that Mead claims they have since there's been very little time given to developing both sides of that relationship. It's all too rushed to justify the significance given to it. So Rose and

Dimitri do the deed in this book, and I'll give Mead this: she's good at making these scenes both steamy and audience appropriate. That being said, I wasn't exactly a fan of them bumping uglies when Rose was so emotionally vulnerable. I also get the impression that that time in "the cabin" is going to come up ad nauseam in the future. Rose also becomes very melodramatic about the nature of their relationship. Dimitri becoming a Strigoi is certainly traumatic and worthy of reaction, but for Rose to be lamenting about losing her "other half" and not sure how she'll go on without part of her soul had me rolling my eyes. Again, they aren't a married couple, they haven't been together for years, and their relationship has never struck me as overly passionate, so this level of drama seemed a little silly. I guess, all in all, you could say that I'm just not that big of a fan of this pairing getting as serious as quickly as it did. However, what I am a huge fan of is the platonic relationships that Mead takes the care to cultivate. In this book, Rose and Christian develop their friendship, and they share some of the most quotable, amusing lines in the whole novel. They're like two rebellious kindred spirits in some of their antics. I also enjoyed her easy friendship with Eddie, Mason's best friend. Though he wasn't much of a figure in the previous novels beyond being Mason's bff, now it seems like he's there for her as a friend should be. And of course there's her long relationship with Lissa, which only becomes more complex as Rose learns more about their bond and Lissa's spirit powers. At this point, I enjoy Rose's friendships far more than I enjoy her romantic relationship with Dimitri. What she has with Dimitri feels more like hero worship at times, and when it doesn't come off as that, it's not entirely convincing as a relationship; her friendships, however, seem completely genuine and I often found myself wishing that Mead would drop the necessity of having a romance in favour of just letting Rose move forward in life with her friends. Especially since in the end she throws it all away for her love (sorry, I can't get over this). Mead is just so much better at portraying the platonic relationships in Rose's life. My love of Rose as a main character continues sort of. I enjoy her caustic wit, her ability to kick ass in all forms, and her infallible self-confidence. In a genre ridden with protagonists who constantly lament their plain appearances, it's a breath of fresh air to get Rose, who loves her curves and her dark hair, and never questions whether she's attractive enough or not. She's a very genuine teenager and tends to act like one: she gets emotional, she can be jealous or smug, and is prone to reactions. She's seventeen/eighteen

years old, and I appreciate that Mead chooses to portray her as such. I was also impressed by the depiction of her trauma and her journey to work through it. However, I noticed a pretty big flaw in her character in this book that seems to cause a lot of problems, specifically her tendency to learn something that would be informational or useful to someone only to not tell them because she doesn't think the person could handle knowing whatever she learned. It leads to a fair number of problems and I began to grow frustrated that she wouldn't just bloody tell people things instead of letting information go unknown until the recipient found out anyway and then blew up. Additionally, Rose has a little problem with communication with Lissa of all people. She often laments that Lissa (nor anyone else, but Lissa is probably the most important person) doesn't understand how Rose feels about this or that. This wouldn't be a problem if Rose would actually talk to her best friend about what's on her mind instead of internalizing it and then getting mad when Lissa doesn't magically figure it out. Perhaps Rose will grow out of these tendencies as she's done an admirable job of moving past other flaws but they were things that stood out and made her character rather annoying to me. I was also none too pleased at Rose's behavior toward Adrian at the end of the novel. See, Rose needs money to look for Dimitri (to kill him, since they'd made some unofficial promise to do just that if one of them became a Strigoi). Adrian happens to have a lot of it at his disposal, so Rose turns on her womanly charms to talk him into giving her some cash, including a completely insincere promise that she'll give him a chance with her when she returns. I tend to admire that Rose is willing to do what is needed to achieve what she wants, but this just seemed so underhanded and hurtful that I couldn't bring myself to be impressed by her duplicity. Maybe it's just because I think Adrian is a better match for Rose than Dimitri, but I didn't appreciate her using him for money and playing with his emotions in the way that she did. While my love of Rose experienced a plunge, I think my enjoyment of the other characters went up. Christian especially shines in this novel. His snark and cynical outlook make him an amusing figure and his powers and devil-may-care attitude toward using them give him a significance beyond just being Lissa's boyfriend and Rose's assigned Moroi. Adrian is equally intriguing in both his spirit abilities (and the problems they cause him) and his sarcastic bad-boy persona. Despite his nonchalant exterior, he seems to care more about others than he lets on, and I like that about him. It's just a shame that Rose doesn't seem to see the same appeal. Lissa also starts growing into herself,

moving from *Shadow Kiss* to *Shadow Kiss* to *Shadow Kiss* into a burgeoning spirit-user caught in her own character independent of the protagonist. I'll even give a shout out to Dimitri because aside from being Russian and sexy, I like that he isn't the typical YA love interest. He has a strong set of morals that he sticks pretty firmly to and it's sort of refreshing to get a male lead that isn't the brooding supernatural bad-boy, but rather serves as a sort of paragon of good. The other characters fill out their roles well and some, I feel, will hold bigger parts in the future (Jill, a younger student, for example). So, all in all, while I have my complaints about *Shadow Kiss* particularly in regards to the romance and the main character's lack of ethics and honesty, there's a lot to appreciate about the book. I love that Mead took a risk in the ending and really committed to making this third installment a true gamechanger in every sense of the word. I may not like the decision that Rose made in the end, but I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't intrigued with where the story could be going next. With everything we learned in this book about Rose's bond and her potential future, I'm interested to see what Mead does with these revelations. The secondary characters really begin to come into their own and I continue to enjoy the many friendships that Rose cultivates with them. I'll give it a solid four stars. It's entertaining, it's impactful, and it's a Hell of a good read.

There is a moment in each of Richelle Mead's series that is designed to emotionally slaughter you. In the Vampire Academy series, that moment is in the second half of *Shadow Kiss*. After suffering such a huge loss, Rose is determined now more than ever to finish school at the Academy and step into her guardian shoes. The school hosts its annual field experience for the guardian novices, which gives the dhampirs a chance at testing their skills of guarding a Moroi. But during the test, Rose starts to see the ghost of a lost loved one. Soon, she realizes that he's there to warn her of something. But what? Could danger be lurking inside the protected wards of the school or is her mental state slipping? Just like the previous books in the series, *Shadow Kiss* is an exciting, fast-paced story with moments that will leave you swooning and more than a little heartbroken. So much happens in this book, things that you won't see coming. In the last quarter of the book, throw out what you thought was going to happen because Mead takes the series in a completely different direction. Even though I've read the series before, I still found myself affected by what happened. Mead makes readers wait for Rose and Dimitri moments in this one. But I sort of love that

they are few and far between because it makes the times where they are together even more special and meaningful. One of my favorite moments was when Dimitri shows up to Rose's community service. And you know he was there just so he could spend time with her and no one would question it. How sweet is that? I've read a few of Richelle Mead's series and what I always admire about her is her storytelling. Each book has its own solid story arc but also moves along the arc for the series. Here, Shadow Kiss hints at placement for Lissa in the Royal Court, while solidifying Adrian as a possible love interest for one of the characters. This really is a fun and campy young adult paranormal romance series. I whole-heartedly recommend it because it's so well-crafted and wildly entertaining. Up next, BLOOD PROMISE! I know it's going to hurt, too.

Holy moly, this book took me everywhere, but in the end, it wrecked me. Seriously hit me in a place where I never would have suspected the possibility of *this* happening, and yet it did (big sob). And that cabin scene, that was so fantastic, because FINALLY!!! I swoon every time Dimitri says "Roza" because I know it comes from a special place in his heart. Rose is trying to keep herself together knowing that the darkness calls to her because of the shadow kissed relationship to Lissa. But Rose being Rose, she absorbs as much as she can without telling anyone what is tormenting her. As for Adrian, it's impossible not to like/love him, too. And Christian? How much do I think he and Rose are secretly kindred spirits with their same sense of humor and sarcasm? While Lissa isn't my favorite person, she's slowly growing on me with each book. There's plenty of action and fighting in this one, where Rose showcases her true abilities and I admire her at every turn. That big showdown at the end? Talk about a shocker of an ending. This series. It's amazing. Don't miss out.

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