



## Shadows on the Moon

**Peter Freeman Vantu**

FriesenPress

(240pp)

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*In the musing novel Shadows on the Moon, a veteran searches for his place in the world after surviving the personal and collective trauma of war.*

Peter Freeman Vantu's spiritual novel *Shadows on the Moon* seeks to understand the truest forms of humanity and happiness. Set in urban Canada just after the height of the war in Afghanistan, the book focuses on an eclectic cast of characters dealing with love, loss, wisdom, and physical and mental fortitude.

Before the war, Tommy fought different battles. As a hockey player in Manitoba, he sustained a number of injuries in exchange for praise for his athletic feats. When he volunteered to trade the ice and his skates for sand and passive bombs in Kabul, the "Manitoba Tiger" became the "Desert Puma," and scars of all kinds marred his body and soul.

Back home, hard times push Tommy to the streets, where he meets fellow homeless people with their own colorful pasts. Extra Cup on St. Mary's Road is a sort of haven for the likes of Jim the Fat, Kim the Dwarfed, Bob Long Neck, and Crazy Josie, all of whom have faced issues like racism in the NBA and addiction. After a grueling hospital stay, Tommy grapples with a crisis of faith, and a compassionate priest offers him advice that stays with him long after he's well again and is joined by a faithful, furry friend, Dog. Lilly, a well-meaning but perhaps misguided love interest, then does her best to get Tommy back on his feet through books and social interactions, only for him to recall the priest's words and realize that her idea of living and loving may not be for him after all.

Despite all that he's endured, Tommy is developed most in terms of his propensity for introspection. Abstract concepts, including fear and anxiety, have tremendous influence on his narrative arc—and on the arcs of the people around him. Though they face hardships like the loss of their homes and families and destructive habits, they all seek to overcome the stress and uncertainty of their circumstances. The book's romantic thematic inclinations are at odds with its more bitter interludes, though, which also exist in stark contrast to Tommy's whimsical thinking.

Tracing scenarios from both the present and the chaotic past that come across as continual dreams, such as confrontations with the local police that require instinct and action, the book's pace reflects Tommy's life of hardship and of having to remake himself over and over again. Its transitions are nonetheless abrupt, and missing commas and ill-placed ellipses are interruptive throughout the text. More consistent are Tommy's moments of quiet reflection, wherein philosophical questions about the prevalence of warmth and comfort are emphasized. He muses over the value and relevance of religion in moments of brief reprieve before his next crisis strikes.

*Shadows on the Moon* is a thought-provoking novel in which a troubled veteran seeks stability and love, struggling to make sense of the world through his traumas.

KATELYNN WATKINS (January 14, 2025)

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