

**Title:** *Ship of Smoke and Steel*

**Author:** Django Wexler

**Genre:** Fantasy

**Reviewer Name and Grade:** Kaitlyn H., 8th Grade

**Date Reviewed:** January 12, 2021

Isoka Gelmei is a ward boss and sorcerer in hiding in the Blessed Empire. While working to not get her powers caught, she also makes sure her younger sister Tori stays safe in her sheltered life. She has developed thick skin and a take-no-prisoners attitude from her years in the business of tax collection and essentially, murdering. Maybe that is why she becomes so paranoid that the second her powers have a chance of being discovered, she frantically kills anyone who knows anything about them, including her closest comrades. Despite her “precautions,” she gets caught, and sent onto a ghost ship, to deliver it back to the government officer who has her sister’s life in his hands. She is drawn to several crew members on the ghost ship Solition, including a princess/witch names Meroe. After several near-death experiences and more than several murders, Isoka makes a name for herself as a pack leader on Solition. Upon discovering her feelings for Meroe, she decides to save both of them from the deathly destination of the Solition. While Isoka would love to leave the others on Solition to die, Meroe saves everyone aboard. The credit, of course, goes to Isoka. I am sure that in the future of these characters, it does not help Isoka’s obvious superiority complex. That is why I do not believe Meroe and Isoka’s relationship would ever happen, considering the stark difference in their personalities. But all unrealistic portions aside, their relationship is one of Isoka’s few redeeming points. The other is her dedication towards her sister. The fact that she is living her entire life repaying debt to keep her sister in a sheltered life shows grit and determination. But the state of society arises questions as to where this story is located, and when. The simplest answer is a made-up land, during a made-up time.

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

To be brutally honest, it didn’t. I love to appreciate a good action scene, and this book had a few. But what dragged it down was the sheer amount of death. A good character death comes after you begin to feel for the character. Many of this book’s characters were killed off so quickly that you really did not care about them. And the fact that all but one of the major deaths were caused directly by the main character does not make it any better. Another character that I found myself unable to care for was the protagonist, Isoka. She was incredibly cruel, stubborn, and blunt, paired with a ridiculous superiority complex, as I previously mentioned.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

Much like its protagonist, the book moved on far too fast. It was hard to keep track of what was happening, especially since many of the challenges Isoka faced seemed dreadfully repetitive.

While it could have been an excellent action-packed novel, it fell short in the aftermath of the fight scenes.

*What grade levels is this book appropriate for?*

I think this book is best suited for 6th, 7th, and early 8th graders.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

As weird as this may sound, someone like a gamer. Someone used to the fast pace, repetitive action scenes, and incredibly casual violence.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

This book has a frightening lack of emotion. And many of the characters aren't very likable.

*I star, I would not recommend this book.*

As much as I hate to say it, I really did not like this book. I tried and tried, but I found myself thinking that this would have been better as a video game than a book. The main character's morality was horrifying, and she was overall incredibly inhuman. If you do read this book, I hope you enjoy it at least the slightest bit more than me.