Sea of Shadows: Age of Legends by K. Armstrong

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Abstract


This Young Adult fantasy novel tells the story of identical twin sisters Moria and Ashyn. In this mythical world, twin girls are special, because they can sometimes communicate with spirits. This means that when they are babies, twins are submitted to a ritual to see if they are destined to become Keeper and Seeker – magical roles that require the girls to quiet the souls of the damned, and protect the rest of the empire. Bond beasts accompany the twins – a giant wildcat for the Keeper, and a giant hound for the Seeker.

Moria and Ashyn live in the village of Edgewood by the Forest of the Dead. Moria is a fiery warrior with a penchant for telling scary stories, and Ashyn is a shy romantic who often doubts herself, although both sisters are very close. The Wastes separate the Forest of the Dead, where criminals are often exiled from the rest of the empire. Every year, during the ritual of the Seeking, the Seeker and her hound must find all the restless spirits of the dead in the Forest, and quiet their souls. Often the dead are exiled criminals or are angry because they were not granted justice in life. The imperial court’s Keeper and Seeker have trained Moria and Ashyn for this ritual, and this is the first year they will perform the Seeking alone.

During the Seeking, things quickly go wrong due to forces beyond the girls’ control. As a result, the girls’ village is destroyed, and their friends and family are killed by evil spirits. In the aftermath, Ashyn is separated from her sister. With the few remaining village survivors, Ashyn decides to set out with Ronan, a young thief she met in the Forest of the Dead. She hopes to take her people to safety. Moria follows her sister’s trail with the help of the last of the village guards, the stubborn Gavril, who is himself descended from sorcerers.

Along the way, both sisters face mythical beasts, and discover their own strengths and weaknesses. They also deal with loss, and the harshness of a world beyond their village through encounters with bandits, kidnappers, and outcasts. Once the girls reunite, they learn that the failed ritual and the destruction of their village were not accidents. They are forced to warn the emperor and travel to court, where they must learn to navigate the politics of the realm. They also discover one of their companions may not be what he seems.

This book is the first in a trilogy, although the journey of the two sisters is a complete story. The novel is told through the viewpoints of both sisters. Many deaths occur, and there are several violent scenes. The story also features creatures from horror stories that might frighten younger readers. Overall, it is a story well suited to young adult audiences, featuring interesting characters and mythology.

Recommended: 3 out of 4 stars
Reviewer: Colette Leung

Colette Leung is a graduate student at the University of Alberta, working in the fields of Library and Information science and Humanities Computing who loves reading, cats, and tea. Her research interests focus around how digital tools can be used to explore fields such as literature, language, and history in new and innovative ways.
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