

An Ember in the Ashes

Sabaa Tahir

Reviewed by: Ritika Chhabra, 13

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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In a world of destruction and cruelty, Laia knows that submitting to the laws of the Empire is the only way to keep living. But suddenly, her brother is being arrested for treason and Laia no longer wants to keep hiding in the shadows. To free her brother, Laia seeks help from a rebel organization, the Resistance. In exchange for their aid, she is sent on a mission to the Empire's best military academy, where she will act as a spy to gain information and survey targets. In the academy, Laia meets Elias Veturius, a student whose dangerous secret threatens to destroy their futures.

This book is perfectly balanced in physical action and mental growth. Even though parts of the book were slower paced and lacked consistent activity, the story line was completely engrossing and interesting. Each scene evoked a strong emotional response, and did so in a way that was shockingly truthful, raw and captivating. Anger at the unjust system and tentative, but aching hope for the main character draws the reader in and traps them in an overwhelmingly clear and real world. The story isn't gentle, graceful or delicate. It's hard, direct and horrific. It's this sincerity that blurs the boundaries of the book, making it physically impossible to distinguish between reality and fiction.

Laia begins as a naive, innocent and fearful character, who doesn't understand the capability of the world around her, much less her own. As the plot progresses, her growth is incredible to watch, and adds greater tension and understanding to the plot. The book addresses many difficult concepts, including loyalty vs. making your own decisions, oppression, learning from mistakes and perspective. The romance in this book is also handled more realistically than other YA novels. Instead of a shallow, appearance based love-triangle, *An Ember in the Ashes* emphasizes perspective and personality in making these decisions. This refreshing and unique novel would be best suited to an audience ages 13+, due to the dark atmosphere of the world.

Recommended Titles:

Serpent and Dove by Shelby Mahurin

A Curse so Dark and Lonely by Brigid Kemmerer

Children of Blood and Bone by Toni Adeyemi

The Wrath and the Dawn by Renee Adieh

Shadow and Bone by Leigh Bardugo