

Down with This Ship

Katie Kingman

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In Katie Kingman's humorous novel *Down with This Ship*, a high school junior who leads a double life as a blogger is exposed. But in this sweet exploration of ambition and romance, the introverted, panicky girl discovers that her escapist passion is valuable, and that she's more capable than she believed.

Kole is a fan of *The Space Game*. Her fanfiction ships its television characters, and her posts are popular. After her story garners the Best Ship 2019 award, one of her Crystal Lake Prep honors-writing classmates discovers her sideline and threatens to out her. Amid self-doubt about commenters' critiques, interest in her neighbor, exchanges with her class's aspiring valedictorian, and coping with a bully's over-the-top demands, Kole learns to defend herself.

Kole's personal concerns are spliced with her soapy blog posts. They center on fielding outside pressures and her discomfort with the spotlight. When the lines between her secret and everyday worlds cross, her peers start "shipping" her with boys at school. This inspires a tangle of emotions, and the novel blends the fervor of fandom with the embarrassment of being singled out. Its is a lucid, light portrayal of high schoolers targeting one another that features oddball situations. Kole's older brother and friends are supportive, and they help sharpen Kole's perspective and self-esteem.

The book's upper-crust setting, where SAT words and Ivy League aspirations saturate the every day, leads to some stereotyping. Kole's nemesis is an uncomplicated troll, both online and off. But when Kole's methods of resolving her problems lead her to visit a niche convention for *The Space Game*, the portrayal is more than accurate.

Down with This Ship is a delightful novel that is wholehearted in embracing geek culture.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2021)

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