



Fearless

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Media type:

Book

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Check **Fearless** out on the web and you'll find a talking head of Tim Lott speaking *en passant* of two of his favourite authors, Orwell and Wilde. So it is no surprise that denizens of the City which is the setting for this novel gaze at vidscreens as they sip their narcobevs, or that statues weep and there is the sound of a human heart breaking. Such echoes and maybe others of writers such as Atwood and Huxley enrich this fable for our times. **Fearless** could be classed as yet another dystopia for the young, a genre which threatens to rival high fantasy in its headlong expansion. (If future critics share the French scholar Paul Hazard's 1932 notion that a culture's values can be discerned in its children's books of the period, what will they make of the noughties?) However, such a categorisation is too limited, for Tim Lott's first novel for young adult readers is also permeated by Fairy Tale – a heroine sets out on her quest three times, a bottle is filled by 12,703 tears precisely, nursery rhymes become evil incantations in the mouth of a witch-like villain. There is oblique political and social commentary upon our own times running alongside Truths about the Human Condition; at the climax of the tale, a mystical seer asserts, 'We should worship one another. We should worship our sameness as well as our uniqueness. We should worship what makes us truly human. Compassion. Courage. And truth.'

Out of context, this might well sound a bit much, so I should say that such high-sounding truth-telling is rooted in very down-to-earth soil; a City Community Faith School for Retraining, Opportunity and Hope, whose attractively painted walls in reality confine a thousand girls separated from their families, enslaved in a huge laundry. (Lott trades in ironies, so it is no surprise that the hapless inmates are employed in washing the city's dirty linen.) They are controlled by a single male (with a dark secret) assisted by a privileged group of trustees not unlike concentration camp guards. Against this oppression stands Little Fearless – the true names of the girls are stripped from them in favour of appropriate nicknames. Her faith is that if only she can tell the world outside the walls what is really going on, the girls will be saved. As it turns out, the world is not concerned to listen.

Long ago, in a life before the State imposed a Curriculum which, you might say, left less room for a literature teacher's impulsive enthusiasm, you might have bought a set of this novel and turned a class loose on it. **Fearless** is excitingly teachable in the way that **Lord of the Flies** is teachable; adolescents have an appetite for allegories about the fallibility of human nature and the hypocrisies of society. Interestingly, publishers evidently believe there's an older market equally ready for such texts, from Pullman to Potter. So, it seems, **Fearless** is also produced in an edition for

adults (with an alternative cover).

Running Order:

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