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The Book of Pearl

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Timothée de Fombelle is a storyteller of charm, style, mystery and invention, whose tales are at once expansive and detailed, and in which character and adventure are given equal attention. If they might appear to an English reader as somehow distinctively French, it is perhaps that he belongs, with Dumas and Verne, to a storytelling tradition that finds romance in history and science, and that he also enjoys bringing in aspects of life and culture that seem to have a distinctively French flavour, whether, as in this novel, a high class confectioner's shop in pre-war Paris, with its own exclusive brand and wrapping paper, or the struggle against the German occupation in the Second World War in the mountains of Provence. All that said, the story begins: 'Who could have guessed that she used to be a fairy?' and it moves apparently effortlessly to and fro from a fairy tale world of prince brothers, one cruel and tyrannical, the other gentle and loving, to historical France. Both worlds and their various incidents and characters are deftly brought to life. And exile, thwarted love, friendship and treachery are interwoven in a plot that mysteriously twists and turns its way to a powerful and satisfying conclusion. This is a beguiling tale which is both epic and intimate and, without being portentous, brings together the political and personal and illuminates the qualities that characterise the best in both worlds.

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