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Ugliers

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Tally, almost 16, has been an Ugly since she was 14. On her birthday she will be made Pretty, and after the operation will join the other Pretties for a hedonistic life of parties, clothes, music and fun. Unless, that is, she decides instead to follow her friend Shay to the Smoke where people live out of view of the authorities, following a more or less self-sufficient lifestyle. Echoes of *Brave New World*, as Tally realises there's something more sinister about the operation than simply being made Pretty. She becomes involved first in spying against the people of the Smoke, and then in trying to save them to assuage her betrayal of them.

The cover, featuring a kidney bowl filled with dismembered Barbie Dolls, and a strapline reading 'in a world of extreme beauty, anyone normal is ugly?', initiated an 'Oh, no?' from me at first, but I was soon engrossed. Tally's fascination with the Pretty lifestyle, the powerful conditioning that leads her to regard anyone unaltered as almost unbearable to look at, and her wish to conform contrast with her strong sense of teenage adventurousness and curiosity about the world to make her a recognisable heroine, and an attractive one. The comment on our current fun-filled, media-obsessed, fashion- and shopping-led culture is made without too heavy a hand, and while the Smoke smacks rather of an earnest '70s homespun alternative, a gritty edge is given by the realities of technology, used both for us and against us, and by the possibility of change.

The politics are not too overt, and the story is gripping to the extent that rather than being irritated by the 'now read on?' extract from *Pretties* (the sequel), I was actually relieved not to be left on the cliff-edge and to get a taste of volume two of what promises to be a thought-provoking and enjoyable trilogy. AG

Running Order:

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