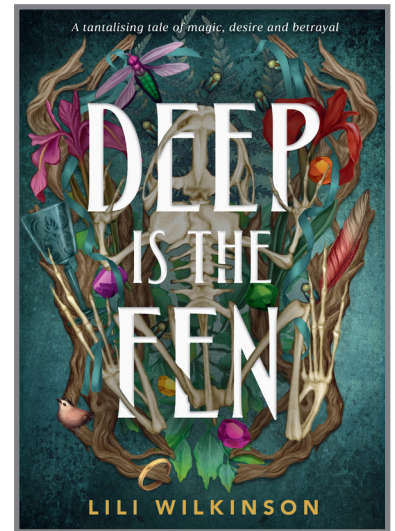


Deep is the Fen

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence, Sexual References, Language)

SYNOPSIS

Merriwether Morgan doesn't need a happily-ever-after. Her life in the idyllic town of Candlecott is fine just as it is: simple, happy and with absolutely no magic. Magic only ever leads to trouble.

But Merry's best friend, Teddy, is joining the Toadmen—a secret society upholding backwards thinking and suspiciously supernatural traditions—and she is determined to stop him. Even if it means teaming up with her academic archnemesis, Caraway Boswell, an ice-cold snob who hides his true face behind a glamour.

An ancient Toad ritual is being held in the nightmarish Deeping Fen, and if Merry doesn't rescue Teddy, she'll lose him forever. But the further she travels into Deeping Fen's foul waters, the more Merry wonders if she can possibly save her friend—or if she's walking straight into a trap.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lili Wilkinson is the award-winning author of nineteen books for children and teenagers, including *A Hunger of Thorns*, *After the Lights Go Out*, *The Erasure Initiative* and *How to Make a Pet Monster*. Lili established the Inky Awards at the Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria. She has a PhD in Creative Writing, and lives in Melbourne with her partner, child, dog and three chickens.

THEMES

- Fantasy
- Magic
- Friendship
- Feminism
- Society

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Define the term 'fairy tale' and name some of the most famous fairy tales. Discuss how and when you discovered these stories and why you think they were first told. Discuss the idea that fairy tales may have begun as a means of teaching children about the perils of a dangerous world, and that they have evolved over generations to paint pictures of 'ideal' heroes and heroines.

- Using examples from fairy tales already mentioned, make a list of characteristics that define the leading females and males. (Expect words for females such as: beautiful, kind, young, fragile, powerless, and for males: tall, handsome, 'princely', powerful, etc.).
- Read the epigraph. 'For every girl who refused to be a damsel in distress.' What expectations does this create for the story to come? Do contemporary games, films, books and social media challenge or reinforce fairy tale tropes?

WHILE READING

- Merry sets out to 'rescue' Teddy from the Toadmen and, in the process, subverts the usual role for young girls in fairy tales. In what other ways is Merry not your typical 'damsel in distress'?
- How do Caraway, Teddy and Sol conform to and defy fairy tale tropes?
- If glamours existed in our world, what sort might you want to use and in what circumstance?
 - In your opinion, is our world better or worse without glamours being available? Why/why not?
- What do you think Merry means in the following quote?

All that power, that money, that magic. All in the hands of a bunch of rich men who don't have to play the same game as everyone else. p 142

 - In what way might Merry's observation apply to our world?
- Thurmond Boswell justifies the harm done by the Toadmen by claiming that his power—and by extension the power he provides to his wife—makes the world a better place. Is there any evidence in the book that he is right, or do you think he is only driven by the desire for power?
 - More broadly, does the old saying that 'the ends justify the means' ring true to you?

AFTER READING

- The story of the Fox Bride features a knight, an unwilling bride (the Fox Bride), a Beast and a toad: all common characters in a classic fairy tale. Choose from one of the characters in the story, and compare and contrast them with their more traditional counterpart.
- Some historians theorise that strong, independent women were more likely to be accused of practicing witchcraft in times gone past because men feared them. More contemporary tales of witches have reframed them as empowering female role models. How does *Deep Is the Fen* portray them?
- Fathers are problematic in *Deep Is the Fen*. Merry's is kind but easily led, while Caraway's is cruel and manipulative. Which would you say is the more 'typical' father figure in fairy tales?
- The corporations Ilium, Moracle and Welch control almost everything in the world of *Deep Is the Fen*. Is our world similarly 'ruled' by a handful of corporations? Which are they and how do you think they wield power?
- There are five key fantasy tropes (commonly recurring literary devices, motifs or cliches). These tropes are good vs. evil, quest, magic, medievalism and the existence of unusual races or species. Find examples of each trope in *Deep Is the Fen*.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
CAROLYN WALSH