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Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

Donor 23

Cate Campbell Beatty
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Four Stars (out of Five)

This amazing story concept will have teens clamoring for more.

In this exciting fantasy adventure, Joan Lion, aka Lionheart, breaks free from the donor system and learns a great deal about herself in the process. In the future, donors are injected with the blood of the people they are assigned to donate to. As time goes on, whenever a part is needed, the donors are farmed. Lion is the donor for the governor's daughter who is an exalted athlete. She is often used for muscle and tendon donations. But when she learns she is going to be forced to donate her heart, Joan decides to do what few do—run away from the Alliance.

During her escape, Joan discovers that there is an amazing world outside of the Alliance walls. She learns a great deal about herself and releases the guilt she feels for the deaths of her mother, father, and close friend.

The characters are realistic and beautifully drawn. Joan is a flawed character who grows and changes throughout the story; readers will root for her every step of the way. The charming gentleman, the taciturn thinker who saves Joan in the wilderness, and the driven Alliance tactical officer are some of the more stock characters, but Joan's journey makes up for their static characterizations.

There are two main settings in the story, each providing a stark contrast to the other. The Alliance is a repressive system, and there are many references to the Underground that is trying to topple the governor and his allies. Outside the walls there are open spaces, sparkling streams, and people who loosely resemble Native American tribal members.

The theme is obvious from the beginning, and at times the book gets a little didactic with its clichés. Often, however, the reader is so excited from a chase scene or close encounter that this is not an unwelcome respite. Joan has many wise advisers around her, and when she is able

to actually hear what they are telling her, readers are typically off for another exciting ride. There are some grammar and word choice errors here, but they don't seriously detract from the narrative.

The premise of the novel and the story of Joan's escape will have teenagers clamoring for the next installment. *The System* is an excellent suggestion for older teens who have read *The Hunger Games* several times.

Lynn Evarts