

With *Ice Breaker: The Hidden Series*, Lian Tanner has led us into another world of adventure and danger. In this world of ice and warring tribes, Petrel is The Nothing Girl, ignored and reviled by the crew of the Oyster, an ancient icebreaker that follows a never-ending path through frozen waters for reasons long forgotten. She lives by her wits, avoiding the others as much as possible and stealing food to survive, until everything changes when a boy, a stranger, is rescued from the ice and brought aboard after she sees him and tricks the crew into stopping for him.

Soon, life on board the ship is thrown into chaos with murder, battle, and a fire that threatens everyone, while Petrel strives to protect the boy who has become the target of everyone's malice. The boy holds a secret of his own, though, and, even as Petrel tries to keep him safe, he is on a mission that will see the ship and everyone on board destroyed.

Lian Tanner has once again created a truly believable world – this time built of oil and rust and hidden corners in the dark – and peopled with vivid characters, filled with their own fears and insecurities, whose part in the action changes and strengthens them with every step.

The reader follows on a knife-edge of suspense, given just enough insight to dread every possibility, locked into Petrel's journey towards what seems to be certain self-destruction.

I had high expectations of Lian Tanner and was not disappointed. *Ice Breaker* is an exciting story that should appeal to young readers between about ten and thirteen (perhaps even older!), especially those who enjoy danger and suspense. In reading it with a class, it opens up scope for discussing human behaviour, ethics and morality, and how fear can motivate action. It is also a fabulous example of how to build an authentic world and use description to create believable settings in narrative, without sacrificing pace. Thoroughly recommended.

Cate Whittle, ACT

This is the first in a new series called *The Hidden Series* by Lian Tanner who wrote the *Keepers Series*. What a wonderful book, from the start I was captivated, the story was so well written and the storyline was just incredible.

The Anti-Machinists have removed technology and knowledge and the world is heading into a new Dark Age where the battle between knowledge and ignorance has begun. Petrel is a 12 year old girl, an outcast on board a ship called the Oyster which has sailed the seas for the past 300 years. The people aboard have forgotten why they were sailing in the first place and the important secret which lives on the ship which could change the world, while all aboard think it is just a myth. With 3 different tribes controlling the ship, Petrel lives by her wits and moves between each area with great skill. She has survived like this since she was two with her only company 2 grey talking rats called Mister Smoke & Missus Slink.

The story unfolds as Petrel spies a body on the ice and manages to get the ship to stop and pick up the stranger. The stranger has a mission but as time goes on this mission turns out to be second to the friendship which is formed between him & Petrel. Will he complete the mission or will he turn to a new life which he could have never dreamed of? Is this new life connected to saving the world from the Anti-Machinists?

This book suits older primary age students and could lead to interesting discussions on why knowledge is perceived to be a bad thing in the book or why 1 group of people would want to control another group.

Felecia Phillips, Tasmanian eSchool, TAS

Ice Breaker is an exciting and intriguing read from start to finish. As the reader, we are immediately transported to a world in the future but probably not the world we would expect to find. The story unfolds through the eyes of Petrel, a young girl who is ignored and distained by the crew. We find ourselves crawling through dark rusty tunnels in the hull of a ship that has been travelling the seas, along with generations of crew, for three hundred years. The ship has secrets and they unfold throughout the book. When a stranger comes on board the ship is stirred up like it has never been before. Petrel and other members of the crew begin a journey of discovery about themselves, each other and their ship.

As a primary school teacher, I look forward to sharing this wonderful story with my students. They will be thrilled by the adventure and endearing characters. They will also be challenged by the controversy and social dilemmas raised in the story. This book provides many opportunities for discussion and learning. I can see this becoming a must read series for young people and a classic alongside other great Australian reads like *The Deltora Quest*. I can't wait to continue the journey with the next book in the series *The Keepers*.

Jodi McLeod, Primary Teacher, Albany, WA

Lian Tanner is an extremely talented, imaginative storyteller whose multi-award winning *Keepers* trilogy has taken the world by storm. She now brings us a tantalising new series – *Hidden* – and commences brilliantly with *Ice Breaker*. This deliciously steampunk novel is set on an old ship, the Oyster, in the far southern reaches of the world. When the heroine, Petrel, spots a boy on a passing iceberg, she is determined to rescue him. Yet when the boy is securely on the ship, a chain of events is set in motion that affects every person on board the ship and reveals secrets that were hidden deep in the past.

The reader is engaged from the very first page, because we are privy to the secrets that Petrel and the raggedy crew of the Oyster do not know. They only know what has come down, through hundreds of years, into legend – stories of a sleeping captain who will wake when he is most needed. But who knows if the legend is even real? What is real to the crew of the Oyster is the ship itself; the ice; the hunger of winter; and the tensions between the three tribes that inhabit the three levels of the ancient vessel.

Ice Breaker is a highly appealing fantasy adventure novel for grades 3 to 8. It can be linked to a variety of themes, including Antarctica; weather; the impact of machinery on society; artificial intelligence and automata; as well as life on board a ship, particularly an icebreaker. There are also themes of courage; of endurance; of loyalty; of open mindedness; and of truth. Despite the cold and ice-bound setting, *Ice Breaker* has a wonderful warmth and fire to it that all ages will enjoy.

Jo McDougall, Geelong, VIC

Readers of *The Keepers* series have been waiting excitedly for the release of Lian's new book *Ice Breaker* and they won't be disappointed. Petrel has spent her whole life on the icebreaker, the Oyster, never belonging to any of the three territories the ship is divided into. Survival is difficult for her because not belonging means no safe place to sleep or food to eat. Her only friends are Mister Smoke and Missus Slink, rats who inhabit the ship. When Petrel spots a boy on the ice she ensures he is picked up by some of the crew starting a chain of events that leads to the secret the ship has been keeping for hundreds of years being exposed.

The reader won't be disappointed with this offering from Lian. The characters are expertly crafted and the description of the ship itself has you climbing rungs and hiding in dark passages beside Petrel and the rats. The way each chapter ends ensures that you must read another chapter to see what will happen next. It makes this book extremely difficult to put down. Most readers are going to want to read it in one sitting with the 300 pages making this easy to achieve. There will be many torches under the bedcovers to achieve this.

This would make an exciting class read aloud. The passionate readers in your class will be begging you to borrow it overnight so they don't have to wait for daily instalments but of course will thoroughly enjoy listening with the class again and enjoying their excitement. For your reluctant reader the text will capture their imagination and they will be begging you to read some more with cries of don't stop ringing out. Unfortunately, readers have a long wait, until late 2014, to get hold of book two in this series but if book one is anything to go by it will be worth the wait.

Roxanne Steenbergen, Windermere Primary School, TAS

Lian Tanner has done it again! The popular author of *The Keepers* series has produced a gripping novel set in a future world, which is unlike any other you have read about. Her imaginative and strong world building, interesting and believable characters and action packed story, set aboard an ancient ship, will delight her fans and gain her new ones.

One of the most interesting things about Lian Tanner's books is their complete originality. They don't resemble any other series out there. I loved *The Keepers* series and I enjoyed this book even more. The characters rely on their wits and skills, rather than on strained coincidences, to deal with the situations which arise.

Although Lian is Tasmanian, the novel is international in its scope and appeal. It was nice to read about the Southern Ocean and fishing for toothfish as an integral part of the story. Lian obviously has done her research well, as the ship is described in amazing detail and the conditions on the deck and on the ice are vivid.

Petrel is an interesting and active female protagonist, and her relationships with other crew members and the tribes which make up the ship are believable and heart-wrenching. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and am eagerly waiting for the next book in the series. I will be recommending this book to

friends and students.

Ceri Davies, Teacher, St Brendan-Shaw College

There is a ship called the Oyster, an icebreaker, and it is sailing the freezing northern seas, it has been for three hundred years. A culture of warring tribes has developed, 'The Braids (Officers), The Cooks and Grease Alley (Engineers)'. They all have their jobs to do and sections of the ship that they control, and you don't cross from one section to another unless you have permission.

Then there is the 'Nothing Girl', Petrel, she doesn't belong to any tribe, she has to scavenge for food and clothing, she finds small hiding places on the ship to sleep, she is not always safe, everyone seems to hate her and she doesn't know why. Her only friends are two talking grey rats, Mr. Smoke and Mrs. Slink, who seem to know a lot more than they tell her.

Petrel is on deck one day and sees a boy laying on an iceberg, a stranger, who can he be and where could he have come from? The ship is her whole world, she has no idea that anything else even existed. Petrel is clever, she knows no-one will listen to her but she does know the codes that each tribe use to send 'tapping' messages throughout the ship, so she tells Albie, the Chief Engineer that Orca, the First Officer has given orders not to stop to pick up the stranger. This produces the exact result that Petrel wanted as Albie, who will not be ordered around by Orca, stops the ship to rescue the boy.

Who is this boy though, is he friend or foe? How has the world outside the ship developed over the last three hundred years? Are things better or worse in the rest of the world for the people of the Oyster? This is a great book and promises to be a great series, we learn why Petrel is so despised by the crew and what the strange boy's purpose really is, but there are still many questions to be answered. I will be recommending this book to all readers who like fantasy fiction, especially Year 7 and 8.

Jan O'Sullivan, Library Technician, Yarra Hills Secondary College

This latest novel from Lian Tanner captures the reader's interest from the outset. The prologue is intriguing and the subsequent chapters immerse the reader into life aboard the ancient icebreaker, the Oyster. We meet Petrel – also known as Nothing Girl, who is the only person who moves freely between the three groups who inhabit the ship, the Engineers, the Cooks and the Officers. Each is dependent on the other for survival, but conflict and mistrust make life difficult and survival a challenge. A stranger is rescued from the ice and as a result, the tenuous peace of the ship is disrupted and Petrel's life is irrevocably changed.

This novel would appeal to students in senior primary and early secondary level of schooling (Stage 3 and 4). It has many interesting themes that lend themselves to classroom discussion and further reading, including bullying, prejudice, friendship and loyalty. More complex issues such as cults and indoctrination, dystopian states and societies could also be introduced to students. Petrel is a strong protagonist who is placed in an extreme environment and hostile setting and the novel successfully examines survival and the nature of a hero. This novel is highly recommended and subsequent novels in the series will be eagerly anticipated by young readers.

Lyn Pritchard, Hunter Valley Grammar School

Not since I read *Obernewtyn* trapped in a tent in rainy Yamba in 1988, have I been so entranced by a fantasy novel. From the very first page of *Ice Breaker*, Book One in the *Hidden Series*, Lian Tanner transports us utterly to a crystalline, arctic environment. We shiver as we read and reach for warming things; including the warm touch of kind and friendly people. Twelve year old Petrel, the outcast, is a sterling hero with a strong moral compass. She is indefatigable in the face of an exhausting sequence of pressing dangers aboard the Oyster, an ancient icebreaker that has been wandering the seas for three hundred years, remaining loyal to her few friends and insightful about her many enemies.

When the boy is rescued from a passing iceberg, the long held secrets of the Oyster begin to reveal themselves. The boy, christened Fin by Petrel, has to make choices – will he fulfil the deadly mission assigned to him by the Devouts, or will he join his new friends and the now-awake Sleeping Captain and embark on a quest that could save the world?

The Big Questions – What does it mean to be human? Do we dare to care for and connect with others? What will the price of betrayal be? What is true and worth fighting for? – provide philosophical depth to a startlingly intelligent novel. But, these layers of politics and philosophy are skilfully interwoven with rich, complex characterisation and a dramatic plot that drives forward with relentless momentum. The crisp, spare, yet poetic prose quite takes our breath away. *Ice Breaker* echoes themes of dystopian fiction with its anti-technocratic stance, warring factions, petty enmities and ruthless egocentricity; a canvas against which desperate events are projected as the protagonists struggle for survival.

'The child's face was beaten silver. His mind held the knowledge of ten thousand libraries....So far, every moment of his short life had been spent hiding from the Anti-Machinists.'

The age old issues the novel raises are particularly pertinent in a contemporary Australia where compassion seems thin on the ground, philistinism, xenophobia and self-interested scepticism rule the day, and a sense of human decency and care for the planet are at serious risk.

This is a novel I would love to explore with capable readers from 11 -14; a novel I would love to push gently into willing hands. It is a novel perfectly suited to the Australian Curriculum: English, which itself is currently in jeopardy of being dumbed down by reductionist forces.

Jenni Connor, Writing & Education Consultancy

Ice Breaker is the first in *The Hidden* series by Lian Tanner. The title along with the cover by Sebastian Ciaffaglione invites the reader into the freezing world that is the setting for the story. Tanner has created an intriguing isolated setting in the form of the ancient ice breaker that has been travelling through icy seas for several centuries. Aboard the ship, the occupants are strictly divided into three groups that each fiercely guard their territory on the ship.

Petrel, the main character, who is also known as Nothing Girl is the only person who does not belong to any group. She is an outcast, tolerated but largely ignored by the others on the ancient ship. Her parents, having committed what was judged to be a most serious crime were thrown overboard to die in the icy waters. Although Petrel was allowed to survive she is ostracised by the ship's occupants and befriended only by two rats with unusual abilities, Mr Smoke and Missus Slink.

Life changes for Petrel when she alerts a crew member to a boy that she has discovered frozen on an iceberg. When he is brought on board, she attempts to befriend him, hiding him in the maze of secret passages on the old ship. This engenders further complications for Petrel and for the stranger whose secret mission is to destroy the ship and its occupants.

Lian Tanner weaves a mysterious and compelling tale of intrigue. Petrel is a strong and very credible character. The situation in which she and the stranger find themselves will no doubt lead to lively discussion in the classroom about the effects of isolation, denigration and loneliness as well as discussions on situations when there are conflicting sets of choices and values.

Ice Breaker is suitable for ages 10 to 14. The second book in the series will no doubt be eagerly awaited.

Margaret Warner, NSW

It is always a good sign when a student tells you to look out for a book. Student recommendations, in my experience anyway, are usually spot on. So it was with Lian Tanner's new novel *Ice Breaker*. Following on from the success of *The Keepers* trilogy, this is the first offering in another series that will prove to be similarly popular among upper primary and lower secondary students. The book is based on an intriguing premise. What if the thing you are trying to save is long forgotten and the ship created for its safekeeping has become the only world known by the people who live on it?

I am happy to admit that I was sucked in from the beginning. Tanner creates a richly detailed and convincing world of life on board a 300-year-old icebreaker on its endless circumnavigation of the southern icecap. I suspected I knew how events would unfold (and this might be my only criticism of the novel), but I thoroughly enjoyed the journey anyway.

This novel should appeal equally to boys and girls (and their teachers). It would fit particularly well in a study of dystopian fiction or one of belonging. At its heart is a question about truth and identity. *Ice Breaker* highlights the importance of knowing who you are and who you can trust, as well as having the strength to question what you have long been taught to believe.

This is not to suggest that the book is heavily didactic. On the contrary, it is a wonderfully accessible

text that introduces a memorable heroine. Tanner's imaginative world is one well worth the visit.
Jane McGenniken, St Mary's College, TAS