

*Museum of Thieves* is the first volume in Lian Tanner's *The Keepers* series, and what a wonderful introduction to this strange and vivid world. From the very first sentence we are drawn into Goldie's rebellion against the safe but suffocating culture of the city of Jewel. As a runaway, she is breaking all the rules, and, frightening herself with her new found freedom, it is almost too much for her. In the Museum of Dunt, however, she finds an unusual haven and some firm friends, all working together to save the city from unbelievable horrors.

Lian Tanner guides her heroine from fear to bravery with subtlety and gentleness, allowing the reader to grow with her, feel her dread, cheer for her decisions and hold their breath as she fights her way out of increasingly dire situations. Unobtrusive but expressive descriptions take us into the heart of the museum, leading our imaginations on a thrilling and mysterious journey, where we can almost taste the dusty air, we are so drawn into the adventure.

This is a book that will enthrall the reader at the same time as prodding some serious thinking. When does protectiveness become overprotective? Can people learn to think and take care of themselves when everything is prescribed? What and when is it right to be a thief? In a classroom situation this book would provide a good starting place for some critical thinking, promoting discussion on philosophical and ethical boundaries. And Herro Dan offers us useful advice when he tells Goldie how to deal with fear: Don't try and push it away. If you fight it, you make it stronger. You gotta greet it politely, like an unwanted cousin. You can't make it leave you alone, but you can do what you have to do, in spite of it. Everyone can learn from that. Or you could just enjoy a truly good read!

**Cate Whittle, ACT**

In the city of Jewel, the most precious possessions are the children. They are kept safe under lock and key, attached to their parents or Blessed Guardians and never allowed to roam free until their official 'Separation'. Freedom could mean being snatched by slave-trading pirates, or death from terrible diseases – or worse! But, things are changing. The 'Grand Protector' has decided that the age of 'Separation' will be reduced to 12 and this means that our heroine, Goldie Roth, is due for her freedom. Just as she is about to take the oath a terrible incident occurs – an explosion – and the ceremony is cancelled. But Goldie is not about to be denied and with encouragement from a quiet inner prompting, she palms a pair of scissors, cuts her own ceremonial ribbon and makes off and away from captivity.

After a day of freedom spent in hiding, Goldie finds herself in a dead-end alley being pursued by a stranger and in her desperation and hunger, she enters a building from which the most delicious smell is emanating. She enters the Museum of Thieves. The Museum is no ordinary museum and Goldie's presence there is no accident, and she soon discovers that the very safety of the city depends on the Museum Keepers, one of which she has become, and their ability to keep this sensitive building soothed and happy. But, there are forces moving to destroy the Museum and release some of its deadly secrets for their own wicked ends. Will Goldie and her friends avert this disaster and will she ever see her family and friends again?

The first book in a new trilogy, it has made a very promising beginning and would really appeal to Grade 5/6+ students. I found it hard to put down and I am keenly looking forward to the next instalment.

**Debbie Williams, Mountain District Christian School, VIC**

In the city of Jewel, children are kept chained to their parents, from the time of their birth until Separation Day, to ensure their safety. 12 year old Goldie Roth has lived there all her life and longs for the day when she will be free to roam at will. As luck would have it, the Grand Protector lowers the age of Separation from 16 to 12. As the final separation is being made to sever the bond between Goldie and her mother, the dishevelled figure of the Fugelman, leader of the Blessed Guardians, interrupts the ceremony declaring that a bomb has exploded killing children! The event is cancelled! Unable to contain herself, and with no thought of the punishment her parents will face, Goldie runs away. In the chaos that follows, Goldie finds herself accepted into the mysterious Museum of Dunt, a place bursting at the seams with strange objects and relics of the past.

An adventure fantasy filled with colourful characters and ideas, the Museum of Dunt reminds this reader of the fantastical world, Narnia, created by CS Lewis, albeit the evil side. Within its shifting

rooms dangers lurk that are barely contained and threaten to burst forth and wreak havoc at any moment. The writing is energetic, leaving the reader with much to contemplate till they can return to the Museum in the second of the planned trilogy. Highly recommended for children and adults.

**Pia Butcher, Youth Services Librarian, VIC**

In the city of Jewel, children are protected 'for their own good' by chains that link them to either their parents, the Blessed Guardians, or at night, to their beds. "The people of Jewel,' said Olga Ciavolga, 'treat their children like delicate flowers. They think they will not survive without constant protection.'" The 'good' Protector wishes to ease up on this protection, but is opposed by her 'evil' brother, the Fugleman, who secretly wants to take control of Jewel with the help of the Blessed Guardians. Our protagonist, Goldie, has a strong and fiery personality and during a ceremony, escapes from her chain. She is somehow led to the Museum where her dangerous adventures begin. Once free, Goldie cannot bear the thought of being chained again. "But there was another sort of fear, the fear that you would never be allowed to be who you really were. The fear that your true self would have to stay squashed up, like a caged bird, for the rest of your life. That was a fear worst than any soldier".

The Museum is a living entity which also begins to feel the pressure of the Guardians, when they start investigating its secrets and trying to make it still with boards and nails. "But the people of Jewel are like Guardian Hope, with her planks and hammers. They tried to nail life down. They wanted to be completely safe and happy at all times." As the Museum begins the process of 'blowing its top', the city of Jewel and its people depend on Goldie and the Keepers to save the day. The excitement escalates to a peak, supplying readers with a superb ending, which has left our family ready and waiting for book number two: *The Keepers: City of Lies*. *The Keepers: Museum of Thieves* would make a fantastic movie. Perhaps the next Harry Potter...

**The Roach Family, Home-schoolers, WA**

341 pages of rollicking fun and nail-biting adventure make this book a sure hit with readers from mid-primary up. I found myself engrossed from the very first page. Well-paced throughout, we are kept wondering what will happen next. The end, while very satisfying, allows the reader to look forward to the next book in the series. I had been concerned that I'd be left dangling, but Lian Tanner has very cleverly solved enough of the problems while allowing plenty of room to wonder what will happen to the characters and the plot.

Goldie Roth appears as a disobedient child who has worn the punishment chains many times in her home city, Jewel. When she decides to run away, she ends up in the Museum of Dunt where she meets the boy Toadspit. As they try to find their way through the museum and its secrets, we meet the Brizzlehound, Morg the slaughterbird, The Grand Protector, Guardian Hope, The Fugleman and many other rich and engaging characters with plenty of good and villainy thrown into the mix.

Illustrations by Sebastian Ciaffaglione are placed at the beginning of each chapter and give an extra dimension to the main characters. They give a sense of time and place with the costumes and would provide an interesting discussion point in classrooms – is this how you think of the characters? Students could draw their own interpretation of the characters and the places.

This is a choice read for a competent child but would also make a fabulous read-aloud text for the classroom or family. Discussion themes such as cooperation and different language and culture are easily found throughout the book. Action-packed and exciting, it is highly recommended.

**Ruth Jones, Alice Springs, NT**

*Museum of Thieves* is the first book in Lian Tanner's *The Keepers* trilogy. Once the reader opens the book, they are taken into the city of Jewel, where the most precious and important thing in the city is the children. They are literally attached to their parent or a Blessed Guardian by a chain with a lock and key for their protection...until Separation Day. Goldie Roth, a girl with spirit and determination, is just about to experience her Separation Day and freedom when suddenly the situation changes. Faced with losing her freedom for a further period of time, she boldly escapes into a city mostly unknown to her. Goldie eventually finds herself in the museum and discovers that she has been lured there. She soon finds out that she has been recruited to help the Keepers of the museum with its dark and mysterious secrets in their vital mission to keep dark forces from creating chaos and destruction.

In the intricate fantasy world created by Tanner, the forces of good and evil are in contest against a background of juxtaposed values of freedom and protection, kindness and cruelty, truth and deceit, fear and courage. The story is peopled with an interesting and well-drawn array of characters, both young and older. The *Museum of Thieves* is a beautifully crafted novel that completely immerses the reader in a story that is compelling and also leaves the reader with much to consider after the final page has been read. It is suitable for upper primary and older readers who will, after reading book one of the trilogy, be eagerly waiting for book two.

**Margaret Warner, casual teacher, NSW**

This book is the first in what will eventually be *The Keepers* trilogy. The story is set in the city of Jewel where all behaviour is strictly controlled. Children are chained to their parents, ostensibly to ensure their safety, but one wonders if it is more about control than safety. The Guardians are appointed to monitor behaviour and any infringement is severely punished. Goldie Ruth lives in this city and the book opens with her impatiently waiting for her Separation Ceremony when the chains to her mother will be removed. But something is underfoot in the city and Goldie knows she must use the Separation Ceremony as an opportunity for an attempt at escape, even though it will put her parents at risk. Goldie becomes a fugitive and breaks into an old museum looking for food and shelter. When she steals coins she is surprised to find that instead of being punished, she is accepted into their fold, as they only welcome thieves.

This book has all the hallmarks of an exciting fantasy adventure. Goldie and her friend Toadspit are the heroes; the villain is Fugleman who lusts for power and has devious ideas for total domination; his brother is the Protector who wants to lift restrictions in Jewel and make life more 'normal'. The book ends leaving the reader eagerly awaiting the next two instalments: (Will the Fugleman come up with another devious plan?) I would recommend this book to 9 to 15 year olds who enjoy fantasy adventure stories.

**Claire Cheeseman, Summerland Primary School, NZ**

*Museum of Thieves* is a unique and interesting story about a brave young girl named Goldie Roth. From the moment you set eyes on the rustic, old-fashioned cover of the book you realise that this is going to be an adventure. Where are these children? What is the significance of the dog and bird? Why are they there? Goldie lives in an authoritarian city of Jewel. In Jewel, children are the essence of life; they are the most important prized possession. Children are required to wear guardchains for their protection, so they are safe from drowning, diseases, the plague and from slave traders. That is, attached to a parent or Blessed Guardian until their day of 'separation'. Goldie had been waiting for her day of separation and was extremely excited about the prospect of gaining her freedom. But on the day, just before the ceremony, there was an explosion. Goldie was already unchained so she took the opportunity to escape her life and found refuge in the extraordinary living Museum of Dunt, an ever-shifting world where she meets up with Toadspit, a slaughterbird, a brizzlehound and a staircase that changes. With the assistance of the other unique characters Goldie evolves into an audacious and imaginative heroine who saves her city from destruction.

Children from upper primary grades and above would enjoy this tale. I feel that they would be able to relate to it as like most young children in this generation, question the rules and regulations of society, just like Goldie. From a teacher's perspective, the tale could be used to generate higher-order thinking skills and discussion points on society and laws. A story map could be drawn showing the journey that Goldie has through Jewel and the Museum of Dunt.

*Museum of Thieves* is a hard-to-put-down book that never fails to surprise you. Well worth the read.

**Donna Reardon, St Clair, NSW**

This is the first book in *The Keepers* trilogy. The introduction before the first chapter, Separation Day, gives just enough of a hint of what is to come. Separation day is the day when Goldie Roth will at last be unchained. The children of Jewel are chained to the Blessed Guardians until they reach Separation age. This has only recently been reduced to twelve and Goldie is looking forward to her special day. But everything does not go according to plan. The separation is cancelled after a bomb is let off in Jewel. Goldie takes the opportunity afforded by the resultant confusion and, with a little bit of light-fingered ingenuity on her part, gets herself free. She runs away.

This is both a fantasy and an adventure story that will appeal to both girls and boys as Goldie very quickly teams up with Toadspit. Together they try and outwit the evil Fugleman and ensure he cannot use the secrets the museum has for his own purposes. The Museum of Dent has feelings, moods and powers that must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Fugleman. Of course, while Goldie along with Toadspit is trying to learn the secrets of the museum she is being hunted for by the Blessed Guardians. *Museum of Thieves* is a beautifully presented hardcover book with an old-world look but the modern feel of a fast-moving story with fun characters that will delight 8-12 year olds. I'm sure children in this age group will be eagerly waiting for the next two books.

**Dale Harcombe, NSW**

What would happen if parents became so over-protective of their children that it became a way of life for a whole city community? In Lian Tanner's first book of *The Keepers, Museum of Thieves*, we see what happens to the lovely city of Jewel, but taking extremely good care isn't much fun for the children. In fact, it's stifling, and Goldie Roth is about to break free at a very desperate and fearsome price. In Jewel, impatience is a sin and boldness is a crime but being a runaway makes both Goldie and her parents criminals! She finds her way to a very strange Museum. It seems to live and breathe and it holds many secrets. This is where the title of the book is revealed. Who are the Keepers? What do they do? And what is a Museum of Thieves? The title can set the imagination off in hundreds of different tangents. It would be interesting to ask a class what they thought the museum may contain before reading the book.

Living in the museum, Goldie discovers many things about herself that she would never have thought possible, yet realises she always knew there was something more to life than being chained to her guardian or parents. Slowly she learns how to be a Keeper of the Museum and that actions have consequences. She finds that embracing the opportunities to test her courage, help her to grow and learn; trusting her gut instincts so she can overcome problems and help her friends. I found this book captivating from start to finish and was intrigued by the character names. Definitely a high recommendation for 10 – 12 year olds or advanced junior readers.

**Marion Martineer, QLD**

*Museum of Thieves* is a great read. It has a fast moving storyline which keeps one guessing. It is written by a first time author from Tasmania and is the first of a trilogy. The two main characters Goldie, twelve, and Toadspit, the boy, are of a similar age. Well drawn and believable they have the prickly personalities of soon-to-be teenagers. They live in the city of Jewel where there are Guardians who ensure that the inhabitants from an early age encounter no problems, stifling creative or independent thoughts. Goldie however, rails against this regime. On the day she is to be allowed some measure of independence, 'Separation Day', an explosion occurs which propels Goldie towards something entirely unexpected. By following a dangerous and circuitous route of the city she finds the Museum of Dunt which is definitely not what it seems. Inside the museum the author has employed an unusual idea for moving back in time.

The reading level is probably aimed at middle grade 5 readers. The content will interest up to an adult audience. In *Museum of Thieves* the main characters solve problems courageously and creatively. Both the boy and the girl have their chances to 'shine'. This is a different style of fantasy novel which will leave the reader looking forward to book 2.

**Shirley Furmage, TAS**