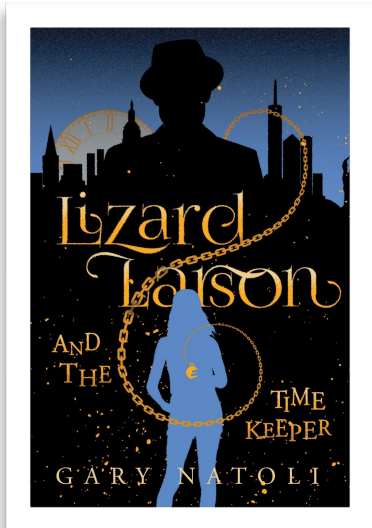




INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper

By Gary Natoli

Genre: Young Adult / Sci-Fi & Fantasy

Reviewed by Andrea Marks-Joseph

The thrilling tale of a time-jumping teenager racing to rescue her parents

Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper is an action-packed mystery following a teenager who is taken out of school by her parents one afternoon and, just a few hours later, finds herself lost in an underworld of adults from the future. Fourteen-year-old Lizard (government name Elizabeth, but she finds the common nickname Liz “*too unimpressive, too plain.*”) learns she can stop time—at the exact

moment her parents mysteriously disappear and secret agents from the future begin to hunt her down.

Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper is a stressful read in the most delicious, enthralling way; you’re always on the edge of your seat. The sticky situation that Lizard is in keeps getting more tangled, and we can’t be sure if anyone is telling her the truth. Who can she trust? Who is lying to her face? Where are her parents? Is she gonna be okay?

And we grow to care so much! We feel for Lizard because she really comes across as a typical teen. At only fourteen, she’s in an awkward “I’m not like other girls” phase, still figuring herself out, while she craves the comfort of long school days spent messing up experiments in class with her best friend. Author Gary Natoli has written something tender and fragile and true in the in-between moments of Lizard navigating this science-fiction mess. We see her as she is, a fourteen-year-old forced to shake off the all-black-everything armor of her teendom and left alone in the wide world not knowing who to trust.

As a reader, I felt protective over her. I felt like I was thrown into this desperate and dramatic whirlwind alongside Lizard. She really woke up one day, went to school, and then just never went home. Along the way, in this mystery that keeps revealing more of itself, Lizard lost her parents in an explosion, discovered that she can stop time, learned that her physicist parents' work created a machine to time-travel. She is even kidnapped and experimented on by part-cyborg people and befriends someone who later loses their limb for a second time. When she escapes with the help of a rebel soldier, she learns more about the terrifying organization hunting her down: ***"Harm me? You've got to be kidding. I think they want to kill me."*** ***"They want you for much worse."*** She's fourteen! It's a lot for one girl to deal with!

Somehow, despite the stress and worry on behalf of Lizard, this book is pleasant to read. It's way more exciting than it is scary or upsetting, and as more information is revealed to Lizard, suspicions are either dismissed or validated. Every time someone I doubted earlier in the book lies to her, it cleverly comes to light as a trick or a clue along the journey.

Readers who love mysteries will have a field day with this one. So much is happening, and Lizard only knows (or perhaps, in her highly stressful situation, only has capacity to think about the very most urgent matter) to second-guess about half of them. The reader either picks up on much more than she does, or we're dragged around the corner holding our breath alongside her while the enemy secret agents leave the building. I could not think of a more perfect encapsulation of the word thrilling than this story.

Natoli writes the time-stopping with a beautiful sense of fascination as Lizard is navigating what it is, and what it means: ***"Everything in sight—cars, buses, pedestrians, dogs on leashes, a plane some distance on the horizon, and a cascade of raindrops—were all suspended. There must be some boundary to this frozen bubble of time, but currently, it was visibly limitless."***

So much unravels for Lizard in this book, and so many new truths answer questions she never knew to ask. But we still have so much to discover! The character of the Time Keeper and the entire concept of The Corporation of Time is fascinating, but we've just had a taste of what it all means. There's much more of its complex, intriguing, one-of-a-kind clockwork body to reveal in a follow-up book. ***"Somewhere in that mystery,"*** Lizard tells the reader, ***"might be the solution to unraveling this paradox she was wrapped in."*** That alone is more than enough to pull me in for more of this story. The final line of this book—not a spoiler, just an excellent intro to the idea of a sequel—encapsulates all that I'm expecting from reading more of Lizard's adventures: ***"Once through the door, her life would take on unimaginable possibilities, and perhaps a new time would begin."***

Content warnings are necessary for the grief and confusion of suddenly losing your parents. Also, in a research lab, Lizard is drugged by the food she's given and suffers through tortuous medical experimentation, including electrocution.

Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper reminded me of the *Dead Boy Detectives* series, with its quirky intricate magic and charming-but-prickly teenagers who bounce off the page and into my heart almost immediately. It's a great match for fans of Nathan Burgoine's young adult teleportation novel *Exit Plans for Teenage Freaks*. The times when the bureau is surveilling and experimenting on Lizard to extract and replicate whatever part of her can stop time reminded me of the Prime Video series *Gen V*. *Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper* matches its "don't trust the adults, we have to do this ourselves" energy.

This book would be great for fans of mysteries, time-travel, and teenage protagonists who have to figure out how to save the world *and* manage being a teenager with a confusing crush at the same time. *Lizard Larson and the Time Keeper* is action-packed and unforgettable. I'd highly recommend it.