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www.bookrapt.org.nz info@bookrapt.org.nz



***Brotherhood of Thieves: the Wardens* by Stuart Daly**

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This first book in a new fantasy series about the mysterious Brotherhood is an exciting read. Although the story is set in a mythical era, it has a medieval flavour with castles, sword fighting, street urchins, and a landscape reminiscent of early Britain.

Five new recruits are chosen from 50 hopeful teenagers to join the secretive Brotherhood formed by King Rhys. His Andalon kingdom is under threat from the giant Roon tribes who live in the frozen North. The giants are fearsome warriors and the King's army is struggling to hold off the invaders. However, tombs of an ancient race of people have been discovered that contain magical weapons and creatures with great powers. They will be invaluable in battle, if the Brotherhood of treasure hunters can gain entry to the burial places which are protected by deadly traps.

The recruits come from diverse backgrounds and must learn to work together as a team. Caspan finds it difficult to trust the other two boys and two girls. He was orphaned as a seven-year-old and has survived as a thief on the streets of Floran. He lived in the sewers with members of the Black Hand where he developed sharp reflexes and swift escape tactics.

As their training progresses, the recruits learn to rely on each other's individual skills. Friendship and trust takes a while to grow and their personalities clash at times. Their teachers are masters in the art of war and have knowledge of ancient ways. They push the young people to their physical and emotional limits.

When an unexpected invasion by the Roon catches the kingdom off-guard the Brotherhood is embroiled in a terrifying battle. The fierce giants massacre all in their path. Ingenuity and courage is required to attempt to stem the slaughter.

The characters are well-defined and believable young people. They struggle with uncertainty, loneliness, competitiveness, and the desire to acquit themselves well when challenged. *The Wardens* is a fine start to this new series for intermediate-age readers.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

Author's website: <http://stuardaly.weebly.com/>

