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The Secrets of Vesuvius

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Lawrence, Caroline. *The Secrets of Vesuvius*. Roaring Book Press, 2001. ISBN 0761326030. 173 pp.

Reviewer: Emily Fry

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Adventure stories; Historical fiction;

Subject: Riddles--Juvenile fiction; Vesuvius (Italy)--Eruption, 79--Juvenile fiction; Lost children--Juvenile fiction; Books—Reviews;

Flavia Geminus once more tackles a mystery in *The Secrets of Vesuvius*, with her friends Jonathon, Lupus, and Nubia. The plot begins to thicken early in the book as the children rescue Admiral Pliny from drowning in the bay of Ostia and he tells them of a riddle that is supposed to lead to great treasure. The riddle has to do with a mysterious blacksmith who works in Pompeii, which happens to be where the children are heading for their summer holiday. While staying with Flavia's uncle for the summer, they begin to piece together the clues to the riddle, solve the mystery of the blacksmith's parentage, have a run in with love, and try to figure out why sheep are dying and snakes are leaving the farm. Will they be able to figure out the clues to Vesuvius before it erupts?

Caroline Lawrence weaves a complex plot that is too big for her book. There are so many intertwining stories involved in the main plot that confusion reigns supreme. For the first few chapters, the action is extremely slow and it is hard to keep interest in the book; however, the action picks up later in the book, but there are too many stories lines to fully follow. There is the love story between Jonathon's older sister, Miriam, and Flavia's uncle, plus a few other suitors for Miriam's hand, the marital unrest between Tascius and Rectina, Mordecai trying to save the lives of injured people, the truth of Vulcan's real father, and Gaius' experiences while trying to warn the people of Pompeii of the dangers of the volcano.

This a good book for younger readers who do not really care about the plot so much as the time period and the subject matter. It is a semi-interesting perspective on the time of Vesuvius' eruption, but holds little else to recommend it to the general public.