

Legend of the Star Runner: A Timmi Tobbson Adventure

J. I. Wagner

Cindy Froehlich, Illustrator

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A spirited trio of kid sleuths undertake a classic treasure hunt in J. I. Wagner's *Legend of the Star Runner*. Taking its inspiration from video games and cloak-and-dagger mysteries, this story for middle-grade readers is a visual feast.

Lilli's grandfather is facing eviction. With the prospect of a pirate's treasure guiding them, she and her best friends, Marvin and Timmi, set out to find the loot to rescue him from his debts. A large-hearted, naïve, and wildly improbable plot delights as the fearless team—led by a treasure hunter—lands in a series of underground worlds.

Several twists and turns hinge on pure luck, timing, and uncanny perceptions. A reliance on video-game staples, including hidden passageways, trapdoors, puzzles, maps, and multiple-choice paths, sometimes threatens to turn the book into a high-concept maze. Still, what the story misses in the depth of its background, the illustrations make up for; they are smart compositions using chromatic palettes and feature clues. From a cluttered kitchen to the check-in desk at the Savoy to a wall of keys at an archive, scenes set a distinct mood for the story.

The tone is wisely calibrated; it's neither overly terrifying nor overly lighthearted. The perils the group encounter pose enough danger to build suspense yet leave room for escape. There's seldom doubt that the kids will prevail, considering their Holmesian knack for observation; the book's pleasure rests in their citywide ranging that peels back history to reveal the secrets of a legendary pirate embedded in their midst.

A list of fun facts lists the book's film influences, which include *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and a section of hints offers insights written in reverse. With the exuberance of a caper, determined protagonists, and a message steeped in family legacy, this first in a planned series is a splendid homage to adventure.

KAREN RIGBY (May/June 2018)

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