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Picture Books

Adventures of Riley: Amazon River Rescue
Amanda Lumry
Laura Hurwitz
Sarah McIntyre, illustrator
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Who could resist another invitation from Uncle Max to accompany him and his family on a scientific adventure? Certainly not his nephew, Riley, and neither will the reader. Riley tells his fellow soccer players in the United States that he is headed to the Amazon rain forest. He expects to see amazing animals, but wonders about his uncle's mention in his letter of invitation about the kapok trees and their lifesaving properties.

As in other titles in this series, the pages are filled with facts about wildlife and the environment, offered by scientists from such prestigious organizations as the Smithsonian Institution, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wildlife Fund. The authors incorporate these facts into an exciting adventure. (Lumry has a degree in photography from the Visual Environmental Studies Department at Harvard; Hurwitz has a degree in English from Yale.)

The illustrator studied art at Bryn Mawr College. Her illustrations are a combination of cartoon-style people and animals and photographs of real animals. Within a double-page illustration of a tree are found photographs of a snake, a toucan, and a parrot. Fact-filled boxes from the scientists offer kid-appealing tips about the creatures. For example: "Many more humans have eaten piranha than the other way around." Or, when discussing the properties of the sloth, a mammologist from Peru notes that it does everything (such as giving birth and eating) upside down, "except for pooping."

While Uncle Max tries to determine if he has discovered a new fungus that he intends to name after himself, Riley and his cousin, Alice, head off on their own, following strange animals that turn out to be capybaras (the world's largest rodent). The kids take a boat out on the river and become lost during their adventures. As dark falls, they find the spot where they had

borrowed the boat, and Alice notes that they may have to sleep under the kapok tree. With that, the resourceful Riley remembers something that he has read: that if you bang on the roots, a booming sound will echo throughout the river basin. They do, and as a result, the search party finds them.

The series, set in various places in the globe, is designed to teach youngsters to appreciate wildlife and its habitat, and the planet's incredible biodiversity. The Riley books encourage readers to be more observant about the world about them, and to save it.

Linda Salisbury