

## Stanley Brambles and the Lost City

**Owen Spendlove**

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*A vast and unique jungle world is the setting for the harrowing adventures of three young friends.*

Owen Spendlove has created a vast and unique jungle world for his second tale of friendship and adventure, *Stanley Brambles and the Lost City*. With lizard people, samurai, giant spiders, attacking bugs, robots, and more, Spendlove weaves together an action-packed thriller for young readers.

This is the continuing story of Stanley Brambles, a thirteen-year-old who finds himself transported to a mysterious jungle planet with his friends Nell and Alabaster. There they are reunited with characters from their earlier adventures and find themselves wrapped up in a plot to stop the spread of evil through the jungle.

There are some obvious recognizable similarities between these three protagonists and the Harry Potter trio. Stanley is a young boy with hidden powers and family members who are connected to another world. Nell is the intelligent girl who can solve engineering problems and play the role of the diplomat when it is needed. Alabaster is the bumbling clumsy comic relief whose loyalty to his friends appears to be his only redeeming quality.

There are also a handful of clichés to in the beginning of this book. The mean schoolteacher who is overly sinister and the bully who baits Stanley into losing control and fighting him after school don't truly impact Stanley's character or forward the story. Despite these occasional formulaic moments, once Spendlove's characters are fully engaged in the jungle of Verduria, the pace and originality of his story pick up. The friends encounter hostile creatures and learn to make friends with warriors. Stanley, haunted by visions of a mysterious crystal and a hint that he may have hidden powers of his own, fights alongside his friends as they explore demonic threats. Stanley also struggles throughout with his own demon of jealousy as he realizes he has feelings for his friend Nell.

Although the story is lengthy and complex enough for teen readers, the writing earlier in the book feels targeted for younger, juvenile adventure audiences. The kids live on "Bubbletree Lane" and "Butter Street" and go to school with "Mr. Grimm" and "Mrs. Drabdale," setting a much younger tone for this book than the later battle scenes and a standoff in "Blood City."

The first few chapters of this book seem stitched onto the much more captivating middle and later chapters, which create a believable and spellbinding story for young readers. Even though the story ultimately comes to a tidy conclusion, there are suggestions that more Stanley Brambles adventures are to come.

SARA BUDZIK (March 26, 2016)

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