

The Lost Valley: An Adventure by Sam and Spot

Leonardo Deangelo

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Leonardo Deangelo has written an enticing boys' adventure book that begs to be read aloud by grandfathers before bedtime.

In this first-grade-level chapter book, readers are introduced to Sam, a somewhat serious boy of indeterminate age, and his scruffy but intelligent dog, Spot, who accompanies and defends his best friend on a variety of unusual adventures. With the help of a magic book that provides the duo with a time-traveling mirror, Sam and Spot travel back in time to a lush tropical jungle full of dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals. While exploring, they encounter Captain Ernesto and his crew, a group of kind scientists from the future, and Vantor, a wizard who trains velociraptors as his attack animals and tries to steal Sam's mirror for his own evil purposes.

Deangelo's prose style is extremely simple, and it recalls the old-fashioned "Fun with Dick and Jane" children's stories from the 1940s and 1950s. For example, "With his eyes still closed, he said to Spot, 'What is up with you, Spot?'" Although typos are sprinkled throughout the text, along with grammatical errors and redundant sentences, the book's old-world charm, like a fairy tale or legend with a stalwart hero and snarling villain, makes up for many deficiencies. The bright orange cover with a tyrannosaurus is eye-catching and will appeal to boys who love dinosaur adventures.

Deangelo, whose first Sam and Spot adventure was called *The Crystal Cave*, describes himself as an "artist, designer, sculptor, movie director and art tutor." It seems a shame, then, that he didn't illustrate his new book with more dynamic visuals of the colorful animals and characters he's delineated in the text. More artistic renderings would have drawn in the reluctant seven-year-old boy reader, and animated the overly long descriptions.

Though filled with danger and death, the "lost valley" of the title is no match for an intrepid boy and his dog, who eventually come home from their adventure, safe and sound, only to run out and play baseball with friends. This book would make an excellent read-aloud story for first- or second-grade teachers.

DEANN ROSSETTI (September 7, 2012)

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