

Zanoo the Pixie

J. A. Neame

Raynald Kudemus, Illustrator

Xlibris UK (Nov 18, 2016)

\$21.95 (54pp)

978-1-5144-9952-8

With its friendly characters and gentle tone, this book would appeal as a read-aloud to children up to six years old.

Zanoo the Pixie by J. A. Neame offers three entertaining tales about the magical and always kind Zanoo, who lives in Fairyland with his friends—a colorful mix of fairies, people, and talking animals.

In the first story, Zanoo worries when he can't find any of his friends. He becomes upset thinking they have left him. Unfortunately, the title of this story, "Zanoo's Surprise Party," gives away the ending. The second and third stories find Zanoo at a Fairyland carnival and then a bonfire, respectively. In all three tales, Zanoo uses his magic to help others when needed; he and other Fairyland grownups also remind youngsters what they need to do to play safely. Each tale ends with Zanoo snuggling down in his bed and thinking to himself (with slight variations), "If you are nice and kind to others, they will be nice and kind to you. Then you will always have nice friends."

The stories are told in a kind, grandmotherly manner: "All Zanoo's friends lived in Pinecone Wood too—as you will see." Phrasing can be charming, as when lights are turned out and a room is put "into candle-light darkness." The author uses pleasant cadences and appropriate repetition to describe the path of floats in the carnival parade. While all the stories have the potential to capture the attention of young children, at times the pace is somewhat slow, with long passages of narration; examples include when Zanoo is deciding what to wear, and in the description of how intricately a float is decorated. In "Zanoo and the Bonfire Party," too much repetition of the same phrase detracts from the action and story line when Zanoo's task of keeping people away from the bonfire is belabored by multiple mentions of "a long, heavy rope."

A bit of the fun of each story is dampened when young characters are admonished to "never wander off ... on their own because they might get lost" or "never climb high things without a ladder." When a little girl wants to help light birthday candles, Zanoo tells her that "she must never touch matches. They are very dangerous, and she might burn herself." Such reminders make the text feel overly moralistic.

The illustrations are colorful and should appeal to young children. With its friendly characters and gentle tone, this book will appeal as a read-aloud to children up to six years old.

LORRAINE RAVIS (December 22, 2016)

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