



**Publisher:** Xlibris

**Release Date:** January 2004

**ISBN:** 1-4134-2349-3

**Awards:**

**Format Reviewed:** Trade Paperback

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**Genre:** Juvenile Fiction - Action and Adventure (ages 9-13)

**Reviewed:** 2004

**Reviewer:** Kristin Johnson

## ***The Trapping***

By Anthony Vela

The "Oops, I'm really dead and I was just sticking around long enough to complete a mission" plot device may have lost its luster for young adult readers after "The Sixth Sense" and "The Others." Yet Anthony Vela's spooky-spiritual novel, *The Trapping*, revitalizes a cliché his intended audience might have yawned at, had he not mixed in a touch of "Joan of Arcadia," and a battle between angel and devil. After all, when you're old enough to drive legally, you automatically know all there is to know, even if your clinging mother tells you repeatedly that (a) girls are evil, (b) girls are evil, and (c) girls are evil. One can picture actress Maureen O'Hara from "Only the Lonely" in the role of Vela's character, "Martha Chaplin," a possessive mom to college-going artist Gabe Chaplin.

When he falls in love with high school student Sara Livingston, Gabe is robbing the cradle. But an angry father is the least of his problems, and is not even one of his problems. Sara's father admires and respects Gabe, unlike Gabe's mother. While Martha Chaplin gets the clingy-abusive-dependent-elderly-mom role, caregivers will recognize that there is truth to this stereotype. Vela infuses the portrayal with complex emotions undoubtedly drawn from caring for his own mother in real life. Caregivers also will recognize that mental illness comes and goes, as does Martha's, when she at last confronts Sara, and, for a moment, the harridan becomes human. When a battle between good and evil shatters Martha's precious television (she's an Oprah fan who misses the point of Oprah's dynamic messages), her reaction is reminiscent of the classic "Twilight Zone" episode, "Time Enough at Last," in which a bookish man escapes with his library only to have his glasses break.

In a real sense, Martha Chaplin is caught in a trap, as is Gabe. Sara, an angel, inhabits the body of a young girl who died in a car accident. This is the "trapping" the of the novel's title. And Sara's trap frees Gabe to become the artist he is working to become and to live his life freely. Even jaded teenagers can appreciate that denouement.