



## Frankie and the Gift of Fantasy

**Ruthy Ballard**

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In *Frankie and the Gift of Fantasy*, a ten-year-old boy finds independence and purpose when he is transported from California to a distant planet.

Francesco, who goes by Frankie, is always being nagged to be productive instead of daydreaming. When a mysterious crack appears in his bedroom ceiling, he touches it and is transported to Urth, a strange, double-mooned planet. There, he meets an alien woman, Ideth, who serves as a mentor to children like Frankie who have the “gift of fantasy.”

Frankie renames himself “Soccer Fan,” following Urth’s tradition of choosing an anagram of one’s given name. With this symbolic step of taking control, Soccer Fan undertakes his quest to observe, learn, and grow. Along the way, he conquers his acrophobia and rescues a friend from danger.

Among the book’s thought-provoking topics and developments are investigations of the potential unfairness of criminal justice systems, and a subplot about a group of friendly aliens who can’t imagine their future; Frankie is frustrated by their inability to plan for a recurring danger. Kid-friendly scientific descriptions utilize words like “echolocation” and “syzygy.” In an interesting sidebar, the book shows the effects of Frankie’s months-long disappearance back on Earth, where his parents worry and an innocent man is accused of kidnapping him. The stress and pain of the situation is disconcerting, but amplifies the joy of Frankie returning home.

Amid descriptions of Frankie leaping over tree roots in a forest or traversing dangerous bluffs and fissures come detailed illustrations with additional visual context. Ideth and the other aliens are not depicted in these images; their appearances are left to the audience’s imagination.

*Frankie and the Gift of Fantasy* is a rousing science fiction adventure—truly edifying entertainment.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2020)

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