ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

Ignis
Gina Wilson
P.J. Lynch, illustrator
Candlewick Press
978-0-7636-1623-6
(October 2001)

“I don’t feel like a dragon at all,” says Ignis. This young dragon is the fastest runner and highest flier in Dragonland, but he can’t breathe fire. While his peers light the stars in the night sky and play games like Fling a Flame and All Blaze Together, Ignis sets off in search of his true nature. He tries out life as a hippo and a parrot, spends a week with a young human girl, Cara, and then journeys to the mouth of a volcano.

The author’s previous writing credits include a book of poetry for children, and the text of this picture book is alive with imagery and detail. Cara and Ignis spend time “sucking grass stems and swapping stories” when they aren’t feasting on strawberry ice cream or honey from her grandmother’s hives. Ignis’ first flame is “an orange flicker of ribbon streaming out in front of him.” The language may be overly precious for some readers, but it lends a formal and mysterious tone that will tantalize young imaginations.

The cover of the book shows three elderly dragons sternly watching as young Ignis produces fire. Readers who pick up this dragon tale in search of fiery clashes will be disappointed. However, most children will identify with Ignis’s desire to be like the others in his village, and his decision to seek out his fate instead of following his grandmother’s advice that fire will come to him “all in good time.” His adventures are incidental to the changes that are happening inside him as he grows closer and closer to becoming a true fire-breathing dragon. The final scenes are full of fiery fun, and true dragon fans will appreciate this peek into the human side of dragon life.

The illustrations, by two-time Kate Greenaway Medal winner Lynch, are the most outstanding feature of this offering. Ignis and his environment are depicted in watercolor and gouache paintings that capitalize on the magic and mystery of Wilson’s tale. From the sad cast of his eyes as he watches his friends play with fire, to the curve of his wings as he holds a sleeping Cara on his lap, to his triumphant posture as he bellows flames for his tribe, Ignis is made real through Lynch’s artwork. Fans of fantasy and underdogs won’t want to miss this

heartwarming story.