

Mikkee the Martian: The Tiger and the Fair

Peter Locke

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Mikkee the Martian is a diverting middle grade alien story focused on a cross-cultural adventure at the fair.

In Peter Locke's latest installment of the middle grade science fiction series *Mikkee The Martian*, the excitement and detail of a carnival fair are paired with the otherworldly excitement of befriendng a Martian.

Mikkee's second adventure opens in Billy and Jilly's house. Mikkee met and befriended the children earlier, and in his exchanges with them, he shares aspects of his Martian lifestyle, including the fact that he doesn't sleep. The children offer to let Mikkee share their breakfast, after which their mother suggests that they go to the fun fair, a carnival with rides that's set up in town.

Mikkee impresses the children with his ability to play carnival games. The action ramps up when a tiger gets loose and no one knows what to do. Mikkee has the ability to save the day, displaying his unique talents in public. Amid this drama, the children and Mikkee continue to exchange stories about the differences between Mars and Earth, growing closer and enjoying each other's company.

Engaging and direct, the story includes illustrations that keep its intrigue high. Its details about Mikkee's way of life, including his ability to eat stinging nettles, are rich with imagination. The sights and the smells of the fair are also rendered in a sensory way, and the premise is enjoyable enough to make complex scientific and historical backgrounds unnecessary.

The humor of the gentle bickering between Jilly and Billy is distinguishing, and fun mental images, as with the idea of a boy riding a tiger in order to avoid having their pants fall down while his belt is used as a tiger leash, hold attention. The characters' conversations are stilted, though, and some of the plot points, including that Mikkee's magical abilities are still undetected by outsiders during his rescue efforts, strain credulity.

The story's balance between description and action is strong, and it takes a careful approach to its action, reserving time to offer explanations about events, including how a particular carnival ride works. As the children encounter new and unfamiliar rides, the plot device of the children explaining details to Mikkee does double duty, also explaining elements to the audience.

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LAURA LEAVITT (March 17, 2020)

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