

Sailing the Milky Way: A Passport to the Unimagined

Eileen Ferriter

Outskirts Press

(22pp)

978-1-977247-01-8

A fanciful interpretation of a nighttime ritual, the energetic picture book Sailing the Milky Way centers creative dreaming and looking forward.

A peaceful bedtime story, Eileen Ferriter's picture book *Sailing the Milky Way* follows a courageous dragonfly through its explorations.

While he's getting ready for bed, a boy asks to hear the story about Yuri the dragonfly again. Yuri's parents tuck him into his leaf bed with a story of their own: he was "born of light and love" and "entered this world with a destiny." Yuri's flight from the seas to the "rainbow's end" and on through the galaxy is detailed; he returns to Earth with anticipation for the new day to come.

Driven by directives to imagine, think, and leapfrog, this is a straightforward story that is marked by poetic turns: Yuri is persuaded to "Play hopscotch in the wind" and "Listen to the comet's tales, dance to the music of the moons." In receiving such encouragements, Yuri becomes a stand-in for humans audiences who are, in turn, subtly exhorted to embrace their own adventures too.

In the illustrations, star-flecked backgrounds, swirling designs, and rows of sailboats evoke movement. The dragonfly is set against psychedelic colors, spheres, and patterns; these ably interpret the text's abstractions, including "new horizons" and "waves of infinite space." Still, this dreamy story lacks a convincing rationale. Despite its soothing tones, it is not clarified why the dragonfly family has a prominent place, nor does the book reveal why Yuri's tale is being conveyed through the intermediary of a generic boy whose sole purpose is to prompt its telling and who never reappears after. And the self-empowering aspects of the tale, such as about the voyage being of one's own making, are too familiar to be impactful.

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KAREN RIGBY (January 3, 2023)

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