



Unicorn Island

Donna Galanti

Bethany Stancliffe, Illustrator

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In Donna Galanti's adventure novel *Unicorn Island*, magical secrets and a family legacy inspire a twelve-year-old who's far from home.

Sam is capable, bright, and sensitive. Just as she's about to celebrate the first anniversary of a move to Brooklyn, her mother announces that she's heading to Europe. Sam is sent to live with her Uncle Mitch in Foggy Harbor, South Carolina. But when Sam and her new friend Tuck discover that Uncle Mitch is the keeper of a Fog Clock, Uncle Mitch vanishes. As Sam and Tuck learn about the clock's purpose, track down Sam's evasive uncle, and learn about his inherited role as the caretaker of Unicorn Island, they're swept into a rescue mission involving a newborn unicorn that needs Tuck's veterinarian mother's help.

From its exciting opening, which is centered on family relationships and animal husbandry, the book sets out intriguing lines of inquiry, including about how Uncle Mitch arrived at his role; about a potential rift between worlds; about why Sam is able to communicate with unicorns; and about what's behind dark rumblings on the island. A cliffhanger epilogue hints at the island's exposure and future problems.

The story's ocean side and fantasy settings combine with eye-catching illustrations to portray a moody atmosphere. Sam and Tuck's new friendship is a classic pairing of a leader and a follower, with enough subtle differences between the two of them, including that Tuck is more cautious than Sam, to generate interesting energy. Back matter featuring a brief history of unicorns and details about North Carolina's wild horses adds a fun educational element.

With Sam's variegated emotions and positions on display, including her disappointment, curiosity, hurt feelings, bravery, and relief, *Unicorn Island* is an all-too-human, enchanting middle grade fantasy novel.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2021)

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