

★ **Mr. Penguin and the Fortress of Secrets****Alex T. Smith**

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When hundreds of hamsters go missing, only a penguin, a ninja spider, a pigeon, two kids, and an elderly woman can interpret the clues left behind in a sleepy mountain town and crack the case. Alex T. Smith's *Mr. Penguin and the Fortress of Secrets* brings back an avian adventurer for another round of madcap adventures.

The story begins with a whiz-bang as Mr. Penguin and his trusty sidekick, ninja spider Colin, wrest a secret package from some shady characters. They escape via airplane, but the needle hits E and the plane crashes into a mountain. The heroes must find a way out of this predicament—and, in so doing, find their way into the next.

The language zips, skitters, clonks, biffs, staggers, and screeches, and the sheer variety of its verbs and onomatopoeic language sets a breakneck pace, giving the story the feel of a 1930s screwball comedy. Mr. Penguin is a lovable doofus, forever hungry and discombobulated. His partner Colin speaks in scribbled notes and kung fu kicks and is an amusing counterpart for the bumbling penguin. Cooperation and friendship lie at the center of the story; only by working together can the multiple mysteries be solved.

The book's clever plot twists will surprise and delight young readers and will almost certainly lead to another installment of Mr. Penguin's epic adventure. Stylish and intricate drawings wind through the text in black, white, and orange, with Mr. Penguin wearing his signature adventurer hat with an arrow through it and carrying his scruffy leather case.

Mr. Penguin and the Fortress of Secrets is a rollicking caper whose intrigue includes mesmerists, lurking men dressed in black, an isolated fortress, a toasty warm bakery, and a cast of characters who work together to succeed.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (September / October 2019)

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