

Jumping Penguins

Marije Tolman

Lemniscaat USA (Oct 1, 2013)

Hardcover \$19.95 (56pp)

978-1-935954-32-3

Superb illustrations and plenty of humor in this delightful book on little-known animal facts.

Blind chameleons, bats, polar bears that prefer left over right, and jumping bison all populate Marije Tolman's gorgeous and highly recommended children's picture book, *Jumping Penguins*. Despite the motley-sounding cast of characters, Tolman's book is nonfiction, filled with fascinating facts about animals: chameleons change color even if they can't see their surroundings; bats always fly to their left when leaving a cave; polar bears are left-handed; bison (and yes, penguins) have extraordinary jumping ability.

Tolman won Italy's prestigious Bologna Ragazzi Award for her book *The Tree House*, and her books have won, or been nominated for, many other prizes and honors. The accolades are well-deserved, and it's a safe bet there will be more to come for *Jumping Penguins*. It's a book of few, but well-chosen words (supplied by Jesse Goossens), delivering surprising factoids on each animal's double-page spread. The two pages allow plenty of room for text, but more importantly, the space creates a large canvas for Tolman's illustrations.

The illustrations are superb, with enchanting colors and plenty of humor throughout the book—for example, after mentioning on the “turtle” page that some species live longer than 150 years, we see a turtle sitting with a hat on, for his birthday party. On the panda page, we learn, “A giant panda has no permanent resting place. It just lies on the ground whenever it gets tired.” Also, “A panda has more colors than you might expect—its skin is black under its white coat and pink under its black coat.” The accompanying illustration shows unconscious pandas on the roads where they've fallen asleep, while other, awake pandas bicycle from place to place. One has a passenger on the handlebars—another panda, carrying his familiar black and white “suit” on a clothes hanger, with his pink and black skin exposed.

This, and the other illustrations, are delightful, humorous but transcendent; it feels as though somewhere, there might just be a corner of the world where these things take place. The book is a complete work of art, with a cover that stands alone so well that Tolman decided to forgo putting the book's title, or her name, on it (that information can be found on the spine of the book).

Tolman has merged the possible with the impossible, letting her imagination serve as inspiration. There are sharks moving as they sleep, clutching teddy bears; male seahorses carrying their young in human-like baby carriers; and, in what's sure to be a favorite for many children, an excrement-throwing caterpillar, wearing a baseball glove.

Jumping Penguins is a magical book that children and parents will delight in reading.

PETER DABBENE (December 11, 2013)

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