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The Secrets of Code Z Case No. 5

T.M. Murphy
J.N. Townsend Publishing (Apr 4, 2001)
Unknown $9.95 (176pp)
978-1-880158-33-3

“Snow day” are two of every school-aged kids’favorite words, and for sixteen-year-old Orville Jacques, they become days to foil the CIA and solve murder mysteries. Orville is the hero of a new series of mysteries set in the Belltown Beach area of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

“Death surrounds you, Orville. Death surrounds you,” are the words of Hilda the fortuneteller at the winter carnival where Orville has taken his latest romantic interest. Just a few short hours later, Orville finds his first dead body, washed up on the beach.

Orville knows it’s a big case when he discovers that the body is not who it was reported to be and that the CIA is involved. He finds his bedroom bugged and a government agent tailing him.

Orville eludes the agent and finds the supposedly dead man, Nicholas Pushkin. Nicholas is really Demetri Bunzl, a former Russian nuclear chemist responsible for creating “Death Powder,” a salt-like substance that explodes with the force of a bomb shortly after being eaten by a human. He had not known the potential of his creation. Before leaving Russia, he had changed the lab building’s code so that no one could get to the Powder until he could create a neutralizing agent. A certain type of algae growing only in the Belltown Beach area would provide this substance and Demetri could destroy the Death Powder before it got into the hands of the Russian government or the United States CIA. The CIA had named the hunt for Demetri and his Powder “Code Z” for the last letter of the alphabet, and, perhaps, “the U.S.’s last line of defense.”

Orville sidetracks the CIA so that Demetri can create his neutralizer and get secretly to Russia to destroy the Powder. Unfortunately, the youth gets caught by a Russian double agent—the very same CIA agent who was trailing him—and is rescued at the last minute.

Murphy seems to know what teens want to read. This can’t-put-down-until-finished novel has plenty of action and believable characters, both teen and adult. The writing crackles with dialogue and is peppered with descriptions that make the situation credible. It is a novel that middle school readers will devour.

LINDA COOLEY (July / August 2001)

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