



## PENGUIN AND THE MOUNTAIN

*By Tor Caldwell*

*In an old part of the town there's a huge scrapheap, protected by a high metal fence. It's full of lots of different things, waiting to be re-used or made into something else. During the day, people come and go and the scrapheap is busy with the noise of shouting and machinery. But at night, when everyone has left, the scrapheap really comes alive. Because that's when the NumBots come out of hiding.*

As the sun set on the scrapheap, not a single cloud could be seen overhead. The sky changed from a clear blue to orange, followed by pink, ending in deep purple. The crystal stars glistened against the dark velvet backdrop of space. Nobody loved these clear nights as much as PenguinBot - stargazing was his passion.

The stars were like friends to him - they watched over him and whenever he felt lost, they were always there to guide him home. Penguin spent most of his free time watching the stars through his telescope - he would sit for hours counting them, looking out for new ones, or join them up to make amazing patterns and pictures: from dragons and rockets, to lollipops and cupcakes.

Penguin lay on his back in the scrapheap, gazing up at the stars, marvelling at their brilliant light. He stretched out and relaxed with his wings resting behind his head. "Ahhhhh."

But then Penguin let out a long sigh as his smile faded. "Why do the stars have to be so far away?"

He dreamed of being in and amongst the stars, as they twirled and swirled around him, if only he could fly!

As Penguin waddled home, he found himself in the midst of the Scrapheap Mountain. Made up of abandoned machinery and rusting junk, the mountain towered high above the Scrapheap. In fact, it was so tall that Penguin couldn't even see the top - it had disappeared into the clouds!

This gave Penguin a very good idea indeed. To get closer to the stars, all he had to do was reach the top of the mountain! Simple. He rushed back to his pink and white ice-cream van, and frantically packed a bag of spare parts, a tent, a map, and some snacks for the journey.

Penguin finished packing, but just as he turned to leave, RustyBot appeared in the doorway, his old clunky parts shaking as he shivered...he wasn't used to the cold of Penguin's ice-cream van.

"Penguin, where on Earth are you going in such a hurry?" Rusty asked.

Without looking up, Penguin replied as he continued packing. "I must climb the Scrap Mountain to get closer to the stars!"

"The Scrap Mountain?" Rusty repeated with alarm! "brrrr - are you sure you want to - do this? It will take you days, it's difficult to climb and - it can get very cold up there..."

But Penguin could not be discouraged, he was already halfway out of the door! "That is not a problem for me, I love the cold, Rusty!"

And he was off!

As Penguin approached the mountain, it grew bigger and bigger. The mountain loomed over him, enormous, dark, and completely silent. Penguin looked up and up and took a large gulp. Then he put one foot in front of the other and began his journey.

Not long into the trail, Penguin already found himself clambering over discarded dishwashers and scaling recycled radiators. Although he was making excellent progress, he was becoming very tired...and it only took a glance upwards for Penguin to realise how far he still had to go until he reached the top!

Still with high spirits and his starry-eyed determination, he continued to make excellent progress, until...oh no...

"What is that?!" Penguin cried as his beak fell open in shock. He found himself face to face with an *enormous* machine blocking the entire path. It towered over Penguin casting long shadows in the moonlight.

"Wait a minute..." Penguin uttered. "I've seen one of these before in the Scrapheap...it's a digger!"

Penguin tried to push the digger out of the way but it would not budge. He checked either side but it was no use, it was jammed between a sheer drop to the bottom on one side, and another stack of rubbish on the other.

To get past the digger, Penguin would have to climb over it! He swallowed hard as he sized up the digger in front of him. The wind howled and swirled around him. He touched the cold metal of the digger...it was very icy indeed.

He turned around and looked back down the path...he had come far, but it wouldn't take him long to get back home to his ice-cream van. Oh how he liked the idea of sitting down and putting his flippers up...but as he turned to face the digger again, a star glistening in the distance caught his eye and he remembered why he started this journey in the first place.

"No!" He growled at himself. "I've come this far. I can do this!"

Slowly and carefully Penguin heaved himself upwards onto the track tyres. Then he grabbed the windscreen wipers with both wings and flung himself into the air.

"Aaaaaaargh!" He landed on the roof of the cabin with a loud THUD!

On top of the digger, the wind was even stronger as it whistled and whipped around Penguin's ears.

"I love the cold..." Penguin tried to reassure himself through his chattering beak.

With his flippers feeling like jelly, Penguin tiptoed from one side of the digger's roof, to the other. Before he started to climb down the digger, he glanced sideways at the sheer drop down the side of the mountain. Shivers ran down his spine...it was a very long way down indeed!

With extra caution, Penguin started to climb back down the digger. This time, he clutched onto the wing mirror, lowered himself onto the door handle and fell to the ground with a plonk - "ouch!"

Getting to his feet, Penguin let out a sigh of relief.

"Rusty was right, this *is* a hard journey!" He took another long look at the twinkling stars above, tightened his grip on his map, and carried on walking.

But as he progressed along the trail, the temperature got colder and colder, until eventually, even Penguin couldn't stand the bitter iciness of the night air.

"Brrrrrrr" he shivered... "I - love - the - cold"...

He bravely took another step when - PLONK! A large snowflake landed right on the end of his beak.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no" he groaned, as more and more snowflakes began to fall. "I usually love the snow - but not when I'm climbing a mountain!", he cried to the night sky.

Penguin slipped and skidded over the icy scrap metal until he took cover under a wheelbarrow.

Peeking out through the cracks, Penguin watched as the snowstorm beat down on the mountain, the sky a foggy blur of dark grey...he couldn't see a single star.

Penguin sighed. "I'll never make it. This journey is too long and too dangerous." He put his head in his wings, feeling more deflated than ever. He decided to stay and wait for the storm to pass.

Eventually, the blizzard turned to a light smattering of snowflakes, which then turned into an empty night sky. Penguin stepped out, ready to head back down the mountain to the safety of his ice-cream van. When suddenly, he saw a flash of light overhead. He looked up towards the sky and his beak fell open at what he saw...

"Shooting stars! Everywhere!" He gasped.

All thoughts of giving up vanished. His motivation came flooding back to him.

"Last push," he said to himself.

With a determined waddle, he headed for the final part of his journey. He battled his way over defrosting car parts, dodged falling oil canisters, and scaled up old lamp posts. Every time he needed to rest his flippers, he stopped for an ice-lolly. And once the ice-lolly was all gone, he'd pick up his map and continue up the path.

And then, as he finished scampering up a broken ladder, the sky opened up all around him! Penguin stood on top of the mountain, surrounded by the glistening stars.

The stars continued to shoot past him, lighting up the sky as they soared through the darkness. They were even more beautiful up close. Penguin reached out his wing, it almost felt like he could put one of the stars in his pocket.

"I did it!" Penguin shouted triumphantly, his voice echoing through the night. "I've never been so close to the stars, and to think I was so close to giving up! I will always remember this incredible journey and the lessons I've learned."

Certainly, seeing the stars up close brought Penguin happiness. But it was something else that had caused him to light up with delight. Penguin had made it! He persevered through the long journey, pushing through the tough times so that he could complete his goal. The journey had been longer and more difficult than he had expected, but each setback had only made him a stronger, happier Penguin.