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MOONBERRY PIE



MP59

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STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE

The Wrong Comic Book

Story Two – Stranded in a Danger Zone

Starlight, Moonshine and the others on board the ship were in big trouble. Thanks to young Danny's terrible mistake they had been whisked out of their own comic and into one about the Second World War. Now they were stuck on the ground being attacked by soldiers. Joshua had stopped his grandson from turning the page of this, the wrong comic; keeping the last picture frozen as well as actual characters of the war story. They would stay that way until Danny turned to the next picture. This, at least, gave the three people in the real world time to figure out a plan.

"How do we stop those soldiers from shooting at the ship?" queried Lucy. "And that one with the grenade has his arm back ready to throw it."

"Whatever we do will have to be quick," said Joshua. "We have one advantage, though. As Starlight and his crew are from a different comic book, they can still move about and do things; but only on the ship."

"So, if we patch the holes in the balloon," said Danny hopefully, "Colonel Moonshine can do the blow-up thing and they can fly away before I turn to the next picture."

"I doubt they'll be able to get the ship high enough before the one with the grenade throws it," said Joshua, "But we can repair the balloon in readiness. As for stopping the attack, what we really need is a Union Jack."

"Who's that?" puzzled Danny.

"Not a 'who', it's a 'what'," explained his grandfather. "It's the name they call the British flag. Trouble is: I doubt we've got one and I know Starlight wouldn't have one either." Joshua paused for a few seconds to think; then he was staring at Danny. "Haven't you got an Australian flag hanging on your wall?"

The boy nodded. "Yeah, but what good's that?"

"As well as the stars of the Southern Cross," said Joshua, "In one corner is the Union Jack. Not only that, but these are British soldiers who would recognise the Australian flag. There might even be an Australian among them."

While Danny went to his room for the flag, Lucy was fetching the scissors and sticky tape for the balloon repairs. Joshua remained to keep an eye on the comic-book picture, and it was as well he had.

Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw had been crouching down, sheltering behind the side of the ship. "Have a look to see what's happening, Henshaw," ordered Nuff-Nuff.

"Why me?" the giant penguin butler demanded to know.

“Because you’re the servant and I’m your Lord,” sneered Nuff-Nuff. “I don’t do things. That’s what I pay you for.”

“When did you ever pay me?” complained Henshaw. “And even if you had, it wouldn’t be enough to buy a new head when mine gets shot off. If you’re so keen, you...”

“Oh for pity’s sake, you two,” droned Nuff-Nuff’s uncle, Professor Dib Dob. “Just stop arguing. I’ll do it.” From his hiding place near the mast, he crawled over to the side and squeezed between the grumbling pair. Carefully, cautiously he rose until he could peer over the gunwale to look at the scene beyond. “That’s odd,” he exclaimed. “Those soldiers aren’t moving. They’re like statues.”

“And they’ll stay that way until Danny turns to the next picture,” Joshua advised, speaking to the comic-book picture.

“Hear that?” said Nuff-Nuff rising to his feet. “Nothing to worry about, you wimpy butler, Henshaw. And, seeing as the soldiers are sort-of frozen, you can climb down and take their guns off them.”

“Me?” spluttered Henshaw, and he was about to say more when Dib Dob cut him short.

“Don’t start that again,” said the Professor. “But I have to admit, nephew, it’s not a bad idea. I’ll go.”

The rope ladder was rolled up close to him, so he picked it up ready to toss it over the side with the intention of using it to climb down to the ground.. “NO!” bellowed Joshua at the comic; but he was too late. Over went the rope ladder. Unfortunately for Dib Dob it hadn’t been secured to anything on the ship, so it just fell onto the dirt and lay there, still rolled up. Seeing this, Joshua breathed a sigh of relief. “Just stay on board, all of you,” he commanded urgently. “I’m not sure, but I think if any one of you leaves the ship it might start the scene moving again. We need those soldiers to stay frozen.”

“See,” said Henshaw smugly.

“Oh, shut up!” grated Nuff-Nuff.

Lucy came into the kitchen with the scissors and sticky tape, just in time to hear the words from the comic-book picture. She smirked. “Are those two arguing again?”

“At least some things don’t change, thankfully,” commented her grandfather. When Danny entered carrying the flag, Joshua said: “Good. Now we have to do this quickly, but do it right. I want you to take the scissors and tape, Lucy...”

“And I can take the flag,” cut in Danny hopefully.

“No, you must stay here, Danny,” stated Joshua plainly. “You’re the one who can turn the page to start the story up again; but only when we’re ready.”

“So, are you coming with me, Granddad?” asked Lucy.

“I have to stay here too,” Joshua explained, “Because I know the D-Day story Starlight and the others are stuck in; and I’ll be able to tell from the pictures what is about to happen and can warn of any upcoming danger. I’m sorry, Lucy; but this part’s over to you. Are you okay with that?”

“Sure, Granddad, no worries,” the girl assured him. “What do I do first – the flag or the balloon repairs?”

“Give the flag to someone else and tell them to hang it over the side facing the soldiers. You concentrate on the balloon.” He paused for a moment, going over the plan in his mind to make sure he hadn’t missed anything. Deciding that he hadn’t, he said: “Right, Lucy, do you have your Pie?”

She held up the cookie to show her grandfather. With the scissors and tape in the other hand and the flag draped over her shoulder, she asked: "Do it now?" Seeing Joshua's nod and grim smile, she took a deep breath and called out: "Moonberry Pie." In an instant she had the sweet taste of fruit in her mouth and she was flying through the rainbow sky. The next second she appeared on the deck of the ship.

Joshua let out the breath he had been holding. In truth, he hadn't been sure that any of them could Moonberry Pie into the wrong comic-book story, so that was a relief. He spoke to the picture: "Lucy knows what needs doing; so, for the moment anyway, please take your orders from her." He continued to watch as his granddaughter began to put their plan into action.

Holding out the flag she said: "Someone hang this over the side facing the soldiers..."

Before she could say more, Lord Nuff-Nuff walked over and put out a hand. "Seeing as it's a very important job, I should do that."

"If you happen to get shot in the process," said Henshaw with a grin, "Can I have your bed-chamber? My room's pretty pokey."

A concerned frown came over Nuff-Nuff's face as he changed his mind. "On second thoughts, it's not really that important. You can do it, Henshaw."

"Look," snapped Lucy. "I don't care who does it as long as someone does, and quick smart." Turning to face Moonshine she said: "Can you give me some help with the balloon repairs, Colonel?"

Joshua continued staring at the picture, as did Danny; and the boy was saying: "Professor Dib Dob's doing the flag bit. I hope he doesn't drop it like he did the rope ladder."

Then they both watched what was going on aboard Starlight's ship. Although the comic-book picture changed slightly as the Australia flag appeared draped over the side, the soldiers remained frozen. It took a few minutes for Lucy to cut strips of tape and stick them over the holes in the balloon. Once she had, Joshua spoke: "I think it best to put some air in it, Colonel Moonshine, just to make sure the repairs have worked; but only enough to get it floating above the ship with the others. Then you'll be ready to take off if need be."

A few more minutes and everything was ready; at least Joshua hoped so. "Now, be prepared everyone," he warned. "Take cover in case this doesn't work." He waited a few seconds for those on board the ship to obey his order. When they had he said: "Okay, Danny, turn the page to the next picture."

Danny did as he was told. "It just looks the same as the one before, Granddad," he said.

"Not quite, Danny," Joshua corrected while pointing at the picture. "Everyone on board the ship is in hiding now, and the soldiers have started moving; but only a little. I think they've seen the flag and are probably wondering why they never saw it before."

"The one with the grenade is dropping his arm," observed Danny. "I don't think he's going to chuck it."

"Well, that part seems to have worked," said Joshua. He continued: "I've had an idea. Colonel Moonshine," he said, addressing the comic-book character, "Would you be up for doing something a bit risky?"

Moonshine chuckled. "Risky's my middle name, Joshua. Got to be when we're having a Huge adventure like this one."

"Thank you, Moonshine."

"COLONEL Moonshine," Danny reminded him.

"Sorry, you're right, Danny," Joshua apologised, "And that's the idea I had. Moonshine is dressed as a military Colonel, and I believe if he showed himself to the soldiers they'd recognise that. Along with the flag, it should convince them that the ship and all on board are friends."

"By Jove, you could be right, Joshua," declared Moonshine as he stood up and strode across the deck. The next picture proved the theory. Moonshine was leaning over the side of the ship, returning the salutes of the soldiers. Then he was saying: "What are you men doing here, hiding in the bushes? Don't you know about the D-Day landing?"

"That's why we *are* here, Sir," replied one of the soldiers. "There was a report that German tanks were coming to stop the allied invasion, and we were sent to keep an eye out for them."

"A good strategy, Corporal," said Moonshine, "But if you did see them coming, how did you propose to stop them? There are only six of you, and rifles would be useless against tanks."

"That's not the plan, Colonel," the Corporal explained. "When we see the tanks and which direction they're coming from, we've been ordered to hot-foot it back to Company headquarters. We've got our own tanks there and they just need to know where to go..."

He broke off when one of the soldiers tugged his sleeve. "Where to go is actually where we're standing right now, Corp," he said, pointing at something in the distance. "There's tanks just coming over the hill. I don't reckon we'll make it back to HQ soon enough."

"He's right, Moonshine," said Joshua. "I remember this part of the D-Day story; but when I read it before I couldn't work out how the British tanks managed to hold up the Germans when they didn't know they were coming. I'm not certain, but I think we can make that happen. Get the soldiers on board, quickly!"

The Colonel gave the order, but it took longer than hoped for because of the rope ladder. Once it had been thrown back to the ship and secured, however, one by one the soldiers were able to climb up. In the meantime, Moonshine had been busying himself with the blow-up thing; and the moment the last man was on deck, he blew more air into the balloons. The ship rose up off the ground. Moonshine peered at the distant approaching objects through his telescope and announced: "There are lots of tanks, and masses of foot soldiers marching behind them. We'd better hurry so you men can report. Which direction is your HQ?"

The Corporal pointed: "About five miles that way, other side of the ridge."

"Did you hear that, Starlight?" Moonshine called out. "Full speed ahead, if you'd be so kind." As they were flying over the countryside, the Corporal asked what the ship and its crew were doing in the war zone. "Ah," replied Moonshine cagily, "Top Secret mission. I'm afraid I can't say more."

"Understood, Sir," said the Corporal, giving the Colonel a salute. "We all have to do our bit, right?"

Rightly or wrongly Joshua thought when the next picture showed the ship dropping down in a clearing outside the British Company Headquarters. His concern was that Starlight and her ship were really changing history because the D-Day comic-book was telling the story of something that had happened years ago. Then again, this was only a comic; and as he and his grandchildren had proved, stories in them, especially how they turned out, could be altered to make for a happier ending with no harm done. Anyway, it was too late to worry about that now.

The wheels of the ship had barely touched the ground when Moonshine gave his orders: "You go first, Corporal and report to your commanding officer. The rest of you follow."

The two in the real world watched as the soldiers left the ship. Joshua said: "I think it's time to try and send Starlight, Moonshine and the others back to their own comic. I've had an idea about that, but I don't know if it will work."

"What if I did the hand on the picture bit, Granddad," offered Danny.

"You must have been reading my mind, Danny," he said with a smile; but it wasn't a happy one, rather a worried look as he outlined his plan: "I'm thinking back to how this happened in the first place, when your hand trick sent them to the comic underneath the Starlight and Moonshine one. I'm hoping if we reverse the setup it might work." Taking a deep breath he added: "Shall we try it?"

Danny nodded. "Got nothing to lose. What do I do?"

The idea was really quite simple: Danny opened the D-Day comic to the last page, then slipped the Starlight and Moonshine comic into it. "Now close the wrong comic and open it to the last picture we saw, the one at Company HQ." The boy followed his Grandfather's instructions. Joshua nodded. "Okay, try it. Place your hand on the D-Day picture and wish as hard as you can to send them all home."

"You too, Granddad," Danny requested.

"I sure will, lad," said Joshua. "Now do it."

Danny's hand lowered onto the picture and remained there for a few seconds. When he lifted it up, they found themselves staring down at Company Headquarters and there was no sign of Captain Starlight's ship, so hopefully the hand trick had worked. The boy was about to open the D-Day comic-book see the front page of the one inside, just to check that the ship and all on board was back in the right comic. Joshua stopped him. "Something's wrong. The ship has gone, but Lucy's still there!"

"Um-aaah!" retorted Danny. "What do we do?"

"Take the Starlight and Moonshine comic out and put it to one side on the table out of harm's way; then place your hand on the picture with Lucy in it. Tell her to Moonberry Pie back here. I'm hoping she will come home and not end up somewhere totally different."

Danny put his hand on the picture and gave the instructions to his sister. Taking his hand away they were just in time to see Lucy holding out her cookie and calling: "Moonberry Pie." In a flash she was right there in the kitchen with them. "Hello you two," she said. "That was kind of hairy, and I'm glad to be home. What about Captain Starlight's ship and the others?"

The front page of their comic book told the story; at least, it seemed, the one that they should have been reading. There was the ship exactly as it had been before, and with the same title: The Quest for the Golden Gastropod. Picking up the D-Day comic, Joshua moved it well away. "Try the hand bit on the title picture, Danny. Ask Captain Starlight what's happening." When Starlight simply confirmed they were off on another of Professor Dib Dob's expeditions, it was strange there was no mention of the wartime events. "It seems they've gone back in time and have no memory of being sent to the wrong comic-book."

"That's good, isn't it, Granddad?" said Lucy hopefully.

"Very good, Lucy," Joshua confirmed happily. "And we should try to forget what we've seen; and we don't want a repeat; isn't that right, Danny?" The boy's silence and sheepish look were all Joshua needed to put his mind at peace.