

# A Season of Happiness



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## MOONBERRY PIE



MP94

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## STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE BEFUDDLED! Part One

Lucy was sitting at the kitchen table with her younger brother Danny and they had been talking about The Huge Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine. "I know comic-book world is different for us," said Danny, "Because we believe in magic so we can talk to the people in the pictures..."

"And we can actually go there into the story using our Moonberry-Pie cookies," Lucy reminded him. "What don't you understand?"

"Well," Danny started, not quite sure how to go on, "When Granddad brings out a new comic it's as if he doesn't know the stories, but he must do. They're his comics from when he was a kid, so he'd have read them before. I don't get it."

Just then, their grandfather Joshua came in holding a Starlight and Moonshine comic. As soon as he placed it on the table, Danny went to pick it up. Joshua stopped him. "I overheard what you were saying, Danny," he said. "Let me explain something before we start reading. Although comic-book world is a magical place, in some ways it is still like our real world. New things happen day by day, minute by minute. We don't see this until we start to go through the story. I might recall a story from years ago, but when I see it again later, time has moved on for the comic-book characters, and I have no idea how until I read it afresh. Only then can I find out what's happening now, and I won't have a clue how a story will unfold until it does."

"But none of the people in the comic ever seem to get older," observed Danny.

"And they never will," confirmed Joshua. "That's the magic of comic-book world. While we in the real world grow old, Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine will always stay the same age."

"Like Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw," added Lucy unnecessarily.

"Hear that, Brunswick?" Danny said softly as he put a finger into his top shirt pocket. Something in the pocket moved and next second the head of a little mouse appeared. "When I get you back to your special friend Henshaw he'll be the same as he always was. That could be pretty soon, eh Granddad?" he prompted eagerly.

"We'll have to wait and see," said Joshua. "I won't let you Moonberry-Pie into comic-book world if it isn't safe. Let's start reading the latest story. Over to you, Lucy."

His granddaughter turned the comic so that she could see the front. She had to say the words of the title out loud for Danny because he was too young to read and could only look at the pictures: "It just has one word – BEFUDDLED! What does that mean, Granddad?"

"Befuddled means confused or bewildered," explained Joshua.

"They sure look that way," said Danny, pointing at the picture on the comic-book cover.

*Here's something else new readers of Starlight and Moonshine may not know: when one of these three special people in the real world touches the comic, the characters in the picture come to life. And there's another thing: when the ones in the real world speak, whoever's in the picture can hear them.*

Such was the case, and what Danny was referring to did seem rather odd. There were four of them – Captain Starlight, Colonel Moonshine, Lord Nuff-Nuff and his uncle, Professor Dib-Dob. They were standing on a beach and all were frowning at an object in Dib-Dob's hand. He was turning it this way and that and kept scanning the edge of the jungle at the back of the beach.

"What do you think they're puzzling over, Granddad?" queried Lucy.

The moment she spoke, all the characters in the picture looked up. Dib-Dob said a cheery: "Hello Lucy. This is a kind-of map." He held up what looked like a three-pointed star. "But it is also an ancient artefact. I have been commissioned by the Society of Right Royal Explorers to locate where it came from. I'm hoping it is somewhere on this island. As for the artefact, apparently it was set on an altar which was used to practise the art of black magic."

"That sounds cool," chirped Danny.

"But isn't it dangerous?" put in Lucy.

"Not anymore," explained Dib-Dob. "A secret tribe called the Pyth headed by their voodoo witch Mamma Zeeta disappeared long ago..."

Before Dib-Dob could continue, Danny interrupted: "What's foodoo, Granddad?"

"Voodoo, Danny," Joshua corrected. "It's a pretty nasty type of magic that uses hexes," he explained. "And a hex can turn people into zombies."

"Like in the video game," said the boy, "That sounds extra cool."

"I'd hardly call it that, Danny," said his grandfather ominously. "Anyway, why don't we let the Professor tell us more?"

"Thank you, Joshua," said Dib-Dob. "Well, according to rumours, the Pyth lived within a compound – that's a kind-of fenced enclosure like a fortress. This was to keep themselves separated from the ordinary villagers; whom, it is also said, had been bewitched and used as slaves. Whether they disappeared along with Mamma Zeeta and the Pyth is not known. Our first task is to find the compound; then we might discover more about the Pyth and I can report that back to The Royal Society." Turning the map once more he pointed at the jungle. "I think we go that way for starters. Always assuming we can get through the tangle of vegetation."

"Leave that to me," said Moonshine, withdrawing his sword and waving it in the air with a chuckle. "One of the advantages of being a Colonel." Striding to the edge of the jungle he began hacking at it with his sword.

Some minutes passed until Moonshine had succeeded in cutting the beginnings of a track. The others began to trudge after him. Only Lord Nuff-Nuff could be seen because he was lagging behind at the back. Danny stroked the little mouse which was now on the table. "Sorry, Brunswick. There's no sign of Henshaw yet."

Nuff-Nuff heard. Pausing to look up he said: "Henshaw's on the ship, Danny. He's just making some lunch and he'll be along soon. Well, he'd better be."

The boy picked up the mouse and put it back in his pocket. "Turn to the first page, Lucy," he said to his sister. "Let's get into the story. What with black magic and voodoo stuff, I reckon it's going to be really HUGE." And he wasn't wrong.

The first picture of this latest story showed Dib-Dob's expeditionary team walking along the track through the jungle that Moonshine was cutting ahead of them. Nuff-Nuff was at the rear, puffing and muttering: "All this trekking is making me really hungry. I hope Henshaw doesn't take too long to bring the lunch."

The next picture showed Captain Starlight's ship, and there was Henshaw in the galley – that's what sailors call a kitchen. Nuff-Nuff's giant penguin butler was putting the last of the sandwiches into a wicker hamper that was already chock-a-block with food. Danny pulled the little mouse from his pocket and asked in anticipation: "Can I take Brunswick back to Henshaw now, Granddad?"

Joshua thought for a moment before replying: "Might be best to wait a while, Danny. At least until we find out whether there are any dangers ahead." Danny tutted and returned Brunswick to his pocket.

The others had finally made it through the jungle and were facing a collection of mud huts in what was probably once a clearing but was now well-overgrown. At first it seemed there were a number of villagers going about their daily routines, except they were just sprouting up out of the re-growth and weren't moving. "They look like statues," said Starlight. "It's as if they suddenly froze on the spot."

"Perhaps that's what happened when Mamma Zeeta disappeared," suggested Dib-Dob. "Nothing we can do about it now. Let's concentrate on finding the compound." He consulted the artefact again; turning it, looking up, then turning it again. Finally he came to a decision. "I'd say the compound is beyond the village. Come on." And he began walking towards the far side of the village.

The jungle had closed in again, so Moonshine got busy with his sword. Eventually he had hacked the way through to another open expanse which had become overgrown like the village clearing. Despite this, a large structure could be seen towering above the vegetation. "That's it!" declared the Professor with satisfaction. "Mamma Zeeta's fortress."

Unlike the primitive native buildings, this structure was impressive. Constructed of tree trunks, a high wall formed a large circle. Moving closer, Captain Starlight spotted two huge wooden doors in the wall. "That looks like the entrance to the compound," she said. "What now, Professor?"

Dib-Dob walked over to stand before the doors. "I'm guessing Mamma Zeeta's house is inside the compound." He pushed one of the doors. "It's stuck. I need assistance." He waited for the rest of the team to join him and they all pushed. Still the door wouldn't budge. The Professor sighed. "We'll just have to put more effort into it..." He looked up. "I don't suppose you could give us a hand, Joshua?"

"Go on, Granddad," urged Lucy, "And I could come too."

"And me," said Danny.

Joshua was adamant. "You two are to stay here. We don't know what will happen next, and I'm only planning on being there to get the door open; then I'm coming home. I'll be there in a flash, Professor," he said to the comic. Picking up his special magical cookie, he held it in the air and called out: "Moonberry Pie!" In another second Joshua had gone from his kitchen and instantly appeared in the comic-book picture with the other characters.

“Hello, Joshua,” said Moonshine, “Good to see you again. Now, let’s all put in some extra muscle.”

Nuff-Nuff grumbled: “More physical stuff. I’m a Lord – I shouldn’t be doing this. That’s why I’ve got Henshaw; but, of course, he’s never around when I want him.”

With Joshua joining in, at last the door moved and swung inwards. Dib-Dob was first through. For a few seconds he stood motionless panning his gaze around the compound. Like the ones in the village there were more statues here. “They are probably the Pyth, Mamma Zeeta’s secret tribe; and there’s her house.”

The hut was large and imposing. Set in the ground in front was a totem pole with things dangling from it – bones, feathers and animal skulls. On the outside walls of the hut were painted symbols like the ones on the artefact, plus pictures of angry-looking faces. Although the images had stood the test of time, the building itself was in a state of disrepair. Some of the roof was missing and the main door had fallen off. Leaning through the opening, Dib-Dob ducked back suddenly and gasped as a screeching parrot came zooming out of the building just missing his head. He waited a few seconds. When nothing else surprising occurred he stepped through the doorway into the hut.

“This has to be Mamma Zeeta’s,” he said to the others as they filed in; and that included Joshua who was intrigued to see for himself before returning home. There was only one room, a very large one with a dirt floor. The walls were decorated like the outside, plus there were a number of tapestries depicting strange, scary beasts. “And that throne at the back was probably where she used to sit as she performed her magic.” A large, waist-high block hewn from solid timber sat before the throne, and on it were a number of thin stone slabs cut into shapes. “This is probably the altar,” said Dib-Dob. As he approached it something weird happened. The artefact in his hand had warmed up and was vibrating. Next, although not his doing, his arm was stretching out towards the altar. He grunted as he tried to resist the strange force, then gasped out: “I can’t stop it pulling me! And the artefact is getting hotter!”

The scene startled Lucy. “Come back, Granddad! Come back NOW!”

While Joshua fished in his pocket for his Moonberry Pie cookie, Dib-Dob was trying his hardest to prevent himself being pulled towards the altar; but he was failing miserably. Joshua’s fingers closed over the cookie and he was withdrawing it from his pocket at the same time that the Professor’s hand was over the top of the altar. With a sudden jerk, the artefact jumped from his hand, spun momentarily in the air, then dropped down to sit exactly in an indentation the same shape and size as the three-pointed star.

“NOW, Granddad!” shouted Lucy. “Before it’s too late!”

It may well have been. Everything went black for a second; then the light returned as an enormous flash and crackle of lightning exploded. That was followed by a buzzing hum, growing louder by the second. The room began filling with an eerie green light. “Um-aah!” exclaimed Danny. “Granddad’s still there; and all of them are looking at something.”

That something was materialising on the throne gradually until it was fully formed. “Oh no!” gasped Lucy. “Mamma Zeeta’s back! What are we going to do now?”

What indeed...?