

# A Season of Happiness



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## MOONBERRY PIE



MP82

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### STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE THE HIDDEN TREASURE Part One

A new Starlight and Moonshine comic was open in front of them, and the three people in the real world were sitting at Joshua's kitchen table looking puzzled. With most of the other comics they'd read there was usually, a picture on the front page; but this time there was just the title. "It's another Huge adventure called The Hidden Treasure," said Lucy.

Her younger brother Danny opened the comic to the first page and, as sometimes happens with the Starlight and Moonshine stories, only the first picture panel had been drawn whereas the others were blank. None of the three were concerned. They had seen this before and knew that the rest of the panels would fill in as the story unfolded.

Danny in particular was sure everything would be revealed soon enough. "It's a picture of Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw in the kitchen," he commented, and because he couldn't read yet, he asked his sister: "What are they saying, Lucy?"

"They're arguing as usual," she replied, and prepared to begin reading out loud from the comic. As she told the story, Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw his giant penguin butler could be seen moving around in the picture, something else that is special about the Starlight and Moonshine comics.

Lucy continued... "Lord Nuff-Nuff is saying, well growling actually: What's that mouse doing on the table, Henshaw?"

"Waiting for his breakfast," droned Henshaw irritably, "But thanks to you there isn't any."

The next picture appeared and showed Nuff-Nuff's face turning red. "What?!!" he spluttered. "No Crunchy Corn Doo-Dads?"

"You ate the last yesterday," sneered Henshaw, "And as you're so mean with your money I couldn't afford to buy any more. I spent the last of the housekeeping on some eggs. The best I can do for you is a couple of boiled ones. Brunswick won't mind - he doesn't like them."

Nuff-Nuff frowned. "Who's Brunswick?"

"My friend, the mouse," said Henshaw.

"I never said you could have a friend!" challenged Nuff-Nuff, "And if in a moment of weakness I had, it certainly wouldn't have been a mouse." He snorted and scowled. "I suppose eggs will have to do, and don't forget my soldiers; or has your mouse friend eaten the bread?" He spun and began stomping out of the kitchen, snatching a packet of crackers from a shelf by the door in passing. "Maybe these

will keep my hunger at bay. Bring my eggs to the library. I have some reading to do.”

Henshaw stood staring at Nuff-Nuff’s back for a moment before putting two eggs in a pan. “Typical,” he muttered to Brunswick. “We’re starving and he pinches the last of the biscuits. As for reading, I didn’t know his Lard-ship could even read.”

All the picture panels on the first page had now been filled, whereas the ones on the facing page were still blank. Danny was clearly puzzled: “It’s just about Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw. Where are Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine?”

“I’m sure they’ll be in the story soon,” assured his grandfather. “Be patient, Danny. Ah,” he said, “The first picture on the right-hand page is appearing.”

Joshua was quite right. The next picture seemed to be drawing itself and it showed Captain Starlight on the deck of her ship. She was looking over Colonel Moonshine’s shoulder at the note in his hand which had presumably been delivered by Beryl the giant seagull who was perched on the wheelhouse roof waiting. “This is very odd, Starlight,” said the Colonel as he read the note. “It simply says: *Help! I’ve lost Lord Nuff-Nuff.*” Moonshine looked up. “Do we give Beryl a reply to take back?”

“I think we’d best just go ourselves, Moonshine,” said Starlight. “Do the blow-up thing with the balloons and get the ship into the air. If we fly we’ll be in Gumbyland almost as quickly as Beryl.”

Danny was still confused. “The note says Henshaw’s lost Lord Nuff-Nuff, but he can’t be lost – he was on the first page.” But when they looked back, there was no sign of Nuff-Nuff in any of the pictures. Strange, wouldn’t you agree?

The next picture appeared. “Look, Danny,” said Lucy. “Granddad was right about Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine. This new picture shows them in the Gumbyland Manor library talking to Henshaw...”

“I left him dipping a soldier into a boiled egg,” reported the penguin butler. “Needless to say, I had to crack it for him. Typical lazy Lord,” he moaned. “Anyway, then I left him to it. When I came back for the plate, he was nowhere to be seen. And I couldn’t believe the mess he’d made – crumbs all over the table, and he’d even spilt egg on whatever book he was reading.” Henshaw leaned over for a closer look. “Now I’m beginning to understand. This is the journal of his ancestor, Count Yum-Yum.”

“Why would he bother with that?” queried Starlight.

“We are short of money,” explained Henshaw, “And it’s my guess he’s got a bee in his bonnet and has gone in search of the Count’s hidden treasure.” He went on to relate ancient history: “It was said that long, long ago Yum-Yum learned an army from Darkmire was coming to invade Gumbyland. He had already prepared for this possibility by having a secret room built deep below the manor; so, to safeguard his treasure he hid it there. Then, to avoid being captured, Yum-Yum was thought to have set sail for foreign parts and was never seen again. Every ruler of Gumbyland since then has looked for the treasure, but it was never found. My guess is that it’s just a myth and there never was any treasure; but our silly Lord obviously thinks differently and he’s gone looking for it,” Henshaw finished.

“Well,” put in Moonshine, glancing down at the open journal, “At least there are instructions on how to find it; but why would the Count write a list that *anyone* could read if he wanted his treasure to stay hidden?”

“For his own benefit,” explained Henshaw. “He was said to be very forgetful.”

“So,” pondered Starlight thoughtfully, “If we follow the instructions we should be able to find where Nuff-Nuff went from here. Where do we start, though?”

While Henshaw had been telling Yum-Yum’s story he had noticed Brunswick nibbling at breadcrumbs on the table. Now the mouse jumped off and began scuttling across the floor, stopping occasionally to pick up an odd crumb. Reaching a bookcase on the far wall, he flattened himself and pushed his nose into a gap under the bottom shelf. Scrambling backwards, he pulled something out. Henshaw watched as the mouse sat upright and began munching whatever he was holding between his front feet. “I’d say my friend might have found the answer to your question Captain. Look at Brunswick – that’s a piece of cracker he’s eating, and Lord Nuff-Nuff took some with him to snack on. I bet he’s somewhere behind the bookcase.”

Moonshine strode to the bookcase where Brunswick had found the cracker. “Maybe there’s a door to another room? And it might be where the treasure is hidden,” and he added almost breathlessly: “That would be really HUGE!”

“Not likely, Moonshine,” said the Captain. “According to the story, the treasure is hidden deep *underground*.”

“Put your hand on the picture, Danny,” said Joshua. “I want to speak with them.”

*Of course, all previous readers of the Starlight and Moonshine stories know that these special people in the real world can talk to comic-book world when young Danny or one of the others place a hand on a picture. They can also transport themselves into that world, which is really cool. But more of this later...*

The instant Danny’s hand touched the comic-book picture, all three in Lord Nuff-Nuff’s library looked up. “Hello, there,” said Moonshine with a beaming smile. “I’m glad you’ve come at last. I think we may need your help – we’ve lost Nuff-Nuff.”

“We know, Colonel Moonshine,” said Lucy. “Granddad wants to talk to you about it. Over to you, Granddad.”

“Hello, everyone,” said Joshua. “It’s seems obvious Nuff-Nuff is now on the hunt for the treasure; so the clues for finding him will be in Count Yum-Yum’s reminder to himself. What is the first clue, the starting point?”

The three in comic-book world gathered around the table. Moonshine scanned the journal. “Apparently, the search for the treasure begins beyond the wall of knowledge.”

“That’s probably the bookcase,” said Henshaw pointing at a floor-to-ceiling shelf unit filled with books that spanned the entire wall. There must be a door in it somewhere. Does it say how to open it?”

Moonshine carried on reading; then he paused. “Yes, Henshaw. Well done. Yum-Yum writes: *In the Land of Gumby History, unlock the door with number three*. What’s that supposed to mean?”

Joshua spoke to them again: “Are there, by any chance, some books about the history of Gumbyland?”

“Quite a few,” said Starlight, walking to a particular section of a shelf. “Here they are, and it just happens that the third in the set is upside down.”

“By Jove, that’s it, Starlight,” declared Moonshine. “Do something with it and the door might open.”

Starlight’s hand rose to pull the book from the shelf; but as her fingers touched the spine she hesitated when Henshaw called out: “Hold on Captain. I’ve just wiped

off the egg Lord Nuff-Nuff spilled on the journal, and it was covering the next bit which says: *Each step I take may be my last. An iron gauntlet I must pass.*" Henshaw frowned. "Sounds risky. If a door does open, I strongly suggest you have a good look before stepping through."

"Thank you Henshaw, I'll do that," said Starlight, catching hold of the upside-down book. Giving it a tug, she announced: "It seems to be stuck." Pulling a bit harder, although the bottom of the book where it sat on the shelf didn't move, the top swung down. There was a click; then a grating sound as that part of the bookcase began to move, swinging inwards like a door. Starlight jumped back and stood clear to let the door finish opening, then peered around it.

"Well," said Moonshine, "What do you see?"

"Not much," replied Starlight. "It's just a small, narrow room... Oh, wait a minute," she added, "There seems to be a gap on one side at the far end." As she said this, Brunswick scuttled past her into the corridor. Starlight watched as the little mouse paused to pick up a biscuit crumb before running to the end and disappearing through the gap. "Nuff-Nuff must have gone this way," declared Starlight. "Brunswick is following his trail of crumbs. With luck he'll lead us to him."

"Be careful," Lucy warned. All three in the real world were tense as the comic-book characters began to enter the room behind the bookcase. The next picture showed them turning at the end and proceeding along a narrow corridor; then they just stopped and stared.

"The iron gauntlet," reported Starlight unnecessarily. She was meaning the passageway in front of them; and spaced evenly along it with backs to a wall on one side were eight suits of armour. Each held a raised axe. "At least they aren't moving," she said.

"And there's Nuff-Nuff," said Moonshine, pointing at a figure half-way along the corridor and sitting on the floor. "What's he doing there?"

"Stuffing his face with crackers by the looks of it," said Henshaw, as he began walking towards his Lordship.

Nuff-Nuff saw his butler advancing and shouted: "No! Don't come any closer! You'll start them up again!" But he was too late.

Nothing happened until the penguin had passed the first suit of armour; then, with a lot of creaking, squeaking and groaning they all began moving, chopping down with their axes. Henshaw panicked and jumped back just in time before the swinging axe came down, barely missing him. The butler breathed a sigh of relief. "That was a bit hairy. Count Yum-Yum must have engineered this so that the axes started chopping automatically as soon as someone moved into range."

"Not so sure about that, Henshaw," said Moonshine. "I seem to recall an instruction in Yum-Yum's reminder *before* the gauntlet bit. It was to do with opening a gate: something about turning a dagger to a particular number, then something else I can't remember." He took a moment to look around and spotted a circular, iron shield on the wall beside the opening to the corridor Nuff-Nuff was trapped in. It had numbers round the outside like those of a clock; and instead of a hand there was a dagger fixed to the centre at the pointy end, while the hilt had been turned round to the number eight.

"It does explain how our daft lord managed to open the gate," droned Henshaw. "He must have remembered that part from his reading. What I don't understand,

though, is Count Yum-Yum risking being chopped to bits himself. He would have set up a way to stop the axes. Did anyone think to bring the journal?" There were a few seconds of silence. It seemed no-one had thought about that.

"Oh, well," said Moonshine, "Not to worry - I'll go back for it."

While Moonshine was gone, Starlight and Henshaw continued to watch the axes chop-chopping, up and down, up and... Suddenly they stopped. Not for long, it seemed. The little mouse had been following the trail of biscuit crumbs that Nuff-Nuff had dropped, a search which took him into the corridor. "No, Brunswick!" Henshaw warned. "You'll start them up again!"

"He'll be alright," Starlight assured him. "I'd say he's not big enough to trigger... Uh-oh!" Apparently, even a creature as small as a mouse was detected and the axes began chopping again. Instead of going back like Henshaw had, Brunswick carried on scuttling, running the gauntlet of chopping axes until he made it to where Nuff-Nuff was sitting. It was a good spot for him, what with all the biscuit crumbs scattered on the floor. Nuff-Nuff, however, wasn't impressed with the company.

"Still, they're both safe for the time being," said Starlight. "Once Moonshine gets back with the journal we can find a way to stop the axes."

"Not going to happen, Starlight," said the Colonel as he walked up to the other two. "The door to the library had closed and I couldn't figure out how to open it. What do we do now?"

"Hey," Danny chirped up, "I can go to the library and get the journal." Before anyone could stop him, he picked up his cookie, placed a hand on the picture of the library and called out: "Moonberry Pie!"

*This, I should tell you, is what I mentioned earlier – the way people from the real world can transport themselves into comic-book world by using a Moonberry-Pie cookie and saying the magic words.*

In an instant, Danny had gone from the kitchen, and he should have re-appeared in the library; but he wasn't there; nobody was.

Lucy gasped. "He isn't in *any* of the pictures," she said, "And he isn't here; so where could he have gone?"

Joshua simply stared down at the comic. "I don't know, Lucy," replied the old man sounding very worried. "I have a horrible feeling he may not be anywhere."

"But that's not possible, is it?" queried his granddaughter.

He let out a long sigh. "I'm afraid I don't know that either. All I can think is that there is something very wrong with this comic; very, very wrong!"