

THE GOOD SEGWACIAN





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The PM Saga, Book VIII

By Susan Kirby

Christmas Monsterland was gone. Disappeared. Not a trace was left when PM returned from her trip to Washington, D.C., where she had lobbied for the restoration of the spirit of Christmas eliminated by the recent budget enhancements. When she tried to teletransport to her home, to the cave where she and her husband Alabaster Eggshell had shared so many blissful moments, she found herself in the middle of an iceberg. She mentally reset her internal compass, carefully calculating her coordinates. But to no avail. What was once Christmas Monsterland was a now only a gigantic ice cube clinking in the great cocktail called Earth.

She aimed for the North Pole, plotting a landing in the center of Mr. and Mrs. Santa's workshop. Land she did in a wooden structure. But it was empty--devoid of elves, reindeer, toys, candy, and the jolly holiday couple that had enriched the lives of so many for so long. Even Relicta, the ET IT was gone! In fact, the cabin looked more like an abandoned shack from Robert Peary's expedition than the beloved home of her friends.

"Oh no!" she cried. "It has finally happened! Everyone in the world has stopped believing in us. Santa said it was possible.* The Society for the Elimination of Good Will and Christmas has won! Or," she thought, "even worse! My chronicler has run out of ideas and has decided to wipe us off the map." She cried softly, "Boo hoo, boo hoo."

(Now, dear readers, do you really think I would do that? I admit that panicked by lack of inspiration, the thought had crossed my mind, but I could not perpetrate such a callous, crude, un-Christmas-like crime on my public!)

"Now what am I going to do? If my Christmas friends don't exist, then I can't possibly either." And she started to fade away, wailing a loud "Oh deeeaaaarrrrr!!!!!"

*See *A Very Moral Christmas, Book V*, as well as other stories of PM (Purple Monster) and her friends, which can be obtained from the author.

"PM! Wake up! Wake up! That must have been some dream you were having," shouted Alabaster, shaking his mauvette mate.

"Oh Al, it *was* only a dream! I'm so glad. Let me look around. Oh yes, there's the fireplace, and the stockings hung by the chimney with care, and the tree, and ... Oh, I've got to call Santa, make sure he's all right!"

"He's fine, dear," reassured Alabaster. "Relate your somnolent saga." PM did, and Alabaster shook his head in sympathy.

"PM, you have so much on your mind -- your diplomatic duties, the new group, not to mention (*pause*) Christmas Day's festivities. But you're still here. We're all here."

"But darling, it could so easily happen!" she insisted, stretching out the kink that had kunked in her tail.

"Since we agreed on our agreement, and planned what we planned, you've been under a strain. It's getting to you. Maybe you should cancel this year's ride--have your sister take your place."

"Cerise? She's so fat now she'd ground the sleigh flat in no time!"

"My love, my life, my one and only! First nightmares and now nastiness? That's not like you. I think our preparations are having an ill effect."

(Preparations? What preparations? Perhaps now is the time to talk about babies--specifically Christmas Monsterland babies. Although we won't discuss the anatomical vagaries of how they're created--I bet you thought I just made one up, and that was it!--suffice it to say that careful planning is required. The basics are: Two Christmas Monsters--one male and one female--snerkle on Christmas Day. The following Christmas Eve a baby Christmas Monster appears. But the sneorkling must be practiced diligently all year long if the one great day is to be successful. In addition, the female requires much tender loving care for three weeks prior to Christmas Day, as well as the consumption of great quantities of chocolate and champagne. It's a dirty business, but someone has to do it.)

"Yes, I suppose you're right," sighed PM, grabbing a handful of truffles from the nightstand and gobbling them down. "I suppose the champagne is causing my bad dreams."



"No doubt," agreed Alabaster amorously, and he touched PM in a place that suggested they resume practicing for the upcoming ritual.

* * *

On the opposite edge of Christmas Monsterland, Cerise burped her fourth little Monster and spoke to her mate.

"Fir," she said, "I think PM is planning a *child*."

Fir shifted his gaze from his computer to his rotund wife (*well, she is fat*). "How do you know, dear?" he hummed, then returned to the screen.

"Holly says Alabaster's been stocking up on Lindt's, Hershey's kisses, and M&M's, and Laurel said he's bought out the supply of Sparkling Bubbling '80. You know what that means! They might as well have advertised it in *The Times*! I can't believe they're really going to *do* it."

Fir once again looked up. "Why not, dear?" he inquired, then continued to peck away at the keyboard.

"Because with those two, who knows what they'll get! I mean, it could be a *turquoise* Christmas Monster!"

"Whatever they have, dear," replied Fir, this time without glancing up, "I'm sure it will be much loved, just as ours are."

"Speaking of ours, that reminds me," Cerise countered, "Brick, your eldest son, is being badly influenced by my sister and her band of misfits. Since joining that group, he thinks being different is good! He's been threatening to dye his mane and change his name to *Kumquat*!" Cerise waddled to her husband. "And Rosette, your sweet, innocent daughter, talks of nothing but being a Paunchette! They are being *corrupted*, Fir, I tell you. You must *do* something!"

"My dear," said Fir, unable to ignore his wife any longer. "That group is good...and they've asked me to write lyrics for them." He resumed humming and began making a list of words that rhyme with poinsetta.

Cerise had no further comment.

What group, you ask? Peppermint Paunch had spent the last year putting together a rock band, "Peppermint Paunch and the Detectives." Alabaster, who as a lonely youth had pounded a set of drums to satisfy his creative urges and ease his psychic pain, began practicing again and was recruited as percussionist. Elvira Fernhat played bass guitar, and Clyde, fully recovered from his previous year's debauchery, discovered his fingers were adept on a keyboard. Rudolph jingled bells, Relicta was on synthesizer, and Paunch strummed lead guitar. PM's nephew Brick provided vocals, and her nieces Rosette (Cerise's daughter) and Flame and Alizarin (her brother Viridian's offspring) were the "Paunchettes"—the backup singers.

They had painstakingly rehearsed all year, working on new rock arrangements for such old favorites as "Away in a



Manger" and "The First Noel." Fir had indeed been writing away, composing new ditties like "Elves Just Want To Have Fun" and "Reindeer Yell."

The Arctic assemblage was heavily booked for the holiday season throughout Christmas Monsterland and the North Pole. They played while Santa's helpers worked, which St. Nick insisted had doubly doubled their volume--in productivity and sound. Whenever PM's responsibilities permitted, she joined them, adding her lilting lilac voice. Occasionally Mrs. Claus filled in on the chimes. There were no dreams of record contracts or music videos--they just had fun making merry Yuletide music.

* * *

A week before Christmas Mrs. Santa returned from her aquacise class to discover her husband pacing the floor.

"I feel so frustrated," he explained when asked about the cause of the impending hole in the carpet. "So much is going on in the world that I have no control over. The starving in Africa, the dying in India, the homeless in the U.S., the fighting in Central America. And I'm supposed to do Christmas as usual. It's hard to ho-ho-ho when the world is no-no-no."

Relicta and Clyde Elf, arriving for rehearsal, overheard. "I've been thinking about taking off again," said the space traveler. "Maybe I can find another galaxy. I've enjoyed the band, but when the North Pole is depressed, I'm not sure there's any hope."

Clyde shook his head. "Running away won't help. It's selfish and doesn't accomplish anything."

"I suppose so," acknowledged Relicta. "But what can we do?"

Mrs. Santa sat in her rocker. "You know," she said, "we were given certain tasks--to spread joy and love, to give presents to those who need them, to help celebrate a glorious birth. We can do no more, and no less. Humankind, in turn, was given certain commandments,



and the most important of all was that they love one another."

"Yes," agreed Santa. "People have been charged with a heavy responsibility. Yet nobody wants to acknowledge it. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and everyone thinks it's someone else's problem. My, my what fools those mortals sometimes be."

A fog of gloom fell on the room. PM teletransported herself into the muck.

"Oh dear, what have we here?" inquired the North Pole Ambassador. "Don't tell me a return of Apathia Sowhata?"

"No," Mrs. S. reassured, rocking once again. "Just a philosophical discussion of the frustrations we face. It's a harder task this year spreading Christmas cheer." She recounted the conversation.

"Mmm," PM commiserated. "It makes me wonder if Al and I have made the right decision, bringing a new life into this world. We are planning an addition to the family, you know."

"A new addition? Are you getting a dog?" queried Clyde eagerly.

Santa's eyes twinkled once again. "Yes, PM, your mother told us there has been a recent run on Godiva chocolates."

PM flushed fuschia. "Well, yes ... it is part of it all, you know."

"So we've heard," snickered Rudolph, who had just joined the group accompanied by Alabaster.

"What is?" Clyde asked. (He hadn't really understood this new subject one bit.)

"I'll explain later," Rudolph sotto voce'd. Then aloud he said, "Hey, Clyde, after rehearsal will you teach me how to work your new word processor? Santa said you'd help me make the tags for the presents."

"Yes, righto," the elf assented. (Since receiving the long-promised computer and printer, Clyde felt very, very important indeed. His lists of "naughty" and "nice" were now up-to-date and *quite* accurate.)

Peppermint Paunch bounded in boldly. "Hey Detectives," he bubbled, "guess what?" All looked at him blankly. "I got us a *real* gig—at Madison Square Garden on Christmas Eve!

I've been talking to Mick and Sting and some of the other bands and we're doing a benefit for Save the Children! Ain't it great?"

"Hmm," said Santa. "Maybe that's what we need to help us feel like we're doing more for the world. Those British rockers recorded 'Do They Know It's Christmas,' and it's helping. Mrs. C. and I have too much to do here to go along, but you should do it. Just make sure you're back in time for the ride."

"Oh, we will be," promised Paunch. "It's an all-day event, starting early. We're scheduled first! PM, you'll sing, won't you?"

PM nodded. "As long as I'm not too exhausted for Christmas Day."

"Why?" asked Peppermint Paunch.

Alabaster grinned. "I'll explain later," he said.

Mrs. Santa furrowed her forehead. "I don't know. This is the kind of opportunity SEGWAC's been looking for--so many of the Christmas folk together at one time, and on Christmas Eve. That organization has been especially perverse this year. They're not responsible for the drought, I know, but I think the worldwide indifference until recently, not to mention the political haggling about solutions, may be their doing. And the blinders that people wear as they pass the homeless in the streets have the SEGWAC label on them."

"We'll be careful," insisted Paunch, thrilled that a project of his was so successful.

Alabaster drew PM aside. "Mrs. C. is onto something," he whispered worriedly. "What if SEGWAC knows we're planning a kid ... they kidnapped you once, they might do it again, to prevent us from being together on Christmas Day."

"It's a chance we have to take," she replied. "With this concert we can bring the true spirit of Christmas--that of giving--a step further."

* * *

The Christmas coterie arrived in New York December 21st to test their equipment and do the usual media blitz that encircles such events. Because of the housing shortage, Elvira, PM and the Paunchettes shared a room--to the great delight of the nieces, who (although not yet old enough to be

aware of the significance of PM's recent food fetish) found the cartons of bonbons an added bonus. However Alabaster, who had to stay with the guys, was not as thrilled and feared that given the extra time separated from PM his drum technique might improve, but his other technique faced decline.

After a long day of rehearsal on the 22nd, the troop attended a function at Studio 54, where they danced and discoed until the wee hours. There were thousands of people and other invited beings. Penelope Pigeon came, and Gerald Giraffe. Calico Kitty catwalked, Brendan Boxer boogied, and Thomasina Turkey trotted. Someone mentioned to PM that the villainous Viper Carrion had been spotted in the balcony, but there was so much noise she didn't hear. Everyone was having such a good time.



So when 4:00 A.M. came, the house lights went on, and the band reassembled in the lobby, looking a little worse for wear but happy, it was the first time that anyone noticed that Rosette was missing.

"Oh dear, oh dear," hiccupped PM (*the Dom Perignon part of the mating ritual is something that should perhaps be changed*). "What am I going to tell Cerise? If anything happened to Rosette — she's so naive, so innocent of the ways of the World, not to mention New York. We have to find her!"

So once again, just as the year before, a search of the Big Apple was conducted, with Christmas creatures fanning out north, south, east and west of 54th Street and Eighth Avenue.

Rosette, it seems, had been highstepping away under the colored strobes of the disco. At one point, when the blue lights were on and she had a decidedly magenta tint, several nefarious-looking men surrounded her and pushed her outside. They dragged her to 42nd Street and gave her over to robbers, who stripped her and beat her, and departed, leaving her half dead under the marquee of a movie theatre featuring "Chainsaw Santa." Now by chance Rev. Jerry Falldownthewell was going down that road; and when he saw her, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a mink-clad couple, returning to their car after a Broadway opening, when they came to the place, saw her, and passed by on the other side. But a young man, clad in black, with snake-like eyes, saw her, and had compassion. And he bound her wounds, and carried her to her hotel, then called the police who let the word go out to PM and her friends that the missing Monster had been found.

When all encircled the pale Rosette, PM asked, "Who was it that saved you?"

"Some guy with slicked-back hair. He had on a long black cape with a hood. He looked like he was into heavy metal. His name was Vulture, or something like that."

Alabaster traded looks with Peppermint. "Vulture Carrion, Viper's son. Is it possible?"



"If so," chortled Peppermint, "he'll have a lot to explain to his father. The leader of SEGWAC's U.S. headquarters is not going to be pleased to hear that his own flesh and blood helped save a Christmas Monster! I imagine that Viper was behind the original abduction. It sounds like his work. In the dark he probably mistook Rosette for PM."

"Could be. But we're just glad Rosette is safe," PM rejoiced. "We must double our guard and not split up again."

* * *

The evening of the 23rd was spent at Madison Square Garden checking lights and sound levels. The North Pole band practiced their numbers and made friends with the other participants. Several reports were whispered in Peppermint's and Alabaster's ears of sinister figures lurking in the shadows, and all of the Christmas party made sure to keep their eyes on one another. Relicta confided to PM that she had a feeling in her antennae that someone was staring at her, but strangely she registered no evil vibrations.

Knocking off early, the musicians returned to their hotel. After a conference call with the North Pole and Christmas Monsterland to check present preparation progress there, the crew fell asleep, visions of musical notes dancing in their heads.

* * *

At the crack of dawn on Christmas Eve all assembled at the concert hall. Already thousands of young people were gathered outside, clutching tickets in hand, anxious to participate in the special event. They were smiling, happy at the chance to hear good tunes and help the world at the same time.

After checking their equipment, Peppermint Paunch and the Detectives went to the green room to wait. PM complained of butterflies in her stomach, attributing them to her usual nervousness before a performance. Alabaster attributed her indigestion to the two quarts of chocolate-chocolate chip ice cream consumed earlier that morning. Relicta mentioned that, once again, she had sensed someone watching her, hovering about her Moog. "I am so afraid SEGWAC will try to sabotage this event," she said. The others nodded uneasily.

"Fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la," PM and Brick warmed up their voices as their moment drew near. Peppermint tuned his guitar, Elvira ran bass runs, and Alabaster beat flam paradiddle-diddles and ratamacues on his foot.

"And now, all the way from the North Pole, Peppermint Paunch and THE DETECTIVES!" The crowd roared in anticipation as the eleven rushed onstage. "One, two, three, four" shouted Alabaster, and the concert began.

*There's no excuse for hunger
In a world that has so much;
When people are cold and lonely
We've lost the Christmas touch.*

*We've got to love our neighbor
As much as we love ourselves
That goes for Christmas Monsters,
ETs, reindeer and elves.*

The instrumentals took over and the light show began. Laser snowflakes filled the air, and red and green bulbs glittered merrily. The crowd cheered and sang along.

Then silence. And blackness. Then screams and cries of "What's happening?" Panic engulfed the audience as the only visible light--Rudolph's nose--blinked on and off across the stage. Then the stagelights went on as quickly as they'd gone off. PM looked stage right to see a black-caped man standing over the electrical panel. Rudolph had him pinned against the board with his antlers.

"Just a slight technical problem," Peppermint reassured the crowd, and the singing resumed. The band finished their set with an electrified version of "O Holy Night," Rudolph tinkling tintinnabulary ting-a-lings with one antler while containing his prisoner with the other.

The young listeners applauded and applauded, their appreciation resounding throughout the hall. The company made a glowing exit, Clyde remaining to announce the next group. Once offstage the band followed the hooded captive and his captor to the dressing room.

"Alright, you SEGWAC scourge, you denizen, you blackguard, you purveyor of malevolent mayhem and madness, let's get a look at you!" growled Peppermint as he ripped back the hood.

"Oh my," inhaled Relicta, "I think that's who's been staring at me!"

"Oh my," exhaled Rosette. "That's the man who rescued me last night."

"Oh my," coughed P M, "I think we'd better find out what's going on here."

"Who are you?" asked Alabaster. "Or should I guess? You're Vulture Carrion, sent by your father to make one more effort to destroy Christmas."

"Yes," said the young man, who answered the Christmas crew while gazing only at Relicta. His voice came as a surprise, given the band's expectations of sneering and snarling. "I am Vulture Carrion," he confessed in soft and gentle tones, "but I swear I didn't try to disrupt your concert. It was a wonderful performance. I was the one who turned the lights back on."

"You know, he may be telling the truth," Rudolph reluctantly admitted. "The lights went on before I reached him—I didn't touch them."

Vulture rushed on. "You see, I knew my father was plotting a disaster—he hoped for panic and riot, to turn a joyous occasion into a deadly one while keeping you from taking your Christmas ride. I couldn't let him do it."

"But," said Relicta, "aren't you taking a big risk, defying your father like that?" Her voice, too, had a soft tone.

"Oh yes," agreed Vulture. "But for a while now I've felt Dad was wrong. All my life I've been trained and groomed to



follow in my father's footsteps. I've been to business school and was on track to become the chairman of the board of the SEGWAC Bank and Trust. I even have my own Swiss account. Everything was unquestionable—get, get some more, and then get some more. No matter who I got it from. But one day, while evicting some poor tenants from a slum tenement I own, I came upon this book. I had never seen it before, since Dad forbade it in the mansion. I read it. In the first part, and again in the second, it was repeated, over and over—'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* And then I read: 'If I speak in the tongues of men ... but have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ... And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; and the greatest of these is charity.' I looked up 'charity' and found it meant 'love.' 'Love' was heresy in my house. 'Neighbor' I thought meant the guy who owned the coop building next to mine, and I detest him. So I decided to find out what this book was talking about. Dad always ranted that if he could only rid the universe of the North Pole and Christmas Monsterland residents, he'd eliminate good will forever. And he particularly raved against PM, griping that she always speaks of 'love, love, love' as if one can make a profit from it. I went to Studio 54 to see if I could meet the living lavender legend. I witnessed my father and his meanies abducting Rosette. I followed them, lost them, then discovered Rosette and took her home. Yesterday I hung around the concert hall, gathering courage to speak. Then I saw her ...," indicating Relicta, "and was overcome with shyness. I've never had that feeling before, and I couldn't approach. Today, when the lights went out, all I could think to do was stop my father. I want to join your group, to defect as it were."

"Don't trust him," warned Peppermint. "This is another SEGWAC trick, to get a spy into the North Pole."

"No," echoed Elvira, "Santa says we are to be very very careful. We can't take a SEGWACian home with us!"

"I don't blame you for doubting me," sighed Vulture. "But I am truly, truly sorry about all my past wrongdoing."

"Sure, sure," chirped Clyde curiously. "Tell us another one."

**See Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:36-39; Matthew 19:16-22.*

"Wait," Relicta interrupted, keeping her eyes on the man. "Doesn't that same book he was talking about say something about forgiveness as well?"

"Indeed it does," PM nodded.

"So how do I get to be a Christmas person," asked Vulture, "after I've learned to love my neighbor?"

"Go," PM paraphrased instructions, "sell what you possess and give to the poor; and come, follow the Christmas star."

When the young man heard this he looked sorrowful, for he had great possessions. "Give away my condo?"

"Yes," replied Alabaster.

"My Lamborghini?"

"Yes," replied Clyde.

"My Miami Dolphins season tickets?"

"Yup," insisted Peppermint.

"Oh brother," moaned Vulture. "My Sony Walkman?"

"You bet," said Rosette.

"My ... it pains me ... recently acquired, signed first editions of the complete set of the *PM Saga*, Books I-VII?"

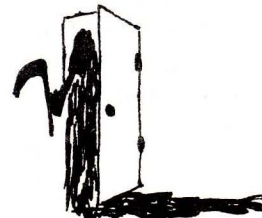
The group winced. "Well ...," mused PM, "maybe you can donate them to Santa for his library."

"Well--okey-dokey. I'll do it."

With this the gang cheered, Relicta seemingly louder than the others. At that moment a noxious stench oozed into the room from the hallway outside the dressing room door.

"It's my Dad!" warned Vulture frightfully. "You must return to the North Pole now! He'll be so angry when he sees me, no telling what he'll do to you! I'll stay and stave him off."

"No need," PM assured. "Come with us." And she teletransported all to the North Pole just as Viper's satanic shadow seeped under the door.



* * *

Mr. and Mrs. Claus warmly greeted the stranger. They asked him no questions after hearing the story, but extended their hands in fellowship.

"I am so grateful you took me in," said Vulture. "I want to do all I can to make up for my past errors."

Santa look thoughtful. "You are welcome to stay here, Vulture—perhaps you might consider changing your name—you could even become Culture Vulture—but I think it would be better if after tonight you returned to your home. I don't want to put you in a compromising position, but you should at least *talk* to your father. You can do more there than here. It will be difficult, of course. For some reason love, which is free, is harder to give and receive than money. Maybe you'll help change that. We'll talk more after our ride. You can decide."

"If you do return," suggested Relicta, carefully choosing her words, "perhaps I can go with you, support you when you're tempted. I too have so much to learn. Maybe we can discover together."

"I think, maybe so," said the young man. PM and Alabaster looked at each other in recognition of what seemed to be developing between the two North Pole aliens. Elvira looked at Clyde to see if he might be getting any sense of what was going on, hoping one day to rock his socks like he rocks hers. (*These mushy scenes are getting to me, too.*)

"Santa, darling," bellowed Mrs. Claus from the doorway, "you'd better shake your booty and grab the reins! We don't want to be late."

"Rudolph, saddle up! PM, if you eat another Milk Dud you're going to get air sick before we reach Albuquerque! Alabaster, are you going with us?"

"Wouldn't miss it for the world! Got to keep in shape for tomorrow!"

"My one and only," swooned PM as her ermine paramour harnessed her in her lead-sleighpuller place. Peppermint Paunch and his Detectives set up their instruments in the back of the sleigh, and amplified loudly as they drove out of sight was the downbeat and intro to "Here Comes Santa Claus!"



A rollicking good Christmas and a rocking New Year to you all!

