Comic Shop Mysteries Book One

The Uncracked Code

FEATURING KOMODO JONES

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troika

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Acknowledgements

KOMODO JONES

The Serum

THANK YOU FOR LOOKING AFTER ME, SAM. I DON'T FEEL SAFE HERE SINCE THE BURGLARY.

YOU'RE WELCOME, GRANNY. YOU'VE ALWAYS LOOKED AFTER ME. IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO.

THEY STOLE MY LOCKET.. WHAT KIND OF PERSON WOULD DO THAT? WHY DON'T THEY UNDERSTAND? WHY DON'T THEY CARE?

I KNOW. I'M SO SORRY

TRY TO SLEEP GRAN. I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING

THANK YOU, SAM

KOMODO. CAN YOU HEAR ME?

KOMODO, ARE YOU THERE?

HI SAM, I'M HERE

I'VE GOT OUR PERFECT TEST CASE FOR THE MPATH SERUM. IT'S JUST WHAT WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

WHO IS IT? AND WHERE DO I NEED TO GO?

I'VE WORKED OUT WHO BROKE INTO OUR FLAT LAST NIGHT I'M SENDING YOU THE CO-ORDINATES.

ON MY WAY.

HE LEFT SOME BLOOD ON THE WINDOW; I'VE RUN THE DNA AND GOT A MATCH.

HIS PLACE IS HEAVILY ALARMED, YOU'LL HAVE TO ACCESS FROM THE ROOF

BE CAREFUL


VWOOSH!




I'M HERE; ARE YOU SURE HE'S ALONE?


DON'T WORRY, ALL CLEAR


CRASHHHHHHH!!

You could be a hero.

You might just be waiting for your moment.

The moment when you stand strong
in the face of fear.

When you discover who you are,
who you are meant to be.

When you take control of your own story.

If you asked Coco which moment was hers,
she might say it was the day of the theft.
For Zac, it came later.

But let's start here ...

Comic Shop Mysteries
by Tamara Macfarlane

BOOK ONE

KOMODO JONES

AND THE UNCRACKED CODE

KOMODO JONES

AND SAM WILSON IN...

KOMODO JONES VS HERSELF

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CHAPTER ONE

Coco needed a wee. This was not, on its own, unusual. She seemed to spend an awful lot of her life hopping from foot to foot, or running down corridors trying to find a loo. It was just that, usually she wasn't being made to stand and wait outside in the street.

Coco glanced in through the window of her mother's shop, Cosmic Comics. She could see the sign for the toilet; it was that close. She looked in through the window of The Comic Café next door and thought about the superhero-themed public loo in there. Before she could stop them, her eyes rolled up longingly towards her flat, directly above the shop, containing another perfectly useable bathroom. Knowing that they were all so close made her even more desperate.

She tried to think about something else.

If this were a scene in a comic, Coco thought, I would not be here waiting for a late delivery van. I would not be curling my toes up to try to stop thinking about how much I really need the loo. I

would not be staring anxiously into my shop, seeing loads of customers staring back at me impatiently.

Crowds of people dressed up as characters from the *Forbidden Galaxy* series were queueing up inside, waiting for the author signing to start. Erica North, internationally popular author and illustrator, was inside, pen in hand, poised to sign comics. Coco checked off the ingredients for a successful signing in her head: the shop was open, the author was there, the staff were at the tills, the fans had all arrived … Cosmic Comics had held hundreds of massive author signings before, but never, ever without the comics!

Her best friend Zac waved from the The Comic Café, where he worked with his step-dad, Ed. They seemed to be massively busy too. Coco tried to signal, 'Can you come out here instead of me so I can go to the loo even though I know you're really busy too,' but it obviously just looked as though she was waving, because he just smiled and waved back, before rushing off to serve more of his customers.

It started to rain.

'Stupid van, stupid delivery company, stupid me-for-not-going-before-I-came-outside-to-look-for-vans-that-aren't-here.'

As much as they desperately needed the comics for the event, Coco was even more excited about some of

the other new issues that were in the late delivery – especially the latest *Komodo Jones*.

Komodo was her and Zac's all-time, absolute favourite superhero – not as well known as some of the other heroes, there were no films or TV shows and there had only been a couple of issues a year but today, *finally*, a new issue was due. She and Zac had been talking for weeks – months, even – about what might happen, and the best part was that today was only Thursday; they still had three whole days of half-term left to enjoy every detail. There were hints in the previous issue that something would happen in this one that would change Komodo's life forever.

But we'll never know, if this van doesn't arrive! Coco thought. If I was a superhero, I wouldn't have to wait here, uselessly hoping that the next thing around than corner was a delivery van … I'd leap up the building, climb high on the roof and perch like a mighty eagle, waiting to dive.

The scene began to ink itself out across Coco's imagination …

Suddenly from the roof, I spot the van. It's trapped in traffic, far in the distance … Only I can get the fans what they are all waiting for. One giant leap and I'm swooping above the city through the clouds. I spiral down. The ground rushes towards me. Four perfect, impact-controlling rolls and I'm under the van. I lift it above my head and take off with it like a bullet, high above the jammed roads.

I burst back out of the clouds. The crowd goes wild. One quick tip of the van and the back doors swing open. Out pour dozens of comics, and — why not — loads of giant doughnuts!

A quick nod to the applauding crowd and I disappear. My job here is done …

'Coco!' Zac gave her a not-very-gentle nudge back to the real world.

'Umm, oh, sorry,' Coco shook her head. 'What did you say?'

'I said that your mum called the delivery people again and they just keep saying that the van is on its way. "Very soon" apparently. And I brought you this.'

He handed her an umbrella.

'Oh great, thank you! I was just thinking about how, if I could fly and carry vans and there were doughnuts –'

‘Sorry, Coco, tell me later; I just wanted to check you were okay. It’s crazy-busy in there – I have to get back to help Ed!’

Zac headed back into the café.

As he disappeared, Coco remembered again that she was bursting for the loo. She had totally forgotten while they were talking. ‘Argh!’ She stamped with frustration.

She tried hopping from foot to foot and then walking up and down to try to forget about it. There was no way that she could leave her post. This would never happen to Komodo Jones.

Just as Coco was sure that she couldn’t hold on for a second longer, she heard a huge cheer surge up from inside the shop as the van swung around the corner. It screeched to a halt in a puddle, soaking her even more.

Inside, Cosmic Comic’s shop assistant, Sasha, emerged to help with the delivery. Her height and confidence magically parted the crowd. She slid out of the door, picked up bundles of the comic and carried them back in. ‘Everyone please take a step back,’ she said, restoring calm. She grinned at the dripping Coco and dropped the comics behind the counter, where Coco’s mum, Emma, was waiting. ‘We need two queues, please. Pre-orders on the

right, new customers on the left.'

Coco made a quick dash for the loo, but luckily was back on duty only moments after the first few comics had been sold. She unpacked her and Zac's copies of *Komodo Jones* from the top of the second box and stashed them safely under the counter. Taking out the customer orders, she ticked them off and put them into the rack in alphabetical order. Her mother worked the right-hand till. Sasha served the queue on the left.

Two hours later, the final customer was served. Emma turned the sign in the door around to 'Closed'.

Coco didn't want to waste a second. She grabbed Zac's copy of *Komodo Jones* along with her sketchbook. 'I've got to get this to Zac. See you both later.'

'Coco,' Emma called after her, 'don't forget, you promised to show Grace around at six o'clock. You've only got ten minutes.'

Why? Why? Why did I promise that? Coco wondered to herself.

On any other day, at any other time, Coco and Zac would have leapt at the chance to show off every last tiny supervillain model and cartoon-painted wall in the shop and café. Just not now, and not Grace!

Grace's mum, Alannah, was an old friend of Emma's from before Coco was born, but Emma had looked as surprised as Coco when they'd both arrived the previous evening.

Alannah was lovely – funny, silly – and she made Emma laugh so hard that Coco thought her mum would actually fall off her chair. The two of them had been chatting practically all night, telling old stories and old jokes. Even though Coco didn't get all the jokes, it was lovely seeing her hard-working mum relaxed and giggling. But Grace was a different matter.

'OK, Mum,' she shouted back. 'I'll meet her back here in ten minutes.'

Stepping away from the desk, Coco ducked between the model planets hanging from the ceiling. She jumped from star to star across the Milky Way that she and Zac had painted on the floor last summer. Knowing that she was far too old to find it so much fun, Coco checked no one was watching her. Stepping off the edge of the painted universe, she ran her free hand along four bookcases, packed with space-themed comics, alien figures and model UFOs, before stopping with her face and toes pressed up close to the shelves of the end bookcase. Reaching up to the third shelf, Coco pressed down on the head of the fifth mini droid to the right. With a quiet

click, the catch released and the bookcase began to revolve.

The hidden door that linked Cosmic Comics with the café kitchen next door never stopped thrilling Coco, no matter how many times she and Zac passed through it. They'd set the droid locking-mechanism up themselves so that even Ed and Emma didn't know how to use it.

In half a spin, Coco was in the kitchen of The Comic Cafe. The smell of warm doughnuts and cheese toasties hit her before the door clicked into place.



'Zac, I've got your comic and I'm taking some cake,' Coco shouted to Zac as she grabbed a slice of brightly-coloured marbled sponge with silver icing on her way out to the counter. She glanced at the label and snorted: 'Intergalactic Gateau, baked mainly by Martians.'

The café was packed. Every table and chair in the entire place was occupied. Ed delivered food at a pace that defied time. He was almost a blur as he darted between tables and in and out of the kitchen.

Scribbling down the order he was taking as fast as he could, Zac smiled at his friend and hurried over to her at the counter.

'It nearly cost me my life,' Coco grinned, thrusting the comic at him. 'The crowd was wild!'

'Bet it'll be worth it!' Zac put down his order pad and pen, took the envelope with both hands and carefully wiped cake and icing from the edges with his sleeve. 'I wish we had time to read it now. It's been insane in here. Ed and I haven't stopped. How's it been next door?'

'Manic!' Coco replied. 'Mum's only just closed the shop. From the look of it, everyone must have got their comics signed and come straight in here to read them.'

'Complete craziness!' Zac said. 'Its great!'

Coco glanced at the clock. 'Look, I need your help. I've got to show the daughter of one of mum's friends around.'

'You know your way around your own shop,' Zac said. 'You practically drag strangers off the street to show it to them. Why do you want me there?'

'Grace is scary! When I met her last night, she sized me up like I was prey.' Coco picked the icing off her cake. 'She makes me nervous I'll say something stupid or trip over or something. Please come with me. You're good with people. They like you.'

'You'll be fine!' Zac reassured her. 'I promised I'd help Ed out until closing time. That's another hour. And then I am doing nothing until I have read this comic from cover to cover!'

'No way! You can't read it without me! And you have to help me – I'm supposed to be with her now! She's probably burning the place down with her evil eyes or something …'

'Impossible! Look at this place,' Zac said. 'Ed will never let me go.'

'Nothing's impossible,' Coco said with a grin. 'Ed!' she called. 'Please can I borrow Zac? Just for ten minutes? I'll bring him straight back. And then I'll come and help too.'