

Praise for *Humbug The Elf Who Saved Christmas*

“A perfect Christmas stocking present –  
a very funny, festive page-turner”

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“*Humbug* is that rare book: funny, original, thought-provoking, and an instant classic” – Francesca Simon,  
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“A laugh-a-minute festive fuelled adventure full of charm and heart. A real Christmas cracker with baubles on that you won’t want to miss”

– James Nicol, author of *The Apprentice Witch* series

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STEVEN BUTLER

**HUMBUG  
THE ELF WHO  
SAVED  
CHRISTMAS**

Illustrated by Kenneth Anderson

 **SCHOLASTIC**

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*For my sister, Jenny Gyertson, and all the  
key-workers and valiant NHS staff.  
Every last one of you is on the Good List.  
Merry Christmas x*



# Chapter 1

## A Bit of a Wobbly Start

*N*ana Pilchard says there's a lot you can learn about a person from their name, and she's really, really, REALLY old, so I guess she must be right. Her brain is like a giant library, full of dusty information and cobwebby facts, and she's almost NEVER wrong! But, secretly ... don't tell Nana Pilchard ... if I'm being completely cross-my-heart honest, I hope she's wrong about the name thing.

I'll explain. I have the worst name in the whole world – no, scratch that – the WHOLE UNIVERSE!

You could travel from the North Pole to the South Pole and back again and not find anyone whose name is anywhere near as bad as mine. I mean it! Even if I gave you a dictionary of TERRIBLE names and loads of time to scratch your bonce and read every page, you couldn't come up with a more gunkous example.

All you Avas and Oscars and Katies and Ibrahims and Jessicas and Ravis and Rubys and Tommys and Sallys and Martins and Lunas and Archies and Fatimas out there have no idea how lucky you are. I'd give anything to be like you – all nicely-named and proud of it. It must feel wonderful.

I bet you're reading this book right now, rolling your eyes and asking yourself what on earth I'm jabbering on about, aren't you? I can picture you crinkling-up your nose, thinking, *What's this wonkling saying? No name can be that bad, can it?* and I can't say I blame you. If I was just like you, I'd probably be wondering the exact same thing, but sadly, I'm not like you. Not even close. And I know



deep down in my belly there's only one way I can prove it. I'm going to have to tell you my name...

Right, are you feeling brave? Have you been to the lavy-loo and hidden yourself away someplace safe? Do you have a bucket nearby in case you get a bit blurty?

Brace yourself, my reader-friend.

My name is...

My name is...

Ugh! I can barely bring myself to say it, but I'll never be able to tell this story properly if I don't. I know – I'll whisper it.

All right, here goes... My name is Gristle.

Gristle P. Humbug to be exact (I'll tell you what the *P* stands for later).

It's ghastly, isn't it? Don't worry, you won't offend me, I already know the answer. It's the most gut-silly, face-frowny, tongue-bleughy name this side of the Arctic Circle and it's the only one I've got.

To make matters worse, a surname like Humbug doesn't exactly make you popular with the other elves up at Santa Claus's Christmas HQ.

OH! I've just realized something... I forgot to tell you about that part, didn't I?

Ugh! Nana Pilchard always moans at me for starting stories at the wrong place, and it looks like I've done it again.

Never mind, there's no time like the present to fill you in on all the sleigh-breaking, Crimbo-cracking, lump-of-coal-licious events of my strange life recently. Are you sitting comfortably? Grab a snuggly blanket and a hot mug of cocoa, and I'll tell you everything. I promise I won't miss even the tiniest detail out.

Now, because the cogs in your human cranium might still be whirring and it hasn't quite sunk-in, I'll say it a little clearer this time. My name is Gristle P. Humbug and I am a Christmas elf. Yep, it's true! I've lived in the wilds of the frozen North for my entire frostbitten life – three hundred and seventy-six years – which means I'm still a youngster around here, but it's long enough for me to figure out how bad my first name is ... and my surname for that matter ... and my job. It's all one gigantic mess!

Don't worry, I'm not going to begin my story by

having a great big whinge-fest, but we have to start with the not-so-nice bits before we can get to the CHRISTMAS-CRACKINGLY exciting stuff.

So, here goes...

The Humbugs have slogged away at the North Pole for hundreds and hundreds of years, but we've been around for much longer, way back before Christmas even existed. We were here when the very first Santa Claus showed up ... Nikolaus, his name was ... and we've been working for the Clauses ever since.

Don't let what you've seen in books and those moving picture thingies on your human-telly-boxes fool you, though. Life isn't a wonderland of tra-la-las and tinsel for us elves at the top of the world. They don't paint the likes of the Humbug family on Christmas cards, no, sirree. We are the ones who live behind the scenes and no one wants to think about...

If you've ever spotted a picture of a Christmas elf before, it will have been a workshop elf for certain. They're the lucky ones... All cheery and giggly, practically tripping over their own round and rosy cheeks while they toil merrily. It's true! The

workshoppers live up at the Big House, where Mr and Mrs Claus can keep a jolly-holly eye on the toy-making. Their days and nights are filled with nothing but happy hugs, gleeful games and mince pie parties ... but, the rest of us don't get a look-in ... not a crumb or a cuddle in sight.

I remember when I was only a lumping of one hundred and three years, I got the cheeky chance to peek through a crack in the toy-room door when I was out on an errand for Nana Pilchard, and it's **STRICTLY FORBIDDEN** for non-workshop elves to show their faces around those parts of the factory.

I'd been to the store shed to fetch some dried griperoot for Nana Pilchard's pot of bedtime tea and I sneaked over to the Big House on my way back. I couldn't help risking a quick look, even though I knew I was breaking the rules.

Before my frozen feet even realized they were tippy-toeing in the wrong direction, the sound of singing and laughter practically carried me right up to that little slither of light at the edge of the enormous carved doorframe, and I peered inside.





I swear, my human reader, I'd never seen so much colour. My eyes hurt, it was so bright! Every elf was dressed in neatly-pressed spotted jerkins, poofed-out pantaloons and pointy hats with jingly bells. They were so clean and grinny, merrily beavering away, painting and hammering, chiselling and sewing the loveliest toys I'd ever seen.

It was right at that moment, as I stood shivering out in the snow, desperately wishing I could be a workshop elf, I realized that being a Humbug wasn't everything I thought it was before.

You see, the Humbugs aren't the kind of elvish family you see on wrapping paper or in storybooks or even knitted on the front of your aunty's jumpers. We don't skip around with snowmen, or twirl, or clink frosted cups of eggnog. There are NO chestnuts roasting on our open fire. We don't even have a fire to roast them on if we wanted to...

Nope! The Humbugs manage and run the R.P.D. department. Sounds fancy, doesn't it? Believe me, it's not.

*"What does R.P.D. stand for?"* I hear you ask...

Well ... brace yourself AGAIN, my human reader ...  
R.P.D. stands for Reindeer Poo Disposal.

Now are you starting to understand a little bit more about what I've been telling you?

While the Frosty-Frisps, and Glintles, and Patonks, and Tumfies, and McMerrypies, and Primly-Bottoms, and ALL the other workshop families dance and sing up at the big house with Mr and Mrs Claus, the Humbugs have spent the last squillion years dealing with the never-ending mountains of reindeer poo in the draughty stables on the far side of the factory.

We're not the only R.P.D. family. There are the Gardyloos and the La Trines as well, but the Humbugs have been around the longest and bear the brunt of all the hard work.

At the moment, there are six Humbugs living in our little corner of the hayloft, amongst the piles of ... umm ... you know what ... and we all get stuck in, scooping and scraping, day in, day out, as the reindeers keep eating and pooing and eating and.. You get the picture.

Nana Pilchard and my grandpops, Old Wimbles,

tend to just sit on the hayloft steps these days, pointing and grumbling stuff like “*That needs movin’*” and “*Don’t pile it downwind!*” My dad, Jiblius P. Humbug, is head shoveller, while my mum, Flotsima P. Humbug, is always armed with her buckets, ready to rush off and deposit fresh droppings into the great belching furnace that heats the mince pie ovens and the big boilers for Santa Claus’s nightly bubble bath.

Then there’s me and my little sister, Scratchet P. Humbug, who dash around after our parents, doing every little (and BIG) job that needs doing.

It’s a poo-culiar life at the best of times, and I bet you completely agree with me about how bad my name is now, don’t you?

*Gristle* is just plain dreadful. The initial *P* that’s gifted to everyone in my family, whether you were born a Humbug or married into our munkled crew, stands for – you guessed it – POO! It seems my ancestors were a lot prouder of our job than we are nowadays ... and then...

And then there’s my last name.



Now, I'm sure it seems that *Humbug* is by far the least terrible of the three, but it's actually the worst by far. You see, because of my family's name, I will always be stuck in the life of an R.P.D. elf, and I'll never have a chance to live in the Big House, making toys and beaming from pointy ear to pointy ear. Elves are very strict about it. You just can't do those things when you're called *Humbug*.

Ugh... What I wouldn't give to cram my gob full of mince pies and prance around, singing like a festive fool. It's a secret dream of mine, but there's no use wishing. Christmas wishes are for humans, not us elves.

I just have to face it ... because of my stinky family tree, I've been doomed to an eternity of hard work and no fun.

Or so I thought ... until ... umm ... until the day EVERYTHING changed. Yep ... my life of poo, poo and more poo was turned upside down recently and nothing has ever been the same since.

I knew that last part would prick-up your non-pointy ears and make you want to hear more. Well,

my human reader, let me tell you exactly what happened. It started a week before Christmas Eve...

Snuggle in and hold on tight. It's going to be a bumpy sleigh ride!