

Friends of the Enchanted Forest: How They Save Christmas

Glenda Crenshaw

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Friends of the Enchanted Forest is a pleasant holiday story with an enjoyable cast of furry heroes.

Glenda Crenshaw's fun early reader *Friends of the Enchanted Forest* follows five animal friends through their magical adventures.

Sweetie is a skunk whose emotions affect his scent. Charlie is a clever jokester of a monkey. Billy is a porcupine with quills he can shoot at will. Jumper is a fox with the ability to jump high. And Sticky is a stealthy raccoon who can understand human speech.

These friends are looking forward to a merry Christmas, but then Santa and his reindeer crash in the woods nearby and are frozen stiff. Only one person can be responsible: a wicked witch who lives on the edge of the Enchanted Forest. With Christmas only a few days away, the animals have to save the holiday. With the help of a wise owl, they embark on a perilous trip to the witch's fortress.

The animals overcome numerous dangers and obstacles on their way to the witch. With the owl on hand to provide useful magic items such as magic paint and self-heating coats, each animal also utilizes their special talents to see them through: Sweetie's ability to produce tar helps them light a torch and negotiate a dark cave, while Jumper's abilities help them to ascend a forbidding mountain face. Elsewhere, Charlie's speed and acrobatic moves get the friends out of tight situations, and Billy's quills provide protection when they're forced to venture through a fiery cave.

Throughout, the story emphasizes the values of teamwork and friendship, as well as of being kind to potential enemies. At one point, a predatory bird attacks the group, but it ends up in a precarious position; when the animals save it, the act pays dividends down the road. This theme of kindness comes to fruition at the story's climax, when the friends confront the witch and exercise sympathy and benevolence.

The illustrations chart the quintet's travels with plenty of wry touches, such as of a domicile run by a self-propelled vacuum cleaner and dancing silverware, and an icy witch who cries icicles. But while the story moves at an agreeable pace, its fantastical action is sometimes muddled and imprecise. The finale is short on originality, even though the life lessons it includes are valuable.

Promising further adventures to come, *Friends of the Enchanted Forest* is a pleasant holiday story with an enjoyable cast of furry heroes.

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