



Mario Kart: Mystery Of The Grand
Banana Kart Cup

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Chapter One

Banana Talk Got Real

"Bigger is slower. And that's a scientific fact!"

Diddy Kong slaps his knee with a grin, every tooth on display. Not a shred of humility in sight. He didn't just believe he was untouchable, he knew it. Like the Banana Cup was already engraved with his name.

Every skilled racer in the Kingdom gathered at Bowser's Summer Castle. Eagerly waiting, praying, they'd be picked to race in the first-ever Grand Banana Kart Cup, under King Bowser's rule.

This was no ordinary race. But THE race. The ultimate challenge. You didn't get here from being weak. No! This was the big league. The peak – tippy top – pinnacle astronomically highest anyone could ever hope to achieve. Only the strongest, fastest, and boldest made it this far.

Real kart racers only.

Donkey Kong let out an obnoxiously loud, mocking CHEST-THUMPING laugh, at least three times louder than was appropriate for the tiny room they were all stuffed into. With his mouth hanging half open, amused with Diddy's pea brain calculations, Donkey Kong snaps back, *"What do you think's gonna happen when you smash into BIG me? Knock me off the track? Run me over?"*

Diddy's blank stare said it. NOT impressed.

“How can you honestly sit there all sure of yourself and NOT remember the billion times I mushroom blasted right out in front of you – on a sharp turn – drop a banana peel, and watch you spin right off the map? BILLIONS I SAY! BILLIONS!”

“Yeah. What the banana ever!” Donkey Kong slams back. *“Try ONCE. And by the way. If you ever try that again, I’ll show you just what a little BUMP from my oversized kart can do.”*

Obviously much smaller than the legendary Donkey Kong, Diddy knew he was slick, sly, and quick. He had an advantage over everyone. All the more reason he knew that was an idle threat.

Half his size, but twice as feisty, crossed his arms and stood a little taller.

“You couldn’t catch me, to BUMP me, even if I had the very last banana on the island. I’m actually shaking.” Diddy eloquently blusters, puffed up like a banana-suited scholar. Unfazed and breathing heavily, he was ready for war. *“Again, you slow brain ape, gotta catch me first!”*

Despite their witty banter, Donkey and Diddy Kong weren’t just rivals, they were brothers and best friends.

Tighter than the wheels on a kart, and way better friends than the rest of the crazies who dare show up for this death-defying kart race.

“It’s a downhill track, genius.” Donkey Kong smirked and said with utter disbelief that Diddy was THIS FAR off his rocker. *“Gravity’s on my side, not yours. In fact, with my genetically superior massive*

gargantuan bones and my super-modified Banana Bunch Barrel Racer 5000, you'll choke yourself on my dust and whatever else I throw your way. After I stomp on you. THAT is a scientific fact!"

Earlier that morning, at the Royal French Fried Banana Brunch Bash, in the Castle's North Star Dining Hall Ballroom, rumors swirled among the competitors of some of the mysterious dangers to come in the race.

Not only did they hear of jumbo active ice volcanoes, savage three headed beasts, and magic mischief machinery. But also of Dinosauric fire-breathing Dragons, astronomical atomic bombs on chains, and pulsating neon glowing cybernetic trapping contraptions, guarding hidden paths – to a secret fortress – leading to a bonus prize treasure trove mystical cavern, reserved for the first to find and touch the Gold Flame Flower.

All the kart racers knew that there WAS a secret hidden treasure, but only King Bowser knew what it was and what it could do.

Diddy throws his hands in the air and rolls his eyes back, vaguely amused, as he burns every brain cell trying to explain, logically of course, that Donkey was 100% wrong in his understanding of what Diddy could actually do on the track, with his slick kart.

"No, the scientific fact is that you're slow and I'm fast. Period. End of discussion." Diddy patiently began to explain, *"You may have a souped-up, top-of-the-line, brand new showroom Banana Class Barrel Racer sixty thousand million. But, you being WAY heavier and INSANELY bigger than everyone else combined – including that plumpy Bowser – has to be knocking around the gorilla grapes*

in your smash banana brain, right? Even with your new little undersized superpower sparkle kart, you're still last off the starting line, and you only go a tiny wee bit faster on a straightaway. A LOOOONG straight away. It's nonsense! Again, you can do your cute little fairy thump bumping us around, but, all facts, you have to catch us, my dear boy."

King Bowser was anything but hospitable. Grumpy by birth, crowned with arrogance, and entitled by destiny, he considered manners a waste of time. This was his castle, his race, and his kingdom. And no one, not even the Royal Peasant Prophet Donkey Kong, dared challenge his rule.

"Dear boy..." Donkey Kong parroted and chuckled under his breath, *"Let me tell you a little something about momentum, MY dear boy. Another science thing too complicated for coconut-sized craniums like yours."*

"Control the gold, control the Kingdom," King Bowser would always say. A family phrase passed down since forever. Everyone knew King Bowser controlled the gold. They respected him because they feared him. But not even King Bowser could control *this* race.

"Momentum," Donkey Kong continued, *"is a little something that tends to have a slower-moving hidden power that can catch you off guard, if you're not paying attention to what's behind you, skinny fast guys. I will bump into you with such heavy-weight force that I will knock you clean off the track and smash your stupid red hat right into a concrete wall, faster than you can say Sweet Cream Banana Burrito."*

None of King Bowser's knowledge advantages mattered when it came to the actual race. The rules of the game couldn't bend or break, not even at the command of the Gold King himself in his own Kingdom. It was a violation of the natural law of the island.

There were forces, powers more powerful than anything King Bowser could command. These sacred sites, these holy lands, on which these race tracks were discovered (not created), had a secret. A dark side. A mystery that haunted anyone who dared enter the deeper corners of the Banana Kingdom.

Chapter Two

Shut It, Already.

“Do you guys know how to shut it for more than five seconds?”

Dixie Kong finally piped up. Slightly irritated from all of this puffy wannabe alpha male oratory echoing throughout the oversized vestibule. She was the youngest and smartest among the Kongs. With a short-fused temper, a snappy attitude, and a VERY low tolerance for this exasperating macho monkey banana-brained brag-slap contest.

“No one cares how many bananas you can eat, how many barrels you can smash, or how many coins you can collect!” Dixie would routinely vent to Cranky Kong.

Dozens of potentially worthy racers stood touching shoulders in what was technically a coat room. They were shoved tightly together in the first room upon entering the castle doors, waiting for King Bowser to let them in. King Bowser wasn't simply keeping his guests waiting unnecessarily, given his more brash demeanor, but he was also waiting too. Just not in the same room with his peasants.

Diddy and Donkey glance at each other, flashing a quick smile. They were both thinking the same thing.

“Well, hey there cry baby Dixie,” Diddy was the first to shoot back, *“you and old man Cranky over there can actually just sit this one out. The Primates In Pampers Kart Cup is next week. Best you*

stop changing tires and practice changing diapers. You're gonna need strong wrists if you plan on winning."

"Boys!" Cranky Kong chimed in, thrusting his cane in the air, "You're one smart comment away from me banana slapping the DK Barrel out of you. Y'all are babies compared to what I've seen."

Cranky, the elder of the Kong family, hadn't come to race. He came to witness. All he wanted was to see this mysterious artifact for himself. He knew he probably wasn't worthy anymore to race, due to his old age. Even though he was grumpy by nature, he knew he was worthy enough to at least stand in the presence of the creature in the artifact and receive whatever wisdom it might have to share. He knew without a doubt that the creature in the artifact wouldn't pick him. No way, no how.

"I'll have you know, junior," Cranky points his cane right at Diddy's forehead and continues, "I've been winning kart races decades before you were born. I raced this cup before King Bowser was King. No one finishes the entire race in the Grand Banana Kart Cup. My 'old age' is my upper hand I have on you, pip squeaks. While you all are busy kart bumping and speed zipping around each other's throats, I'll be watching King Bowser. He knows more than he's telling us. All I know is that this track is alive. No two races are ever the same."

When Cranky Kong spoke, everyone got quiet and listened. They respected him. He earned it. Even though he was a little "cranky" at times, he was always there for you in your darkest moments. He always seemed to know what to do.

It was no accident that the Castle was built where it was. Upon first discovering this land, King Bowser's forefathers had unknowingly, at the time, stumbled into an enchanted puzzle on an island within an archipelago, a secret world of unfathomable mystery and wonder. The land and the creatures King Bowser's ancestors happened upon just didn't make any sense to anyone, anywhere.

They found semi-invisible flying creatures without wings, rainbow shades of mystical plants that came to life when certain heavenly bodies aligned. Giant caves with archways carved into shimmering crystal, where portals would lead to fantastic or frightening new worlds beyond comprehension.

The land was riddled with endless hidden surprises and wonder. A land that's impossible to map, due to the constant and ever-changing nature of these unknown forces giving life to and manipulating the physical essence of all it's connected to.

Funky Kong, always ready to catch some waves on a freshly waxed surfboard, was *smooth* about picking his moment to enter the conversation.

"You guys are wild!" Funky Kong said enthusiastically, *"I'm only here for the free buffet. I only win races when I need Banana Coins for surf stuff. What's the deal with nobody ever winning a trophy on the Grand Banana Kart Cup?"*

They all got quiet, a question on everyone's mind.

Funky scratches his chin.

“Like, maybe the point isn’t winning, man. Maybe the track just wants to see who wipes out with style.”

Before anyone could respond to Funky’s bizarro statement, he said something that made everyone think deeper.

“Y’all ever think maybe nobody wins ‘cause this race wasn’t built to be won? Or maybe the trophy’s cursed. Like, reverse-golden-banana-vooodoo or somethin.”

In time, the Bowser family eventually came across the single most intriguing artifact on the island. This artifact was a sophisticated, intelligent entity of some type. An elusive creature, a type of conductor, who appeared to be the source of energy, the source of life, animating the strange activities.

The artifact was discovered at the bottom of the deepest canyon on a special night where the moon, the dark sun, and the planets aligned just right, sparking to life to motions of the creature contained within the array of octagonal spires surrounding a Sea Of Magma.

Seen from afar, bright sparks and pulsating glowing orbs emanate from the Sea. Roaring, crackling sounds radiated as they approached the outer ring. Once close enough, the harsh, reverberating blasts of cannon fire softened into a soothing tune of spectacular awe, illuminating the spirit deep from within with grand visions of magical competition.

A race.

A magnificent race among the worthy who are hand-picked to serve, by the creature within the artifact.

“Great question,” Donkey Kong says to Funky. “How else would it be so alive?”

“Maybe it’s a deception and King Bowser is really controlling the strings?” Diddy speculates.

“That makes about as much sense as throwing a banana at a baby?” Dixie responds.

“Is that why we throw bananas at you?” Diddy quips.

“Didn’t I say enough, boys!” Cranky squints his eyes at Diddy.

“My bad, Cranks,” Diddy says, trying hard to hold back laughter, “I honestly tried not to say it.”

Cranky looked down. Silent. The weight of old memories shifts behind his tired eyes. Carefully choosing the right words to express the overwhelming memories of his last Grand Banana Kart Cup race.

After a few moments, Cranky looks up and slowly starts sharing an almost forgotten memory, *“I’ve only raced this cup once before, pre King Bowser reign. The creature in the artifact allows each King, during their reign, to initiate the Grand Banana Kart Cup only once. That’s it. Time ran out before anyone could complete the track. That moment devastated the Kingdom. A furious King is never good for his subjects.”*

Cranky continues to explain the story of what he knew and experienced.

“Most of what was revealed on that first night was revealed to the people in the very first Kingdom. But the true secret was kept quiet. The Bowser family is the only one who deemed themselves worthy enough to keep the deepest secrets of the artifact. They couldn’t keep anyone else away from the sacred race, but they could conceal what was ultimately at stake, the power to control the creature within the artifact. This is where the Bowser Family chose to build their castle, centered directly above the artifact. Not only to keep it safe, but to keep absolute control over who had access to the artifact and the information revealed throughout the cycles of the stars.”

Mario, Princess Peach, and Luigi weren’t standing too far away. In this tiny coat closet, everyone could hear everyone.

Princess Peach couldn’t help but overhear. She glanced at Mario and Luigi, took a few steps towards the Kong family, gently placed her hand on Cranky’s shoulder, and asked.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking, but what was the Kingdom like before King Bowser took the Throne? I read that King Bowser’s father was unusually hard on him after failing to win the cup. Is that true? Is that why King Bowser is the way he is?”

Bowser was waiting in the chamber of the artifact. He wanted to be the first in the room when the creature presented itself and began the racer selection examination process to choose only the most worthy in the Kingdom.

All of a sudden.

The Sea of Magma began to stir.

The Spires started glowing.

The ground began to shake.

Bowser stood up, took a deep breath, staring hard at the movements of the array. Listening closely, he cracked a wicked smile in eager anticipation to finally be the first generation to claim the power all for himself, once and for all. Like his father, he justified his actions, promising himself in secret that one day, after he got control of the creature in the artifact, he would again treat his people right.

Cranky looks up at Princess Peach and said, *“Before failing to get the cup, King Bowser’s father was a good man. A kind, honest king who wanted what was best for his people. He was the first king to rule over the new, exciting world. Then one day, they discovered something that they couldn’t control. Something more powerful. Instead of giving to his people, King Bowser’s father put everyone on emergency rations and put all his resources towards a secret project. Things haven’t been the same ever since.”*

“How awful.” Princess Peach said.

King Bowser signaled his second-in-command. *“Bring them in.”*

Above, the racers were still discussing what was to come in the coat room when the door creaked open.

“It’s time,” the Goomba official said.

The crowd of potentially worthy racers stepped forward, unaware that today's Grand Banana Kart Cup would change everything.

Some were thinking about glory. Others were thinking about food. None of them were thinking about surviving.

Chapter Three

Artifact Picks Racers