



**GHOSTS OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE**  
**A REFLECTION ON THE ANFRACTUOSITIES OF TIME**  
OR  
**THE FART THAT SAVED CHRISTMAS**

**T**HERE ARE MANY MYSTERIES IN LIFE and more than a few of them have something to do with Christmas. How can Santa Claus deliver presents to every child in the world in a single night? How can he have helper elves, when no scientist or taxonomist (or anyone else for that matter) has ever seen them? How can he live at the North Pole, as cold and remote a place as there is anywhere in the world? These are profound questions but the answers to them are surprisingly simple. Just believe and you know it must be so.

This story is not about Christmas, or the North Pole, or elves. Oh sure, it takes place around Christmas, and parts of it happen at the North Pole, and it certainly has elves in it, but this story is not about any of that. This story is about believing in things and making them real.

This story is also about time. By which I do not mean to say that it is about time this story was told, only that this story pertains and relates, in terms of its plot and narrative, to the muddy concept of time.

Time, it has been said,<sup>1</sup> is like a river, but that is wrong. Yes, a river flows one way, but unlike time, a river can flow fast and slow, it eddies and pools, and time

---

<sup>1</sup> One of these people is The Alan Parsons Project, which recorded a very maudlin song about Time, entitled, predictably enough, "Time". It describes time as "flowing like a river, on and on, to the sea." I never understood that. What happens when time gets to the sea? Does it have a

never does that. It is a fundamental law of the universe that time pass in one direction only and that it never stray from this path. As such, time is better described as a one-way freeway, with no stoplights and all traffic lanes heading straight and purposefully in a single direction. No one can stop, turn back or speed up. Those that try are inevitably run over and flattened where they stand.

Only one person<sup>2</sup> in the world has ever figured out how to break the universal law that time go forward straight and true, and that person is not a person at all: he is an elf named Yugo and he lives at the North Pole. Yugo is a brilliant engineer, a gifted physicist and a talented bowler. In fact, when it comes to all things scientific, Yugo was a genius among geniuses. Some might have described him as a *genius savant*.

Once upon a Christmas, Yugo built a snowmobile. It was a snowmobile like no other, powered by a miniature nuclear reactor and equipped with a comfortable weatherproof passenger cabin, rocket engines and small bar fridge. Yugo also installed a time machine in his snowmobile that let him reverse the flow of time and steer against the treacherous traffic of time and into the past.

And so, our story begins with three elves in a workshop at the North Pole, about a week before Christmas; not because this story is about the North Pole, or Christmas or elves, but because all stories have to begin somewhere and that is where this one does.<sup>3</sup>

It was a cold December afternoon at the North Pole when Sam laid down his chisel and stretched his arms. It had been a long afternoon, just as every afternoon was in the week before Christmas and Sam was tired. However, Sam was not stretching his arms because he was tired. He was stretching them so that as he reached out with his hands, he could discreetly cover his ears. In that way, he would no longer be able to hear his friends Iggy and Yugo talking. Sam was not sure exactly what they were speaking about because he was not really listening, but the strain of *not* listening to their conversation was really starting to wear him down.

---

beach holiday? Does it go on a whale watching tour? I always though that song was kind of stupid, and, accordingly, no further mention of it will be made here.

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, this is not actually true. Time travel was actually invented by Dr. Drew Beetlemeyer, a renowned Nobel Prize winning quantum physicist. Unfortunately, while returning from a sojourn in Medieval France in his time machine, Dr. Beetlemeyer was killed when he collided with himself traveling the other way. These sorts of problems crop up repeatedly when one travels through time. For this reason, and many others, time travel is a mode of transportation best left to trained and experienced professionals.

<sup>3</sup> I suppose the story could have started in Tahiti, and maybe it should have, but this one does not. If you like stories about Tahiti, I am sure your local library has many that you might consider. But honestly, we are only one page into this story and nothing has actually happened yet, so I suggest you give it a chance. If you get to, say, page 7 and you would still rather read a story about Tahiti, you should probably do that.

What Sam was trying not to hear was yet another discussion between Iggy and Yugo on the anfractuositities of time. This was something that Iggy and Yugo talked about a great deal and was a subject of which Sam had little interest.<sup>4</sup> Yugo had just finished explaining to Iggy that while it was possible to travel into the past (which he had done with Iggy and Sam several times), it was nonetheless impossible to change history once you got there. This was, as Yugo explained, because the moment you did something to change history, you became part of history yourself. Anything you changed was immediately absorbed into the fabric of time and the universe continued without incident. That was when Iggy asked if it was possible to travel forward in time and change the future.

“Now that is impossible,” said Yugo.

“I don’t see why not,” replied Iggy. “When you go forward in time you’re not changing history.”

“Oh, you’re quite right,” Yugo conceded. “You’re not changing history, because the history of the future hasn’t happened yet. And that’s the problem. You can’t travel into the future. You can only go backwards.”

“I don’t see why not,” said Iggy.

Yugo explained, “You can go into the past because it has already happened. There is a place to go to. However, the future is a different thing entirely. You cannot go there because it has not happened yet. There is no where to go to.”

“I don’t see why not,” said Iggy. “We’ve done it before. Every time we have gone to the past in your snowmobile, we’ve come back again.”

“Yes,” said Yugo. “We have, but we’ve always come back to a time that has already happened, so we haven’t really gone into the future.”

“I don’t see why not,” answered Iggy, “Once we’re in the past, the present is part of the future. From the point of view of everyone in the past, our present has not happened yet. But we’ve always found a place to come home to.”

“But that’s different,” Yugo began, and then he stopped and scratched his head. “Maybe it is possible,” he mused.

“I don’t see why not,” said Iggy. “Anything is possible if you believe in it.”

At this point, Sam turned to the two elves and waggled his hand drill at them. Iggy was forced to duck as Sam had inadvertently<sup>5</sup> forgotten to turn off the drill before waving it around. “Look you guys,” he said, “We have nearly 4 million little red wagons to build in the next few days, and none of them are getting built while the two of you prattle on about ‘time this’ and ‘the universe that’. I think you should

---

<sup>4</sup> Sam preferred to talk about food and the latest in ladies’ beachwear.

<sup>5</sup> Or perhaps not.

both just pay a little more attention to this pile of unfinished toys in the here and now,” again the drill swung about menacingly, “and a little less attention to the when and then.”

Iggy nodded and returned to assembling wheels. Although Yugo also picked up his little hammer and nails, he continued thinking about how an elf with a snowmobile might travel into the future.

“I’VE DONE IT,” YUGO ANNOUNCED THE next morning when he joined Iggy and Sam for breakfast. “It’s really so simple I can’t believe I never thought of it before.”

“Done what?” asked Sam, apprehension and fear creeping into his voice. This was not unusual for Sam, who considered that the world and everything in it had evolved for the sole purpose of inflicting an excruciating death upon him. Because of this, he remained at all times in a state of the “highest alert”.

“What have you thought of,” asked Iggy. He did not share Sam’s anxiety. Iggy was never anxious; it simply was not in his make-up. Iggy was such an optimist, that if he fell off a cliff, he would appreciate the view on the way down and worry about the ground only when he got there.

This kind of thinking made Sam crazy. “You’re just encouraging him, you know.”

“But I want to hear what he has to say,” said Iggy.

“Nothing good will come from it,” answered Sam. “It never does.”

Iggy ignored him. “Go ahead, Yugo.” Sam glanced nervously over his shoulder, as if Yugo’s words alone might unleash some disaster.

“As I was saying, I’ve done it. I’ve figured the whole thing out,” said Yugo. “Iggy was right. You can travel into the future.”

“How did you do it?” asked Iggy.

“It’s nothing new at all,” explained Yugo. “When we use the time machine to travel into the past, we’re still connected to the present in some way. That is how we get back again. So, to go to the future, you just have to go to the past.”

“You’re right,” jeered Sam, “it is pretty simple when you explain it like that.”

“Think of it this way. Think of time as an elastic band.”<sup>6</sup> Yugo pulled a rubber band from his pocket to demonstrate. He stretched it between his left thumb and

---

<sup>6</sup> And not like a river. As indicated, time is nothing at all like a river.

forefinger and pulled the middle back. “When you pull it back, you’re traveling back in time. But you’re still connected to the present. Then when you release it, it snaps back. But before it stops, the elastic stretches past the point where it started.’ Yugo released one end of the elastic. It darted past his left hand before bouncing back again. “Every time we come home from a trip into the past, we bounce into the future a little ways before stopping. The further we go back, the bigger the bounce.” Yugo pulled the elastic back further and released it again. This time the loop bounced a full inch past his hand before coming to rest. “All we have to do is stop the snowmobile before it can settle back in the present.”

“Do you really think it will work?” asked Iggy.

“Of course,” said Yugo. “I simulated it on my computer this morning. Of course, there is only one way to really be sure, and that’s to actually do it.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” asked Iggy. Sam took the elastic from Yugo. He stretched it back and let it snap against Iggy’s shoulder. “Ow!” shouted the elf.

“That’s what we’re waiting for,” said Sam.

“Relax Sam,” said Yugo. “It will be painless. Are you ready to go?”

Iggy rubbed his shoulder gingerly. “You bet,” he said.

Sam sighed. He had no desire to get into Yugo’s time machine. Who knew what catastrophes awaited them on their arrival. However, he knew that Iggy and Yugo were going to need him if they went ahead with this. Neither Iggy nor Yugo could sense danger like Sam could, and certainly neither one knew how to get away from it quite like him. “I guess so,” said Sam. “Just let me make sure my life insurance premiums are all paid up before we go.”

**“BUCKLE UP!”** YUGO CALLED TO THE TWO ELVES in the back seat of the snowmobile. Although Iggy dutifully fastened his seatbelt, it was not necessary that Yugo remind Sam to do so. From the moment Sam entered the snowmobile, his seatbelt was securely fastened, his seat was in the upright position, and his table tray was raised and locked to the seat back in front of him. He also carried with him a backpack filled with airsickness bags, mace, an oxygen tank and his will. Sam was satisfied that he was prepared for all contingencies.

Yugo slipped the snowmobile into gear and it rolled easily out of its hangar and onto the bleak white Arctic plain. He guided the snowmobile forward, gradually accelerating as he did so. Soon the elves were dashing through the snow at over 100 kilometres per hour. Yugo turned to the others. “We need a lot of speed because we have to go pretty far back into the past so we can get enough velocity to snap back into the future ” he said. “I’m setting the time transponder to take us back 12,000 years. That should be plenty.” He turned and looked at the other elves. “Everybody ready?” he asked.

Iggy nodded enthusiastically, but Sam just grimaced. Yugo took this as a 'yes'. "Then let's light this candle," he shouted. Large snowflakes spun through the air and spattered against the tinted windshield of the snowmobile. Iggy thought they looked like stars twirling past them. Yugo adjusted his headset, spun a black dial and then sharply pressed a flashing yellow button. "Next stop, 10,000 B.C.," he said.

Sam tried to look on the bright side. He was sure that there were no nuclear or chemical weapons in 10,000 B.C. But he was also sure there were sabre tooth tigers, mastodons and the kind of people who knew how to hunt and kill them. He was not looking forward to this trip at all.

The snowmobile started to hum softly. White snowflakes swelled and swirled past the windows and danced in a kaleidoscope of shapes and colours. Yugo's stomach lurched as the snowmobile gave a shudder and then jerked backwards through time. They seemed to move forwards, backwards and sideways all at once. The quiet hum of the snowmobile's time transponder grew to a physical roar, which was suddenly silenced as the snowmobile spun to a stop. Steam drifted up from the hood.

Yugo pressed a green toggle switch and the passenger doors opened on silent hydraulic hinges. "Here we are," he said. "12,000 years in almost no time at all. Why don't you two step outside while I recalibrate the frammingaster for the return trip"?

Iggy and Sam stepped outside. It was cold. Now, it is always cold at the North Pole, but somehow it seemed colder than it ever had before. Somewhere, a seal bayed mournfully. "I don't like it here," said Sam, shivering. He looked around at the dark and empty landscape "Where is everything?"

"It's 12,000 years ago, Sam," said Iggy. "There's nothing here."

"What about Santa Claus, and the workshop?"

"Nope," said Iggy. He swept some snow from a large block of ice with his gloves and sat down on it. "There's no Santa Claus and no workshop because there is no Christmas yet. Remember, this is a long time ago now."

"Wow," said Sam, sitting down beside Iggy. "I can't imagine a world without Christmas. I just assumed that there had always been Christmas."

"Christmas has been around a long time," said Iggy, "but not forever. Somebody had to think of it first. And believe in it. That's what made Christmas real."

"So nobody has thought of Christmas yet?" asked Sam.

"I guess not. So, nobody believes in Christmas yet, either. That's the most important part."

Sam sat thinking quietly. Yugo poked his head out of the snowmobile. “Okay guys, we’re ready to go,” he shouted. Iggy and Sam stood and walked back to the snowmobile. Sam did not notice his keys had fallen out of his pocket and onto their icy bench. Twelve thousand years later, he would find them there, perfectly fossilized.

“Here’s the plan,” said Yugo as Iggy and Sam strapped themselves back into the snowmobile. “We’ll accelerate to maximum velocity. That’s a little under mach 3. Then we’ll hit the time transponder. That should give us enough power to shoot right past our start date and into the future.”

“How far?” said Iggy enthusiastically. Sam had been about to ask the same question; although with a lot less enthusiasm than Iggy.

“I reckon maybe half of one percent of the distance we traveled back in time. So, if I can hit the brakes quickly enough, we’ll stop anywhere from 50 to 75 years in the future. This is not a very precise process.” Sam squirmed uncomfortably in his seat.

“Let’s go, then,” said Iggy. Yugo obliged him by punching a flashing red button and the snowmobile jerked forward. Just as Sam thought that his face was about to make a permanent home at the back of his head, Yugo twisted a yellow dial and the snowmobile twisted into oblivion. The elves saw the familiar swirl of lights as the snowmobile slipped into the time vortex. Then they saw a strange green shadow settle over the window. Yugo pulled hard on the black lever at this side. The snowmobile ground to a sudden halt.

“Here we are gentlemen,” said Yugo. He looked at a flashing display screen. “It’s December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2068. Welcome to the future.” The snowmobile’s doors slid open again and the three elves stepped outside into an unknown world.

“This is a little more like it,” said Sam. They stood at the end of an icy cobblestone street beneath a street sign that read “Santa Claus Lane”. It wound through Santa’s Workshop at the North Pole. At the end of the street rose the 24 story Santa Claus Tower, the corporate headquarters of Santa Claus’ worldwide gift distribution operation. As they walked down the street, they passed a variety of small buildings; to their right was the Elf Bunkhouse and a little further off, the Caribou Coffee Shop and the Real Plastic Snow Factory. On their left, they passed the Reindeer Flight Training School and the Mini Donut Shop. “It looks just like home,” said Sam.

“No it doesn’t,” said Yugo.

“Something’s wrong,” said Iggy. He took a few steps to his left, scraped some frost from the window of Mrs. Claus’ Greenhouse and looked inside. It was completely empty.

Yugo knocked on the door of the next building, The Elf Spa. There was no answer. “These buildings are all deserted,” he said.

“They’ve been abandoned. It’s like they’ve all been retired,” said Iggy.

The elves made their way down the road, knocking in vain on each door they passed. Sam, who was on the verge of panic at the best of times, started to shake. “What’s going on?” he demanded. “Where is everybody?” The only answer was the howl of the wind. So much had changed since they had been in the distant past, yet, in a way, nothing had.

“We’d better find Santa Claus,” said Iggy. “He’ll be able to tell us what’s happened. “How are we going to do that?” Sam asked plaintively, “Everybody’s gone.”

“Don’t worry,” Yugo said, pulling a small gray object from his pocket. He pressed a button on the top and a small screen extended from the side. He opened a keypad on the other side and started to tap in a long string of letters and numbers.

“What is that?” asked Iggy.

“It’s a GPI, a Global Person Indicator. It’s something I’ve been working on for the last few weeks,” Yugo explained.

“What does it do?”

“It can locate anybody anywhere in the world. I just key in some identifying information, and let it go to work. It searches through just about every computer database in the world, you know, government records, phone books, and mailing lists, that sort of thing. It will pinpoint Santa’s location in no time.” Yugo looked down at the little screen. A minute passed by, maybe two. “Funny, it’s a little slow. It seems to be having trouble finding him.” Then the GPI emitted a small “peep” and an address appeared on the screen.

“Is that it?” asked Sam.

“Where is he?” asked Iggy.

Yugo read the lines from the screen. “Sunnyvale Nursing Home and Retirement Residence, 14 Cherry Lane, Phoenix, Arizona.”

**T**HE SNOWMOBILE TOOK THEM TO ARIZONA IN just a few hours. Within minutes of their arrival, they realized that Arizona was everything that the North Pole was not. It was sunny, it was hot, and most important, it was crowded with people. Yugo parked the snowmobile in the parking lot of the Sunnyvale Nursing Home and Retirement Residence beside a couple of large cacti. Despite their bright

green hats and tunics, pointed ears and comparatively short stature, nobody paid them the slightest attention.

Small cars passed by silently on the street. Yugo nodded with approval. "Look," he pointed. "All of the cars run on electricity."

"They look like bumper cars," said Iggy. It was true. A thick rubber bumper ran around each car on all sides. Every driver, and all of the passengers, wore helmets. In fact, now they noticed that all of the pedestrians were wearing helmets as well.

"It's the future," explained Yugo. "A lot of the customs will be different. I expect the safety laws of this time require people using the roads to wear helmets, even if they are only going out for a walk."

"Sounds like a good idea to me," said Sam, who was always looking for ways to promote and preserve his own personal safety. "I'll have to snag me one of those."

"They look a little uncomfortable in this heat, though," said Iggy, who was feeling a little uncomfortable himself. His fur lined green coat and pants were made of wool and designed for a much cooler climate.

Although it was warm, most of the people on the streets wore jackets and long pants as well. These garments were made of a thin shimmering fabric that sparkled in the sunlight. "How interesting," Yugo said. "People are obviously safeguarding themselves from the sun. It must be dangerous to go outside without covering your skin." Sam nodded and pulled his sleeves down over his wrists. Then he carefully placed his hands in his pockets.

Iggy walked up to a tall man in a silver jacket with a red helmet. "Excuse me, sir," said Iggy. "Does Santa Claus live here?"

The man did not answer. Indeed, it seemed that he had not noticed Iggy was even there. He was nodding rhythmically to some message or music only he could hear. He stepped forward and nearly knocked Iggy over.

"How rude," remarked the elf.

"It's okay, Iggy. I know the way," said Yugo. He drew a thin black Palm Pilot from one of the many pockets in his vest and touched the screen quickly with his pointer. "He's in room 17J. It should be just inside."

The elves walked up to the sliding doors at the entrance to the building. Though they stood right in front of them, the doors did not open.

"How about that. Even the doors are rude here," commented Iggy.

Then a tired looking woman walked up alongside them. She paused and turned to look at the helmeted young girl behind her. The girl was dressed in a shiny blue

jacket with “Backstreet Boys 75 Anniversary Reunion Tour”<sup>7</sup> embroidered on the front. She looked to be about 13 years old. “Hurry up, Winston, we’re already late,” said the woman.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” whined the teenager. “I still don’t know why we have to waste our Saturday afternoon here, Mom. All of my friends are at the mall.”

“We’ve been through this a dozen times, Winston,” her mother sighed. “It’s your Grandmother’s birthday. It will mean a lot to her to see you today.”

The girl named Winston stamped her foot on the ground. “I never get to do what I want!” she shouted. She stood glaring at her mother then caught up to her, mumbling under her breath the whole time. As they reached the doors, they slid open and let them in. Iggy, Yugo and Sam scrambled in behind.

“Well there’s one thing that hasn’t changed. The teenagers are still rude,” observed Sam. “And what kind of a name is Winston for a girl, anyway?”



Yugo tapped a few times on his Palm Pilot. “It’s not that surprising really,” he said. “A lot of girl’s names, like Leslie and Beverly, Jordan and Tanner all started out as boy’s names.” He looked at his Palm Pilot. “According to this, Sam is a very popular name for little girls right now.”

Iggy giggled, but stopped when Sam glared at him. They walked through the quiet halls. Here and there little old people sat in chairs, which floated a few inches off the ground. Some of them were staring transfixed at a three dimensional image of someone reading the news which was projected in the center of a large room. Many others were just staring off into space, obliviously. A number of the old people steered their floating chairs up and down the halls. One chair glided past the elves and bumped them against the wall.

“Fascinating,” Yugo remarked as he tapped an entry into his Palm Pilot. “The people of the future have developed hover chairs and holograms.”

Iggy rubbed his elbow. “But they seem to have un-discovered their manners,” he commented. “We are going to have to get some of those safety helmets if we stay here much longer.”

“And some safety masks,” added Sam. “This place smells like piss. What’s Santa Claus doing in an awful spot like this?”

---

<sup>7</sup> It is true. After numerous break-ups, failed marriages, unsuccessful solo projects, brushes with the law and countless other scandals, the Backstreet Boys reunited for a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour in 2068. While their harmonies were as tight as ever, the dance numbers were somewhat limited because three of the original members used walkers, one was on oxygen and the fifth was dead.

“Let’s find out, here’s his room,” said Yugo. The elves stopped for a moment in front of the door to room 17J and then stepped inside.

It was a small and tidy room. Along one wall was a row of bookshelves filled with old cloth bound volumes. In the center of the room stood a crisply made bed, with a hand knitted blanket draped over the end. In a big leather chair in the corner, reading a magazine with a sailboat on the cover, sat Santa Claus.

The jolly old man looked up from his magazine as the elves entered the room and his eyes twinkled.<sup>8</sup> “Ho, ho, ho,” he chuckled. “I never thought I’d see you three again.” He stood up slowly and walked across the room, taking the three elves into his big arms and embracing them tightly.

He stepped back and looked at the elves. “However did you find me here?” He asked, and then looking over at Yugo, answered his own question. “Oh, I see. Snowmobile? Time machine?” Yugo nodded. “Ho ho ho,” laughed Santa Claus.

Iggy spoke next. “Santa Claus,” he asked, “What are you doing here? We went to the North Pole, but there was nobody there; what’s happened?”

Santa Claus became more serious. “Sit down boys,” he said patting the bed. He returned to his big chair. The elves sat down. Santa Claus bent forward. “I guess I’m retired now.”

“But what about Christmas?” blurted out Iggy.

“Oh, nobody believes in Christmas any more,” then, pointing to his big chest, Santa Claus sighed, “Nobody believes in me.”

“No Christmas?” blurted out Yugo.

“Oh, there’s still Christmas, I guess,” Santa explained. “But it’s all about shopping for things you can’t afford and big noisy movies holo-vision specials. I thought Christmas would always be here, but everything slowly changed. Christmas magic doesn’t just happen. It only works if people believe in it. And slowly in the past 50 or a hundred years, people just stopped believing in Santa Claus, and Christmas.” He looked gravely at Iggy, Yugo and Sam, “And elves.” He added.

“No elves?” blurted out Sam.

“I’m afraid the elves were the first to go,” said Santa Claus. “One day, when nobody believed in them anymore, they just faded away.” For the first time the elves noticed Santa Claus himself seemed to be less substantial than his surroundings, as though he were a little less solid than anything else in the room.

“That’s why nobody noticed us outside,” said Sam. “They don’t believe in us.”

---

<sup>8</sup> Yes, they twinkled merrily, if you must know.

Yugo finished his thought, “And they can’t see what they don’t believe.”

“We have to do something!” exclaimed Iggy.

“Ho ho ho,” laughed Santa Claus. “I’m afraid there’s nothing to be done boys. Besides, I kind of like it here. I get three squares a day and every Thursday a cute nurse gives me a bath. Not to mention the weather. It’s fantastic. It’s never cold and this climate has done miracles for my joints.

“But you’re Santa Claus!” shouted Sam.

“Shhhh,” said Santa, placing a finger to the side of his nose. “Not so loud. They call me Mr. Twinkle. When I first got here, I told them I was Santa Claus. Of course, they didn’t believe me and thought I had lost my marbles. So, they gave me some pills that made me dizzy and gave me horrible dreams filled with spiders and monsters. There’s no way I’m doing that again.”

“Now fellas, while it’s been great seeing you again, its time for my nap. If I don’t have my nap on time, I don’t get any desert. And today they have chocolate pie.” Santa Claus got up and showed the elves to the door. “But do come again soon. We have turkey for dinner every Wednesday. They serve it with stuffing straight from a box. It’s terrific.” He waved his fingers and then shut the door.

**T**HE ELVES STOOD DUMBFOUNDED IN THE HALLWAY. Slowly they made their way outside and stood beside the snowmobile. “This is horrible,” said Iggy.

“You’re right,” said Sam. “This place is horrible. We should get home.” He pulled open his door, crawled inside and began fastening his seatbelt.

“We can’t go back,” said Iggy. “We have to do something.”

“But what can we do, Iggy,” asked Sam as Yugo slid behind the steering wheel.

“I don’t know,” answered Iggy. “But the reason everything here is wrong is that no one believes in Santa Claus and no one believes in Christmas. If we can just get people to believe again . . .”

“But that’s exactly the problem,” said Yugo. “Nobody here believes in us. They can’t see us. We can’t even open an electric door by ourselves. I’m afraid Sam’s right. There’s nothing we can do here.”

Iggy sighed and slowly climbed into the snowmobile. “We have to do something,” he persisted as Yugo slipped the snowmobile into reverse and backed up.

“Yugo, look out!” shouted Iggy. Yugo slammed on the brakes, but not before they heard a sickening thump from the back of the snowmobile. They jumped outside and saw Winston the teenage girl picking herself up off the pavement.

Her mother ran over to her. “What is it, Winston? What happened?” she helped Winston brush the dirt off of her jacket.

“I dunno,” complained Winston. “Something knocked me down.”

Her mother looked around and right through the elves. “I don’t see anything,” she said.

“Oh God, Mother,” bleated Winston. “You never believe anything I say.”

“I’m sorry, Winston, but there’s nothing here,” she said. Winston just snorted and followed her mother into their bumper car.

“How interesting,” said Yugo. “Even though they can’t see or hear us, the snowmobile still knocked that poor girl down. I’m glad she wasn’t hurt.”

“That’s it!” said Iggy.

“That’s what?” asked Sam suspiciously. It appeared to him that Iggy had just had some sort of idea that was certain to delay their departure, and perhaps prevent it altogether.

“We can make a difference here. The accident with the snowmobile proves it,” said Iggy.

“So what do you propose we do Iggy,” asked Sam. “Run over some more people?”

“No, no, no,” said Iggy. “We just have to find a way to make ourselves heard. If we can do that, people will know that we are real, and they can start believing in Santa Claus.”

“I suppose it might work,” mused Yugo. “But where would we start?”

Iggy watched as Winston and her mother slowly drove out of the parking lot. “There,” he pointed. “That girl. If we can get someone like that to believe in Santa Claus, we can get anybody to.”

“Well, then,” said Yugo. “What are we waiting for? Let’s follow them.”

Sam just sighed and started wishing he was back on assembly line 3B at the North Pole. Sure, people sometimes lost a finger or two working with the band saw, but overall, it was a lot safer and more secure than an adventure in Yugo’s snowmobile.

**F**OR FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS, THE ELVES followed Winston everywhere she went. For the most part, this involved trips to and from the Mall. Each morning they sat at her breakfast table, watched her do homework and hang out with her friends. Every night they returned to the snowmobile, folded out the tent that attached to the rear hatch and tumbled into bed, exhausted and disappointed. Then the next day they rose early and started over again.

They did everything they could to get her to notice them. They yelled at her. They screamed at her. They waved their arms in her face and even tried pulling her hair. But nothing worked. It was as though they did not even exist in her world.

By the end of the second day, Yugo was beginning to feel a little dizzy and out of sorts. When he mentioned this to Iggy and Sam, they each said that they felt the same way. Yugo looked in a mirror. The face looking back at him was indistinct, like a reflection in a pool. “We’re fading away,” he gasped. “Just like Santa Claus said. If we don’t get someone to believe in us soon, we’re going to disappear altogether!”

But they couldn’t get Winston to notice them the next day, either. That evening, Yugo placed his hand over a newspaper and found he was able to read the type beneath it. “We don’t have much more time,” he said to Iggy and Sam. “By tomorrow night, we’ll be gone.”

The next morning dawned clear and bright. It was December 24<sup>th</sup>, and the elves found themselves once again sitting beside Winston at a food court in the Mall. “What are we going to do?” asked Iggy. “We’ve tried everything. She just can’t see us.”

“I think we should just go home,” said Sam. He was eating a big chilidog, and sauce dribbled down his chin and onto the table.

Iggy picked up a towel and wiped away Sam’s mess. “How can you eat that stuff?” he asked. “And just where did you get it, anyway?”

Sam laughed and little bits of bun sprayed onto his jacket. “I finally found something good about the fact nobody can see us here. I just walked up to that hot dog cart and fixed myself up a big double chili bratwurst. With extra onions. It’s terrific.”

Sam was sitting beside Winston. She was reading a magazine and was completely oblivious to him.

“I’m out of ideas,” said Yugo. For an elf who always had a lot of ideas, this was a serious admission indeed.

“I guess there is nothing more we can do then,” said Iggy. “I suppose that we should just go home.” Suddenly, there was a loud noise. It sounded like the call of an old dying goose, or a the rumble of a motorcycle with a badly tuned engine, or a ...

“Scuse me,” said Sam. He grinned sheepishly. “Must have been the onions.” Iggy coughed and covered his nose. Yugo began waving the smell away, as tears filled his eyes.

Some things are so powerful and overwhelming, they take on a separate existence of their own. The smell that Sam made was one of these. It was a freshly sliced limburger and blue cheese nightmare come to life. It had a physical presence that could not be denied. It spread out from Sam in noxious physical waves. It assaulted and battered the senses. Iggy and Yugo struggled desperately just to breathe. Then, through their teary and squinted eyes, they noticed something remarkable.



Across the table, Winston was holding her nose. She choked back a cough and made a terrible face, as though she could smell something dreadful. Though Winston could not see the elves and could not hear them, somehow Sam's smell infiltrated her awareness.

Now, it is a basic fact of human nature, that when confronted with bad news, the mind struggles to find an explanation. People need to understand why sad things happen so they can make sense of them. And so it was with Winston. She could smell something horrible, but had no idea what it was, or where it came from. She looked to either side of her and then under the table. Then she looked directly at Sam. As her brain grasped for something, anything, to explain the awful thing she smelt, she suddenly saw him. He faded into her perception like a ghost come to life. It was as though he had always been there, but now she noticed him for the first time. She stared at him, and then she said, “was that you, you little troll? You reek.”

Sam stared back at her; slack jawed. A piece of uneaten sausage fell from his mouth and bounced off the table and onto the floor. “You can see me,” he whispered.

“Of course I can see you, you booger,” she answered. “I just wish I couldn't smell you.”

Sam turned to Iggy and Yugo. “She can see me!” he shouted.

“Who are you talking to?” asked Winston, coughing. She looked in the same direction as Sam, and then Iggy and Yugo faded into her view. Once Sam had

imposed himself on her awareness and materialized in front of her, it was no stretch to perceive Iggy and Yugo as well.

Iggy sensed recognition in Winston's eyes. He set his hand down on the table. It was solid and completely opaque. "She believes in us!" he said to Yugo.

"She has to," explained Yugo. "In her mind we have to be real. It's the only way she can understand what her senses are telling her."

"You're talking about Sam's smell, aren't you?" asked Iggy.

"Hey!" interjected Sam.

"It's okay, Sam. You and your chili dog might just have saved us all," said Yugo.

Iggy turned to Winston. "You can see us?" he asked.

She sneered at him. "No duh. It's not like I'm blind, you know."

Iggy chuckled gently. "Certainly not," he said. "But we've been following you for four days now, and you didn't see us until just this minute."

Winston recoiled from him. "You've been following me? What kind of freaks are you?"

Sam burped. Iggy answered, "Actually, we're Christmas elves. And we need you."

Winston snorted. "Yeah right, you're Christmas elves. And I'm Queen Elizabeth the Third."

Iggy persisted. "We are Christmas elves. You have to believe us. In fact, we can prove it to you. Right Yugo?" He turned to his friend, who was struggling for something to say.

Winston leaned back in her chair. "I knew it. You're just a bunch of little perverts in green and red suits."

"The snowmobile," stammered Yugo. Sam started choking on his bratwurst. "We'll take her in the snowmobile."

"Great idea, Yugo," said Iggy. "Once she sees the North Pole, she'll have to believe us. She'll have to believe *in* us. Let's do it."

As the three elves stood up together, Winston realized for the first time that these three peculiar little men were, well, very little men. Each one of them would have to stand on their tiptoes just to look into her armpit. They were dressed in red and green wool suits trimmed with white fur and little silver bells. They certainly seemed odd, but they did not really seem like perverts. She wondered if she was on

some sort of hidden camera and looked over her shoulder. Nobody else in the mall seemed to have taken any notice of the funny little men.

Iggy looked up at Winston. “We’d like to show you our workshop at the North Pole. Would you like to see it?”

“Your workshop,” said Winston. “I suppose you have a Jack in the Box Plant and a Reindeer Barn, too”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam exchanged glances and then nodded.

Winston snorted. “Christmas elves. What’s next, the Tooth Fairy?” She looked down at the three hopeful faces gazing up at her. “Oh, what the heck, why not,” she decided. She pulled on her red helmet and shiny blue jacket and followed the elves to the mall parking lot and into Yugo’s snowmobile.

Now, as you would expect, Winston’s mother had told her countless times not to take rides with strangers. But like most teenage girls, Winston was not one for listening to her mother or following her directions, no matter how sage her mother’s advice might be. If her mother told her not to play on train tracks, Winston was as likely as not to go sit on the tracks and wait for a train to come by so she could ask the engineer why she was not supposed to be there. If you know any thirteen-year-old girls, then you know what I am talking about.

It was a little crowded in the snowmobile. After all, it was not designed to carry passengers taller than four feet. But with a little effort and some shoving, they managed to squeeze in together.

“Everybody ready?” Yugo asked as he turned on the fission reactor and engaged the rocket boosters. “Next stop, the North Pole!”

**S**CARCELY THREE HOURS LATER THE SNOWMOBILE TOUCHED DOWN at the end of Santa Claus Lane and they made their way slowly north up the street.<sup>9</sup> It was as cold and empty as it had been four days earlier. The windows of the Peanut Brittle Factory and Tillie’s Tiny Cup Café were coated with frost and snow. Yugo slowed to a stop in front of the Cold Care Clinic. It was shuttered and deserted.

---

<sup>9</sup> At their point of arrival, Iggy, Yugo and Sam were at one of the few places on Earth where an elf could travel north in a straight line for only about a hundred metres before he would start going south again without even turning the wheel. This is because once the elves reached the North Pole; they would start heading south, no matter which way they went. Many strange and wonderful things happen at the North Pole. This is only one of them.

“Well, what do you think?” Iggy asked Winston. “Isn’t it everything you ever imagined?”

Winston looked through the big tinted windows on either side of the snowmobile. She pursed her lips. “It isn’t much, is it?” she remarked. Iggy gasped. “I mean it’s just a bunch of cold little buildings on a cold little street in the middle of nowhere,” continued Winston. “I thought Santa Claus had a bunch of happy little elves and reindeer.”

Iggy stammered, “it’s not always like this. It’s usually the best place in the world, full of elves and reindeer and stuff.”

Sam poked Iggy in the ribs. “This is a waste of time. We’re not going to make Winnie . . .”

Winston cut him off. “Don’t call me that,” she barked. “I hate it when people call me that.”

Sam rolled his eyes and carried on. “We’re not going to make . . . Winston believe in elves and Santa Claus by showing her a bunch empty frozen buildings.” He looked out the window. “Heck, this wouldn’t even get *me* to believe in Santa Claus.”

“Sam’s right,” said Yugo. He pulled on a blue lever. The snowmobile shuddered and coloured lights danced outside the windows.

“Hang on!” shouted Sam as the snowmobile jerked forward and the stopped. As the lights faded a new North Pole came into view. Elves hurried back and forth across the street. A dozen of them stood in a line, waiting to get into the Eggnog Pub. Three elves were tangled in tinsel outside the Northern Lights Tinsel Mill. Behind them, daredevil elves slipped and slid across the hills in their saucers. Another elf on a small scooter dashed ahead of them, cutting a trail through the snow. In the sky, a reindeer soared overhead.

“What happened?” gasped Sam.

“I just backed us up 70 years or so,” explained Yugo. As he slipped the snowmobile into gear and they started up the street he said to Winston, “this is what the North Pole is really like.”

They drove past a small group of elves who stood on the sidewalk in front of the Glass Ornament Factory, untangling Christmas lights. Four elves eating snow cones waved at them as they passed. Three other elves dashed by on two sleds, apparently testing the toys they had made. Laughter rang out of the windows of the Popcorn and Cranberry House.

Yugo slid to a stop in front of the Santa Claus Tower, parked the snowmobile and stepped out. “Now what do you think?” he asked Winston as he helped her out of the snowmobile and onto her feet. Giant snowflakes gently fell on her shoulders. She stretched her arms and took in the sights around her. Two neatly trimmed elves

walked out of the Beard Barber Shop and greeted two others outside the Tin Soldier Shop.

“Well, I got to admit, it’s pretty cool,” said Winston. “But I know it’s not real.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam gawked at her. “How can you say that?” Iggy stammered.

“I mean the effects are really good. But I saw a hologram movie a lot like this one last year. Here, I’ll show you.” She took off her helmet and placed it onto Iggy’s head. She flipped a dark visor down over his eyes. As Winston twisted a dial on the side of the helmet, two plugs slid gently into Iggy’s ears. Though she looked at Iggy as she spoke, she was plainly talking to the helmet itself. “Play ‘Christmassacre,’” she said.

Suddenly Iggy was in a different world. Little wooden snow covered houses surrounded him. In front of him was a big pole, with a red sign at the top that read “North Pole”. It was nothing like the North Pole he was familiar with, but it appeared completely real and convincing nonetheless. Then he heard a faint buzz in the distance. The noise grew to a dreadful roar in the sky. Iggy looked up and saw three sleek jet planes flying overhead. They looked like space ships. As he watched, transfixed, red laser beams shot out from the jets at the little buildings around him. Flames burst from the windows, the heat washing against Iggy’s face.

Iggy dove behind a snow bank as bombs crashed into the ground beside him. His ears rang as they detonated and shrapnel scattered into the snow around him. He tried to burrow under, but was thrown back as another bomb exploded in front of him.

Then a gruff voice behind him shouted, “not now! Not today!” He turned and saw Santa Claus walking towards him. Well, a man who sort of looked like Santa Claus. He had a white beard and wore a red suit and toque, but he also carried what appeared to be a futuristic looking rocket launcher. He bent down on one knee and raised the big gun to his shoulder. He took aim on the lead jet. He pulled the trigger, and a missile screamed into the air. It tore into the first jet and it exploded into a fiery orange ball.

“Ho ho ho!” shouted Santa Claus. “Take that!” He threw the rocket launcher to the ground and pulled out a large machine gun from his jacket. One of the jets turned, and bore down on Santa Claus, laser beams firing. Santa sprayed machine gun fire from his hip and cried “I’ll see you all in Hell! Ho Ho Ho!”

“Aaaaaaaah!” screamed Iggy, pulling the helmet from his head. The jets and the explosions were gone. Happily, Psycho Santa was gone, too. He was back in front of the Santa Claus Tower at the North Pole.

“Relax Iggy,” said Winston soothingly. “It’s just a movie. Just like this is,” she added, gesturing to the little village around her.

Iggy was still shaking. “Well, I didn’t like that movie, no I didn’t,” he mumbled through chattering teeth.

Yugo pulled open the front door of the Santa Claus Tower. “Come on in, Winston,” he said. “There’s someone here you really should meet before you go home.” He led her into the building and the four of them walked across the polished marble lobby. An elfin receptionist nodded as they walked up to the elevator.

They took the elevator to the top floor. When the doors opened, they stepped out into a large office that spread from one side of the building to the other. Behind a desk the size of a small pier sat a rotund bearded man in a red jacket. He stepped out from behind the desk to greet them.

“Ho, ho, ho,” laughed Santa Claus. “What are you three doing here?” He looked over at Winston. “And who is this?”

“I’m Winston,” said Winston.

Santa Claus extended his hand. “How odd,” he commented. “I don’t believe we’ve met. And I thought I knew all the children in the world. But, it is nice to meet you, Winnie.”

Winston took his hand in hers and shook it warmly. His eyes twinkled and his belly jiggled. He smells like cookies and pine trees, she thought. And for some reason, she did not mind a bit that he had called her Winnie.

Santa Claus stared into her eyes. “Still, I think I know your grandmother,” he said. “I’ll probably be seeing her later tonight. But it’s going to be a long time before I see you again, isn’t it Winnie?” She just stared back at him. She had no idea what to say.

Santa Claus broke his gaze and turned to Iggy, Yugo and Sam. “It’s Christmas Eve, boys,” he said. “I think it’s time you took Winnie home. We all have a busy night ahead of us.”

“Right away, Chief,” said Iggy, and the four of them returned to the elevator.

“Ho ho ho,” chuckled Santa Claus as the elevator doors slid shut behind them.

**T**HEY MADE IT BACK TO WINSTON’S HOUSE A LITTLE after nine o’clock on December 24, 2068. Yugo explained that now they had been to the future, there was no problem getting back to it. This was simply because now the future had actually

happened, while previously, it had not.<sup>10</sup> He did not have to add that since nobody believed in Santa Claus then, it was a sad and bleak place to which to travel.

Winston let them in the back door and led them to the kitchen. “It looks like my Mom has already gone to bed,” she said.

“But its Christmas Eve!” exclaimed Iggy.

“Yeah, that’s why she’s in bed. She wants to get an early start tomorrow. After all, it is the biggest shopping day of the year. If she isn’t at the mall by 6, she’ll never get a parking spot.” Winston opened the refrigerator, pulled out a blue bottle and poured a tall glass of milk.

“But the mall is closed on Christmas!” said Iggy.

Winston looked at him quizzically. “Maybe on Jupiter or wherever it is you come from. But everybody I know spends Christmas Day at the mall. You would not believe the bargains you can get on Christmas. It’s a wonder anyone ever shops on any other day at all.” She put the bottle back in the refrigerator.

“So that’s how you’re going to spend Christmas? At the mall?” asked Yugo.

“I suppose so,” answered Winston. “Although it does get pretty busy.” She walked into her living room and set the glass on a table beside a flat screen on the wall. “Fire,” she said, and a three dimensional image of a small fire filled the screen.

“Don’t you have a fireplace?” asked Sam.

“Gosh, no,” answered Winston. “They’re illegal. They pollute too much.” Sam shook his head. Aside from the chili bratwursts, there was not much about the future that he liked or understood. Winston went back to the kitchen.

Iggy followed her. “But that’s crazy,” he said. “You should be here, at home, spending Christmas with your family!”

She pulled a box of cookies from the pantry and walked over to the counter. “If I spend the day at home, I won’t be with my family. They’ll be at the mall”.

Iggy pressed on, “but surely you believe that we’re Christmas elves now?”

“Oh, I believe that *you* believe that you’re Christmas elves,” she said. “Some of the people who live at the home with my Grandma think so too, but that doesn’t make them Christmas elves.” Winston lifted a few cookies out of the box and returned it to the pantry.

“But what about the North Pole?”

---

<sup>10</sup> As I have already explained, time travel is really complicated and nothing at all like a river, flowing on and on to the sea.

“Like I said, good special effects,” said Winston. “But that doesn’t make it real.”

“Oh come on, you actually met Santa Claus!” exclaimed Sam. “You can’t tell me he’s not real.”

Winston sighed. Her mind drifted back to the friendly old man she had met earlier that night. When she was with him, she could only think of jingle bells and candy canes and dashing through the snow in a one horse open sleigh. “I got to admit. The old guy was pretty good. Way, way better than the one at the mall. But you and I both know that there’s no such thing as Santa Claus.” She walked back into the living room with her plate of cookies and set it down on the table beside her milk glass. She bent down and hugged Iggy. “I had a lot of fun today,” she said. “But it’s getting late, and I’m pretty tired. My Mom will be waking me up before dawn. I think I’m going to go to bed now.” She patted Sam on the shoulder and gave Yugo a little peck on his forehead. “Thanks for everything guys.” She turned and walked up the stairs.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam sat on the sofa staring into Winston’s fake fireplace. None of them spoke for a long time. The house grew quiet. “I don’t believe it,” Sam muttered finally.

“Me neither,” Iggy and Yugo said together. They watched the fire a little longer.

“I guess there’s nothing else we can do,” said Iggy. Sam reached over and picked a cookie up from the plate on the table. As he bit into it, he heard a gentle tapping at the window. The elves turned towards the noise.

Outside the window, standing in the snow was Santa Claus, a small bag slung over his back. He gestured to the elves to open the window. Iggy jumped up and helped him in through the window.

“Can you believe it?” asked Santa Claus. “Nobody has a chimney anymore. I don’t know what I am going to do.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam gawked at him in disbelief. He was not the shadow saw in the Sunnyvale Nursing Home and retirement Residence. He was as real and whole as he had always been.



“I thought you were retired,” said Iggy.

“You said nobody believed in you,” said Yugo.

Santa Claus set his bag on the floor, placed his hands on his belly and laughed. “Ho ho ho. Nobody did believe in me. But now somebody does,” he said, and pointed upstairs.

“Winston?” said Iggy.

“Winnie herself,” said Santa Claus.

“But she said she didn’t believe in you,” said Iggy.

“What she said, and what she believes are not necessarily the same,” explained Santa Claus. He reached over and pulled the cookie out of Sam’s hand. “I believe that was left here for me.”

Sam looked down at the glass of milk and the plate of cookies Winston had left by her fireplace. “She does believe in you,” he whispered.

“But she’s only one person,” said Iggy.

“It’s a start,” said Santa Claus. “It took a long time for the world to believe in me before. Just one person can make a difference.” He opened his sack and reached inside. He drew out a large box wrapped in red shiny paper. “It’s a new holographic helmet,” he whispered. “Iggy, you’ll be happy to know that I’ve replaced all of the movies from the old one.”

Iggy smiled. “And now,” said Santa Claus. “We’d best head back to the North Pole. I think Christmas is back in business, and the four of us have a lot of work to do.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam followed Santa Claus out onto the front lawn. “Say,” he said as he looked at the snowmobile. “Do you think you can give me a lift? I came here in a rental car, and I just don’t think I’ll be able to get home in it.”

The elves laughed. Santa Claus was right. With Christmas back in business, there was a lot of work to do. And they could not wait to get started.

## MERRY CHRISTMAS