



Nightmare on Elf Street

A Tale of Woe

IT WAS WINTER AT THE NORTH POLE and that meant only one thing. It was cold. And it was dark. Okay, winter at the North Pole meant two things. It was cold and it was dark.

Well, three things, really, but the third thing goes without saying. Winter at the North Pole is cold and it is dark, but it also Christmastime. And that means that, despite the coldness and the darkness, winter at the North Pole is a happy time.

Winter at the North Pole is also a busy time, particularly if you are an elf. Of course, elves work hard all year long making toys, but with the coming of winter the work only gets harder. The workshop operates three full shifts every day and night.¹ So, winter at the North Pole can be summed up in four ways. It is cold, dark, happy and busy.

¹ Day and night are almost meaningless at the North Pole, because the sun never rises. Also, because all time zones converge at the North Pole, it is almost impossible to ever know what time it really is. The workshop itself spans 6 time zones. For a number of years, a certain clever elf named Rimple Stumplebeard tried to work this geochronistic peculiarity to his

Of course, because it is busy that also means it is noisy. The air is filled with the roar of power tools: saws and sanders, punchers and presses, routers and rollers and a hundred others. So winter at the North Pole really means a lot of things. It is a cold, dark, happy, busy and noisy time.

"But mostly a noisy time," thought Sam the Elf, as he sat at his bench, his hands over his ears, nursing a hangover, his complexion only a shade or two lighter than his green tunic. He had tried to explain to Iggy that morning that it was not really his fault that he felt this way and that it was really only because he forgot to take a couple of aspirins before he went to bed. But Iggy only chuckled and said it might have had something to do with the 11 Supreme Sized Flaming Foggy Noggies he drank at Yugo's birthday party at the Egg Nog Pub the night before.

"If only I'd eaten a little something more", Sam whispered.

"If only you'd drunk a little bit less," Iggy replied playfully.

Since there was no sympathy coming from that quarter, Sam turned to Yugo, who was assembling a remote controlled bookcase at the next bench. "Can you keep it down a bit?" he asked.

Yugo looked up from his project. "I didn't say anything," he answered.

"You didn't have to," said Sam. "I think I can hear your eyeballs moving." At that moment a horn sounded and the din of the power tools faded. "Finally," grunted Sam. "It's lunchtime."

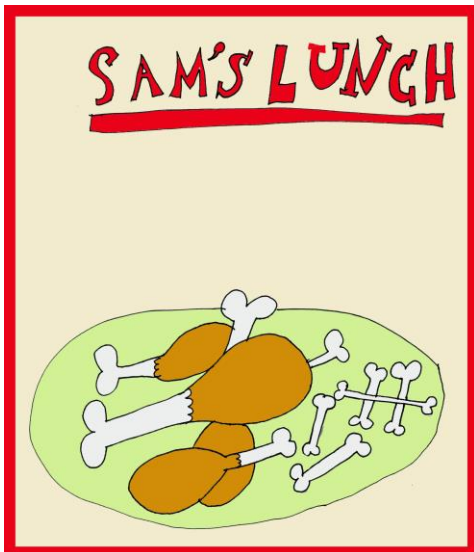
The elves hopped down from their stools and shuffled towards the lunchroom with the others. They sat down at their usual table. Iggy opened his lunch pail and pulled out a container with home made pasta salad and another with home made low fat yoghurt. Iggy was a slender elf, with a long face, long arms and long legs. You might even say he was gangly, for an elf. His eyes twinkled when he smiled, which was often. Like most elves, Iggy

advantage by always starting his shift at one end of the building and then gradually crossing the floor to clock out at the end of his shift only two hours later. This plan worked to perfection until Rimple died of old age three days before his 32nd birthday.

wore a red and green jacket with red tights. His cap was pointed, as were his shoes and his ears. He took it off and revealed an untidy mop of dark brown hair, with a cowlick that rose straight up from his forehead. No matter how hard he tried, Iggy could never tame his cowlick, so he wore his cap whenever he could.

His friend Yugo, always kept his thick black hair neatly combed and his big black moustache trimmed and tidy. Yugo was a clever elf, with a knack for inventing things. He was often lost in thought, either puzzling out the workings of some new toy, or perhaps, the universe itself. Instead of the usual tights, Yugo wore a pair of loose fitting red and green overalls, so that he could always keep his tools and his slide ruler handy. He opened his lunch pail and took out his usual clubhouse sandwich with a small dish of fruit salad.

Though Sam was younger than the others by six or seven decades, his curly red hair was beginning to turn grey. This was because Sam worried a lot and tended to scare easily. Sam was a sturdy elf with a thick chest, arms and legs. This is just a polite way of saying that Sam was chubby, which itself is just a polite way of saying that Sam was fat. Where Iggy's fingers were long and Yugo's nimble, Sam's looked more like a row of sausages. He opened his bag and spread several dozen cold chicken wings on his plate. As Iggy and Yugo looked on in disgust, he began devouring them.



"Those aren't ..." began Iggy.

"Yup," said Sam, wiping barbeque sauce off his chin with his shirt cuff. "Leftovers from last night. Such a waste to leave them behind," he added as he slurped the last remains from the bone.

"That was a great party last night," said Yugo. "Thanks a lot."

"Oh, it was nothing," said Iggy.

"Yeah," said Sam, "Nothing at all." Here Sam was more correct than usual. He had not brought a gift with him to the party, explaining that, like his wallet, he had mistakenly left it behind.

"Well, it was a lot of fun," said Yugo. He turned to Iggy. "I've put my new seat covers in the snowmobile. Do you want to go for a ride after work?"

"Sure," Iggy replied enthusiastically. "I can't wait to see them." Iggy had spent a little more than he had planned on Yugo's birthday present, but when he saw the festive red satin seat covers (trimmed with green tassels) in the window of Artie's Auto Accessory Haus, he knew Yugo had to have them.



"Count me out," interjected Sam.

"Oh come on," said Iggy. "Don't be a poopy pants."

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of," said Sam. "Every time I get into that contraption I end up on some sort of horror ride. It's a miracle I've got any clean underwear at all."

A horn sounded again. Sam looked at his watch. "What the ... ", he muttered, lunch isn't over for another 15 minutes. A voice sounded over the lunchroom intercom.

"All elves are asked to immediately make their way to the workshop floor. The Chief Executive Officer will be making a brief address."

"Chief Executive Officer? That's Santa Claus," said Iggy.

"I wonder what this might be about," said Yugo.

"I don't know," replied Iggy. "But it must be pretty important. Let's go." Iggy and Yugo got up from their seats and started walking towards the

lunchroom door. Sam shuffled in his seat and stared down longingly at his remaining chicken wings. He scooped up a half dozen or so and slipped them into his pocket. Then he looked at what was left of Yugo's fruit salad. He wrinkled his nose, then shrugged his shoulders and dumped it into his pocket as well. He stood up and scrambled after Iggy and Yugo.

ELVES STOOD CROWDED SHOULDER TO SHOULDER throughout the workshop when Santa Claus entered the room and made his way to a podium against the south wall.² Ordinarily his expression was jolly, but on this occasion he looked bothered and grim. Two officious looking elves named Bric and Brac, who were dressed in small black suits and carried oversized leather briefcases, accompanied him.

Bric and Brac were, without question, the two most unpopular elves at the North Pole. Their beady little eyes gazed at the crowd through thick black-rimmed spectacles that rested on their long pointed noses. Bric and Brac worked in the legal department in a pair of small, dark offices on the 24th floor of the Santa Claus Tower. None of the other elves knew where Bric and Brac lived, most just assumed they slept in their little dark offices, surrounded by stacks of files and paper. Nor did anyone know what Bric and Brac actually did. For the most part, their jobs seemed to involve shouting. They shouted at people who came into their offices, they shouted at people at the other end of the telephone or, when there was no one to listen to them, shouted into their Dictaphones. It was clear that if Bric and Brac were involved, the message Santa Claus was about to deliver could not be a good one.

Santa Claus reached the podium, gazed around the room and cleared his throat. "Thank you all for coming. I have an important announcement that concerns all of us," said Santa Claus. He brushed his eye with his red wool mitten. "It is my unpleasant responsibility to tell you all to stop working. Put down your tools. You won't need them. You can all go home. I am afraid to say that Christmas has been cancelled."

² It goes without saying that at the North Pole every wall in every room is necessarily the south wall. Since it goes without saying, no further mention of this fact will be made here.

For a moment there was no sound in the room except that of Sam chewing on a chicken wing. Then all of the elves began talking at once. Santa Claus raised his hands. "Quiet everyone, quiet down, now," he said. But still the uproar continued. Santa Claus rapped on the podium. "Quiet, I say". Gradually the din of the elves lowered to a rumbling whisper. "I am afraid it is true," explained Santa Claus. "This morning the World Court issued an injunction restraining the world from celebrating Christmas."

Santa Claus gestured to a large screen behind the podium. He pointed at the screen with a small remote control. An image appeared of a small group of serious looking men, each dressed in identical black pinstriped three piece suits with red ties, who were standing in front of a large white building. "This is a live press conference from the World Court," said Santa Claus. "I expect that this will explain everything".

The image on the screen zoomed in on a dignified looking man at the centre of the group who stepped up to a large black microphone. White letters at the bottom of the screen identified the speaker as J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C., a senior partner of the law firm Padd & Gowdge LLP, Barristers and Solicitors. J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C. held a thick sheaf of white pages in his hand, which he waved in time with his address. "It gives me great pleasure and professional satisfaction," began J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C., "to advise you all that this morning the World Court issued its decision in the case of *Roe v. Kringle et al.*; which concerns that most frivolous and vexatious of holidays. I speak, of course, of Christmas, and all of the hoopla and merriment that surrounds the heretobeforementioned institution. I am most gratified to announce that the Court accepted the eminently reasonable contentions laid out in our detailed brief³ that the said holiday, which is to say, Christmas, is, in all of its facets and dimensions, discriminatory and offensive to the basic human rights and values of all peoples, to wit, the basic right under constitutional law and custom to be treated and protected equally under the law. Notwithstanding that many people apparently enjoy the said Christmas; they do so with wanton and careless disregard for the rights and feelings of others. The simple fact remains that in every city in every nation of the world there are people who do not observe the said Christmas and want nothing whatsoever to do with it

³Only a distinguished firm of barristers and solicitors like Padd & Gowdge LLP, could describe this 1100 page document as a "brief".

of any kind or nature whatsoever. Yet, these poor people, good and true, are endlessly and unwillingly exposed to the said Christmas in all its irksome and intrusive manifestations. People of countless faiths and cultures, not to mention beliefs and creeds, who do not recognize the said offensive celebration have their personal integrity and dignity violated each day; *inter alia*, they must endure Christmas programming on their televisions, Christmas decorations in their streets, Christmas carols on their phonographs, and Christmas cookies in their restaurants. There is simply no end to the presence of the said Christmas. This most foul festival is to be found everywhere and at all times. In fine, our clients have plainly and abjectly been discriminated against, to their prejudice, on this question of Christmas by all those who do celebrate the said holiday. The harm our many clients have suffered and continue to suffer is irreparable. It was accordingly the decision of this noble and august court," and here J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C. gestured with his pages at the big white building behind him, "that the people of the world be restrained and forever enjoined from the observation and celebration of Christmas, for only in this way can those who do not share this holiday be spared the continued wrongful, unfair and tortious discrimination and oppression by those who do." J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C. removed his eyeglasses, grinned broadly and invited questions from the assembled media.

Sam spat out half a chicken wing. "I have a question," he shouted at the screen. "What the heck did he just say?"

One of the officious looking elves at the podium stepped forward, "I know it is a little confusing to the ignorant and uninformed layman," Bric barked.

"But, what Mr. O'Malley, Q.C. said just now, most clearly, is that the Courts have ordered that no one can celebrate Christmas," finished Brac.

"Well why didn't he just say that?" Sam stammered.

"That's lawyers for you," answered Iggy, glaring at Bric and Brac. "But why would the Courts stop people from having Christmas?"

Santa Claus stepped back to the podium. He cleared his throat. It sounded a little like "Hu hu hu", and that did not sound right at all. "I'm afraid that

this has been a long time coming, boys. Not everybody celebrates Christmas, and some of those people do not like it when anybody else does. In some places Christmas parties have been cancelled. In others, we've seen Christmas concerts and dances become "Winter Festivals". And now their lawyers have seen to it that nobody can celebrate Christmas at all."

"That's just not right," said Iggy.

"You're right, Iggy. It isn't right." Santa Claus sighed. Although he had lived for centuries, for the first time in his life he felt old and tired. "But that is the law. And you cannot fight the law. Now everybody, please just go home. There is nothing more for you to do here." And with that, Santa Claus stepped down from the podium and left the workshop, his head and shoulders sagging.

IT WAS THREE PARTICULARLY QUIET, thoughtful elves that made their way from the workshop to the hangar where Yugo stored his snowmobile. Yugo pulled the cover off the snowmobile. He looked at it and sighed deeply. Iggy thought his friend might be in love.

He was probably right. His snowmobile was the joy of Yugo's life. He spent almost all of his spare time working on it, tuning the engine, polishing the fenders and making various modifications and improvements. And it showed. This was no ordinary snowmobile, but the product of Yugo's rare genius.⁴

It could travel through snow thin or deep, but any decent snowmobile can do that. By pressing a red flashing button, flicking a blue switch or pulling a green lever, the snowmobile could float on water, fly or even travel through time. Very few other snowmobiles can do that. A small lithium fission reactor, which most leading scientists regarded as purely theoretical, fuelled its powerful engines. Its fully enclosed cabin was large enough to hold several passengers (even more if the passengers were only three or four feet tall, which included most of Yugo's circle of friends and acquaintances).

⁴ One of the peculiarities of Yugo's rare genius is that he can recite π to over 60,000 decimal places, yet he still has trouble remembering a grocery list.

Yugo carefully brushed some dust from a knob on the passenger door and pressed it gently. There was a soft click and the door slid open quietly on well-oiled hydraulics. "Climb on in," he said to Iggy and Sam.

Iggy scrambled onto the gleaming chrome running board and into his usual seat. He softly stroked the red satin fabric. "The new seat covers look great! Come on in, Sam."

Sam shrugged his shoulders. "Guess I might as well," he said. "There's nothing else to do." He stepped in and sat down beside Iggy. Yugo followed and slipped into the front seat, the place he usually referred to as the "cockpit". He fastened his seatbelt over both shoulders and pulled on his helmet. He pressed a glowing orange button and the engine came to life with a quiet growl. It idled softly, yet impatiently, as it waited for Yugo's next command. Yugo deftly slipped the snowmobile into gear.

"Let's go," he said,

"Where are we off to?" asked Iggy.

"I don't know yet," replied Yugo. "Wherever she takes us." With that, he pressed on the accelerator and the snowmobile rolled into the crisp Arctic night. Yugo guided it past drifts and dunes of snow, sculpted over eons by the constant winter wind. He pulled on a black lever and wings slowly extended from either side of the snowmobile. It climbed into the dark and frigid sky. He gradually levelled off and executed a long slow bank turn. The lights of the workshop and surrounding buildings sparkled softly far below them.

"I can't imagine a world without Christmas," said Iggy. "I just can't."

Although he had never been an elf of any particular imagination, Sam agreed. "I just don't understand it," said Sam. "How can a bunch of decrepit old judges tell us we can't have Christmas anymore?"

"That's the law, Sam," replied Yugo. "Like Santa Claus said, 'you can't fight the law'."

"Well, it's a dumb law," said Sam. "Somebody should do something about it."

"Sam's right," agreed Iggy. "Somebody should do something about it. We should do something about it."

"What can we do?" said Yugo. "There's only the three of us. We're not lawyers or judges or anything. We can't change the law."

Iggy's eyes sparkled. "I'm not saying we change the law. I'm saying we *break* the law!"

Sam squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. "I'm not sure that's such a good idea, Iggy. We could get in a lot of trouble."

"Why not?" said Iggy. "You said it yourself, Sam. It's a dumb law. And we don't need lawyers or judges to fix it. We've got something better."

"What's that?" asked Yugo.

"This," said Iggy, patting his seat.

"Red satin seat covers with green tassels?" asked Sam incredulously.

"No," Iggy laughed. "This snowmobile."

Yugo grinned proudly. "What do you have in mind, Iggy?"

"It's only three days until Christmas. The toys are mostly finished. The naughty and nice list is pretty much complete. Just because Santa Claus won't deliver the toys doesn't mean that can't be delivered. We can deliver them. We'll keep Christmas going. I don't care what a bunch of judges in some silly court say. Christmas is more than a bunch of affidavits and depositions and legal briefs. Christmas isn't wrong. Christmas is real. Christmas *matters*. If we can make Christmas happen, surely everyone will see this, too."

Sam squirmed even more uncomfortably,⁵ "I don't know Iggy. Do you really think we could? Do you really think we should?"

"We could, we should," Yugo interjected. "And we will." With that, he turned up the volume on the snowmobile's satellite octophonic surround sound radio system. The musical stylings of the Bobby Fuller Four rang out in brilliant digital harmony:

*I'm breakin' rocks in the hot sun
I fought the law and the law won
I fought the law and the law won⁶*

Sam groaned. "Do you think, at least, we could listen to a different station?"

IT WAS A QUARTER PAST LUNCH on Christmas Eve when Yugo finished securing the new trailer to the snowmobile. It had taken him the better part of three days to build to customize a trailer that could be towed by the snowmobile. It had to be able to withstand velocities greater than the speed of sound, without damaging its cargo. And a precious cargo it was; all of the toys assembled by a thousand elves over the last twelve months, each one designed and crafted with a particular girl or boy in mind.

"Okay," said Yugo. He stood up and brushed the snow from his tunic. Then he walked around to the back of the snowmobile. He pressed a small remote control and the back door of the trailer slid open. "Let's load it up."

Iggy whistled and waved at a line of 8 or ten large dump trucks. They slowly rolled toward the trailer. Each was heavily laden with all manner of presents and gifts. As each truck arrived, it was quickly unloaded by a group of elves,

⁵ Although, to be perfectly fair, at least some of this squirming has to be attributed to the chicken wings.

⁶ © 1959 Opryland / Acuff - Rose Music, INC. (BMI). All rights reserved. (I had to say that. It's the law. You cannot fight the law, you know.)

with each parcel carefully stacked inside the trailer. By dusk,⁷ the task was complete, and Yugo closed the trailer doors. He looked at his watch and turned to Iggy and Sam. "Okay. I guess it's time to go."

The three elves settled themselves in the snowmobile. Yugo lifted his finger to press the blue flashing ignition switch when he heard a faint tapping on his window. He turned his head and came face to face with Santa Claus and a pair of other unpleasant looking elves. "Oh fudge," Yugo said to Iggy and Sam. "It's Santa Claus. And he's got those two meddlers, Bric and Brac, from legal with him. We're done for." He pressed a yellow toggle switch and his window slid down. He smiled.

Santa Claus smiled back. "Might I inquire what you three fellows are up to?" he asked gently.

"Oh, nothing much, just going for a little drive," Yugo replied.

Santa Claus looked at the big trailer behind the snowmobile. He stroked his beard and continued. "That's a mighty big trailer you are towing today, Yugo. It looks to me like maybe you just might be doing more than going for a little drive."

Yugo turned red and began to stammer. All of the other elves around the snowmobile shuffled nervously. Nobody made a sound. Iggy leaned forward and interjected, "we're just hauling a few things to the dump."

Santa Claus nodded thoughtfully. "Well, sure, that's just fine then. If it's only a few things." He turned and looked again at the trailer. "Still, it's such a big trailer. I can't help but get the feeling that maybe; just maybe, you aren't going to the dump at all. It occurs to me that perhaps the three of you might be planning on delivering some toys tonight."

"Who, us?" asked Iggy innocently.

⁷ It is, of course, technically incorrect to speak of dusk occurring on December 24th at the North Pole. Dusk actually occurs sometime around October 28th and lasts three days. What I really meant to say here was that around the time dusk would have occurred if the North Pole were a normal place. As is plainly evident, the North Pole is anything but a normal place.

"It just occurs to me that with a trailer that size that maybe that's what you are up to."

"Who, us?" asked Sam innocently.

Santa Claus lowered his round, rosy cheeked face into the snowmobile. "Of course you all understand that it is against the law to deliver toys on Christmas Eve, don't you?" The two elves at his side glowered at Yugo.

Yugo's face quickly turned from red to white. "Sure, sure we do," said Iggy.

"Yes, yes, I am sure you do understand that," said Santa Claus. He looked down at Bric and Brac who nodded at him in unison. "And of course you also understand that the Santa Claus Corporation (International) and its worldwide affiliates and subsidiaries cannot have anything to do with breaking the law, can they?"

"Oh no, no sir," said Iggy.

"Good then," said Santa, and he waved Bric and Brac away. The two elves turned and walked away shaking their heads. "As long as we have an understanding." Santa stepped back and Yugo rolled the window back up.

"That was a close one," he whispered to Iggy and Sam.

"Let's get out of here, before he has any second thoughts and decides to look in the trailer," said Sam.

Yugo pressed the ignition button and the lithium fission reactor hummed to life. He reached down to shift the snowmobile into gear. There was another tapping at the window. He looked over and saw Santa Claus was still there. He swallowed hard, and rolled the window down again.

"Good luck," said Santa Claus, his eyes twinkling. He winked and chuckled a quiet "ho ho ho," as Yugo stepped on the accelerator and the snowmobile rolled forward, dashing through the snow.

"We're on our way," Yugo said. He pulled the black lever and sleek black wings slowly extended from either side of the snowmobile and clicked into place. He pulled back on the steering wheel and the snowmobile rose into the sky.

"Christmas, here we come!" shouted Iggy.

IT SEEMED LIKE ONLY MOMENTS LATER that the elves found themselves ten miles above a large city. Yugo looked at the digital time readout on his dashboard. "We're right on schedule," he said. "I'll take us down to the ground so we can start our deliveries." He pushed the steering wheel forward and the snowmobile gradually descended towards the city below.

"Yugo, we've got thousands of toys in the back. How will we know where to deliver them?" asked Sam.

Yugo pressed a yellow button and a small computer screen popped out of the dashboard. He tapped the side of the little monitor. "I downloaded the entire nice and naughty list directly into the snowmobile's onboard computer," he said. He typed a few commands on a keypad and a list of names scrolled down the screen.

"This is going to be easy!" said Iggy.

"Um, I'm not so sure," said Sam, looking out of his small window.

"Oh fiddle faddle, Sam," said Iggy. "What can possibly go wrong?"

"That," said Sam, pointing out the window.

Yugo glanced out the window and then studied his dashboard instrument display. "Uh oh," he said.

"What is it?" asked Iggy.

"Bogies at 10 o'clock," answered Yugo. He reached up and flipped a series of switches over his head. "This is about to get complicated."

"What are bogies?" Iggy asked Sam. But before Sam could answer, Iggy saw them for himself. Three fighter jets were approaching rapidly from the left. They would overtake the snowmobile in moments.

The radio crackled. "This is restricted airspace. Please identify yourself and your mission. We demand that you comply with the orders of the World Court. No Christmas presents may be delivered here. If you fail to desist, we are ordered to shoot you down."

"This can't be good," said Iggy.

"We'd better do as they say," said Sam.

"Buckle your seatbelts," said Yugo. "I have a couple of tricks up my sleeve."

"I just knew that he was going to say that," said Sam, as he checked his seatbelt and tightened the straps on his helmet.

The radio whistled again. "We repeat. Identify yourself. And land your ... your ... vehicle. If you do not comply, you will leave us no choice. We will shoot you down."

Yugo pressed a green button. The radio went silent. "That's better," he said. He jammed the steering wheel forward while turning it hard to the left. The snowmobile plummeted into a dizzying spiral dive. Iggy screamed. Sam calmly reached into the seat pocket in front of him and removed the small paper bag secured there.

The three fighter jets turned in formation and dove after them. The silent night was shattered by rocket fire. Yugo levelled off and tacked left and right as shots screamed past either side of the snowmobile. He pulled the wheel back and the snowmobile climbed steeply. The fighter jets fell in behind them. More rockets whizzed past their windows.

"Hang on," Yugo grunted. He pulled back still harder on the wheel and the snowmobile tipped backwards and then began to loop back down. Iggy and Sam could see the fighter jets below them now, trying to duplicate Yugo's aerobatics. Yugo increased their speed and the snowmobile began to rise again.

Iggy gasped as the three fighter jets sprang into view in front of them. The snowmobile had completed a full circle and doubled back behind them. It was now the pursuer. Yugo pressed the green button again and spoke into his microphone. "I have you in my sights. I'd recommend you call off your attack," he said firmly.

"Yugo, what are you going to do?" asked Iggy.

"This is going to be great," Sam shouted gleefully. "Hit 'em with everything you've got. Let 'em have it with the torpedoes and the flame throwers and the plasma grenades!"

Yugo shook his head. "Come on, Yugo," said Sam. "You've got to have rocket launchers in this thing, don't you? Or fuel to air missiles?" he added hopefully.

"Nope," Yugo replied. "But I have made a few modifications." He pressed his thumbs down on two buttons on the steering wheel. Streams of colour shot out of the front of the snowmobile and splattered onto the fighter jets in front of them.

"Paint?" Sam blurted incredulously. "We're shooting those jets with paint?"

"It's working!" shouted Iggy. And it was. The three jets were covered in globs of green and orange paint. Unable to see any longer, they had turned away and were attempting to land.

Sam muttered to himself, "why would anyone even install paint guns in one of these things?" Yugo just shrugged his shoulders.

"That was great, Yugo," said Iggy.

Yugo sighed. "It's not over yet. Look, there's more of them." Six more fighter jets had appeared from below. They soared up and began firing on the snowmobile.

"Hit them with the paint!" cried Sam. "Hit them with the paint!"

"I'm afraid we're out of paint," said Yugo. "But I'm not out of tricks." With that, he slammed the snowmobile into reverse. It stopped suddenly and hung still in the air for a moment, and then it shot backwards. The six fighter jets swooped after them. Yugo turned from side to side, but the squadron remained in close pursuit. "This is no good," said Yugo. "With that trailer, I can't see where I am going." He threw the snowmobile back into forward gear. It stalled briefly and then darted ahead, directly into the middle of the fighter jets' formation. Confused at the sight of a trailer towing snowmobile flying straight towards them, the jets scrambled to avoid a collision. While they successfully evaded a collision with the snowmobile, they were unsuccessful in evading a collision with each other. Five of the jets crumpled together and then fell from the sky, their pilots ejecting and parachuting gently behind them.

The sixth jet circled around and resumed the chase. Yugo steered the snowmobile lower, but the jet stayed right behind them. There was the chatter of gunfire, and more shots whistled past their windows. "I can't hold him off forever," Yugo said.

"You're absolutely sure that you don't have any machine guns or bombs in this thing?" asked Sam.

"Sorry, Sam. No bombs. Unless you count toy ones." Yugo grunted as he pulled from side to side. Then he paused for a moment. "Sam, you're a genius," he said.

Sam beamed with pride. "I knew that."

Yugo gestured to the back of the snowmobile. "There are some spare toys behind the back seat. I thought we might need them. Pull out as many as you can." Iggy and Sam reached into the back and began piling dollhouses

and racecar sets into the front seat. Yugo pressed a brown switch. The passenger window slid down. "Okay, throw those toys out the window."

"What?" shouted Sam above the roar of the wind outside.

"Just do it," Iggy screamed. The two elves shoved action figures, plastic models and video games out the window. The toys flew back and battered the cockpit of the remaining fighter jet without any effect. Iggy pushed a large stuffed teddy bear outside. It drifted to the fighter jet, where it was sucked into the engine.

The engine ground to a stop with a sickening *clank*. The explosion that followed was both loud and impressive. The pilot ejected as his plane tumbled to the ground in a ball of flames.

Yugo pointed the snowmobile down. "I think we'd better land before we get into any more trouble," he said. "We can stay on the ground for a while."

He brought the snowmobile down softly on a quiet street and stopped. "Let's get started." He typed a few commands on a keypad and a list of names, addresses and toys scrolled out of the dashboard computer. "Iggy, you take this list. Sam, here's yours. You can cover the west side of the street. I'll do these ones."

They went to the back and opened the trailer. Aside from a few stray bullet holes, the trailer and its contents had made the trip undamaged. Each of the elves grabbed an armful of toys and made their way to the houses on their lists.

THEY CARRIED ON IN THIS FASHION for several hours, staying on the ground and taking to the air only when they had to, and even then only at low altitude. As they came to each new street, they stopped, checked their lists twice, collected some toys and then scrambled down chimneys, through open windows and any other way they could find to deliver their cargo.

From time to time, they heard police sirens in the distance. On one occasion, Yugo stopped to pat a cat, but discovered to his horror that the family pet was actually a raccoon. On another, Yugo found a family had left a bowl of cookies beside their fireplace, but on eating one learned they were dog biscuits. Still, for the most part, they completed their deliveries without incident.

They came to a house on a beach. They parked the snowmobile on the sand while Sam ran into the house with an electric train. Iggy and Yugo waited for him beside the trailer. Yugo looked at his watch and then out into the sea. "We're finished here. But we're running behind schedule and now we have to cross the ocean."

"Do you think it's safe to fly yet?" asked Iggy.

"Not a chance," replied Yugo. "I've been listening to my satellite police scanner for the last two hours. They know what we're doing. The sky is filled with military aircraft. The police aren't far behind us, either. We wouldn't make it ten miles in the air."

"Then what are we going to do?" asked Iggy.

"We're going to have to cross the old fashioned way," said Yugo. "By boat. It will take us a little longer, but it is the only way."

They heard a dog barking, and turned to see Sam running back along the beach. "We've got to get out of here!" he yelled. Four burly uniformed policemen with dogs were running after him.

"Rats, they're closer than I thought," said Yugo. "We've got to get going now." He slammed the trailer doors shut and ran around to the front of the snowmobile. Iggy followed him and dove into his seat. Yugo started up the engines and drove the snowmobile down the beach towards the water. Sam was still about 20 yards away and his pursuers were gaining on him.

"Yugo, what are you doing?" Iggy hollered. "We can't leave Sam behind."

Yugo didn't seem to hear him. He pressed a black button and the passenger door flipped open. He pulled a red knob and a small hatch opened on the side of the snowmobile. A large slingshot rose out of the opening. Yugo carefully twisted the knob and the slingshot turned toward Sam. He pressed the knob in and the slingshot fired. A plunger attached to a cable sprang at Sam. It stuck to his chest, but hit him with such force it knocked him several feet backwards and on to the ground. The four policemen let go of their dogs, which surrounded Sam and started sniffing and growling at him. The policemen reached him and drew their handguns. Yugo pulled the red knob back out and the cable quickly wound back in, dragging Sam along the beach. The policemen began waving their guns and hollering at Sam to stop, stop, stop in the name of the law. The dogs bit and tore at Sam's green tights.

The snowmobile bounced along the beach, dragging Sam along behind while gradually drawing him in closer. Sam shut his eyes as sand filled his nose and ears. He came even with the passenger door just as the snowmobile reached the first waves and Iggy pulled him in. The door slid closed behind him.

Yugo pressed a flashing green switch and pontoons began inflating on either side of the snowmobile. He pressed the accelerator and they shot out into the sea, leaving the four policemen waving their guns and cursing at the edge of the beach.

Sam fell into his seat, spitting out sand and seawater. He rubbed his chest where it had been struck by the plunger. "That's going to leave a mark, you know," he said.

"Sorry about that," said Yugo. "But we really didn't have any choice."

Sam dumped a handful of sand out of his cap and examined his torn uniform. "Sure you did. Next time let me take my chances with the cops. The worst they can do is shoot me."

THEY COMPLETED THEIR OCEAN CROSSING in a little less than three hours. While this surely shattered all previous aquatic speed records, Yugo had become increasingly anxious about the time. "We should have been finished by now," he said. "Santa Claus would have been finished by now."

Iggy patted Yugo on the shoulder. "Well, he is Santa Claus, after all," he said. "We can't expect to be as good as Santa Claus the first time out."

Sam, who was still digging sand out of his ears, added "and Santa Claus doesn't usually get shot at."

"We're just going to have to go faster," said Yugo. As they drew up out of the ocean, he printed three more lists from his computer and passed them around. "Here's our next stop."

Iggy and Sam stepped out of the snowmobile and stretched. It had been a long⁸ and exhausting night. Sitting for three hours in the snowmobile had caused their sore and tired muscles to stiffen up. Yugo opened the trailer. Iggy sighed and stretched again. The deliveries had to be made. He looked at his list, collected his gifts and started up the sidewalk to the first house.

And so it began again as the elves worked their way from street to street and from city to city. Soon, the familiar sound of police sirens could be heard in the distance, and the elves were forced to stay low and travel on back roads. Yugo kept his police scanner on all of the time.

"They're closing in on us," he remarked.

"How many more houses?" asked Sam, yawning in the back seat.

Yugo consulted his computer. "Just a few more." The sun was rising in the east, spreading velvet ribbons of crimson across the horizon.

⁸ It had been an extremely long night. Because Iggy, Yugo and Sam were travelling around the world from east to west, they had already experienced the midnight hour 18 times in 18 different time zones. The only time this could possibly be a good thing is on New Years Eve. At any other time, it is absolutely exhausting.

"We're not going to make it," said Iggy.

"We're almost done," said Yugo. He turned onto a side street and stopped in front of a large house. "This is the last road. Just these three houses, and then the big one at the top of that hill."

The elves stepped out of the snowmobile. They each took a toy and ran to separate houses. Iggy slipped inside through the living room window. Yugo rooted around in his pocket and pulled out a thick Swiss Army knife. He flipped open a few tools and then slipped one into the back door lock. The door popped open and he stepped quietly inside.

Sam approached his house and tried the front door. It was locked. He quickly checked the windows, but they, too were impassable. When he came around to the rear of the house, he saw a doggy door and scrambled through that. He left his parcel and got back down on his hands and knees to crawl back through the little door.

"Oh, what the heck," he whispered. He had just realised he did not need to crawl out. He could just open the back door from the inside and walk out. He stood up, walked to the door and turned the knob. The door scarcely opened when a loud horn sounded. He had set off the burglar alarm. Sam grimaced, pulled open the door and ran outside. Lights appeared throughout the house. Sam pounded through the snow towards the snowmobile. He jumped in beside Iggy and shouted "Go! Go! Go!"

Yugo turned the snowmobile down the road and headed up the hill. "Only one more house," he said. The police sirens were getting closer and louder.

"Hurry, Yugo," shouted Iggy.

"Almost there," he said. The road turned to the right around a large stand of fir trees. Yugo sped around the corner. As soon as they came around the trees Yugo looked up and stabbed the brake. The snowmobile skidded sideways before coming to a stop.

A half dozen police cars blocked the way. Several police officers were assembled around the cars, dressed in riot gear and heavily armed. Yugo

spun the snowmobile around and started back down the hill, only to find several more police cars approaching them from the other direction.

"Now we're done for!" cried Sam.

"We'll have to take to the air," said Iggy.

Yugo reached for the black lever to extend the snowmobile's wings, but as he did, a group of three helicopters, silhouetted black against the pink dawn sky, rose over the horizon. There could be no escape that way. Yugo rested his hand on the lever and looked to his right. A snowplough had left a deep line of snow along the edge of the road, which sloped down to a forest of fir trees surrounded by swirling and drifting banks of snow. The helicopters drew closer. The policemen at the roadblock raised their weapons.

Yugo smiled. He turned the snowmobile to the right and pressed the accelerator. Sam rubbed his hands together, "what have you got up your sleeve this time, Yugo? Anti-aircraft guns? Laser beams?"

Yugo held the steering wheel steady. "I don't think we'll need any of that," he said. "This snowmobile is a lot of things. But first and always," he grunted as he bashed into the ploughed snow at the side of the road and streaked into the woods, "it's a snowmobile." The snowmobile's thick rubber tires churned through the snow and it sped around trees and rocks, the trailer lurching and bouncing erratically behind. The policemen stood at the side of the road shouting. One police car drove after them, but quickly became mired in the deep snow and stalled. The helicopters tried to follow them, but the snowmobile was virtually invisible as it wove through the fir trees.

Yugo cornered tightly around a large boulder, the snowmobile's front skis cutting a clean trail before them. There was a loud clang as the trailer struck the rock. They sped past some trees flew over a small rise. Then, Yugo turned the snowmobile up the hill. "Where are you going?" demanded Sam.

"We still have one present left," said Yugo.

"You can't be serious," said Sam.

"There's the house now," said Iggy. A large brick mansion with a peaked roof appeared through the trees. The snowmobile burst out of the forest and Yugo drove it across the wide lawn in front of the house and into the driveway. He pushed open his door, hopped out and led Iggy and Sam to the back of the snowmobile.

The trailer was twisted and dented from the journey through the woods. A gash split one side like an open wound. One of the back doors was missing, the other swung forlornly from a single hinge. Iggy stepped inside. At the front corner of the trailer sat a single lonely rag doll with a red ribbon in her hair. Iggy picked it up and climbed back out. He held the doll out before him. "It's the last toy," he said. "Let's do it together."

Iggy walked up to the big brick house with Yugo and Sam behind him. The doors and windows were locked, but at the side of the house they found a trellis. Iggy gestured to Yugo and Sam to climb up and he followed them. Once at the top, they carefully climbed the steep peak to the chimney. The wail of police sirens filled the air as they pulled themselves up the chimney and dropped down.

LITTLE AMANDA O'MALLEY

ALWAYS WOKE UP EARLY. She was usually the first one down the stairs every day. Little Amanda was a pretty blonde girl. Although she was almost nine years old, she was small for her age and anyone who met her often thought she was only five or six. But it was not because she was small that everyone called her Little Amanda. Her mother was also named Amanda, so everyone called her mother Amanda and they called Little Amanda, well, Little Amanda. Little Amanda thought this was unfair and that her mother should be called Big Amanda,



but apparently this would not be polite. Sometimes Little Amanda wished she had been named Julie or Martha or even Bill, but she had not had any say in the matter when she got her name and it was too late to change things now. So, Little Amanda she remained.

That Christmas morning was like pretty much every other morning. Little Amanda rose with sun, put on her peculiar yellow slippers, made herself a big bowl of cereal and sat down in front of the television set, to watch cartoons until the rest of the family woke up.

Although Little Amanda was small, she was a good girl. She was polite and cheerful and cleaned her room some of the time. Because of this, she was on the nice list at the North Pole. But she was still very surprised when three elves dressed in red and green tumbled out of her fireplace, spreading ashes and soot across her grandmother's living room carpet.

Little Amanda leapt to her feet, spilling her milk and fruit loops on the rug. "Who are you?" she asked. Then she looked again at the three unusual gentlemen tangled up on the floor. "What are you?"

Iggy stood up and brushed the soot from his tunic. He was exactly the same height as Little Amanda. She looked at him with her big blue eyes. She was so short; she hardly looked at anyone directly in the eyes. Iggy thought they were beautiful. He reached out his hand. "I'm Iggy," he said. "And this is Yugo, and that's Sam." The other two elves got to their feet and nodded their heads in greeting. "We're Christmas elves," explained Iggy.

A look of panic spread across Little Amanda's face. "Christmas elves?" she asked, aghast. "You really shouldn't be here then. Nobody celebrates Christmas here."

"Oh, I don't believe that for a minute," said Iggy. "Surely you still believe in Christmas?" He reached down to what had become a badly stained living room carpet. He picked up the slightly soiled doll from the floor and passed it to Little Amanda. She took it from him and cradled it gently in her arms.

"Harrumph." Somebody was clearing his throat. But this was no simple throat clearing. This throat was cleared in a rich and husky baritone that

filled the room and reverberated off the walls. It *resonated*. The elves turned and saw a distinguished looking gentleman standing at the foot of the curving staircase. It was none other than J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C.,⁹ senior partner of the revered and august firm of Padd & Gowdge LLP, Barristers and Solicitors. J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. was attired in a pair of neatly pressed flannel pyjamas. His shirt top was tucked into his pants. His hair was perfect.

"Grandfather!" cried Little Amanda, and ran across the room to embrace J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C.

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. reached down and patted Little Amanda on her head, cleared his throat again and spoke. "I am satisfied beyond any reasonable doubt that you three intruders have broken into my home, with malice aforethought, with the sole purpose of perpetrating an act of Christmas in my said home and thereby violating and breaching the directives of the World Court in respect of that said matter."

Sam shook his head. "Do either of you know what he just said?" he asked Iggy and Yugo.

"I have no idea," said Iggy.

Yugo pulled a small electronic device from his pocket. He looked down at the liquid crystal screen, turned a dial and said, "This portable translator doesn't really have the power to translate jargon. But I think he said that we're breaking the law," answered Yugo.

"Oh," replied Sam. "Well, I already knew we were doing that."

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. continued, "You can be assured that I will take, forthwith, all rights and prerogatives available to me to attain redress in this regard; such rights and prerogatives including, but are not limited to, prosecution before appropriate criminal tribunals as well as all civil remedies available to me, such remedies to involve, without limiting in any way the

⁹ Observant readers will note that no toy was carried into the house for J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. While his name was included in the database contained on Yugo's onboard computer, it was on the naughty, and not the nice, list.

generality of the foregoing, aggravated, punitive and exemplary damages. Kindly govern yourselves accordingly." J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. cleared his throat again for emphasis.

"He says he's going to have us thrown in jail and sue our pants off," Yugo translated for Iggy and Sam.

Sam looked down at his stained and tattered green tights. "If he really wants them, he can have these pants," he said.

Iggy smiled and looked up to J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. "Surely you don't mean all of that," he said.

"I most certainly and emphatically do, sir," replied J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. with a sneer. "You have brought Christmas into my very domicile with reckless and wilful disregard of the clear and express prohibitions enunciated by the World Court. Moreover, and for greater certainty, you are in direct violation of the edicts of that said Court. You must face the consequences of your said actions."

Iggy straightened himself and said, "I'm prepared to face the consequences of bringing Christmas into your home," he said.

"You most assuredly shall," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. as he reached for the telephone.

He was interrupted by a small voice which said, "Grandfather, please don't." J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. looked down at Little Amanda. Like Iggy, he found her big blue eyes arresting. She was holding the new rag doll Iggy had given her. "Please don't take Christmas away."

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. knelt down in front of Little Amanda. He looked from her to the doll and back. "My dear sweet child," he said. "These ... " he looked over at Iggy, Yugo and Sam in their torn and dirty uniforms. "These ... juvenile delinquents are guilty of crimes most heinous against the state and public order. They have broken the law. And the law is the veritable foundation of any just and civilised society, including that of the said state.

Surely you can see why this sort of behaviour is offensive, improper, wrongful and intolerable, can you not?"

"Oh, Grandfather," said Little Amanda. "I really have no idea what you just said. I just know that they made me happy. And Christmas makes me happy."

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. smiled and looked again into the eyes of his granddaughter, and this time he saw more than something big and blue and beautiful. He saw Christmas looking back. J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. stepped back in surprise.

J. Murphy O'Malley, Q.C. rose unsteadily and turned to Iggy, Yugo and Sam. "It's been so long, I'd forgotten," he mumbled.

"Forgot what, Grandfather?" asked Little Amanda.

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. patted Little Amanda on the head. "About Christmas," he said. "I forgot about Christmas. What it means to people. What it means to children. What it means to you. Little Amanda," he said, kneeling back down again. "I'm afraid that your grandfather has done a very bad thing."

The carved wooden front door shook under the force of a loud knocking. "Open up in the name of the law!" a voice bellowed. "We have the building surrounded. Open up or we will break down this door!"

J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. spun around. "Oh no," he said. "This can't happen. Not now."

The knocking grew louder. Iggy looked out the window. Several policemen in riot gear ran past. For a moment he wondered at what point the newspapers would say that the police had swarmed the building. Then he heard helicopters and footsteps on the roof of the house and reckoned that point was already long past. He turned to Yugo and Sam. "We had better get out of here," he said.

"No wait," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C., raising his hand. "Don't go." At that moment, there was a tremendous crash as the heavy front door flew off its hinges and slid along the floor. A team of heavily armed police officers charged into the room.

"Everybody put your hands up and get down on the floor!" shouted the first police officer. Iggy, Yugo and Sam looked at each other in confusion. They slowly raised their hands as more and more weapons were pointed at them.

"Please officers, listen to me," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. "There has been a mistake. I've made a terrible mistake. There's no problem here, everything is fine."

The police officers slowly lowered their guns. The first policeman walked up to J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. and bellowed in his face, "what do you mean a mistake! We've been following these fugitives for hours. We've traced them here. There's no mistake!"

"No, you can't arrest these young fellows," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. in his rich and melodious baritone. "I was wrong. What these ... gentlemen have done is right."

"What do you mean?" shouted the police officer, spit flying from his lips as he spoke. "We have the court order right here. It says 'No Christmas'. Or at least that's what I've been told that it says.¹⁰ They're under arrest."

¹⁰ Actually, the Court Order said 'All people wheresoever and howsoever situated, and each of them, upon hearing read the terms of this Order (hereinafter referred to as "this Order") shall be and are hereby restrained and enjoined forever from the observation and celebration of Christmas (as further and more particularly defined below and referred to throughout this Order as "Christmas") in any form or manner whatsoever, such prohibited actions and deeds including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, the display of decorations bearing any resemblance, actual or apparent, to Christmas theme or motif, the exchange of gifts, presents, toys, cards, socks, ties or fruitcake; the raising and ornamentation of trees, wreathes, mistletoe or other flora; the singing or playing of Christmas music, be it carols of a traditional nature or popular recordings, and the use of stockings or other footwear as receptacles for the receipt and storage of gifts of any kind; Christmas being defined herein as that holiday or festival traditionally observed on or around the 25th day of December in each year, together with all trimmings and trappings customarily appurtenant thereto; and such Order shall apply *mutatis mutandis* to any and all cultural variations and observances related in any manner to or derivative from the said

"What I mean," explained J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C., "is that the World Court was wrong. I was wrong. Christmas belongs to everyone. It belongs to the world. No court can stop that."

"So what are we supposed to do then?" the police officer yelled. "We've got orders you know."

"I know that officer," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. "But those orders are about to be cancelled. I'll be filing papers to dissolve the injunction this afternoon. So go home to your families. Share Christmas with them."

The police officers seemed stunned for a few moments, and then they set down their weapons and marched back out of the room. The big police officer turned back and said. "All right then. Sorry about the mess. Merry Christmas."

"And a merry Christmas to you officers," said J. Murphy O'Malley Q.C. with a grin. He picked up Little Amanda and walked over to Iggy, Yugo and Sam.

"You three look awfully tired," he said. "Perhaps you'd like to stay here for dinner. I think we're going to have a turkey."

Christmas whenever and howsoever such observances may be observed; it being the intent and purpose of this Order to abolish Christmas in any and all forms; and such Order to be effective immediately and to remain in full force and effect in perpetuity unless and until it is varied or dissolved by further and other Order of this Court (etc. etc.)..." Not even Yugo's portable translator could make any sense of that.

EPILOGUE

LITTLE AMANDA O'MALLEY grew a lot taller and eventually had a family of her own. She was always polite and cheerful and generally cleaned her room some of the times she was asked to. Her daughter, whom she did *not* name Amanda also grew up and had a daughter of her own, whom she did not name Amanda, either. She named her Winston, which was a popular name for girls in the middle of the 21st century. Winston would eventually have her own adventures with Iggy, Yugo and Sam, but that is another story.

J. MURPHY O'MALLEY, Q.C. retired to a cottage on the shores of one of the Great Lakes. Later in life, when asked why the mosquitoes and other blood suckers seemed to leave him alone, he drolly replied, "professional courtesy."

BRIC AND BRAC became partners of the distinguished law firm of Padd & Gowdge. They rarely leave their dark corner offices and the employees of the firm have speculated they actually live in them. Bric currently acts for a group suspected of ties to organized crime. Brac is representing a Fortune 500 company accused of contaminating a small community with toxic waste. They are both very happy.

IGGY decided to withdraw his application to law school and concentrate on building toys. He is currently working on developing new and exotic robot pets, including a line of toy raccoons. He is very happy.

YUGO accidentally stained his new seat covers with soot and fruit loops when he got back into his snowmobile. He tried everything, but he could not get the mark out. He never told Iggy.

SAM returned to the North Pole after his long night's work and slept for 22 hours straight. When he woke up, he had leftover chicken wings for breakfast.

SANTA CLAUS remains the President and Chief Executive Officer of Santa Claus Corporation (International) and employs over 3000 elves in the manufacture of toys. He continues to deliver presents to the children of the world every Christmas Eve.