

A Christmas Caroline

A Tale of 'Citement and "Ventures

IT HAD BEEN DREADFULLY COLD at the North Pole that year, and the blizzard that blew through on Christmas Eve only made matters worse. The snow was piled up to the windows of the workshop, and it was all Iggy could do to stay warm while he sanded and polished the toys on his bench. Iggy was a junior elf, third class. There were only two or three others still working this late. Iggy hoped that if he got these toys finished, he might get promoted to junior elf, second class. Shivering, he walked across the workshop to put some more wood on his little fire.

On the way, Iggy passed the bench where his friend Sam was working. Sam was a bit of a cantankerous sort, but he was all right, once you got to know him.

"Hey" shouted Sam, "get out of the way of the fire, it's freezing in here!"

"Sorry" muttered Iggy, stepping aside and shaking his head. He looked over and saw another elf, Yugo, screwing something into some sort of mechanical gizmo. He set the thing down on his table and pressed a button. Immediately the contraption started bouncing up and down and blowing bubbles out its top. Yugo had a knack for designing goofy looking things that kids never seemed to know what to do with on Christmas Day.

As Iggy returned to his bench, a plump and jovial looking fellow strode into the room. He was clothed in red, had a fluffy white beard, and carried a large sack over his shoulder.

"Is it ready yet?" he asked.

"Yes, Santa" replied Iggy, "I've just finished it now."

"And not a moment too soon" replied Santa, taking the tiny doll from Iggy's hands, "There is a little girl in Didsbury who wants nothing more than to find this doll under her Christmas tree. Nice job Iggy, you may get to be Junior Elf, second class, before you know it." He placed the doll in his sack and turned to leave the shop. Iggy followed him out into the blizzard where his sleigh was waiting for him, with its engine running. Iggy walked past the reindeer, and noticed that even they were shivering in the cold. Yugo and Sam and some other elves helped Santa into his sleigh, and passed the enormous sack up to him. Santa carefully stowed the big bag behind him, and gripping the reins tightly in his left hand, started forward into the storm. In a few seconds the sleigh rose into the air and soon was lost in the blizzard.

Iggy turned to Yugo, "Well, it looks like our work is finished for another year".

"Yes," said Sam, "But tomorrow we have to start working on next year's toys".

Iggy nodded in agreement, when his eye caught a colored lump in the snow. He reached down, and brushing the snow off of the lump discovered the doll, which he had only just given to Santa.

"Hey guys," said Iggy holding up the doll, "Santa left this toy behind!"

"Oh no" cried Yugo, "What will we do?"

"Put it with the toys for next year!" suggested Sam, "There is nothing else that we can do!"

"But Sam," said Iggy "This isn't an ordinary doll, this doll is meant for a very special Christmas tree. Little Julie wrote

Santa last August and told him that she wanted him to bring a doll for her little sister. Kids are always asking Santa to bring something for themselves, but Julie asked him to bring something for someone else. It doesn't happen very often, and it is very important that we get it to her!"

"How?" said Sam "We can't very well fly there like Santa, we have no sleigh, no flying reindeer!" Iggy stared blankly at the little doll in his hands and sadly shook his head. "There must be a way..."

"I have a way," exclaimed Yugo, "Last year I built a snowmobile in the workshop, but Santa said it was too big to take in the sleigh."

"We could use it to take this doll to Julie's house!" shouted Iggy, his face instantly brightening. It was agreed, despite some argument from Sam, and in ten minutes Yugo was wheeling the snowmobile out of the workshop and into the cold night air. Iggy and Sam were bundled up for their journey. Soon they were piled up, 3 deep on the black padded seat. Iggy made sure he had the doll stowed in his pack and Yugo pulled the starter cord, sending them after Santa, and into the raging storm.



"Of course," explained Yugo, over the whining roar of the engine, "this is no ordinary snowmobile. Otherwise, we wouldn't have a chance of reaching Julie's house by morning. I spent a lot of my spare time installing a few, uh, modifications".

"Modifications? What kind of modifications?" blurted Sam.

"Watch this," said Yugo. He pulled on a red lever and a silver canopy slowly folded out over top of snowmobile. Sam jumped as it clicked into place. "Now, hang on," Yugo said with a grin. He jammed his thumb onto a green glowing button. There was an enormous bang and Iggy was pushed back into his seat. He slowly forced his eyes open and saw the snow and ice covered North Pole racing past him at an enormous rate.

"Hyper speed" chuckled Yugo, "I saw it in a movie once. Pretty neat eh?" Iggy could only nod as the white covered ground quickly gave way to green. They were traveling south at an unbelievable speed, and had just crossed into Greenland.

"Julie lives in Canada," said Yugo, reaching into his glove box and pulling out a map. He passed it to Iggy "See if you can find her house on here". Iggy unfolded the improbably large map, which filled most of the back seat. Iggy and Sam scanned the map. They found Greenland without any problem, and could see how they had traveled from the North Pole, across ice-covered ocean to Greenland, and how any moment they would reach the southern coast of Greenland, and with it, the Atlantic Ocean.

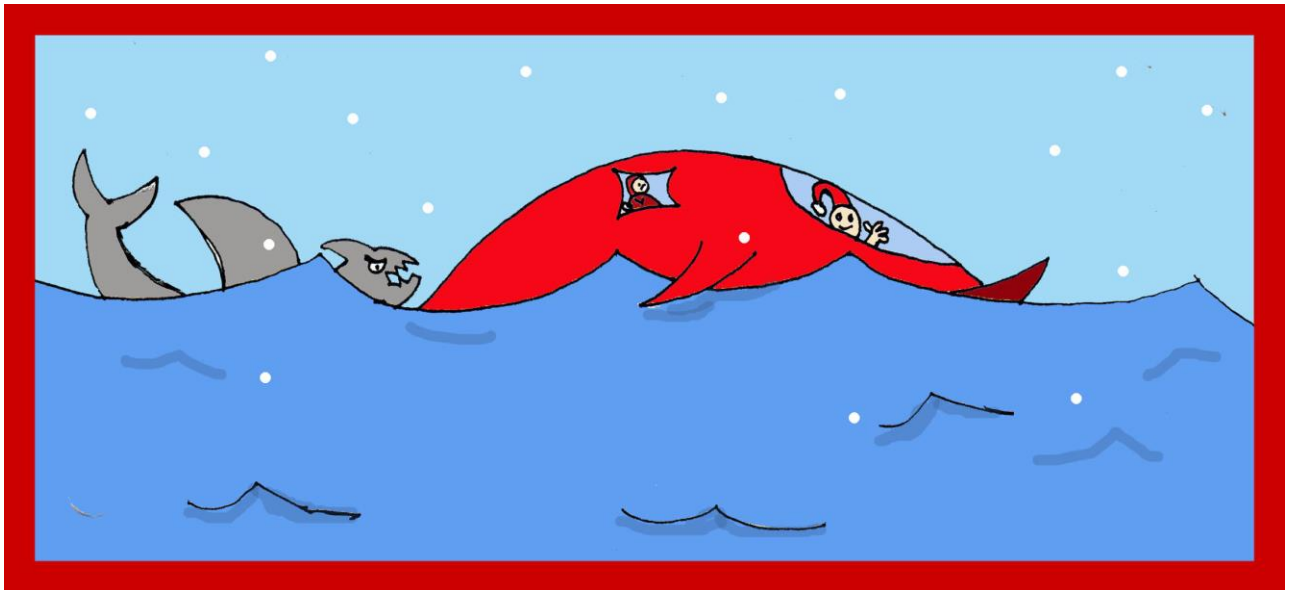
"Ocean?" said Sam, "Hey Yugo, slow down, we're gonna drive ..." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the snowmobile shot across a grey sandy beach and plowed into the cold blue water.

"Now what are we gonna do?" shouted Sam. "We're all gonna drown to death, that's for sure. I knew I should have stayed at the North Pole. You can't drown in ice".

Yugo smiled "No problem. I told you, this is no ordinary snowmobile." With that, he flipped a few switches and the snowmobile's powerful hyper-drive engine shut down, to be replaced by a gentle whirring sound. A propeller had slipped out the rear of the snowmobile and it pushed them gently, but swiftly through the water. Two fins stuck out from either side of the vehicle, giving it stability as it sliced through the water.

"It's a water-mobile now!" shouted Iggy with delight. He looked down at his map. "Turn west for Canada" he called. Yugo steered easily to the right, and towards the coast of Newfoundland.

They had drifted through the water for about 20 minutes when Sam noticed a dark shape slip past the window. He spun in his seat and looked out after it. It spun in the water and looked back at Sam. Only a great wide maw filled with hundreds of pointed white teeth separated its deep black eyes. Sam had never seen a shark before, but then, the shark had never seen an elf in a deep-sea snowmobile before either. Both of them agreed that the elf was in trouble.



Sam turned to Yugo and started ranting "O.K. Mister Smarty-pants, now what are we going to do? That thing is gonna sharpen its teeth on the snowmobile, and then use them on us!" Yugo's fingers danced over the controls as the snowmobile dipped and dove just out of the shark's reach. They maneuvered through jagged remnants of ships that dotted the ocean floor, always just inches from the shinning white teeth of the shark. They glided up towards the surface of the ocean and Sam could no longer see the shark.

"I think we lost him, nice driving Yugo," said Sam, clapping the blushing elf on the back. Suddenly the shark's head rose up in front of them. It seemed to be smiling.

"Holy smoke," shouted Yugo, punching a blue knob in front of him. A deep black oil slick filled the water in front of them. The shark seemed to choke, and Yugo guided the snowmobile around it. They sped away, with the shark in determined pursuit.

Iggy pressed his face on the window and peered out at the shark. It opened its enormous mouth and Iggy could see down its throat, into its stomach. It wasn't a pretty sight. He leaned over to Yugo. "Okay, what have you got up your sleeve now, a torpedo?"

"Nope", said Yugo. "Couldn't find room for the torpedo tubes once I put in the covalent dual pressure barreled carbureted overhead turbo thruster".

"Not to worry though," he went on, "I think I see land ahead." Yugo retracted the fins and propeller and extended four large wide rubber wheels just as the snowmobile reached the beach. The big wheels spun madly and finally gripped the wet sand and propelled the snowmobile out of the ocean and back onto dry land. The shark struggled up after them, gnashed its teeth together once or twice and then turned back into the ocean. Sam watched without breathing until long after the shark had returned to the deep dark depths of the sea.

The snowmobile had traveled about 30 meters up the beach when it ran into a snowdrift. Yugo immediately retracted the big wheels and extended the snowmobile's original skis. In a few moments they were again traveling across the land at hyper-speed.

Iggy got dizzy watching telephone poles whiz by like the boards of a picket fence. He returned to his map. "We have to

get all the way to Alberta, it's about another 5,000 kilometers to go. Do you think we can make it?"

"Sure," said Yugo, "Although our oil level is kind of low after all that stuff I shot into that shark's face. We may have to stop at a service station on the way".

"But it's the middle of the night," shouted Sam "and its Christmas Day, where are we going to find an open gas station?"

"Hmmm; I guess we won't be able to get any more oil" mumbled Yugo. "But I think we can get there". It was at about that time that the engine began to knock.

They managed to ignore it while they roared through the Maritimes, and tried hard to pretend it wasn't happening all the way through Quebec, but by the time they reached the Ontario border, the engine would not be denied. Thick plumes of black smoke gushed out of the vents on the side of the snowmobile. The knocking had become a steady drumbeat, the kind the Mini Pops sing to. Then with one final, rasping wheeze, the snowmobile ground to a halt.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam stepped outside and stretched their legs. Being rather tiny folk, the snow came up to their waists. All about them were fir trees and little furry critters. Sam flinched when he saw a pair of yellow eyes staring at him. The chipmunk they were attached to quickly turned and bolted up a tree. There was no gas station in sight. Iggy sighed. Suddenly he felt all alone.

It is not fair to say that they were completely on their own. Down in the woods, they could see a rumbled down cabin with a thin trail of smoke rising up out of the chimney. It didn't look like much, but it was all they had. "We might as well be on our own", thought Sam.

It took a few minutes to reach the door. Iggy got there first and knocked as loudly as he could with his little pint size hands. A few moments passed. Iggy raised his hand to knock once again, when the door flew open.

An enormous man filled the doorway. He stood nearly seven feet tall and must have been four feet across at the shoulders. He had a flaming red beard that faded into the twisted brown hair on his chest. His forearms were as thick as Iggy's head. He had a grim expression on his face. Iggy had an awful feeling that this was the type of fellow who would sprinkle an elf on his cornflakes for breakfast, and save his two friends for dessert.

"What do you want?" the big man bellowed. A blast of his hot gassy breath struck Iggy in the face and nearly knocked him down. Sam fainted dead away. Yugo looked down at him and shrugged. They both turned and looked up at the giant. It was a long way to look up for two little guys.

"Uh-well", began Iggy, "We-ah-gee. Our snowmobile broke down and we, were, um, wondering if we could-uh-use...."

"Well why didn't you say so?" bellowed the giant, "come in, come in" he stood aside and beckoned the three of them in with his great hairy arms. Yugo picked up Sam and dusted him off. Sam took one more look at the big man and fainted again.

"You'll have to excuse him," said Iggy, "he has a nervous disposition".

"Me too," said the giant, patting his stomach and burping. "My doctor says I have to stop eating fried food." He pulled up 3 chairs near the fireplace and sat down in a big armchair. He gestured for Iggy to sit down in a rocking chair, and pointed out that Yugo and Sam could sit in the other, as it was "big enough for two to curl up in."

"My name is Paul," said the giant, once they were all seated, "Now what can I do for you?"

"Well, like I said, we need some oil," began Iggy, "our snowmobile ran out in the field up there. It was making funny noises and smoke was billowing from the engine."

"Hmmm," said Paul, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "sounds to me like you might have some valve and cylinder damage too. You had better let me have a look at it." He stood up and walked briskly to an adjacent room. There were some crashing noises and the sound of clutter being moved about, and soon Paul emerged with a large toolbox in one hand, and a big jug in the other. "It's cold out there tonight," he said taking a big swig from the jug and passing it to Yugo. Yugo looked at Iggy and Sam and back to Iggy and then once again at Sam and carefully swallowed a mouthful. It felt like he had swallowed liquid fire. His throat burned and his eyes bugged out. He could feel every hair on his body standing straight up. His face glowed cherry red and tears ran down his cheeks. Sam, who had just regained consciousness, took one look at Yugo and fainted again.

"Good stuff, eh?" chuckled Paul, "it's my own home brew."

"It's very-uh-smooth" Yugo sputtered. He passed the jug to Iggy who shook his head with a smirk. He revived Sam by splashing some of the jug's contents in his face and the four of them slipped out into the cold night air.

The blizzard had followed them from the North Pole, and by the time they returned to it, the snowmobile was half covered in snow. Paul set up a lantern and he and Yugo began poking around the snowmobile's engine. "Very innovative design," commented Paul, as he fiddled with some parts and diddled with some others. Yugo was scraping some black stuff out of some gizmo or other while Iggy and Sam watched, shivering.

Within minutes, the snow about the vehicle was heaped with discarded parts and both Paul and Yugo were covered in black grease. Their hands dashed in and out of the engine, installing new parts and adjusting others. Paul hummed some song about lumberjacks as he worked. Before long, they both lifted their heads up from the engine and smiling, shook each other's hands. Paul pulled a large can of oil out of his toolbox and poured it into the engine. Iggy could swear he heard the engine sigh.

Paul slammed down the hood as Yugo slipped into the driver's seat. He pulled the starter cord and the engine roared back to life. He revved it a few times, and then let it idle for a moment. The others were all clapping except for Sam who said: "Well, what are we waiting for, let's get going!" Just then the engine sputtered, chugged hard a few times and then stopped. Yugo pulled the starter cord a few times, but the snowmobile only grunted in response.

"Pulling that cord won't do you any good," said Paul thoughtfully. "I think you boys are out of gas."

Yugo slapped his forehead with the palm of his hand. "Of course! But now what will we do?"

Paul looked at them sadly. "I'm afraid I don't have any gas boys." Then his face brightened. "But I do have this," he said, lifting the big jug of moonshine out of the snow.

He looked at Yugo who only said, "Well, let's give it a whirl, this new engine could run on anything!" They emptied the jug into the gas tank and again Yugo pulled the starter cord. The engine perked to life with a hearty 'vroom'. It seemed to have more pep than ever before. Perhaps it was only the rebuilt engine.

Iggy turned to Paul. "We can't pay you," he said, "all our money is at the North Pole." (Their accountant had invested it

in T-Bills and some guaranteed blue chip securities): "But we can pay you back later...."

"Nonsense," roared Paul, who looked a little bit insulted. "It's Christmas, the one day every year when giving is more important than getting. This is my gift to you boys," he said, spreading his arms.

"Well thank you Paul," said Iggy, shaking his hand. Actually, Paul's huge hand held most of Iggy's arm. The elves then climbed into the snowmobile and pulled slowly away.

Paul called out to Yugo as they were leaving, "You come back real soon. I could use a fellow with your know how to help me fix my still!" He waved a fond good-bye to the departing snowmobile and did not turn back to his cabin until it had disappeared into the snowstorm.

The snowmobile dashed across the frozen prairies towards Alberta. Yugo had slammed into hyper-speed soon after they got going again, and most of Ontario streaked by in a sparkling white blur. Soon they crossed into Saskatchewan and the rugged landscape gave way to a broad flat plain. Yugo turned to Iggy and Sam and said, "you guys might as well get some sleep. It's all flat from here to Didsbury, I checked the map. I'll just put the snowmobile on autopilot and we'll all wake up at Julie's house." Iggy leaned back and rested his head on Sam's shoulder. It was nearly three in the morning, and it had been a busy night. A few seconds later, both he and Sam were sound asleep.

Iggy couldn't say how much later it was when he woke up. It was still dark outside. The snowmobile had bounded down a steep slope and come to rest in a snowdrift. Yugo looked back at his friends, a glazed look in his eyes.

"What happened?" yelled Sam, "I thought it was flat the rest of the way!"

"So did I", said Yugo, looking somewhat frazzled as he dug through the glove compartment searching for the map. He pulled it out and they all stared at it. There were no hills or valleys in Saskatchewan. The elves looked out their window and saw that despite what the map said, they were stuck in a deep and cavernous valley. Cliffs rose up away from them on all sides. It was at least one hundred meters to the top. It was more of a hole than a valley, and it looked like a long way out. Yugo sighed. Even with the hyper-drive and the turbo thrusters and the solid rocket boosters, the snowmobile would never manage to climb up one of those icy walls. As far as he could tell, they were stuck there until spring. He was about to tell the others when matters really took a turn for the worse.

There was a loud growling sound and the snowmobile suddenly flipped over. The elves tumbled about inside and then the snowmobile flipped back the other way. Iggy pressed his face against the window and looked out. A big yellow eye, about half a meter across was looking back at him. Yugo looked out the front window and saw another big yellow eye, just like the first one. Both eyes blinked together. Sam would have fainted, but his head was stuck under the seat and he was unable to see anything.

Iggy and Yugo looked at each other and blinked their considerably smaller eyes together. Yugo slowly opened his door and looked outside. It wasn't just a pair of big yellow eyes that was batting the snowmobile about. It was a pair of big hairy white arms; and attached to those arms was a big hairy white body, which rested atop a pair of big hairy white legs. The big yellow eyes bulged out from either side of a big hairy white head. The whole thing added up to one horrible awful big hairy white monster.

"That's an abominable snowman!" shouted Yugo. Sam, who could hear everything from where he was stuck, promptly fainted. The snowman reached a big hairy white hand out and wrapped it around the snowmobile. He began to pick it up in the air.

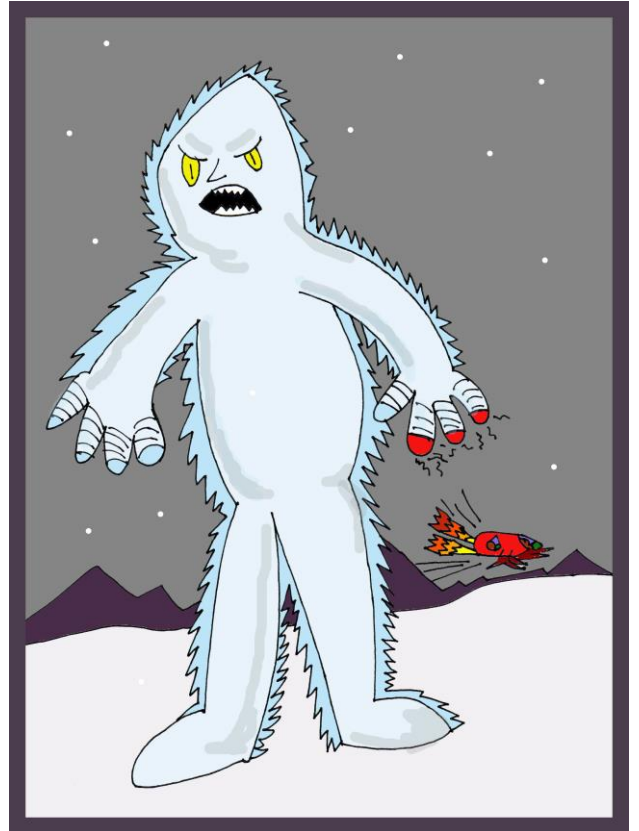
"Now what are we going to do?" asked Iggy.

Yugo scrambled into the driver's seat and started punching buttons. "Well I'm not going to let that fur ball catch us without a fight!" The hyper-drive, the turbo-thrusters, and the solid rocket boosters fired up all at once and the snowmobile shot out of the snowman's hands and across the valley like a silver bullet.

The abominable snowman howled in pain. He stared at his burnt fingers and glared at the little red snowmobile as it zipped across the valley. Now there is only one thing in this wide and wonderful world worse than an abominable snowman, and that's an abominable snowman with burnt fingers. Growling, the snowman stomped off after the snowmobile.

The snowmobile crossed the valley in seconds, and Yugo had to turn the wheel hard to keep from colliding with the cliff face at the other side. The elves buzzed along the valley looking for a way out, with the snowman in hot pursuit. Though he didn't have hyper-speed or a turbo-thruster, he had big hairy white legs that were about 20 meters long, and was able to keep pace with the tiny snowmobile without even breathing hard.

"Boy, do I wish I had put some torpedoes in this thing" said Yugo, keeping one eye on the snowman, and the other on the ground ahead. The snowman was gaining on them and Yugo couldn't go at top speed without slamming into the side of the valley. Iggy could hear the enormous footsteps of the monster echoing behind them. Each stomp brought it a little closer. Iggy pressed his face against the back window. The snowman was very close now; it



bent over and reached down toward them. Its hot breath fogged the back window of the snowmobile. The big hairy white hand slowly started to wrap around them. In a moment they would all be crushed.

Just then Yugo spotted a large black opening in the side of the valley. He turned the snowmobile hard toward it. The little silver snowmobile squirted out from between the snowman's burnt fingers and darted into the deep dark cavern.

Yugo flipped on the high beams and lit up the cave. It was a wide tunnel that wound back and forth into the cliff face. Yugo was forced to slow down to navigate the twisting corridors of the cave. Suddenly the tunnel opened up into a huge underground room.

"Well, we should be safe in here", said Yugo. He swept the high beams around the room. Sam had just climbed out from under the back seat and was understandably relieved to learn that they were safe at last. Then the headlights panned onto a big hairy white monster standing in front of a huge black stove. She had thick curly lashes and was wearing an apron that said, "I hate housework".

"Oh no!" shouted Iggy "There's another one of them. It's a Mrs. Abominable Snowman!"

"I thought you said we were safe," mocked Sam to Yugo. He would have fainted, but by now he was feeling quite rested. Mrs. Abominable Snowman grinned broadly and started after the elves. She had a large wooden spoon the size of a tree trunk in her hand that waved over her head as she chased after them. For some reason, the spoon had holes drilled through it. Sam was convinced this was so she could dip elves in the gravy pot.

Yugo shifted the snowmobile into reverse and they sped backwards into the tunnels. Mrs. Abominable Snowman stomped after them. Iggy and Sam stared out the back window, shouting

directions to Yugo. Yugo was too busy looking at Mrs. Abominable Snowman to worry about looking where they were going. She was familiar with the tunnels and could charge through them much faster than the snowmobile could. The ground shook with each approaching step.

Suddenly, Iggy and Sam gasped. From the other direction the first snowman was blundering towards them. It was like being caught between a rock and a big hairy white place. This time, Sam did faint.

Yugo punched the hyper-speed button. "Hang on guys!" he shouted as the snowmobile zapped ahead, or perhaps I should say behind, at super speed. The snowmobile rocketed through the first abominable snowman's legs and shot out of the tunnel, back into the valley. Mr. Abominable Snowman turned and looked out after the snowmobile. Just then Mrs. Abominable Snowman ran into Mr. Abominable Snowman at top speed. The entire valley shook with the force of their collision and they both collapsed into an unconscious heap.

"That should take care of them for a while," said Yugo, slowing the snowmobile down to subsonic speed. "Now we just have to figure out how to get out of this hole."

"Preferably, sometime before spring," yawned Sam.

"At least we won't have to worry about anymore abominable snowmen while we are thinking about it," said Iggy. He turned to look out his window. A big yellow eye, though not so big as other yellow eyes in Iggy's recent memory, looked back at him. "Uh, perhaps I spoke to soon."

Medium sized yellow eyes surrounded the snowmobile. "Snowmen got kids?" said Iggy. "Now what are we going to do?"

"If we ever get out of here," said Yugo, slamming his fist on the steering wheel, "I swear I'm going to put torpedoes in this thing!"

There were six little snowmen of varying sizes around the snowmobile. One of them kicked it gently towards another who kicked it a little harder at a third. The elves were tossed around inside the snowmobile like a salad. Yugo hung on tightly to the driver's seat and stared desperately at the dashboard. There was a green toggle switch there he had never noticed before. Considering he had built the snowmobile, this came as a bit of a shock to him. Next to the knob was a little note taped to the dashboard. It read "For Emergency Use Only - Paul" Yugo stared at it again in disbelief. He remembered that Paul had done a lot of things to the engine Yugo hadn't quite understood at the time. "Oh well, what the heck" thought Yugo, as he reached over and turned the knob. "Anything is better than being kicked around by a bunch of big hairy white snowkids."

The snowmobile shuddered and made a loud popping sound. The six snowkids backed away. A deep rumbling noise built up inside the engine. Yugo quickly did up his seat belt and hung on. The snowmobile jerked forward. A large propeller Yugo had never seen before sprouted out of the roof of the snowmobile. It started spinning. The snowmobile bounced forward picking up speed. Seconds later it lifted off the ground. It rose quickly into the air and out of the valley. Yugo pushed the brake pedal gently and the snowmobile leveled off. He grinned. "Now it's an airborne snow-copter."

"I never knew this snowmobile could fly!" exclaimed Iggy.

"Neither did I," replied Yugo, guiding the snow-copter into the night sky, heading west towards Didsbury.

The sun was peeking up over the eastern edge of the horizon when the snow-copter fluttered across the outskirts of Didsbury. Yugo was just getting used to the controls of the snow-copter as

they approached Julie's house. He pressed on the brake pedal to go down and pressed it again to go up. The gas pedal was used to accelerate, and he could steer with the steering wheel. Now, as he hovered over Julie's house, he slowly pressed the brake and gently descended to her front lawn. Once they were down, he turned the green knob back to the left, and the propeller spun to a stop and retracted into the snowmobile's canopy. Yugo pressed the starter button, and the engine ground to a halt. They had arrived at last.

The elves slipped out of the snowmobile and stretched their stiff bodies for a moment. Iggy took a couple of steps toward the front door, and then turned back to the snowmobile to get the doll. He joined the others on the porch and turned the doorknob. It was locked.

Iggy tried a couple more times, and then gave up in despair. He turned and looked at the others. Sam stepped forward and reached out for the bell. "Well, we'll just dingle and get Julie's folks Iggy grabbed Sam's arm and tackled him to the ground. "We can't ring the bell; we'll wake the whole household up! Then they will all see us and you know nobody can see one of Santa's elves!"

"Why not?" inquired Sam, his face half buried in snow.

"Because, uh, because" began Iggy. He turned towards Yugo. "Why not?"

"It's in the policy manual, I think," said Yugo. He dug into his jacket pocket and pulled out a thick blue paperback book. He quickly leafed through it and then read aloud: "Rule 142, sub rule 3, paragraph 6, sub paragraph G. No Junior Elf of any class shall allow himself to be seen by any human."

"Oh" said Sam, standing up and brushing the snow out of his ears. "Well, if it's in the policy manual, that's good enough for me."

"What about Paul, he saw us" said Iggy.

Yugo peered back into the policy book. "There's an exception in sub paragraph H. It says Rule 142, sub rule 3, paragraph 6, sub paragraph G doesn't apply where elves require the help of a 2 1/2 meter giant to repair their snowmobile on Christmas Eve."

Sam turned to Iggy. "A good policy manual deals with all eventualities," he said.

"Well," said Iggy, "we'll have to find some other way in. Yugo, you go check the back door. Sam, see if you can find an open window." Both elves jogged around the building looking for an entrance. Five minutes later, they met Iggy at the front door. Both shook their heads slowly.

"There's no way in," they said together.

Iggy looked up to the roof and said, "We'll just have to go in the way the Chief does, down the chimney."

Sam swallowed hard, "down the chimney?" he asked.

"Down the chimney" echoed Iggy and Yugo.

They ran back to the snowmobile and Yugo flipped it into the snow-copter mode. They swiftly ascended to the roof and landed the snow-copter by the chimney. The elves slipped out and walked over to the chimney. Iggy paused and carefully studied the snow on the roof. "Hmmm," he hummed. "Fresh reindeer tracks. Santa must have just left. Funny that he should be running so late."

"Yes, that is strange," said Yugo, "usually he is back at the North Pole by dawn."

"Well, no sense worrying about it now, we'll find out what slowed him up when we get back home. In the meantime, we better hurry, and get this doll under the Christmas tree before Julie

wakes up!" With that, Iggy climbed over the edge of the chimney and lowered himself into it until he was hanging in the dark pipe by his fingertips. He closed his eyes tightly and held his breath. He hoped that nobody had woken up early and started a fire below him. Then he let go.

The long drop he was expecting ended abruptly when he struck a soft furry object about half way down the chimney. A loud "Ho!" sound came out of the object. He bounced up a short ways, and then landed on the object again. This time it went "Ho, Ho!"

"Ho? There's only one thing I can think of that goes Ho!" thought Iggy. He poked the object two or three more times. "Is that you, Santa?" he asked.

"Iggy?" replied the object. "Am I ever glad to hear you! I've been stuck here for almost an hour! I sent the reindeer back for help, but I never expected you to get here this fast."

"Well, uh," said Iggy, "I happened to be in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd drop in. How did you get stuck here anyway?"

It's a long story," began Santa. "I came past here late last night, and discovered I'd misplaced that doll. When I finished my rounds, I realized I must have left it behind. So I came back here to apologize to Julie. However, I guess I ate a few cookies too many and drank a little too much eggnog tonight. I always find the last few chimneys a little sticky, tonight I just went down one more chimney than I should have."

"I see," said Iggy, but of course he couldn't see because the chimney was very dark. "Now, how are we going to get you out of here?"

No sooner had Iggy finished speaking than they heard Yugo calling from above them. "Yo, Iggy. Is everything all right in there? I'm coming down!"

"No wait," shouted Iggy, but it was too late. Yugo landed on top of them with a loud thud. Iggy gasped for air, then noticed that the impact had caused Santa to shift about a meter down the chimney. This gave Iggy an idea. He shouted up the chimney to Sam.

"Hey Sam, come on down here, we need your help!"

Sam leaned his head over the rim of the chimney. "Are you talking to me?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I'm talking to you," hollered Iggy, "do you see anybody else up there named Sam?"

Sam looked around. "No" he answered.

"Well get down here! We need you to nudge us out of the chimney!"

"I'm not going down there," said Sam crossing his arms and shaking his head in a defiant way, "I might twist my ankle or break my arm or crack my head like an egg. Uh-huh, I'm not going down there."

"Sam!" bellowed Santa, "You get down here this minute or I'll demote you to Junior Elf 10th class and you'll be lacing footballs for the rest of your life!"

"Right chief, one elf, coming down," said Sam, flipping into the chimney and tumbling down onto the others like a cannon ball. The collision jarred Santa loose and all four fell to the ground with a thud. They rolled out into the living room floor. Iggy squinted against the bright light in the room. When his eyes finally focused, he noticed that the four of them were black from head to toe with soot and grime.

Footsteps fell on the floor above them. "Someone's coming" squealed Iggy, "We have to get out of here!"

"First things first," said Santa. He picked up the doll from the floor and carefully wiped the black ashes from her dress. Then he skipped over to the Christmas tree as quietly as a mouse and placed the doll under the tree. Then, with a grace that seemed impossible for his great bulk, Santa danced back to the elves, scooped them up against his portly belly and slipped behind the sofa. In a moment, two little girls bounded down the stairs, and charged towards the presents under the tree like a pair of heat-seeking missies.

A moment later their parents entered, looking a little sleepy, but quite happy nonetheless. Iggy and the others peered out at them from beneath the sofa. The living room had become a swirl of colored paper flipping and whirling in all directions. Then Julie's little sister (her name was Caroline) saw the little doll. She picked it up and held it at arms length. Then she pulled it close to herself and hugged it tightly. After a few minutes she set it down.

Suddenly, it stood up by itself and smiled. It did a somersault, and a couple of cha-cha steps and then leapt back into Caroline's arms. "I love you," it said. Caroline's eyes seemed to grow in her face. She hugged the doll again, grinning and laughing and giggling and bubbling in her excitement.

Iggy looked at Santa, who looked back at Iggy in puzzlement. "I never knew it could do that Chief," said Iggy "I made it the same way I make all my other dolls..."

Yugo interrupted them, blushing. "I made a few, uh, modifications to it yesterday while you were on lunch, Iggy. You told me it was a very special doll." They all looked back over at Julie and Caroline. Julie was laughing as much as Caroline was. "Why is she so happy?" Sam asked Santa quietly, "It's not her doll."

"Well Sam, that's what Christmas means. It's the giving that matters. Giving is what Christmas is all about."

"Oh" said Sam. He had never thought of Christmas quite that way before. He smiled. He suddenly felt a lot better about being a Christmas elf.

The four of them crawled silently out of the living room into the kitchen and out the back door. Iggy slipped into the garage and found a ladder, which they took out into the backyard. They quietly climbed back onto the rooftop where the snowmobile remained just as they had left it. The sun had risen, and the entire town sparkled under the thick layer of snow that had fallen that night. Neither Julie, Caroline, nor their parents ever noticed that they had been in the house; though Julie's father was curious that afternoon when he found the four sooty footprints, a big pair and three little ones that led from the fireplace to the sofa, but he just cleaned it up and never mentioned it to anybody.

Santa, Iggy and Sam stood beside the snowmobile while Yugo warmed up the engine and brushed the snow off the windows. They all tried to climb inside, but it was obvious Santa would not fit.

"No problem," said Yugo, flipping an orange toggle switch on the back of the snowmobile. A rumble seat popped up in the back. "Ho, ho ho..." chortled Santa "A rumble seat, it will be just like riding in my sleigh!" He pulled a long woolly scarf out of his belt and wrapped it around his fluffy white chin. "Come boys, let's away!" he called out.

Yugo spun the green knob and the propeller buzzed into action. The snow-copter climbed into the air. Yugo turned it easily towards the North Pole and hit the hyper-speed. The snow-copter shot out of Didsbury and rocketed towards home.

* * *

SPRING HAD COME TO THE NORTH POLE. Of course, spring at the North Pole is still like winter any place else. Iggy, Yugo and Sam were already hard at work on next Christmas' toys in the big Workshop that Wednesday afternoon when Santa walked into the room.

"Iggy, Yugo, Sam," he called. "Please step forward."

Silence filled the workshop. Every elf in the place had stopped his work and was staring at Iggy, Yugo and Sam as they meekly walked towards Santa. The three of them stood humbly before Santa, wondering what they had done wrong. Santa opened reached into his belt and pulled out a medal, which he pinned on Iggy's chest. He pinned similar medals on Yugo and Sam's jackets.

"For bravery and service above and beyond the call of elf duty, I hereby appoint you all Junior Elves, first class. Congratulations, boys."

Iggy grinned. Even if giving was the most important part of Christmas, sometimes getting felt pretty good, too!