

The Last of the Snow Wolves

-or-

Those Vicious Fang Toothed Monsters Ate My Elves

WARNING: *What follows is a weepy story better suited to certain mothers than to their teenage daughters. You have been warned.*

One hundred Christmases ago, there were snow wolves beyond number at the North Pole. They roamed the Arctic unchallenged. The land was harsh and cold, but prey was plentiful and for the snow wolves, life was good. They were the masters of the North. They feared nothing.

The snow wolf is a proud and marvellous creature. Its pelt is white and streaked with silver. Through some fluke of evolution, or maybe even magic, its fur sparkles like newly fallen snow.

The snow wolves hunted and lived in packs that stretched across the horizon. Though fierce in combat the wolf is also gentle. It cares for its young as any human parent would; nurturing it and teaching it to live off of the bounty of the land.

It has been many Christmases since a snow wolf was seen at the North Pole. Once the land was good; now it is spoiled and prey is scarce. The snow wolf, once a proud hunter, has become the hunted, prized for its shimmering pelt. Of the hundreds of packs that once roamed across the North, but one small pack of perhaps a dozen wolves remains. It has retreated further and further north, fleeing the cold metal traps of man.

This is the story of that wolf pack and the three small elves that tried to save it ...

* * *

One Christmastime, not too long ago, Iggy, Yugo and Sam sped across the snow fields near Santa's workshop. The icicle crop was good that year, with tips that rose as high as an elephant's eye. Not that you ever saw an elephant anywhere near the North Pole, but you get the idea. They were riding in a red snowmobile that cut through the drifts like an Olympic skater. It was a rare afternoon off for them with Christmas approaching.

"I do enjoy these country drives," said Iggy.

"What's to enjoy," asked Sam. "There's nothing to see but snow, snow and more snow. Except for the odd bit of ice, that's all there is. Snow. And it's freezing out here!"

Yugo reached over and turned up the heat. The snowmobile was immediately bathed in a warm current of air. Sam started to speak but then thought better of it.

Yugo had developed a new high traction tread for the snowmobile that he claimed let them travel into deeper snow than they ever had before. This prospect brought neither comfort nor joy to Sam, but he had agreed to help Yugo test the new feature. The snowmobile dug into a snow bank and plowed over it. Soon, Santa's workshop was out of view.

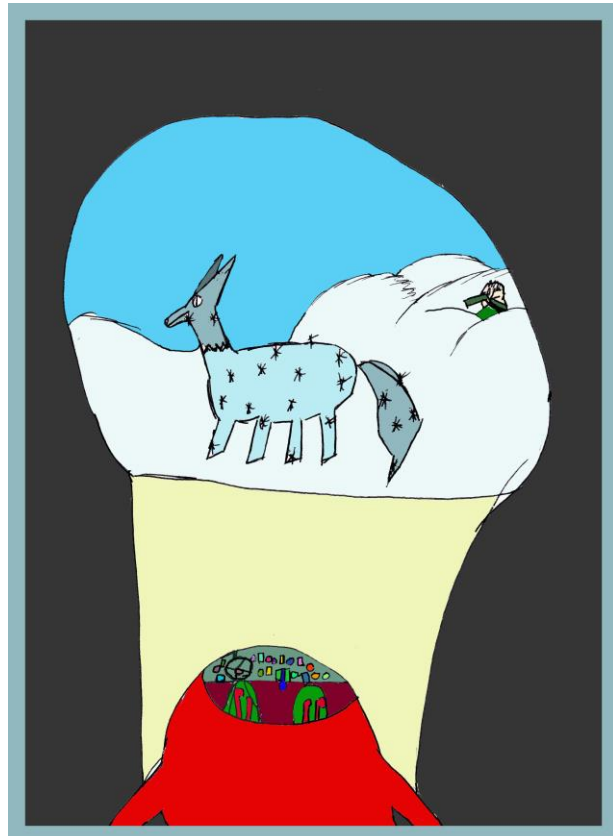
It was dark at the North Pole at that time of year. The sun would not rise for a few months. That was why Iggy was startled to see a flash of light out of his window.

"What was that?" asked Iggy.

Yugo turned the snowmobile towards the spot where Iggy had seen the flash of light. The headlights reflected off of the snow, but there was nothing to be seen. Yugo turned back and then they saw the flash again.

"It's a wolf!" cried Iggy.

Indeed it was, its shimmering fur reflected in the headlights of the



snowmobile. Yugo shut down the snowmobile and the three elves sat and watched the wolf bound across the snow, a flash of quicksilver in the Arctic night. The wolf dashed from side to side, its fluid pace barely disturbing the powdery snow.

Suddenly a sharp crack shattered the still December night. The wolf fell in a broken heap, a splash of blood bruising the crisp snow.¹ The elves turned in the direction of the noise. Three men wearing white fur capes and carrying rifles plodded slowly and noisily through the snow to the fallen wolf.

Yugo punched the starter button and slipped the snowmobile into gear. It gained quickly on the hunters, who were unable to avoid it in the knee-deep snow. At the last moment, Yugo swerved to miss them, burying the hunters in a wave of snow sprayed up from the snowmobile's runners.

The hunters shot at the snowmobile, but their bullets bounced off its patented titanium body. Yugo turned back towards them and pulled a yellow lever. A black oil slick spat out of the front grill of the snowmobile, coating the hunters. Terrified by this sudden turn of events, the hunters turned and fled.

Yugo steered back to the fallen wolf and parked the snowmobile. Iggy and Sam leapt out and approached the animal.

There was nothing they could do. The wolf was dead.

Not far away they saw perhaps a dozen wolf tracks that meandered north and disappeared on a region of hard packed snow and ice. That was the path the rest of the pack had taken.

“At least those hunters won't be able to track them now,” Iggy muttered angrily.

The elves picked up the big wolf's body and carried it to the snowmobile. As they set it on the back seat they heard a small whimpering noise from behind a nearby snowbank. Iggy and Sam ran over to investigate.

Iggy and Sam found them as they rounded the snow bank. Two mewling little wolf puppies. They were frightened and cold, but allowed the elves to pick them up.

¹ Look, I told you this was going to get weepy. You may want to stop reading at this point and skip directly to the next story where the elves go to Disneyland and eat cake.

“They must be separated from the pack,” observed Iggy. “The big wolf must have been their mother. I bet she was trying to distract those hunters from her puppies.”

“What are we going to do with them?” asked Sam.

“We can’t leave them here,” said Yugo. “They’ll never survive on their own.”

“We’ll take them to Santa Claus,” said Iggy. “He’ll know what to do.” They placed the pups in the back seat of the snowmobile. They curled into the dead wolf for warmth, but there was none there. Yugo turned the heater up, but Iggy knew that it would not be the same.

* * *

Santa Claus agreed to see the elves right away and they quickly found themselves ushered into his spacious corner office on the 24th floor of the Santa Claus Tower, the big building that was the centrepiece of Santa Claus’ operations at the North Pole. They set the two wolf pups on Santa’s desk while Iggy told the story of what they had seen. Santa Claus walked around the desk, picked up one of the pups and gently stroked its fur.

“These are snow wolves, one of the rarest animals in the world,” explained Santa. “I haven’t seen one for years. I feared that they were all gone. Do you see the way the fur sparkles in the light?”

The elves nodded.

“I think that this peculiar fur results from all of the magic in the air around here,” Santa continued. “Unfortunately, this magic has proven to be a curse to the snow wolves. It is highly valued by fur traders, who place no value on the wolves themselves, or on the survival of their species.”

“Can’t you stop the hunters?” asked Iggy.

“The type of men who hunt and trap the snow wolves have little time or faith for Santa Claus. My power over those who don’t believe in me is limited.”

“It makes me glad I’m not a human,” Sam grumbled.

Santa Claus set down the first pup and picked up the other. “These pups should be returned to their pack. They may be the last of their kind and the pack might perish without them.” He passed the two pups to Iggy and Yugo.

“Can’t we keep the puppies here?” asked Sam.

Santa smiled. “These creatures belong in the wild,” he said, “If we kept them here, away from the land and their own kind they would die as surely as if we had hunted them ourselves.”

Sam sighed. He knew that Santa Claus was right and that the wolves would have to go back.

“But you must be careful,” Santa added. “Those hunters you chased away will surely be back.”

Santa led the elves to the door. “Take what you need from the workshop,” he said. “And then hurry back. Christmas is coming and I need you boys here!”

* * *

Yugo occupied a cluttered workbench on the third floor. He had spent the better part of October developing a snowball-throwing device that ran on water pressure. He had also developed a line of mutant lumberjack action figures. Though condemned by most international toy testing councils, they had proven very popular with the children. Each had specialized accessories, which could be used to saw, whittle or drill wooden objects. Many parents complained that the mutant lumberjack action figures were usually used to saw, whittle or drill useful wooden objects, like household furniture. Yugo tried not to pay any attention to these complaints. After all, he was an artist and what did parents really know about toys, anyway? Yugo tossed thee items, among others, into a green canvas bag and slipped it over his shoulder. “This stuff should keep us out of trouble,” he said.

The elves stopped at the cafeteria on the tenth floor to pack a few things for the trip. Sam put a half dozen jelly donuts into his sack and popped two more into his mouth. “These trips always make me hungry,” he explained.



They made their way out to the big garage where Santa parked his sleigh (and where he also allowed Yugo to park the snowmobile). Yugo spent an hour or two in the garage everyday, washing the snowmobile or tinkering with some of its more elaborate innovations. He was especially pleased with the 12-cylinder fusion reactor he had installed the previous spring.

The elves climbed into the snowmobile and took their usual seats; Yugo and Iggy up front and Sam in the back.² Yugo double clutched and shifted the snowmobile into reverse. In a moment, they were on their way.

There was a steady wind building from the south³ and Yugo was forced to turn on his sodium arc fog lights to see through the swirling snow. They sped out across the compound and into the nasty northern plain.

Yugo turned on the radio and searched for a station. Of course, the snowmobile was equipped with a small satellite dish but it was still difficult to find a station in the snowstorm. He skipped through a couple of talk shows and a rap station before turning off the radio in disgust and slipping an old Beatles disc into the CD player.

“They don’t make songs like these any more,” said Yugo.

“Yeah, yeah yeah,” agreed Sam, in time with the music.

They had travelled for two hours when the ground suddenly shook beneath them.

“What was that?” cried Sam.

Yugo struggled to keep control of the snowmobile. “It’s the greenhouse effect,” he muttered through gritted teeth.

“Huh?”

Yugo explained, “global warming is causing the polar ice cap to melt and is making some of the weaker parts of the North Pole a little unstable.”

“A little unstable?” said Sam. “That tremor shook one of my fillings loose!”

² With the lunch.

³ In many places, a north wind is seen as bringing cold weather. At the North Pole, where every direction is south, a south wind can be very chilling indeed.

“Sit tight, it will pass.”

Sure enough, the shaking subsided. Then it returned and passed again. Then the ground shuddered a third time. Yugo jammed on the brakes and the snowmobile skidded to a halt at the edge of a vast gap in the ice.

Iggy looked out the window. The ground beneath them had broken into a number of randomly drifting ice floes. The elves were on a small iceberg and were entirely surrounded by the bitterly cold Arctic Ocean. They were trapped!

“Well, isn’t this something,” said Sam. “Now what are we going to do?”

“No problem,” said Yugo, punching a codeword into the keyboard in front of him. Two inflatable outriggers popped out on either side of the snowmobile and a shiny new outboard motor sprung out of the back. Yugo drove the snowmobile out into the ocean. “We are going to have to be careful,” he explained. “With the Earth getting warmer, it has become pretty dangerous to travel on some of the thinner regions of the ice cap.”

The snowmobile sped across the water, dodging icebergs and the occasional walrus. Soon they reached an area of hard packed snow. Yugo retracted the outriggers and they continued on their journey.

They travelled into a region of deep and drifting snow, which whipped and swirled in the wind. Yugo turned on the windshield wipers and high beam headlights, but the way before him remained barely visible. He flipped on the radar guidance system and weaved his way through the snowdrifts.

Sam reached into his lunch bag for another jelly donut. There was a whimpering noise in the back seat. He looked down and saw the two little wolf pups looking up at him. Sam wiped some of the jelly from his chin and looked at the remains of the donut in his hand. He looked again into the deep brown eyes looking back at him. He sighed and passed the donut down to the snow wolves. They gobbled it up eagerly. In the next five minutes, Sam succumbed to those brown eyes 6 more times and fed all of his donuts to the pups. “I hate sharing my lunch,” he grumbled.

Iggy laughed. “Come on, Sam. It’s Christmas.”

Sam muttered something that Iggy could not hear. It was just as well, as Iggy might have been offended to hear that his mother was a ferret and his father was a troll.

The snowmobile swayed from side to side as Yugo struggled to make it through the drifts that surrounded them.

Iggy tapped him on the shoulder. “Yugo, I think I saw one of those snow drifts move.”

“Me too,” said Yugo. He yanked his steering wheel hard to the left to avoid a drift that suddenly bounded up in front of him.

“Now I know that snow drift wasn’t there a minute ago,” said Iggy.

Yugo jerked the snowmobile back to elude another moving snowdrift that rose in front of them. The snowdrifts were closing in.

“They can’t be alive, can they?” asked Sam.

Suddenly three snowdrifts scooted around them, blocking their forward path and preventing Yugo from turning left or right. He was forced to slam on his brakes. Six more snow drifts emerged around them. There was no escape.

“Yes Sam, I think they can be alive,” Yugo whispered. There was now a virtual wall of snow around them which pressed in on the sides of the snowmobile.

“This is just great,” said Sam sarcastically. “I am going to miss Christmas because some self important snow is about to mash me into a matching tie and handkerchief.”

“No problem,” said Yugo. “I think we can handle this. After all, what is a big pile of snow other than a big pile of cold water?” He pulled a blue lever and a large exhaust pipe extended from the front of the snowmobile. He pressed a red switch and hot air blew from the vent. “Let’s see how tough these guys are when the heat is on,” he grinned.

The snowdrifts immediately softened under Yugo’s heat wave and began to melt. Soon the snowmobile was surrounded by a large heaving mass of slush. The heat had not solved the problem, it had merely changed it. The snowdrifts were now nothing more than water drifts – but they continued to close in on the snowmobile.

“Hmmm” Yugo mused. He scratched his head and then turned up the heat. The snowmobile was covered in water. Sam started to whimper. Yugo cranked the heat up to the top.

The water started to bubble.

“It’s getting a little warm,” said Iggy.

“Just bear with me,” said Yugo, “after all, what is a big pile of water except for a big pile of cold steam.”

Sure enough, a minute later the water had boiled away into steam. Yugo put the snowmobile into gear and drove through the steam.

“What is going on?” asked Sam.

“I think I know,” said Iggy. “I think that Nature doesn’t like what’s going on up here. It doesn’t like the way the hunters are driving the snow wolves to extinction and it’s trying to put an end to it. So it broke up the ice floes and sent the snow drifts after us.”

“But why is it after us?” asked Sam. “We’re trying to help the snow wolves.”

“I think it’s trying to keep everyone away from the snow wolves,” explained Iggy. “It can’t see that we’re trying to help. Maybe it just doesn’t trust people any more.”

“But we’re not people!” Sam shouted. “We’re elves!”

“Well, we look a little like people,” said Iggy.

“Like little people anyway,” Yugo said with a grin. He looked down at his directional scanner and adjusted his course. They carried on for a few more minutes and then Yugo eased the snowmobile to a stop. “This is where we first saw the snow wolves,” he said.

The three elves stepped out of the snowmobile and searched the ground for tracks that could lead them back to the wolf pack. There were tracks scattered about, but most were obscured by blowing snow and the elves could not find a clear trail. A low growl broke the silence.

“Sorry guys,” said Sam, rubbing his stomach. “I guess I’m a little hungry.”

Iggy went back to the snowmobile and brought out the wolf pups. “Maybe these fellows can help find the way,” he said. The two pups sniffed the air and then darted away together. The elves ran after them, but could not keep up.

Then Iggy’s heart lurched. From behind a large boulder stepped the hunters. Each of the big men was wearing snowshoes. They ran after the pups, much faster than the elves could follow. Iggy looked around helplessly. The hunters were already drawing their rifles and the elves were too far from the snowmobile to reach it in time to save the pups.

“No problem,” said Yugo. He reached into the green canvas bag hanging over his shoulder and pulled out his water-powered snowball-throwing device. He set it on the ground, aimed it at the hunters and pulled the starter cord. The mechanical arm on the machine sunk into the snow, formed a perfect snowball and hurled it at the hunters. It struck the lead hunter in the ear and knocked him over. The other two turned about, only to face a barrage of snowballs.

“It throws 180 snowballs a minute,” Yugo boasted.

The hunters were in a state of absolute confusion. The snowballs came so rapidly they had no chance to dodge them.

Then the snowballs stopped.

“What happened?” asked Iggy.

Yugo bent over to examine the machine. The power lines were clogged with ice. Sam took one look at this state of affairs and started to rant.

“Of course the power lines are filled with ice,” he ranted. “It’s a water powered machine. Of course it’s going to freeze up in this weather. What kind of a person would invent a *snowball* machine that runs on water?”

Yugo glared at him and Sam stopped ranting and started looking at his boots.

“Come on,” said Iggy. “We have to get the pups to safety before the hunters can recover. The elves ran after the cubs. As they passed the hunters, who were still lying face down in the snow, one of them reached up and grabbed Sam by the ankle.

Sam flipped over and sprawled in the snow. “Help!” he screamed.

Iggy and Yugo stopped and turned around. The other two hunters got up and lurched toward them.

“No problem,” said Yugo and reached into his green bag. He rooted around and pulled out a dozen mutant lumberjack action figures. He tossed three of them to Iggy. “Wind these up,” he shouted.

Iggy cranked up the little dolls as quickly as his cold fingers could twist. Each figure was a man with a red and black checked jacket and a toque. However, instead of arms, they had saws, axes or other tools that extended from their shoulders.

As the first hunter reached them, Yugo leapt at him and slipped a mutant lumberjack into his pants.⁴ The hunter screamed and danced an erratic jig in an effort to shake loose the little mutant; which had dug its saw blade arm into the man’s thigh. Iggy shoved a little fellow with drill bit fingertips down a second hunter’s shirt. He immediately fell down into the snow, clawing at his back where the mutant lumberjack was administering a spinal tap.

Iggy and Yugo rushed over to Sam’s aid. The hunter who had grabbed him had his hands full with Sam, who was kicking, squirming and twisting. The hunter did not even notice Iggy and Yugo dropping two especially nasty little mutant lumberjacks into each of his boots. The hunter immediately dropped Sam and rolled over in the snow grabbing at his feet.

As the hunters struggled, Iggy, Yugo and Sam shuffled quietly away. “They’ll be busy for a while,” said Yugo. A flash in the distance caught his eye. Look,” he pointed. “There are the pups.”

The elves ran after them, up a steep and icy cliff face and into a small cave. The rest of the wolf pack was inside. The pups had finally found their way home.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam crept silently into the cave, taking care not to startle the snow wolves. There were three grown wolves and about six pups. This was all that remained of a species that once ranged from Baffin Island to Siberia.

The two pups ran across the cave to one of the older wolves and cuddled into him for warmth. The elves sat on a ledge in the cave and watched the wolves for a long time.

⁴ The hunter’s pants that is, not Yugo’s pants. It would not make very much sense for Yugo to stick one of these awful little toys in his own drawers, would it?

“You know,” said Yugo after a while, “they are just like any other family.”

Iggy wiped a tear from his eye. “I’m going to miss those two puppies. But Santa was right. This is where they belong.”

“We’d better get going,” said Yugo. The elves got up and walked out of the cave. No sooner had they stepped out of the cave entrance than they ran into the hunters. The three men dropped the mutant lumberjack action figures in the snow at the entrance to the cave. They had wound down and the hunters had followed the elves tracks to the cave.

“They look pretty upset,” Sam whispered to Yugo. “What have you got in your bag to stop them this time?”

Yugo dug his arm into the bag. “Uh, I think we have a problem,” he said. He pulled his hand out, clutching two jelly donuts.

Sam blushed.

The first hunter drew his rifle. He swung it in a wide arc, striking Iggy on the chin and sending him reeling back into the cave. The elves struggled to reach him, but the other two hunters held them down. They were helpless. The first hunter stood at the cave entrance and raised his rifle. He looked down at Yugo and Sam and sneered. He aimed his rifle at the largest of the snow wolves.

“No!” screamed Iggy, but there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Then, something remarkable happened. The wind, which had only been a breeze minutes before, suddenly blew with a hurricane force. The clear sky darkened and snow blew into the mouth of the cave. In an instant the elves and the hunters found themselves at the centre of one of the worst blizzards the North Pole had ever known.

The hunter’s rifle was blown from his hands. Yugo and Sam broke free from their restraints in the confusion and staggered into the cave to join Iggy.

The hunters tried to follow, but the biggest snow wolf rose and strode towards them. He was an enormous animal and blocked the entire entrance with his bulk. He bared his teeth and growled at the hunters. Without their rifles, they stood no chance.

They backed away into the screaming maw of the storm. Sam could see them for a moment or two, waving their arms around their heads and struggling to find their way through the storm. Then the sky darkened further and he could see no more.

The elves stayed in the cave with the snow wolves the rest of the day and all of the next night. By morning, the storm had passed. Nearly 8 feet of snow had fallen and all traces of the hunters were gone.

“It’s like I said yesterday,” Iggy explained as they slowly trudged back to the snowmobile. “Those hunters were an affront to nature itself. When it looked like they were going to kill the wolves, Nature reacted and sent them away.”

“The snow wolves couldn’t hope for a better protector,” said Yugo.

They searched for signs of the hunters for several hours, but found no trace of them. It was as if they had never been there. Some say the storm blew them all the way back to the cities from which they came. Only one thing is certain, the hunters never returned to the North Pole.

It took them the rest of the day to find the snowmobile and dig it out. It was evening⁵ by the time they reached the compound at the North Pole. Yugo parked the snowmobile in the big garage, where Santa Claus was polishing his big sleigh. Santa listened to their story thoughtfully and then spoke. “You lads did a good thing. But you can’t depend on Nature to save the snow wolves. True, these hunters are gone, but there will be others. You must always be vigilant to protect the wolves and the North Pole from others of their kind.

“The forces of Nature are powerful indeed, but if we don’t care for Nature ourselves it will weaken. And all of us will be the poorer for it.”

Santa Claus looked at his gold pocket watch. “Come lads, two more days until Christmas. There’s a lot more work to be done!” He led them back to the workshop.

Sam stopped at the cafeteria for a couple of jelly donuts. After all, if there was a lot more work to be done, he was going to need his energy.

⁵ In December at the North Pole, evening lasts until March.

Many Christmases later

Santa Claus had left on his long journey and Iggy, Yugo and Sam were drinking a toast of hot chocolate when they heard a scraping noise at their barracks door. Iggy went to the door and opened it cautiously. Outside, two large snow wolves stood proudly, their litter of four pups rolling around them in the snow.

One of the large snow wolves padded up to Iggy. Though it was a lot bigger than it was when they found it in the snow many Christmases before, there was no doubt that it was one of the wolf pups they had rescued from the hunters. Iggy knelt down and embraced the big wolf. Yugo and Sam ran out to join them.

Christmas had come and with it, the hope that once again there would be snow wolves beyond number at the North Pole.